

**Solent University**

**To:** Learning, Teaching and Student Achievement Committee

**Meeting Date:**  
06/02/2019

**Agenda item:**  
14

**Paper Ref:**  
19/LTSAC/10

**Presented by:** Ian Harris, Head of Quality Management

**Written by:** Mike Firth, External Examiner Officer

**ANALYSIS OF EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS AND UPDATE ON ISSUES RAISED**

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**Executive Summary**

This paper provides an analysis of the external examiner reports received for 2017-18 and an overview of the issues raised in the reports and the subsequent actions taken at both school and university level.

All external examiners have confirmed that the standards of the University's awards and student performance are secure and align with the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable benchmark statements.

The substantive themes identified from the unit external examiners' annual reports were: feedback; range and design of assessments; marking and internal moderation; employability skills and industry links; staff commitment; and external examiner support.

All issues raised by unit and award external examiners have been actioned and resolved by the schools and/or professional services.

The full list of issues, as well as the responses and any actions taken (if applicable) are contained within the uploaded version of this paper [here](#).

**The Committee is asked to:**

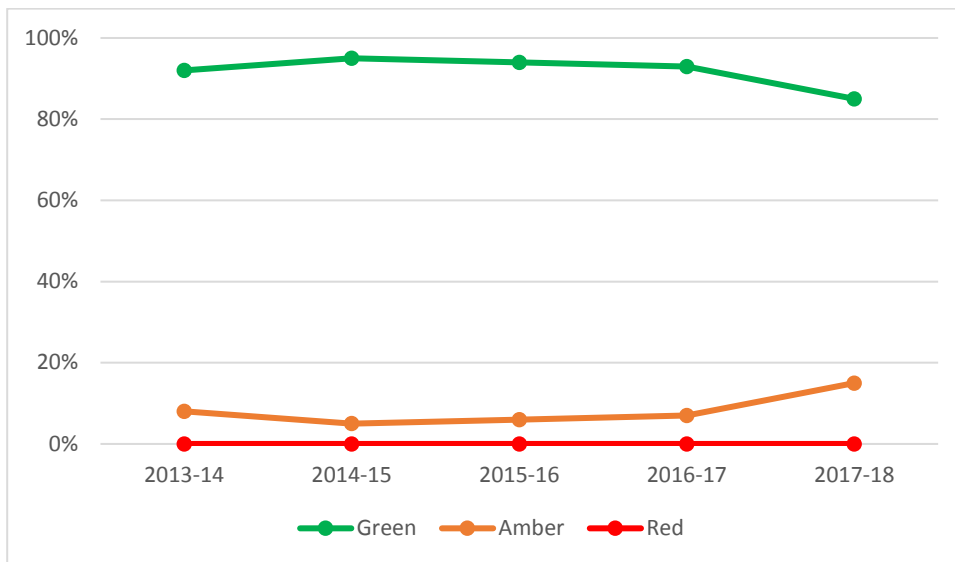
1. Note the outcomes of the 2017-18 external examiner reports and the actions taken by course teams to address the issues raised in the reports.

**Background**

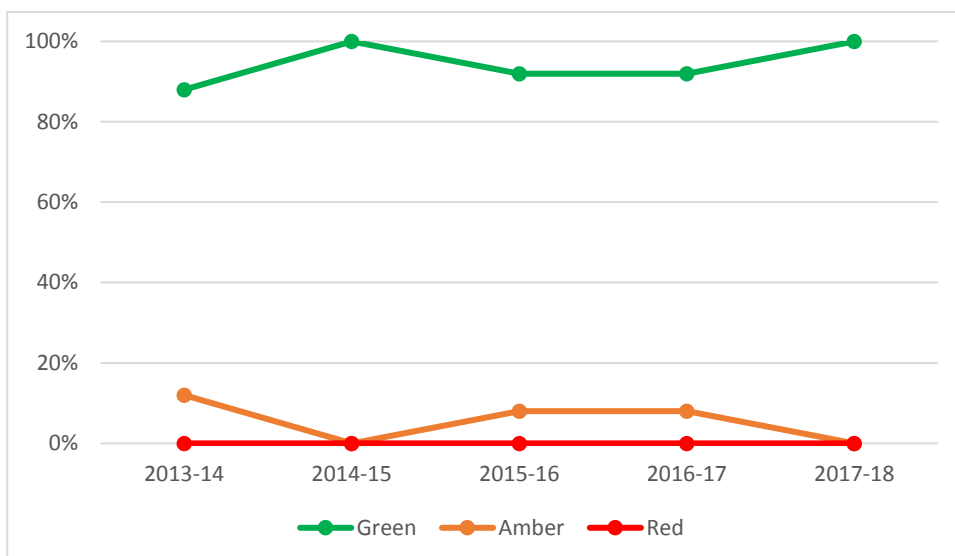
2. External examiner reports are reviewed by the Quality Management department and allocated a RAG code (Red, Amber or Green) which indicates the status of the report contents.
3. Quality Management identifies the issues that the school/service should respond to as a minimum in their responses and forward the RAGged reports to the schools/services who then carry out their own analysis and provide a detailed response to each external examiner. The reports are also considered as part of the Course Review process and discussed at Course Committees. Student course representatives are provided with access to relevant external examiner reports.

