

Thematic Report on Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) Reports 2013-15: External Examiners

Introduction

As part of the ELIR 3 method, QAA Scotland produces regular Thematic reports to support learning from the outcomes of individual ELIR reports. The purpose of the Thematic reports is to inform future development work in the sector and, in particular, to inform future QAA activity including work carried out in collaboration with the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC).

Scope and structure of this report

This report identifies material relating to external examiners within the first nine reports published in the ELIR 3 cycle. The institutions included in this report are: the University of Aberdeen; the University of Dundee; Glasgow School of Art; the University of Glasgow; Queen Margaret University; the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; Scotland's Rural College (SRUC); the University of Strathclyde and the University of the West of Scotland.

This report summarises the more detailed findings included within the ELIR Technical Reports. Please note this report draws on the ELIR reports from the nine institutions only. It is possible that good practice or areas of development are present in other institutions. It is also possible that additional practice takes place in these nine institutions, but only those elements of practice included within the ELIR Technical Reports is included here. The report subsequently includes the areas of positive practice and the areas for development identified in the ELIR Outcome Reports, before it briefly outlines the next steps in the ELIR process, following the publication of the reports.

The annex includes references to external examiners within the ELIR Technical Reports. The paragraph numbers used in the annex are taken directly from the original reports.

External examiners: activity to promote good practice

This section identifies current interesting practice at the nine institutions as identified in the ELIR Technical Reports.

Induction and support: Many institutions provide induction and support to external examiners once they have been selected. The Technical Report notes that Glasgow School of Art provides institutional and school induction for external examiners on appointment as well as update sessions for established external examiners. Since the 2009 ELIR, Queen Margaret University has developed new coordinated support for external examiners. The Technical Report for the University of Aberdeen noted that the external examiners remit is clearly defined and that a range of information and resources is made available to support external examiners, including a direct link to the Higher Education Academy's External Examiner Handbook. At the time of the ELIR visit the University was also considering developing an online induction pack. The University of Glasgow's Technical Report noted that there is an effective approach to induction for external examiners and that the University provides guidelines on report completion. At the University of the West of Scotland, a

handbook is provided and a one-day induction event is held in each academic year for newly-appointed external examiners.

Availability of external examiner reports to students: The ELIR Technical Reports recognised the efforts institutions were making in providing student access to the external examiner reports in line with the indicator in *Chapter B7* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Glasgow School of Art's Technical Report noted that staff-student consultative committees considered the external examiner reports. Queen Margaret University's report states that external examiner reports are seen by student representatives on programme committees, with annual summary reports being posted on the Quality at QMU website. The Queen Margaret University Student Experience Committee also receives an annual summary report on the good practice identified in external examiner reports. The University of the West of Scotland has initiated a pilot project that has placed external examiners' reports on a student-accessible virtual learning environment (VLE) site.

Responding to external examiner reports: Many of the ELIR Technical Reports provide examples of institutions taking action in response to external examiner reports. The Queen Margaret University Student Experience Committee considers an annual analysis of the points raised by external examiner reports and monitors the action taken to address institutional action on issues of a cross-institutional nature that are raised by external examiners. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) is identified as having a well-structured process in place for capturing and responding to external examiners' comments with individual staff being identified as responsible for carrying out follow-up action. RCS also track the responses to the reports through their committee structure. At the time of their ELIR, the University of Aberdeen was intending to revise its Common Assessment Scale (CAS) as a result of feedback from external examiners. The University of Glasgow reports the analysis of trends and issues arising from the external examiner reports to their Academic Standards Committee for action, which the ELIR team identified as an effective arrangement. The University of Strathclyde is able to systematically consider external examiner reports as part of the University's annual monitoring processes, using the findings to enhance the student learning experience and inform institutional strategy.

Consistency of approach: A number of the Scottish institutions have multiple campuses, within Scotland and internationally. The ELIR Technical Reports recognised the work that some institutions are doing to ensure a consistent approach to external examining across their various campuses. SRUC nominates external examiners for approval by the relevant awarding university and provides its own External Examiner Handbook which explains their remit within SRUC. The External Examiners must submit a report to both the Principal of the awarding university and to SRUC. Glasgow School of Art's Technical Report also describes its partnerships with the Singapore Institute of Technology. Glasgow School of Art ensures a comparable student experience between students in Singapore and Glasgow by including external examiner reports from both campuses as part of their quality assurance system.

