# External Examiners’ Reports for Undergraduate Programmes 2015/16

## University Overview

The Taught Programmes Sub-Committee (TPSC) considered the Faculty summary reports of External Examiners’ Reports for the 2015/16 academic year at its meetings held on 7 March and 4 April 2017. University Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee endorsed the proposed actions at its meeting on 3 May 2017.

## General

1. External examiners confirmed the standards of Newcastle University awards as well as the standards of the achievements of the University’s students, and found that both of these were comparable with standards at other institutions in the UK.
   - No major concerns were identified, although a number of external examiners raise issues for the attention of the University. These issues are being followed up LTDS on behalf of the University, and external examiners will receive a response from the institution.
   - In the majority of cases, FLTSECs were satisfied that all boards of studies had been meeting their responsibilities for considering and addressing external examiners’ reports. Any responses deemed unsatisfactory by FLTSEC were returned to the relevant school for revision.
   - One external examiner had not submitted their report despite repeated chasing in accordance with University policy.

## Issues of strategy, policy and process identified by external examiners that raise issues relating to University strategy, policy or process

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<th>2. Procedures</th>
<th>The University acknowledges the substantial commitments made by external examiners in attending Boards of Examiners.</th>
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<td>A small number of external examiners’ reports for programmes within HaSS had not been submitted as a result of the external examiners resigning their appointments, citing the Universities and Colleges Union pay dispute as grounds. The University’s emergency regulations were invoked to ensure that Boards of Examiners took place as planned, and that standards could be confirmed.</td>
<td>To mitigate the risk of further disruption as a result of industrial action, ULTSEC agreed at its meeting on 3 May 2017 that a formal notice period of three months should be introduced for all new external examiner appointments. This has now been incorporated into the Policy for External Examiners of Taught Programmes.</td>
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<th>3. Quality Management</th>
<th>1. It is already a matter of official University policy that half-marks should not be used for final module marks.</th>
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<td>1. The Cross-Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee had been asked to consider a recommendation that half-marks should not be used in final examinations.</td>
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2. The Cross-Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee had been asked to consider a recommendation that assignments could be conducted in more controlled conditions or more tasks added.
3. A small number of external examiners for programmes within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences commented on a perceived lack of clarity in the University’s Personal Extenuating Circumstances Procedure. The external examiners in question were concerned in particular by how PEC operates in relation to the use of discretion by Boards of Examiners.

6. Educational Partnerships
1. One of the external examiners for INTO Newcastle University programmes had recommended that there was scope for reviewing the decision-making process for pass and progression decisions for English for Academic Purposes modules. TPSC noted that the Board of Studies responsible for the programmes was open to having broader discussion of the issue and that a view on the matter had already been considered by the INTO Academic Group.
2. One of the external examiners for INTO Newcastle University programmes had recommended that the University reconsider use of the IELTS style common scale to assess students’ proficiency across all INTO programmes, arguing that this created problems in differentiating between students’ abilities to apply their language to the increasing demands of each programme level.
3. One of the external examiners for INTO Newcastle University and NU London programmes had highlighted a perceived lack of parity of approach between the two joint ventures, where versions of the same programme were taught at both locations.

Examples of effective practice identified in external examiners’ reports

14. Exemplary Practice
A small number of specific areas of exemplary or effective practice were identified from across the faculties, and TPSC highlighted the following with a view to further dissemination on a University-wide basis:
1. The practice of identifying and interviewing students who were either close to failing or who had failed some modules as this had impacted positively on retention.

The Learning and Teaching Development Service is actively investigating these areas of potentially exemplary practice at the request of TPSC. Any examples of exemplary practice will be written up as case studies and added to the new Case Studies of Teaching Practice database.
2. The School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development received favourable feedback for its External Examiners' Handbook.