**For Information**

- 4. Overall the external examiner reports for 2017-18 were positive as evidenced by the number of reports RAGged green (149/87%). No reports from unit or award external examiners were coded red for the eighth year in succession.
- 5. Compared with the previous year, there was an increase in the number of reports flagged 'amber' from 7% to 13%. The majority of these reports were flagged as 'amber' due to the Unit External Examiners (UEE) not being able to access samples for moderation. This issue was linked to tight timeframes associated to the academic year. The Quality Management department is liaising with the Assessments and Ceremonies Manager to ensure that going forward UEEs have access to the samples for all the units within their allocation. The Quality Management department will also be contacting the Schools and all UEEs to make the expectation of UEE visits to the University more explicit. The majority of other issues raised in UEE reports were specific to individual units and addressed in the responses and, where required, through the course review process.
- 6. RAGging of unit external examiner annual reports.



- 7. RAGging of award external examiner reports:



8. Following a review of the six week time period within which a response should be provided to external examiners' reports, at its June 2018 meeting, LTSAC approved a proposal to change the University policy so that external examiner reports for all units that are attached to courses following the standard undergraduate calendar reports must be responded to by the end of September, and all other reports must be responded to within four weeks of submission.
9. 87% of the responses issued to external examiners were sent within the new timeframe. This is an improvement on 2016-17 when 73% of responses were issued under the former time period of six weeks from the date the report was received. A breakdown per school/service is shown in table 1 below.
10. It is important that responses are provided within the timeframe stated in the policy. Course teams were reminded by Quality Management when responses were due and those responses that were outstanding were flagged with the relevant Deans. All responses have now been received and issued to the external examiners.

**Table 1 - External examiner response rate per school/service**

School/Service	Number of Responses Issued on Time (by end of September or within 4 weeks of receipt)	Number of Responses Issued within 3 weeks of deadline (end of September or 4 weeks deadline)
Art, Design and Fashion	24 (96%)	25 (100%)
Business, Law and Communications	43 (88%)	49 (100%)
Warsash School of Maritime Science and Engineering	13 (76%)	17 (100%)
Media Arts and Technology	26 (68%)	38 (100%)
Sport, Health and Social Sciences	19 (100%)	19 (100%)
Solent Learning and Teaching Institute	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
New College of the Humanities	7 (100%)	7 (100%)
Various (Award EEs)	16 (100%)	16 (100%)
Overall	149 (87%)	172 (100%)

11. All issues raised by unit and award external examiners have been actioned and resolved either through the responses sent to the external examiners, the course review process and/or updates provided by the course teams. A breakdown per school/service is shown in table 2 below.

