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**Review of External Examining Arrangements in the UK**

**Response from Loughborough University to the UniversitiesUK, GuildHE and the QAA for HE review.**

**1: Are these principles acceptable and are there other principles that should be considered?**

The proposed principles include also recommendations, e.g. ‘More should be done ...’, ‘This should continue to be supported and strengthened’. We would recommend distinguishing between these and rewriting the principles in the style of Annex F HEFCE 2010/17.

In regard to Principle 3, it would be more appropriate to propose the development of ‘minimum expectations’ of the external examining system, rather than proposing the development of ‘external examining expectations’. This would allow for flexibility in the role of external examiners and would not constrain or restrict institutional practice (paragraph 27 refers).

**2: Are these initial ideas and the distinction between judgement and advice a helpful starting point for developing minimum expectations?  Where might these initial ideas be clarified or developed to ensure that it is relevant to all institutional practices?**

The initial ideas are a helpful starting point, but require development to address ambiguities. For example, the distinction between achievement of standards and comparability of standards is not sufficiently clear. It may also be appropriate to distinguish between what external examiners do (sample scripts, review alignment of the programme to qualifications frameworks etc), and the powers of external examiners (advise that the student cohort be re-marked, provide a comment on standards etc).

The proposed distinction between judgement and advice is not clear and will inevitably lead to confusion.

Sector-wide consultations and focus groups, such as those used by the QAA to develop the Code of Practice, would be appropriate fora in which to develop minimum expectations.

**3: In order to increase transparency and public confidence there should there be clear expectations about the selection processes in institutions and the processes should be publicly accessible, do you agree?**

Selection criteria should be published by institutions, as at present, and checked through external review, as at present. However, for reasons of confidentiality the selection process for each individual appointment should not be publicly accessible.

**4: There should be a national set of generic criteria established for the appointment of external examiners, do you agree? What should be included in the criteria?**

The criteria currently detailed in Section 4 of the QAA Code of Practice are appropriate, and have been adopted nationally. Any generic criteria should be sufficiently broad to allow for the diversity of provision across the sector and to allow institutions to make judgements on the appropriateness and ability of an individual to undertake the role.

**5: Should all institutions provide induction for external examiners who are new to the institution and training and development for first time external examiners? Should a common core programme and template for induction and training be developed?**

Individual institutions should provide a minimum level of induction and training on the role. Due to cost and efficiency considerations this should not necessary involve a face-to-face induction.

We would not welcome the provision of generic sector-wide training provided, for example, by the Higher Education Academy. It would have to be supplemented by a further induction into the individual institution and programme, and so would not be an efficient use of resources.

**6: The importance of this role should be recognised by all Universities and institutions with degree awarding powers in promotion procedures, including clear and demonstrable recognition of the value to the institution, the subject and the sector, do you agree? How else should it be recognised?**

Agree.

**7: Should there be a national template for external examiners reports?**

The QAA Code of Practice guidance on report content is an appropriate level of prescription as it allows reports to be tailored to the arrangements and needs of the individual institution, whilst meeting minimum expectations.

The justification for a national template above and beyond this is questionable if there is no expectation that they will be published nationally.

**8: Should there be a specific section written for all students and should these be made available to students within the institution and made available to any external party on request?**

The whole report should be made available to students, so there should not be a specific section written for them. However, it is recommended that the external examiner should be allowed to provide confidential comments to the institution.

**9: Should all reports and all analysis of reports be shared with student representatives?**

Yes.

**10. Should all institutions publish names of all external examiners, their job titles and institutions? What would be the most effective way of ensuring that this information is easily accessible?**

The value of this level of transparency is questionable. However, these details are generally made available in external examiner reports.

**11: Institutions should have in place transparent internal procedures for considering and dealing with robust discussion of issues and concerns which include the possibility of making a report direct to the head of the institution? Do you agree and what else might these procedures include?**

Yes.

**12: Should there be a clear and independent mechanism for external examiners to use once they have exhausted internal procedures? Does the QAA Causes for Concern procedure represent an appropriate mechanism?**

There should be a clear and independent complaint mechanism for external examiners, and the QAA Causes for Concern procedure may represent an appropriate mechanism. However, there is a distinction to be made between a complaint about process and a complaint about standards. The latter is a matter of academic judgement, and so would be inappropriate for a QAA investigating officer to make a judgement on.