External examiners: areas for development

This section sets out the areas within the nine ELIR Technical Reports where activity could be enhanced or developed further.

Availability of reports: It was noted that students at SRUC were not aware of external examiner reports or the role of examiners, therefore the Technical Report recommended that SRUC should consider how it will make external examiner reports available to students. The University of Dundee's report noted that there was no systematic approach to making external examiner reports available to all students and encouraged the University to consider publishing the reports so that all students have the opportunity to engage with them.

Oversight of reports: It was identified that, while the SRUC Academic Development Manager (Higher Education) scrutinises the external examiner reports, currently there is no mechanism within the SRUC committee structure for all of the external examiner reports to be considered together. The ELIR report, therefore, asked SRUC to ensure that it can take a critical overview of a range of information including the external examiner reports.

Enhancement: The University of Glasgow's report noted that there would be benefit in external examiners providing more details in the enhancement section of their reports.

Areas highlighted in the ELIR Outcome Reports

In ELIR 3, Outcome Reports identify areas of positive practice and areas for development.

Positive practice

Positive practice relating to external examining was identified in two of the nine Outcome Reports:

University of Strathclyde

Data analysis and reporting of information from external examiners and student surveys - The outcomes of student surveys and external examiner reports are systematically considered as part of the University's annual monitoring processes, and are used to enhance the student learning experience and inform institutional policy and practice.

University of Dundee

Enhancement from quality assurance processes - The University has been successful in ensuring that the design of its quality assurance processes contributes to enhancement of the student learning experience by, for example, including quality enhancement as a standard heading in templates for annual monitoring reporting and the external examiner system. The quality assurance processes, alongside the committee structures and college roles, also facilitate the deliberate and systematic sharing of good practice across the institution.

Areas for development

Development areas relating to external examining were identified in two of the nine reports:

SRUC

Institutional oversight and academic leadership - as a matter of priority, establish regular and systematic arrangements to ensure there is institutional oversight of the conduct and outcomes of key quality processes, such as annual programme monitoring, external examiner reports and student feedback. This should ensure that processes are carried out as intended, avoiding over-reliance on individuals, and that the outcomes of the processes are evaluated critically within programme, departmental and institutional level committees, drawing on the contributions of a wide range of academic staff and managers. Related to this, SRUC should ensure there is strong academic leadership, particularly at the institutional level, and that academic dialogue and debate take place at all levels.

Glasgow

Consistent application of assessment regulations in relation to exam boards - Continue to monitor the impact of the University's guidelines on the use of discretion by exam boards to ensure consistent application of the assessment regulations across all exam boards.

What happens next?

QAA Scotland follows up the ELIR outcomes with institutions individually through annual discussion visits and each institution is required to produce a Follow-up Report indicating how it has addressed its own ELIR outcomes. QAA Scotland also promotes collaborative working between institutions to share good practice and to find collective solutions to common areas for development. Each institution is invited to participate in a Follow-up event to engage with the ways other institutions who were reviewed at around the same point of the ELIR cycle have addressed their review outcomes.

References to external examiners in the ELIR 3 Technical Reports

The paragraph numbers below refer to those in the original ELIR Technical Reports for each institution.

Glasgow School of Art

59 The SCQF level 12 qualification descriptor is the central reference point for setting academic standards in relation to postgraduate research. GSA has augmented the generic requirements in the descriptor with detailed assessment criteria that are appropriate for different fields of research study. Supervision, external examining and the Annual Research Degrees Report are the primary means by which standards are maintained and reviewed. The Academic Coordinator (PGR) writes the Annual Research Degrees Report, which is informed by minutes of PGR staff student consultative committee meetings, student and supervisor annual reports, external and internal examiner feedback, and student and supervisory feedback from the research degrees training programme and the Postgraduate Certificate in Supervision. The report is considered by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee, which then reports to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee for information and further consideration.

64 External examiners are appointed by the University of Glasgow on the recommendation of GSA's Academic Council. External examiner policy and practice meet the requirements of both GSA and the University of Glasgow (the latter as the degree-awarding body), and are in line with sector expectations. GSA provides central and school induction for external examiners on appointment, and school update sessions for established external examiners. With the exception of any separate confidential reports, external examiner reports are published on the VLE following PMAR.

