Newcastle University
Taught Programmes Sub-Committee

University Overview of Postgraduate External Examiner Reports 2017-18

Background
1. This report provides an overview of all the key issues identified in the postgraduate taught external examiner reports for 2017-18.

Overview of reports
2. All except for one external examiner reports have been received.
3. The outstanding report relates to the MSc Structural Engineering programme. LTDS have made several attempts to contact the external examiner regarding the non-submission of their report, however, there has been no response to the requests. This matter was referred to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and the University has terminated the appointment of the external examiner.
4. LTDS will be responding directly to external examiners who have raised matters to the University. Individual Boards of Studies will respond to all other recommendations and suggestions.

Quality and standards
5. All externals have confirmed that the intended learning outcomes of the programmes were appropriate and were appropriate to the level of award as set out in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

Procedures
6. Similar to the undergraduate reports 35 External Examiners provided comments on procedural and administrative matters, these mostly consisted of individual areas for consideration by the specific Academic Unit.

There were, however, some common issues which a number of externals across the faculties raised including:
   a. The way in which materials are being supplied to external examiners. One external examiner noted that they had received materials in four different ways, paper versions, USB stick, Blackboard and NESS. Another external examiner noted that materials were made available via Turnitin but they had found this difficult to navigate.
   b. External examiners noted that scripts and moderation were not available for review during their visit.

Feedback
7. As with the undergraduate reports a number of externals (20) made comments in relation to feedback provided to students mainly relating to inconsistencies in the length and type of feedback provided and the variety of approaches to feedback across programmes. It was noted
that some generic feedback on Blackboard was dated from 2014. With the move to more electronic marking and feedback there were suggestions that more support is provided in this area.

Marking and Moderation and the use of the full range of marks

8. 36 externals made specific comments on marking and moderation processes, while some relate to particular assessment types in subject areas there was a recurring theme around the clarity of the moderation process whereby scripts and feedback sheets provided to the externals did not clearly show how work had been moderated.

9. There were comments on the use of the full range of marks noting the reluctance to use the full range, which is similar to comments received in the review of the undergraduate reports.

10. Two external examiners commented on the interaction between the first and second marker on project dissertations and suggested that the second marker should be independent of the project.

Staffing and resource issues

11. Seven external examiners made comments upon issues relating to staffing and resources, which included the workload on small programme teams and the administrative support provided to programmes.

12. One external examiner had commented on the low attendance at the Board of Examiners.

Student support

13. Six external examiners raised student support issues, however, these related to subject specific issues and there were no generic issues for University consideration.

University recommendations

14. There were few University recommendations this year. The recommendations mainly focused on the way in which external examiners received their materials.

15. One external examiner commented on the process for monitoring responses to the report as they had not received a reply to their previous report. The new online response function within the external examiner database would address this matter.

Summary

16. External examiner comments on the whole were positive about Newcastle University degree programmes and in the main recommendations and suggestions were provided to enhance already good practice.

Recommendations to TPSC:

Similarly to the Undergraduate External Examiner Overview Report the following suggestions are made.

17. To consider whether further guidance should be provided on the types and methods of feedback for assessed work.
18. To consider whether to ask NUI T for guidance on a consistent and reliable approach to providing access for external examiners to materials required to carry out their duties.

19. To consider whether support and guidance should be provided for online marking and feedback.

Laura Johnstone, Janice Trewick, Gilly Box, and Jolein De Ridder - LTDS
23 April 2019