EXAMINING ISSUES

Regulatory Issues

One External Examiner expressed concern that the use of a zone of consideration means that grade boundaries are being lowered at RHUL and that the practice is out of line with the rest of the University of London. It was suggested that the College benchmark its regulations on raising against those of the rest of the University of London.

This will be referred to the Regulations Working Group.

One of the External Examiners in Science noted that the amount of scaling used by the department has decreased over the years, although a small number of examiners are still justifying scaling as the norm. The External noted that it is important that examiners set assessments that correspond to the College/Department's standard rather than setting a harder paper when a particularly strong cohort takes a module course unit.

Scaling has been discussed by Regulations Working Group with a view to providing relevant guidance to internal examiners in the Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors.

Marking and Moderation

A number of issues were raised about second marking/ internal moderation processes: (i) difficulty in identifying how the first and second markers reached the final mark as no comments and/or no justification are provided in some cases; (iii) there was not always evidence of second marking, e.g. no initialling by markers; (iii) sometimes it was not clear what the original two marks were even though comments may have been noted; (iv) one examiner asked for standardisation of moderation feedback across Moodle/ Turnitin and the hard copy forms and asked that tutors to make it very clear when submitting samples of work whether the work has been marked online and where evidence of moderation dialogue could be found.

The Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors will be revised to include this and Chairs of Sub-board will be reminded at briefing sessions.

A number of issues were raised about second marking/ internal moderation processes (pre-external) was needed, as internal moderators are reading selected scripts and suggesting mark changes without having read the whole cohort. This was deemed to raise issues of parity, as not all students work will have been scrutinised consistently and there is a risk that externals may therefore effectively be repeating the work of the internal moderator.

This will be referred to the Regulations Working Group with a view to providing relevant guidance in the Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors.

One External Examiner suggested that the Department could make more effective use of external examiners by involving them as moderators as opposed to additional examiners. The examiner argued that this would provide the Department with additional valuable input and allow the externals to take a broader view of student performance and quality assurance. The examiner made clear that the College and the Department has good systems in place for reconciling disputes over marks and that these should be adhered to without involving external input. The examiner concluded that they felt 'uncomfortable' at being asked to comment on whether a numeric grade should be raised or remain the same, adding that this practice is no longer consistent with the sector.

It has been made clear to departments in the Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors and in Sub-board Chair briefings that External Examiners' responsibility is to take an oversight of standards. The only situations in which any changes should be made are in the context of borderline candidates where a comprehensive review of a range of the candidate's work might be undertaken and lead to one or more mark changes.

There were a number of comments on use of the full range of marks, how students can be supported in improving and therefore achieving higher marks, more explicit use of the marking criteria when providing feedback/justifying the grade awarded, and making clear the marking criteria for work (in one departments there was inconsistency in this regard as well as in terms of expectations across cohorts).

To be referred to the Faculty Teaching Committees for further discussion.

Significant differences between coursework and examination marks should be investigated.

To be referred to the Regulations Working Group with a view to providing relevant guidance in the Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors.

One External Examiner noted that the wording of the new online form for reporting external examiners appears to be somewhat more streamlined and allows a much shorter and easier process of completing the form. However, the form requires the Examiner to work on their initials in the Moderation Panel before making any changes to the marks. This can be very time-consuming and the form does not allow for quick and easy changes to be made.

This will be referred to the Regulations Working Group with a view to providing relevant guidance in the Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors.

Feedback

A graduate intern will be joining AQPO in May and will be in place following feedback received from Department Managers.

Marking and Moderation

One External Examiner voiced concern about the current practice of anonymization of summative assessments. The fact that staff are unable to identify students from their summative assessments is seen to further erode the personalisation of feedback, the familiarity with individual strengths and areas for development and, on a broader level, the relationship between staff and students. The Examiner also stressed that the practice prohibits staff identifying students who demonstrate a higher than average aptitude for research in their assessments, thus precluding the opportunity for the interests to be fostered and mentored by staff.

Anonymity can be broken once the internal marking process has been completed and staff then have the opportunity to provide additional feedback to students in tutorials or one-to-one meetings.

Issues were raised in some cases about the consistency of feedback, both in terms of that for students as well as that available for external as part of the moderation process.

To be referred to the Regulations Working Group with a view to providing relevant guidance in the Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors.