65 External Examiner reports are considered by schools, programme leaders, staff student consultative committees and boards of studies at the start of the academic session. Programme leaders are required to report on any action taken as a result of external examiner feedback in the Annual Programme Report as part of PMAR. External examiner reports, and evidence of any action taken in response to issues raised in the reports for the previous three sessions, form part of the documentation available to Periodic Review panels. The external examiner reports seen by the ELIR team were constructive and thorough, and were appropriately acted upon as part of programme management and review.

77 The Institution-led quality review reports are thorough, with evidence of attention to standards and enhancement, and include discussion of how best to disseminate good practice across the Institution. External examiner reports include a useful summary report and provide evidence that schools have undertaken individual analyses of the reports.

78 GSA uses a wide range of external reference points in its evaluative processes. Monitoring and review processes are informed by external examiners, the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education, the SCQF, subject benchmark statements, the Enhancement Themes and the UK Professional Standards Framework. There is also reference to PSRB requirements on the PMAR proforma.

89 The relationship with the University of Glasgow is governed by a memorandum of agreement which is scheduled for review during 2014-15, and the partnership with Singapore Institute of Technology is governed by a Collaboration Agreement which is scheduled for review in 2016-17. Collaborative provision is monitored through GSA's quality assurance system, including annual monitoring and periodic review processes as well as the external examiner system, to ensure a comparable student experience.

90 The SIT partnership is managed in Singapore by GSA's Director of GSA in Singapore and is overseen by the School of Design in Glasgow. In addition, an operations committee is held biannually between SIT and GSA. Curriculum design and quality assurance processes are owned and undertaken by GSA, and Academic Council makes external examiner recommendations to the University of Glasgow, which is responsible for making appointments. The validating institution and degree awarding body is the University of Glasgow.

Queen Margaret University

58 External examiner reports are considered by the Programme Leader and responses are approved either by the Dean of School or, in the case of questions on regulations, by the Assistant Registrar. The Quality Enhancement Unit also monitors responses to actions requested by external examiners. Full reports are seen by student representatives on programme committees and annual summary reports are posted on the Quality at QMU website.

60 External examiners report satisfaction with the administration of examination boards. Criticism over the lengthy agenda of new divisional examination boards in the School of Health Sciences has led to the requirement that external examiners only attend for those items of the Board relevant to their responsibilities. In their reports external examiners have noted the alignment of assessment with learning outcomes and, in some cases, the very effective integration of theory and practice.

62 External examiners, through a tick box on their annual reports, confirm that the programmes are aligned with external reference points such as subject benchmarks and the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF). The University has also been mapping its academic practice against the Quality Code as sections of the code are published.

64 The University has effective arrangements for securing academic standards. The SEC receives an annual summary report from QEU on the good practice identified in external examiner reports. This is a well structured and comprehensive report covering the full range of programmes, and the SEC requires institutional action on issues of a cross-institutional nature that are raised by external examiners.

70 At school level, the annual monitoring report provides a very thorough review of programme-level monitoring in addition to analysis of feedback from students and other stakeholders (for example external examiners), reflection on key performance indicators, performance against key strategies (for example QELTA), identification of good practice and items for consideration by School Academic Boards and the Student Experience Committee. It also provides an action plan for the coming year, as well as an open and reflective account of progress on the previous action plan. Overall, the ELIR team found that monitoring and review procedures were effective, and that significant positive practice leading to quality enhancement was derived from annual monitoring and review carried out at programme and school level.

80 Following the 2009 ELIR, a University working group reviewed collaborative practice. Actions resulting from the group's work included clarification of moderation regulations, risk assessment, better communication links with partners and coordination of support for external examiners. Risk assessment templates cover a range of risks including academic, reputational, financial and political. Examples seen by the ELIR team had been carefully compiled but highlighted the difficulty of assessing the political risk where stability at the time of writing can change quickly. For example, minutes of the Joint Board of Studies showed that in Nepal and Pakistan some meetings had to be postponed and, at times, some

students could not attend classes. The University revises the risk assessment template annually and the examples given here show the importance of regular monitoring of political risk in particular.

83 To aid staff involved in collaborative provision, quality assurance procedures have been brought together in the collaborations manual. The ELIR team found this to be a comprehensive and carefully structured document that provided staff with clear guidance on facilitating all aspects of collaborative provision. In 2012 the University strengthened the guidance by providing a module co-ordinator handbook specifically for collaborative partners. The guidance addresses some of the small, perennial problems identified by students and external examiners such as critical reading, referencing and plagiarism, and how students access library, IT and web resources.

