KEELE UNIVERSITY
COVER SHEET FOR SENATE AND SENATE COMMITTEE PAPERS

Committee	Quality and Academic Standards Sub-Committee		
Author and Sponsor	Quality Assurance	**Date of meeting**	11th November
Title of Item	UG External Examining Overview Report 2018/19		

Category (delete as appropriate and use only one box)

Item for discussion	✓

Executive Summary of paper:

This report is a summary of the main items raised and commented on by undergraduate external examiners in their annual reports for 2018/19. This paper was considered by Faculty Education Committees in their meetings the week commencing the 4th November

Action required from Senate/Senate Committee:
(Please include a clear indication where formal approval is required)

QAS are invited to comment on the paper and the suggestions included in section 6

At which Committee (if any) has this paper been considered previously?

Committee of Senate: (Please specify)	Faculty Education Committees w/c 4th November		
University Executive Committee		**Other:** (Please specify)	

At which Committee (if any) will this paper be considered at next?

Committee of Senate: (Please specify)	Education Committee	**Council:**	

Communication/Next Steps:

This overview report will be approved at Education Committee and reported to Senate. A copy of the report will be made available on the website and circulated to external examiners

Student Consultation:

As a University, we are committed to developing policies and procedures in partnership with our students, where this is appropriate and possible to do so. Therefore, please provide details below of how this paper has been consulted with, or developed in partnership with students or with student union representatives.

Has student consultation been undertaken to develop this paper? (Please tick one box)	Yes	
	No	
	Not Applicable	✓

Consultation Method and Outcome:
(Please provide details of the consultation taken and the outcomes delivered as a result. If **no** consultation has been taken, or it is not applicable to this paper, please provide the reason why.)

Report is a collation of responses from external examiners.

EXTERNAL EXAMINING OVERVIEW: UNDERGRADUATE PROVISION
REPORT FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2018/19

1. Background

1.1. This report is a summary of the main items at faculty and university level identified in external examiners' reports for undergraduate provision. The scope of the report covers all reports received to date (see statistical data regarding report completion in Annex A).

1.2. This annual external examining overview report produced by Quality Assurance for Faculty Education Committees and Quality and Academic Standards Sub-Committee who are invited to comment on the report before it is approved by the University Education Committee. The report will form part of the Education Report submitted to Senate. A final version of the overview report is due in February 2020 once external examiner reports for postgraduate programmes have been received.

1.3. An update on actions following the 2017/18 overview report is given in section 3, a summary of the main findings in relation to 2018/19 is provided in section 4. Section 5 covers the main issues identified by the external examiners for 2018/19 and section 6 considers suggested actions.

2. Introduction

2.1. Keele University is committed to the safeguarding and enhancement of its academic standards. In this endeavour, the University's external examiners play a vital role by ensuring that the quality and standards of the academic provision and the learning opportunities provided to students are comparable to those in other UK higher education institutions.

2.2. All undergraduate external examiners are asked to provide a detailed written report, using a standard university template, within four weeks of the examination board. In line with the Code of Practice on External Examining, Schools have delegated authority to approve responses to external examiner reports to enable a timely response to be sent to the external examiner.

2.3. The University expects Schools to respond quickly and appropriately to all recommendations made by external examiners and to give full and thoughtful consideration to suggestions for further enhancement. Feedback from external examiners informs the reflective discussions at School and Faculty level and supports the enhancement and development of assessment practices and the taught curriculum.

2.4. In addition to Schools' engagement with the feedback from their external examiners, the University recognises that there is a need to take a collective overview of issues which emerge from the reports and which may assist the University in identifying wider concerns and in disseminating good practice. This overview function is undertaken by Quality Assurance, which scrutinises all external examiner reports for critical issues and emerging themes.

2.5. Since the new external examiner online induction course was launched in January 2018, this has been viewed and completed by 71 external examiners (82% of those who received the link). Bespoke sections of the course have been developed to cover the specific contexts that apply in Foundation Year, Medicine, Nursing & Midwifery and the International Study Centre and it is supplemented by a School-based induction.

