Guidelines on Departmental Induction of External Examiners (taught programmes)

Responsibilities

The Head of Department/the appropriate Director of Teaching in the School of Management/the Learning Partnerships Office (LPO) is responsible for ensuring that External Examiners are adequately briefed for their role. In some Departments, the Head may delegate some or all of the task to Directors of Studies, Examinations Officers or other role-holders.

Following appointment by the Board of Studies, Academic Registry sends an appointment letter to the External Examiner together with the Handbook for External Examiners and a copy of QA12: External Examining.

Aim

The briefing should enable the External Examiner to appreciate the aims and philosophy of the programme(s) and to contribute in an effective and appropriate manner to the assessment process.

Timing

Induction is probably best carried out as an on-going process with information provided at the time of need. For instance basic programme materials (Programme Handbook, Programme Specification) should be provided at the beginning of the appointment period and some Departments invite their External for a preliminary visit at this time. It may be more appropriate to provide, or repeat, detailed information on assessment processes prior to the Board of Examiners meeting(s).

The briefing should cover:

- key contact details in the Department/School/LPO
- annual cycle of work and key dates
- expectations of the role - see details on External Examiners' web pages
- responsibilities at the Board of Examiners - see details on External Examiners' web pages
- QA Code of Practice: in particular QA12 (External Examining), QA16 (Assessment, Marking and Feedback) and QA35 (Assessment Procedures for Taught Programmes of study)
- assessment regulations
- Individual Mitigating Circumstances process
- composition and membership of the Board of Examiners including the names and subject areas of other External Examiners (see QA35)
- how the assessment sample seen by the External is determined (see QA16 Assessment, Marking and Feedback, section 10)
- arrangements for involvement in assessment of placements, study year abroad etc.
- Department/School policy on confidentiality relating to matters of commercial sensitivity, eg in relation to assessment of placement and work-based learning (where relevant)
- any relevant professional issues eg fitness to practise
- processes for making changes to units and programmes including role of External Examiner

Good practice:
- the SAMIS spreadsheet, looking at flowcharts and example decisions and outcomes.

Briefing of first-time External Examiners

If the External Examiner has not previously acted in this capacity at another university, additional support mechanisms should be put in place. Where the individual is part of a team of Externals it may be helpful to ask one of the other more experienced team members to act as mentor.

Documents to be provided
On appointment:
- Programme Specification(s)
- Programme Handbook(s)
- Unit Descriptions
- last annual report from previous role holder with departmental response and action plan
- generic marking schemes
- feedback policies
- links to any relevant Department/School web pages

It may be useful to provide:
- any recent professional body submission and response
- annual monitoring data
- Degree Scheme Review report or equivalent

During appointment:
- all draft summative exam papers, and other summative assessment tasks which make a significant (more than 7%) contribution to degree classification, with marking criteria and model answers appropriate to the discipline, for comment
- samples of students' scripts and coursework which make a significant contribution to degree classification
- proposed changes to units and programmes, particularly those relating to assessment.

Meeting students
Many External Examiners welcome the opportunity to meet with a group of students as part of familiarising themselves with the programme and its academic standards. (It must be made clear to External Examiners and to students that such meetings are not viva voce examinations and do not contribute towards assessment.)

Good Practice
One Department asks a small group of students to take the External Examiner for lunch or an evening meal, to provide an opportunity to discuss student experience on the programme (no staff present, expenses paid).

Provision of information
Departments increasingly use electronic methods of sharing documents and information with their External Examiners (eg Moodle, LMF). Feedback from Externals on the use of these mechanisms has in the main been very positive although some need initial support eg where their own institution does not use Moodle.

Visits
Departments/the School/LPO are strongly encouraged to provide External Examiners with an opportunity to visit before the assessment period to familiarise themselves with the programme, the institution and its procedures.

Good Practice
One Department invites new appointees to come to Bath for a day, well ahead of the first Board of Examiners meeting, for a detailed induction with the Director of Studies followed by a shorter meeting with the Head of Department.

The web pages for External Examiners are provided to supplement departmental induction.