90 The University has acted rapidly and appropriately on issues raised in external examiners' reports. Where a partner has not responded sufficiently to these plans the University has instigated closure of the programme.

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

50 The Conservatoire is managing its assessment practices effectively. There is clear evidence through external examiner reports and supporting documentation of the effective management of assessment processes. There is a well-structured process in place for capturing and responding to external examiners' comments with individual staff being identified as responsible for carrying out follow-up action.

52 Much of the assessment is based upon performance and often in public, adding an additional layer of complexity to managing the assessment process. In response to the 2009 ELIR, greater clarity has been introduced to the role of those external examiners who are directly involved in assessing student performance, including giving them the distinct title of external assessors. This level of externality is a critical component of assessing performance. The external assessor role is now fully defined and explained in the assessment handbooks.

70 In addition, the ELIR team identified a number of areas of good practice including: the whole approach taken to the Curriculum Reform project; the extent and quality of staff-student interaction at all levels and, in particular, as part of the programme management processes; the robust use of external examiner reports including the tracking of responses through the committee structure; and the development of learning contracts as a tool for students and transition tutors.

71 The Conservatoire meets sector expectations in the range and manner in which it uses external reference points in its evaluative processes. Of particular note is the robust use of external examiner reports. There is clear evidence of these reports being considered at school and institutional level, and in the Monitoring Evaluation and Review (MER) processes.

SRUC

92 The ELIR team formed the view that SRUC makes scrupulous use of external examiner reports at programme level, and should progress its intention for them to be scrutinised by the Academic Development Committee which, in turn, would provide a summary overview report to the Academic Board.

93 SRUC nominates external examiners for approval by the relevant awarding university which specifies their roles and responsibilities. SRUC provides its own External Examiner

Handbook which clearly explains their remit within the College; this guidance may be supplemented with additional advice from programme leaders. External examiners communicate with programme teams through the year and at the annual board of examiners, and submit a report to both the Principal of the awarding university and to SRUC. Programme leaders are responsible for responding formally to the external examiner and additionally to show, through the APR process, how any issues have been addressed.

94 The external examiner reports considered by the ELIR team used the University of Glasgow report proforma. Responses from the Programme Leaders were comprehensive, addressing the points made in the reports.

95 The external examiner reports are currently scrutinised by the SRUC Academic Development Manager (Higher Education) and through the overview reports submitted to the awarding universities. Currently, there is no mechanism within SRUC for all of the external examiner reports to be considered, although the ELIR team noted that SRUC intends for the Academic Development Committee to consider these in future with the Academic Development Manager (Higher Education) providing an overview report for consideration by the Academic Board.

96 Students who met the ELIR team had no knowledge of external examiner reports or the role of the examiners. SRUC should consider how it will meet the Indicator in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code relating to making external examiner reports available to students.

97 Both awarding universities receive an annual report from SRUC together with a summary of the comments of the relevant external examiner reports. These annual reports are considered by the relevant sub-committee of the university senates. The reports seen by the ELIR team met the specific requirements of the relevant university and, therefore, were different in layout but were comprehensive, offering overview reports of developments at SRUC, reports on academic standards, the student experience, successes and areas for improvement together with a range of detailed annexes in matters such as student data, validation schedule, new staff and reports on academic appeals and complaints. The minutes of the awarding universities' committees demonstrated a detailed and careful consideration of the reports. There would be considerable benefit in SRUC considering these annual reports, for example at its Academic Board, prior to their submission to the relevant university. This would provide a further opportunity for SRUC to develop collegial ownership of the programmes, and share in the consideration of both good practice and areas for development that are reflected in the reports (see paragraph 109).

109 As a matter of priority, SRUC should ensure it has an inclusive institution-wide critical overview of the academic standards of its programmes through the scrutiny of and reflection on the outcomes of validation, institution-led subject review, annual programme review and external examiner reports. This could be achieved by developing the role of the Academic Board and its associated committees.

121 The ELIR team noted that the Expectations of the Code were generally met, although SRUC identified the need to remap Chapter B3 against the emerging Portfolio Delivery Strategy and acknowledged that a number of Indicators relating to the Chapter on External Examining had not yet been implemented fully. Additionally, the team noted that SRUC had not fully mapped its practices as a provider working with others against Chapter B10 of the Code, particularly Indicators 1 (the need for a collaborative strategy), 7 (to have formal legal agreements in place before the commencement of the programme) and 10 (a formal record of all arrangements subject to a formal agreement) (see paragraph 135).