**Table 2 - Number of external examiner issues per school/service**

School/Service	No. of EEs	Total No. of Issues	No. of Issues Actioned and Closed
Art, Design and Fashion	25	69	69 (100%)
Business, Law and Communications	49	147	147 (100%)
Warsash School of Maritime Science and Engineering	17	45	45 (100%)
Media Arts and Technology	38	106	106 (100%)
Sport, Health and Social Sciences	19	42	42 (100%)
Solent Learning and Teaching Institute	1	0	N/A
New College of the Humanities	7	10	10 (100%)
Award EEs	6	13	13 (100%)
Overall	162	432	432 (100%)

12. The full list of issues, as well as the responses and any actions taken (if applicable) by the school and/or professional services are contained within the uploaded version of this paper [here](#).
13. The following themes were identified from the unit external examiners' annual reports: feedback; range and design of assessments; marking and internal moderation; employability skills and industry links; staff commitment; and external examiner support. The themes are summarised below.

#### **Feedback to Students**

14. Overall, external examiners commended the quality of feedback issued to students, noting that feedback was comprehensive and constructive which helped the students to progress through their courses. In particular, the external examiners praised the use of audio feedback that was utilised by some course teams. It was recommended, however, that audio feedback should be short and concise in order to not lose its purpose.
15. A small number of external examiners commented on the inconsistency of feedback provided between units, noting that some feedback was minimal and too generic. The relevant course teams proposed that they would standardise the type and delivery of feedback to students to ensure consistency.

#### **Range and Design of Assessments**

16. As in previous years, external examiners commented positively on the range and type of assessment tasks provided to students and the innovative design of these tasks. Recommendations were made regarding specific unit assessments; the course teams have considered these recommendations and have made appropriate modifications to assessments taking into consideration the feedback received from external examiners.

### **Marking and Internal Moderation**

17. Overall external examiners commented positively on the standard and consistency of marking. The internal moderation process was considered to be robust and the Externals praised the evidence of the course teams working together to ensure that marking was fair and consistent.
18. A small number of externals highlighted some inconsistency with the format and presentation of internal moderator comments, highlighting instances where the comments were minimal and did not clearly evidence how marks had been agreed. The course teams will address this to ensure a more consistent presentation of internal moderation results.

### **Employability Skills and Industry Links**

19. The embedding of employability skills and real world learning has been an area of good practice highlighted in external examiners' reports since the University introduced a policy in 2011-12 which stipulated the inclusion of real-world learning in the core curriculum of all traditional awards.
20. External examiners once again commended the embedding of 'real-world' learning within the curriculum of the University's provision. They commented that the placement opportunities and numerous links with employers and professional bodies provided the students with a distinctive edge in terms of securing employment following graduation.

### **Staff Commitment**

21. The external examiners often commended the University's staff for their commitment, dedication and organisation. It was highlighted that the level of support provided to students allowed them to develop and enhance their knowledge and skills which prepared them for life after University.

### **External Examiner Support**

22. On the whole external examiners thought that they were effectively supported and provided with the necessary information and resources to carry out their role. Externals praised the interim visits to the University to meet with course teams and to conduct moderation. In addition, feedback from the annual external examiners' briefing was overwhelmingly positive with the externals praising the organisation of the event and the information provided.
23. In previous years, the external examiners have experienced issues with logging onto the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). In August 2017 the University's ICT department applied a new password policy to the log in credentials for external examiners. The password expiry was extended to 12 months which ensured that external examiners' passwords did not expire at the time that they were conducting their moderation duties. As a result, the number of external examiners reporting issues with logging into the VLE has reduced significantly.
24. A number of external examiners raised issues with not being able to access samples for moderation. This issue was linked to tight timeframes associated to the academic year. The External Examiner Officer is liaising with the Assessments and Ceremonies Manager to ensure that going forward Unit External Examiners have access to the samples for all the units within their allocation.

### **Award External Examiners**

25. All award external examiner reports were positive with no recurring issues. The externals praised the support they received and commended the conduct and professionalism of the boards. The external examiners confirmed that the application of assessment regulations were robust and decisions on all awards were considered and fair.

### **Conclusion**

26. All external examiners have confirmed that the standards of the University's awards and student performance are secure and align with the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable benchmark statements.
27. Progress has been made by the course teams to address the issues raised by external examiners. The Course Review process has confirmed that course teams have responded to the issues and actions have been raised where necessary to address these issues.
28. All issues raised by unit and award external examiners have been actioned and resolved by the schools and/or professional services. The full list of issues, as well as the responses and any actions taken (if applicable) are contained within the uploaded version of this paper [here](#).