

Responding to External Examiner Reports

We receive a report annually from external examiners. These reports, submitted through the University's on-line system, should be responded to by course leaders. These notes support course leaders in this process.

Overview

Course leaders are emailed when an external examiner report has been submitted, providing a hyperlink to the report. The expectation is that responses are submitted through the on-line system within 10 working days of notification to ensure timely action in response to any issues raised. Once submitted, responses are signed off by a School or Partner nominee and then the Head of Quality.

External examiner reports are key elements of the quality assurance processes. Consequently, it is important that **all** issues or concerns raised within reports are responded to explicitly and, where appropriate, addressed through planned actions. Where responses fail to do this, reports are referred back to the course leader for further work to ensure completeness is achieved.

Reviewing the external examiner's comments

The external examiner is asked to provide comments and observations in response to six statements (or eleven for apprenticeships), provided with an opportunity to share general comments, and are also asked brief questions exploring procedural and academic issues. In addition, the external examiner is encouraged to make explicit recommendations for action within an action plan. Course leaders are required to respond to all issues raised and to explain and respond to any 'no' or 'partially' answers to the brief questions. Consequently, it is important that time is taken to read through and evaluate all of the external examiner's text. In particular, it is recommended that:

- The external examiner's text is analysed to identify all comments that could be judged to indicate a concern or deficiency in the practices, standards and resources in place. Similarly, where the external examiner highlights good practice worthy of further use or dissemination, this should be noted.
- The external examiner's responses to the brief questions are reviewed, with note taken of anywhere the answer was 'no' or 'partially'. For each no or partially, the external examiner should have provided further comment and this should be considered.
- The external examiner's recommendations should be considered. While course teams are not required to agree with or implement all recommendations provided, good reasons for not doing so will need to be provided.

When reviewing the external examiner's report, the course team may feel that some of the comments require further clarification before they are able to fully respond. In such cases, the course leader should contact the external examiner to request clarifications.

Responding to External Examiner Reports (cont.)

Rather than typing into the on-line EE report system directly, it is often easier to compose the text first and then copy-and-paste this into the report.

Completing action plan and general response

The response to the external examiner report should explicitly address every issue or concern raised by the external examiner in a meaningful way. The recommendations set out by the external examiner will cover many if not all of these, but where there are issues and concerns not covered by the recommendations these need to be addressed either through the addition of extra rows in the action plan or through comment in the general response section. Similarly, where the external examiner's responses to the brief questions indicate possible deficiencies, these need to be addressed through further action plan items or discussion in the general response section. External examiner reports exploring provision at more than one location should be completed through consultation with all course teams to ensure consistency and completeness of the response.

Setting out actions

Actions are required for each of the external examiner's recommendations, and further actions may be added to address other issues or concerns and to explore how good practice can be promulgated. Actions should be realistic, timely and achievable, directly address the issue or concern raised, and set out success criteria that are measurable by the Student Voice Forum. Where possible, actions should ensure each issue or concern will be dealt with for the following academic year.

Where the external's comments focus on resourcing, either physical or staffing, the actions set out in response should be discussed and agreed with the relevant line management before completion.

The general response

The course leader's general response is an opportunity to provide overall comments and to address issues not addressed through the action plan. In this area it is often appropriate to:

- Characterise the flavour of the external examiner's comments as a whole;
- Highlight evidence of improvement, particularly where this is the result of previous action plans;
- Provide background and contextual information that would enable the casual reader to understand the report (for example, significant changes or events that impacted on the delivery during the year, or plans for course re-design in the near future);
- Provide clarifications and explanations on issues not addressed in the action plan;
- Indicate how good practice will be expanded or disseminated.

It is sometimes appropriate, particularly when the report is the final one from the external examiner, to acknowledge the support and advice received from the external examiner.

For support and advice in completing External Examiner reports you are advised to contact the Quality Team (eereports@uos.ac.uk)