University of Aberdeen

49 The University indicated that it had modified its quality assurance processes to promote their contribution to quality enhancement, for example external examiners are asked to highlight good practice in their annual reports (see paragraph 69). The school, college and institutional reviews of external examiner reports, as well as those relating to other quality processes, such as Internal Teaching Reviews and Annual Course Reviews, provide a mechanism for identifying good practice. The QAC maintains an institutional overview and recommends further work or dissemination as appropriate.

64 A 21-point Common Assessment Scale (CAS) containing descriptors of standards of achievement has been in place since 1992 supported since 1996 by Grade Spectra schemes for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The CAS and Grade Spectra were developed to encourage parity in assessment procedure across the University. They have nonetheless attracted criticism from both students and external examiners and were reviewed by a UCTL working group. The University indicated that it intends to bring forward recommendations for revisions to CAS and Grade Spectra in 2013-14, implementation of which would be introduced as part of the OneSource Student Lifecycle Project (see paragraph 24). At the time of the 2010 ELIR, a CAS working group had made proposals for modifying the system. The ELIR team noted that those proposals had not been implemented, and would urge the University to progress the intended revisions to CAS without further delay.

66 The University confirmed that external examiners play a significant role in verifying academic standards and monitoring quality. Their remit is clearly defined and the external examining procedures are in line with sector expectations as defined in the Quality Code. A range of information and resources is made available to support external examiners, including a direct web link to the Higher Education Academy's External Examiners Handbook. At the time of the current ELIR visit, there was no face-to-face induction for external examiners but CAD was considering developing an online induction pack. That is likely to help strengthen the University's relationship with its external examiners.

69 The University is encouraged to progress its intention of promoting more explicit links between its assurance and enhancement activities. The ITR process serves well as a vehicle for assuring quality. As the University recognised, a revised ITR system could take a more reflective, enhancement-orientated approach and, in so doing, could also address the 2010 ELIR report's recommendation that there would be benefit in reviewing the volume of documentary evidence required for ITR. Similarly, in highlighting the strengths of its system for scrutinising external examiners' reports, the University acknowledged that it will continue to seek opportunities to introduce a greater role for external examiners in identifying innovative approaches to the design and delivery of the curricula.

78 The University seeks the views of relevant PAB members and external examiners in relation to programme approval, but the institution confirmed that it has no plans to introduce approval events. The ELIR team considered there would be value in the University reflecting on its approach to programme approval, in line with practice identified in the Quality Code.

University of Dundee

80 External examiner reports are, in some cases, brief but largely positive, with several taking the opportunity to address areas for enhancement through the standard template format of the reporting documentation which includes a section on areas for good practice and opportunities for quality enhancement. External examiner reports and PSRB reports are considered within relevant school and college committees. If students have representative roles they may see the reports, or references to them, through monitoring processes,

but there is no systematic approach to making external examiner reports available to all students. This was not a concern for the students who met the ELIR team, however the University is encouraged to consider publishing the reports so that all students have the opportunity to engage with them.

96 Collaborative provision is monitored through the annual monitoring and periodic review processes, and the external examiner system, to ensure a comparable student experience. External examiner reports for the BA in Animation indicate that the programme is subject to the same oversight as a programme delivered at the University and that academic standards are being monitored in line with the University's quality assurance systems.

98 External examiner reports for the BA in Animation have highlighted opportunities for enhancement by, for example, encouraging research-informed practice and the use of student self-assessment. In addition, the revised procedures for the annual review of taught provision have a specific requirement that the effectiveness of collaborative arrangements is considered as part of the annual programme quality enhancement report.

University of Glasgow

52 The University's Academic Quality Framework sets out the procedures for course and programme design and approval, annual monitoring, external examining and periodic subject review, as well as University services review and professional, statutory and regulatory body review. The framework identifies efficiency and enhancement as underlying principles, with the acknowledgement that efficiency in this context relies on significant devolution of responsibilities in relation to setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards.

61 The advance information set confirms that the approach to external examiners meets the Expectation of Chapter B7: External examining of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). The University undertakes effective analysis of trends and issues arising from external examiner reports which are reported to the Academic Standards Committee for action. There is an effective approach to induction for external examiners and the University provides guidelines on report completion, although based on the sample of reports considered by the ELIR team there would be benefit in external examiners providing more detail in the enhancement section of the report.