Assessments

The overlap in assessments was raised in two cases. In one case the Examiner noted that some of the modules covered very closely related topics, that is essentially the same question appeared on three different exam papers while in another case examiner noted cases where students had duplicated content for summative assessment across different courses. This was picked up on by markers in one of the cases but not in the other (where the student was awarded a good first for an answer, two thirds of which replicated a coursework essay). The examiner emphasised the difficult challenge for assessors in picking up such replication given the anonymity of exam marking and also the time lag between different components of the assessment.

This will be referred to the Regulations Working Group with a view to providing relevant guidance in the Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors.

Other issues raised were the setting of assessments so that different standards could be demonstrated by students and also providing equal opportunities to achieve marks across the range in all questions in individual examinations and in all examinations.

This will be referred to the Regulations Working Group with a view to providing relevant guidance in the Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors.

Departmental and Central Support for Visiting(now External) Examiners

One Examiner suggested a course box arrangement would improve document provision to the Externals and would make the external examining process easier for all involved.

Anonymity can be broken once the internal marking process has been completed and staff then have the opportunity to provide additional feedback to students in tutorials or one-to-one meetings.

Departmentals have been reminded of this.

One Examiner suggested that further consideration on the moderation process (pre-external) was needed, as internal moderators are reading selected scripts and suggesting mark changes without having read the whole cohort. This was deemed to raise issues of parity, as not all students work will have been scrutinised consistently and there is a risk that externals may therefore effectively be repeating the work of the internal moderator.

Anonymity can be broken once the internal marking process has been completed and staff then have the opportunity to provide additional feedback to students in tutorials or one-to-one meetings.

Suggestion to be passed on to departments.

One External Examiner recommended that they receive an additional document at the time of the exam board meetings, confirming what has actually been done during that year in response to external examiners' suggestions.

This will be referred to the Regulations Working Group with a view to providing relevant guidance in the Guidelines for Examiners and Assessors.

One new External Examiner suggested that the College consider providing more formal induction for new External Examiners, which would be particularly useful for those who have never carried out the role elsewhere. The suggestion was a day near to the start of the academic year for new External Examiners covering the following: an introduction to the College and the quality and standards department in the morning, followed by a meeting in the department in the afternoon. This would provide an introduction to the procedures before the first papers are sent for review.

AQPO would support this but currently does not have the capacity to plan and offer such an induction

Exemption

Extenuating circumstances online report form: One External Examiner noted that the wording of the new online form for reporting external examiners circumstances should be reviewed.

The form was considered by a student focus group prior to being used in 2014-15. Revisions have been put in place following feedback received from Department Managers.

External Examiner online form: One External Examiner complained that the online form does not permit saving during a session. This is a Contensis issue and for this reason AQPO does provide a screenshot of the form so that External could type out responses in Word and then paste them in when they are ready to complete the online form.

This is a Contensis issue. AQPO does provide a screenshot of the form so that Externals can type out responses in Word and then paste them in when ready to complete the online form. AQPO can investigate whether Contensis could in future provide the facility for saving comments etc during a session.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mark Management System:</strong></th>
<th>The College will be introducing a new Mark Management system this year.</th>
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<tr>
<td>One External Examiner noted that the current system for entering marks and computing recommendations for degree classifications appears somewhat outdated, not supporting well the current state of the regulations, and should be redesigned.</td>
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<td><strong>Proof Reading Scheme:</strong></td>
<td>LTQC has considered how students who cannot afford to pay may be able to access relevant funds.</td>
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<td>One of the External Examiners for CeDAS provision noted that the new Proofreading scheme was &quot;an innovative approach&quot; to tackling a common problem in HE and supported the current development of a regulated system. However, she noted: &quot;It does, however, beg the question of whether students who cannot afford to pay are being unfairly disadvantaged. The impact on students' future employers should also be considered. They sometimes criticise graduates' writing ability, and unlike the other work of CeDAS, this scheme is intended to correct, rather than develop that skill in final extended work such as projects and dissertations. Employers may mistakenly assume that they are recruiting accomplished writers on the basis of dissertation marks.&quot; She recommended that the College consider the impact of offering a paid-for proofreading service on: 1. equality of opportunity and 2. evidence of employability skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative provision</strong></td>
<td>This will be monitored as part of the Annual Review of this programme.</td>
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<td>The External for one of the College's collaborative programmes raised concerns about the standards of marking on three courses in particular where marks were inconsistent with the quality of answers. The programme team were required to consider the consistency of marking across these and other courses on the programme and resolve this and other issues raised before marks were approved.</td>
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