2.6.   The comments below include the views of the examiners who have completed the induction during the 2018/19 academic year. We will continue to review the feedback from examiners and make changes as required:

- *"It seems a good summary. I've served as an external examiner elsewhere and I couldn't think of information I'd need about the University rules and regulations that wasn't there."*
- *"This was a helpful overview to begin my role as an external examiner at Keele."*
- *"I found the course to be useful. It confirmed my understanding of the role of external examiners."*
- *"Very useful Keele specific information, and very good practice to have this. Much better than other institutions I externally examine for."*
- *"Thorough, clear and concise. It is an excellent overview of the role of an external examiner. Who to contact in different circumstances is made clear."*
- *"I was sceptical at first, since I have been an external examiner for several years at various institutions, but I did find the course helpful. Each institution is different, after all, and it was useful to be directed towards your online resources for external examiners."*

3.   Update on actions taken following the 2017/18 overview report

3.1.   A formal action plan was not included in the 2017/18 overview report as following consideration by the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees and Quality and Academic Standards Sub-Committee there were no specific actions identified.

3.2.   The introduction of the Generic Marking Criteria had been welcomed by external examiners. Some had raised concerns with the criteria not distinguishing between different levels of students and the need for additional marks in the 80-90 category. External examiner comments for 2018/19 around the marking criteria focused on the need for more detail in accompanying feedback to support the mark: *"I applaud the institution for introducing this more standardised approach to assessment using the full range of available marks and distinguishing more clearly around grade boundaries. In particular the marks in the new rubric are a helpful guide for staff and students"* and *"The step-marking scheme is to be highly commended in its recognition of the outstanding."*

3.3.   Processes around second marking and moderation were raised with suggestions to routinely moderate work rather than just borderline coursework. External examiners had suggested the need for additional guidance. Marking and moderation featured in a number of 2018/19 reports and is covered in section 5.4.

3.4.   Schools had begun to introduce short statistical summaries for modules and included an overview of aspects they wished the external examiner to consider; this was praised by examiners who had received them and requested by others. External examiners raised this again in 2018/19 and it is covered in section 5.5.

4.   University Chief External Examiner

4.1.   Following a review of the role of the Faculty Chief External Examiners in Humanities and Social Sciences and Natural Sciences, the University introduced for the 2018/19 academic year the role of University Chief External Examiner.

4.2.   The University Chief External Examiner's role is to ensure that the main University Examination Boards award and decisions on progression are made consistently and

fairly and they provide an overview of the soundness and robustness of the University's central Examination Board procedures.

4.3. The University Chief Examiner advises on assessment and progression regulations and guidance relating to examination boards and the University's degree algorithm and criteria for borderline candidates. They contribute to the central University Examination Boards for Levels 4-6 and Reassessment Board to: confirm procedures for assessment have been followed, confirm Guidance for the Examination Boards is being adhered to and offer advice on matters of precedent.

4.4. The University Chief External Examiner's report for 2018/19 included assurances surrounding assessment and progression; *"all of the progression regulations and guidance are clear, appropriate and comparable to best practice in the sector"* but suggested Schools provide a brief written rationale in support of borderline decisions.

4.5. Work was completed across the University to ensure that where modules included qualifying elements within their assessments, they were required for student progression, which the University Chief External Examiner praised; *"I was particularly impressed by the work done around qualifying elements of assessment this year. The Board Chair reviewed these assessments systematically to ensure that all assessment elements that are identified as a "qualifying elements" were required and appropriate. I believe this has and will positively benefit the assessment process and student outcomes this year and in future years."*

5. Main items for 2018/19 highlighted by External Examiners

5.1. Academic standards

5.1.1. External examiners were unanimous in their confirmation that the standards set for the awards were appropriate, student performance was comparable with similar programmes they were familiar with, that students were given the opportunity to achieve beyond the threshold standards and that the processes for assessment, examination and determination of awards were sound and fairly conducted.