University of Strathclyde

71 The University is managing its assessment practices effectively. The Procedures for Assessment and Award (2010) document covers all aspects of the process, including marking conventions, compensation schemes, ranking conventions for awards, composition and conduct of boards of examiners including the role of external examiners, examination arrangements, marking of examination scripts, publication of results and appeals processes. Updates are in progress, and the revised version will be available for the academic year 2014-15. The Marking Guide for staff was last approved in 2009 and there would be benefit in the University reviewing it to reflect current learning and teaching practices.

77 External examiner reports viewed by the team confirmed that the University's programme aims and objectives are appropriate with respect to academic and professional subject matter with reference to subject benchmark statements, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and, where relevant, to professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. The University has recently revised its approach to the analysis of, and reporting on external examiner reports. This analysis confirms external

examiners' positive views of moderation of standards, and is helpful in sharing effective practice.

78 The University's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) receives external examiner reports and subsequent responses from the faculties. Departmental/course directors are required to respond directly to the external examiners, and the reports and responses are taken by the faculty representatives to the relevant faculty academic committees or their sub-committees, for consideration and comparison with results from other faculties, and to the QAC. In turn, QAC reports to the Senate.

79 The outcomes of external examiner reports are systematically considered as part of the University's annual monitoring processes and are used to enhance the student learning experience and inform institutional strategy. This systematic analysis and its use to enhance the student experience represents positive practice.

95 Faculties report annually to the Senate through the Quality Assurance Committee on the effectiveness of learning and teaching across the faculty, informed by the joint meeting with Learning Enhancement Committee. The reports (Annual Faculty Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports) consider both assurance and enhancement, including identification of good practice, supported by detailed information and summary updates on previous reports and planned actions. They also include consideration of the effectiveness of professional support services. Information covered includes analysis and overview reporting of: external examiner reports; student surveys; appeals and complaints; and collaborative activities. The process includes peer review by another faculty (see paragraph 56). Staff commented that this was a very valuable aspect of the approach and the ELIR team supported this view, highlighting it as an area of positive practice.

102 As a feature of positive practice, the outcomes of student surveys and external examiner reports are systematically considered as part of the University's annual monitoring processes, and are used to inform institutional policy and practice.

University of the West of Scotland

54 The University has an effective approach to identifying and sharing good practice using a range of formal mechanisms including annual monitoring, external examiner reports and Subject Health Reviews, all of which are regular, well understood and embedded practice, and used systematically to identify and share good practice. External examiners' reports, which are specifically structured to provide an opportunity to comment on areas of good practice, are summarised annually and reported to the Academic Quality Committee. Subject Health Reviews, in particular, are acknowledged by staff as an effective mechanism for engendering, supporting and sharing good practice.

55 The University has initiated a pilot project that has placed external examiners' reports on a student-accessible VLE site to meet the relevant indicator in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). Some students were aware of the site but usage is low at this early stage.

81 The University is managing its assessment practices effectively. Assessment practice is supported by the Assessment Handbook. Introduced at the start of 2011-12, it is designed to provide operational guidance for staff on all aspects of the design, delivery and implementation of assessment strategies at module and programme level. It advises staff that assessment should be seen as a continuous and interactive process that enhances the learning process, measures the achievement of the learner and assures the quality of the learning experience. Built around a series of assessment principles, the Assessment Handbook is comprehensive in scope, containing five sections: principles of effective

practice in assessment; assessment design and approval; implementing, marking and providing feedback; procedures and guidance for assurance of standards; and university assessment regulations. The Assessment Policy and Practice Committee, from August 2014 a sub-committee of the Education Advisory Committee, annually updates and approves the Assessment Handbook to reflect changes in regulations and current best practice, based on sector benchmarking and reflection on external examiners' comments and the outcomes of annual monitoring. The Assessment Handbook is also available in an online version designed to be user friendly. Staff confirmed during the ELIR that the guidance contained in the Assessment Handbook is helpful in designing assessments and in enabling consistency of practice across schools, programmes and modules.

85 The University confirmed that external examiners play a key role in approving the assessment of modules and in securing the academic standards of its awards. The external examiners' remit is clearly defined in the Quality Handbook and the University's external examining procedures are in line with sector expectations as defined in the Quality Code. A one-day induction event is held each session for newly-appointed external examiners. An external examiner handbook is provided to support externals in carrying out their duties.

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