5.1.2. A limited number of concerns were raised surrounding assessments; *"While the standard of work was very high in almost all the modules I sampled, I did – again – have the impression that some of the assessments were quite short"* and *"I do have come concerns regarding mapping of exam and assessment questions to ILOs: … The ILOs of the specification state that students will 'critically evaluate' elements of the teaching, yet the questions posed do not call for anything higher than 'discuss'."*

5.2. Meetings with students

5.2.1. Schools are asked to make external examiners aware of the opportunity to meet with students. Such meetings are either conducted in person when the examiner visits the university or conducted over skype, *"The event was organised over Skype and no academic staff was in attendance. It was gratifying to hear students confirm their positive experience of the course in terms of staff support and the quality of learning material."*

5.2.2. A number of external examiners continue to express an interest in meeting students; *"I would like to have the opportunity to meet with the students … I believe this is important so that they understand the role of external examiners and the 'behind the scene' quality assurance processes, as well as being able to talk about their views on the*

programme of study," *"I would encourage the team to consider ways in which this might be facilitated"* and *"it would be useful to have the opportunity of meeting students."*

5.3. Quality of Teaching

5.3.1. External examiners across the Faculties commented positively on the quality of teaching and the students' learning environment, as noted in the following comments:
- *"My experience of the learning environment, including staff:student interactions and facilities was very good – students were engaged and enthusiastic."*
- *"There is excellent evidence of students being encouraged to engage well with the academic literature (even the weaker students seem to be availing themselves of online journals and up-to-date reading lists). … I am also very happy to see a range of innovative assessment types that feed into students' interests and that work towards employability, aside from enabling different kinds of learners to achieve."*
- *"The staff are enthusiastic and committed to delivering an engaging programme. There are many opportunities for students to engage with innovative teaching and learning activities, which align to real life application of theory to practice."*
- *"The student learning environment appears rich, with good opportunities for engagement with both positive and normative legal issues, which are examined in interesting and appropriate ways."*

5.3.2. Use of the KLE and the information available to students was praised by a number of external examiners, as noted in the following comments:
- *"The KLE is excellent, with staff using it as a supportive tool for students. There is clear recognition of the importance of helping students understand how to learn in addition to ensuring students acquire the required knowledge."*
- *"The teaching material contained on the VLE area tries to cater for diverse learning needs, by incorporating a range of teaching styles. This is facilitated by the diversity of teaching sessions; lectures, workshops, seminars and practical sessions."*
- *"I have to say I am impressed by quality of the teaching and use of the VLE to make modules interesting, contemporary and relevant. All modules I reviewed on Blackboard clearly signpost students to module-specific resources and also to additional learning resources aimed at helping students develop their academic writing and critical thinking skills."*
- *"The resources on Moodle is plenty and carefully created or chosen to support learning both in and out of classroom. This indicates the high quality of teaching and learning."*

5.4. Moderation practices

5.4.1. As in previous years, a number of external examiners commented on aspects of moderation, the consistency surrounding its use and the recording of such processes:
- *"There are processes for standardisation, double marking and moderation but there is only visible evidence of a single process for each module – sometimes standardisation and sometimes moderation – and always on a moderation form. It would be beneficial to have a separate form for each process."*
- *"The marking was done very professionally, in line with all the other activities … I do, however, have concerns over the way in which moderation is carried out. At present this involves moderating a selection of first class, low mark and some borderline scripts and individual marks are changed as a result of this … This means that the up or down lift that is possible say for a low first class mark is not available for 2.1 or 2.2 marks where theoretically the same shift might be possible and might lift a student into a higher class ... In other words it seems inequitable*

that some students have an opportunity to have marks altered whilst others do not."

- *"In some cases, the difference between second marking and moderation (i.e. checking mark award against stated criteria) was not clear. The terminology on feedback sheets does not clarify this."*

5.4.2. In addition to the above comments, external examiners across all faculties did also cite evidence of second marking and moderation amongst examples of good practice.

5.4.3. The University developed a Marking and Moderation Policy based on the University's Assessment Principles setting out expectations relating to the marking and moderation of student work, which was approved by Senate in October 2019 for use in the 2019/20 academic year. Details of the policy will be communicated to external examiners as part of their annual update, and their comments will be reviewed in the 2019/20 reports.

5.5. Additional information requested by examiners

5.5.1. In previous overview reports, best practice had been shared surrounding the production of a short statistical summary of the modules, which could include a summary of any potential issues or aspects the programme team wish the examiners to consider. Feedback from examiners surrounding these included; *"This year, a new executive summary report was provided for the externals which gave an overview of the module grades and highlighted any specific areas to look at. This was very useful and should continue. Although I appreciate that this was initially time-consuming to prepare, this should reduce in future years as figures should merely need updating."*

5.5.2. There are still some examiners who continue to raise this in their comments and recommendations, including;
- *"It would be useful to see more mark averages/ trend analysis of marks at modular level"*
- *"I would recommend that a marking analysis and commentaries are produced for each module. It helps to put the marks in context and also provides an opportunity for the module leader to reflect on the module performance"*
- *"A brief 'overview' document by the Exams Office/Head of Department on the overall range of marks, how things compared with previous years, would be welcome to see if there are courses which score more highly, any general subject-level trends, etc."*
- *"Provide statistical comparison of module and student outcomes at examboard."*

5.6. Feedback

5.6.1. The breadth and depth of feedback is consistently commented on by external examiners within all areas of their report; *"It is noteworthy that most staff take pains to note ways in which students can improve, as well as commending them on positive features of the work," "Feedback is clearly directive to enhance future academic development, sensitive and respectful, and identified both where marks were both gained and lost"* and *"assessors discussed the LOs in the feedback, so there is a strong sense of connectivity between assessment and LOs that is embedded in the student learning experience."*

5.6.2. There are instances where there could be more consistency between modules and individual markers, greater elaboration on marks above 80 or below 40 and focus around learning outcomes in feedback.

5.6.3. External examiners also spoke of the need to encourage students to engage with their feedback and suggested programmes considered this; *"Various strategies (for example dedicated feedback sessions) have been put in place at the beginning of the academic year with follow ups to achieve this and I have noted this has produced a large increase in students accessing the tutors' comments and advice on their coursework"* and *"Looking at the low proportion of students who had viewed their feedback on Turnitin, there may be some work to do in terms of encouraging students to see the value of 'feed forward'."*

5.7. Good practice

5.7.1. External examiners are invited to highlight aspects of good practice in relation to the programme and/or its modules that they feel should be shared across the University and to wider audiences.

5.7.2. The level of information provided to students in module handbooks giving students details of the content, resources and rationale were praised;
- *"Module Handbooks, where the content links clearly back to previous modules. This information helps students identify where this module fits into the wider curriculum and their future employment"* [Applied Biomedical Science]
- *"I strongly commend the practice within the School of explaining to students why particular pedagogic approaches are being adopted, so that students understand the educational significance of these. For examiner, I note in the stage 4 handbook it states, "You will not be provided with model answers to tasks as doing so will not help you to develop your independent learning skills.""* [Pharmacy]
- *"The handbook "The Knowledge: Creative Writing Guide" for Creative Writing modules is excellent and provides a range of resources for students in one place."* [English Literature]

5.7.3. In addition to the use of the KLE mentioned in section 5.3, some programme teams have developed KLE spaces specifically for external examiners, from a pilot process with information for external examiners *"being posted in a secure fashion onto the relevant KLE page for that module well in advance of the examiner's board meeting. This was fantastically helpful, and extremely well done"* [Mathematics] and external examiners citing it as *"an easy way for external examiners to engage easily with the programme"* [Physiotherapy]

5.7.4. As mentioned in section 5.5, the introduction of summary reports for modules was considered an area of good practice were *"Giving examiners access to historic data for modules (in order to see patterns/trends)"* [English Literatures] and the *"provision of an executive summary report for external examiners on arrival."* [Chemistry]

5.7.5. The range of assessment types utilised by programmes, examples include *"contextualised assessment"* [Forensic Science], *"diversity of assessment methods"* [Social Work] and *"I commend the variety of assessments. It is vital for programmes to have a full selection of assessments, and that there ought to be opportunity for exams as well as other work."* [Education]

5.8. Comments from Examiners at the end of their tenure

5.8.1. Examiners coming to the end of their tenure are given the opportunity to provide an overview of their period of office; the following comments show how examiners have found their terms of office with us.

- *"The range of modules offered, and the variation in types of assessment, demonstrate that Keele is a very good university for an undergraduate to study history. For a relatively compact group of staff compared to larger universities, there is an excellent choice of modules on offer."* [History]
- *"I see that good teaching practices are exchanged between the languages. I would also like to commend the support given by the university. The university recognises the importance of language learning in this global job market and encourages students to take up and persist with language learning"* [Japanese]
- *"May I take this opportunity to thank the programme team for their hospitality and commend them on being an excellent team that places the student experience at the core of everything they do, I wish the team every success in the future."* [Music Technology]
- *"This is a high quality programme - relevant to the contemporary world of practice and producing good social workers practitioners for the future."* [Social Work]
- *"Keele is able to offer a unique and commendable student experience due to the size of the cohort and your geographical location of teaching. The staff facilitating the programme know their students well and they are able to provide a superb learning environment in which students are able to thrive."* [Medicine (Year 1)]
- *"The School of Pharmacy at Keele is a very collegiate and open community of colleagues, and it has been a great pleasure to be able to work with the School over the last 4 years."* [Pharmacy]
- *"The modules that I have looked at over the years continue to be appropriate. Continue to build on the use of innovative pedagogies and digital learning experiences to take the course forward further."* [Applied Biomedical Science]
- *"Keele has long-held an excellent reputation for chemistry teaching in the UK, and it has been a pleasure to see how this is achieved. It is obvious that this is entirely due to the hard work and dedication of the staff."* [Chemistry]
- *"I have seen lots of evidence of good practice within the FY centre, and the teaching and admin staff can be justifiably proud of what they have achieved in the past 2 years."* [Foundation Year programmes (Non-Science)]

6. Suggested actions to be considered by Schools and programme teams

6.1. Rather than an action plan for the University, below are a series of suggestions Schools and programme teams may wish to consider. These are collated from areas of good practice commented on by external examiners or areas where more than one external examiners have made a similar request.

Suggestion 1: Actively ask external examiners if they wish to meet with students
External examiners have been requesting to meet with students, it is recognised that for some subject areas this is easier than others, for example inviting external examiners to attend student conferences. Having reviewed the comments in the 2017/18 external examiner reports, Quality Assurance produced an infographic giving suggestions for alternative mechanisms for face to face meetings between students and external examiners. The document 'Opportunities for external examiners to meet students' is available on the Quality Assurance pages on the website (https://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/sas/qa/externalexaminers/Opportunities%20for%20External%20Examiners%20to%20meet%20students.pdf) and was circulated to Schools.

Suggestion 2: Consider producing a short statistical summary at module level for external examiners
Over recent years, some module leads have begun to develop short statistical summaries which external examiners have found beneficial. Summaries could include a summary of any potential issues or aspects the programme team wish the examiners

to consider. The work in producing such reports for the first year are recognised by the external examiners and could also be useful for Annual Programme Reviews.

Suggestion 3: Consider the use of a dedicated space on the KLE for external examiners
A number of external examiners touched on the use of KLE spaces for module leads to share information including module proformas, handbooks and other programme documentation.

6.2.   Quality Assurance can facilitate sharing examples of good practice across the University.

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Annex A: Contextual data for undergraduate provision in 2018/19

1.1.   Report completion (at the time of writing)

Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences	**38 out of 39** reports (97%)
Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences	**26 out of 27** reports (96%)
Faculty of Natural Sciences	**29 out of 30** reports (97%)
International Study Centre (ISC)	**6 out of 7** reports (86%)
TOTAL	**99 out of 103** reports submitted (96%)*

this compares with 95% in 2017/18, 94% in 2016/17 and 96% in 2015/16

1.2.   Exam Board attendance: (based on responses on report forms)

Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences	**33 out of 38** examiners attended
	1 attended via Skype
Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences	**23 out of 26** examiners attended
Faculty of Natural Sciences	**28 out of 29** examiners attended
International Study Centre (ISC)	**4 out of 6** examiners attended
TOTAL	**88 out of 99** examiners (89%)*

this compares with 93% in 2017/18, 88% in 2016/17 and 91% in 2015/16