

# EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' BRIEFING

## Welcome to Oxford Brookes

19th April 2023



# INTRODUCTIONS

**Dominic Corrywright**

**Rob Hayward**

**John Jakeman**

**Sarah Britten-Jones**

**Berry O'Donovan**

**Gavin Barber**

**Polly Magne**

**Chloe Teague**

**Liz Turner**

The team behind the email [externals@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:externals@brookes.ac.uk)

**Samina Bashir**

**Simon Waine**

# ABOUT BROOKES

**Liz Turner**

Deputy Director (Academic Policy & Regulation)

Academic & Student Administration

# ABOUT OXFORD BROOKES

- Post-92 university - teaching and research strengths
- Campuses in and around **Oxford** and in **Swindon**
- Academic teams located in one of four **Faculties**:  
Oxford Brookes Business School (OBBS)  
Health & Life Sciences (HLS)  
Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS)  
Technology, Design & Environment (TDE)
- Supported by Faculty and central administration teams (ASA)
- Range of higher and degree **apprenticeships** offered in OBBS, HLS & TDE
- Many programmes accredited by **professional bodies**.
- **18,000** students in total; around 20% EU/International; approx. 4,000 students studying for Brookes awards off campus.
- **International** partnerships in many countries around the world, including Cayman Islands, China, Greece, Hong Kong, Kenya, Sri Lanka - using various delivery models.
- **UK** collaborative taught programmes, mostly through the Associate College Partnership, Global Banking School, and CPD portfolio with a range of specialist organisations.

# CURRICULUM STRUCTURES

## **Bachelor's degree programmes** - new UG framework started Sept 2020

- UMP (continuing students); first graduates under new framework in 2022/23
- 15 credit standard module size; pass mark 40%
- Compulsory v optional modules (choice increases through levels)
- Degree classification (L5:L6 weighting 25%: 75%)
- GPA (average of all modules from L4 to L6)

## **Foundation degree programmes**

- Mainly taught through ACP, with options to top up to Bachelor's degree
- Small cohorts; few options within programmes
- Award classification - Pass/Merit/Distinction, based on average module mark across L4/L5

## **Master's degree programmes**

- 20 credit standard module size; pass mark 50%
- Variety of structures/credit/award requirements
- Award classification - Pass/Merit/Distinction, based on average module mark; plus minimum mark in dissertation (until next year)

## **Apprenticeships**

- 7 currently running, mainly L7 (Nursing Associate at L5); around 350 apprentices
- Some have integrated End Point Assessments subject to EQA
- Preparing for Ofsted

# New UG framework

**Gavin Barber**

Deputy Director (Registry)

Academic & Student Administration

# Implementing the new UG framework

- Current UG framework came into effect September 2020
- Key features:
  - Streamlined module choice: e.g. fully compulsory first semester
  - Strict progression requirements between levels
  - New classification calculation (25 / 75 between Levels 5 and 6)
  - Credit limits per stage/level

## *Implementation*

- Highly impacted by pandemic
- Immediately relaxed progression requirements
- Students and colleagues caught out by credit limits

# Implementing the new UG framework

## *Lessons and subsequent actions*

- Some relaxation of progression requirements still in place
- Early intervention for struggling students
- Impact on attainment unknown as yet!
- Review of the shape of the academic year



# TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT @OBU

**Dr Polly Magne**

**Head of Academic Practice**

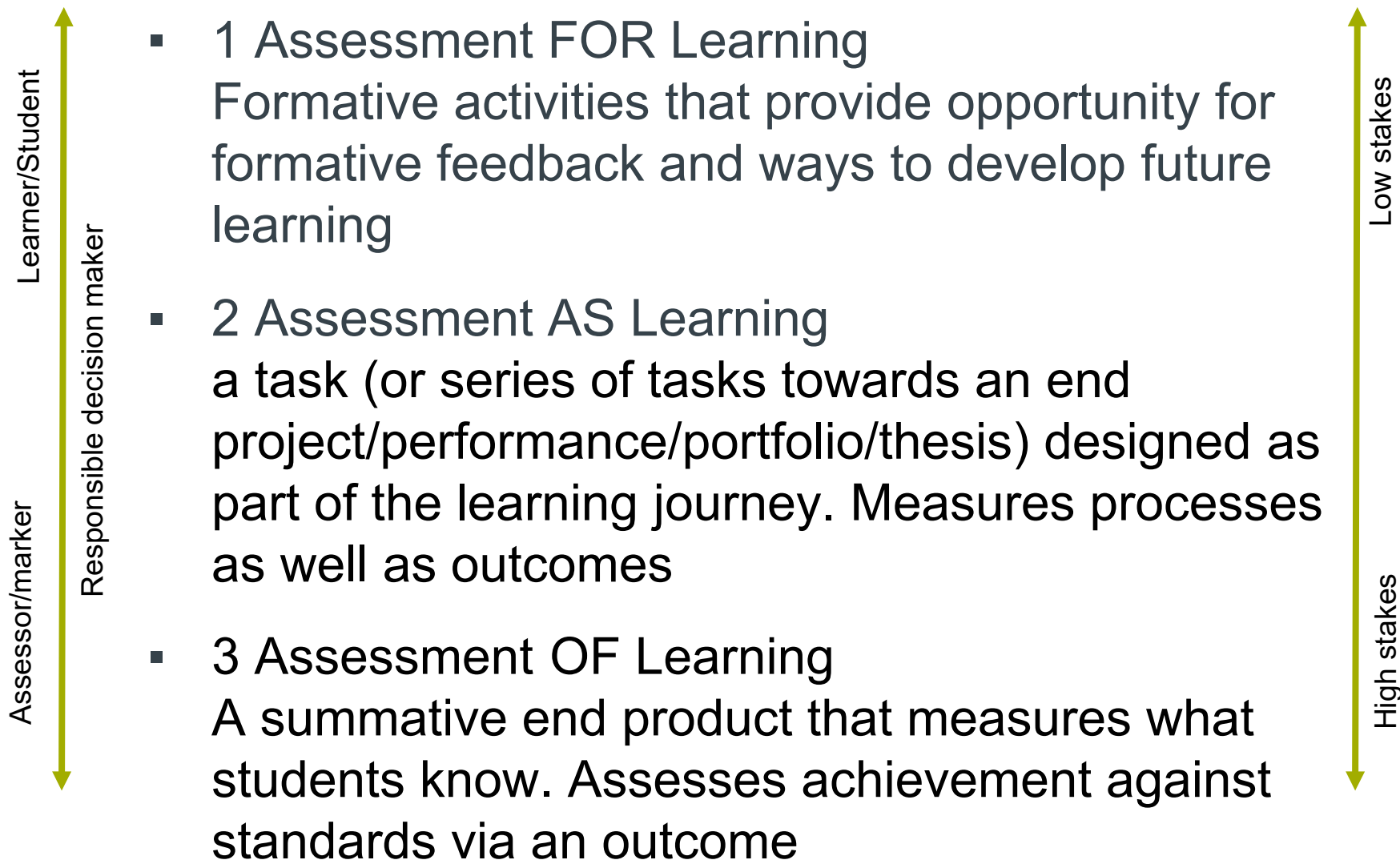
Oxford Centre for Academic Enhancement &  
Development

# IDEAS Framework

A toolkit that enables programme design teams to build learning experiences that encompass each of these elements.



# Assessment as, of and for learning

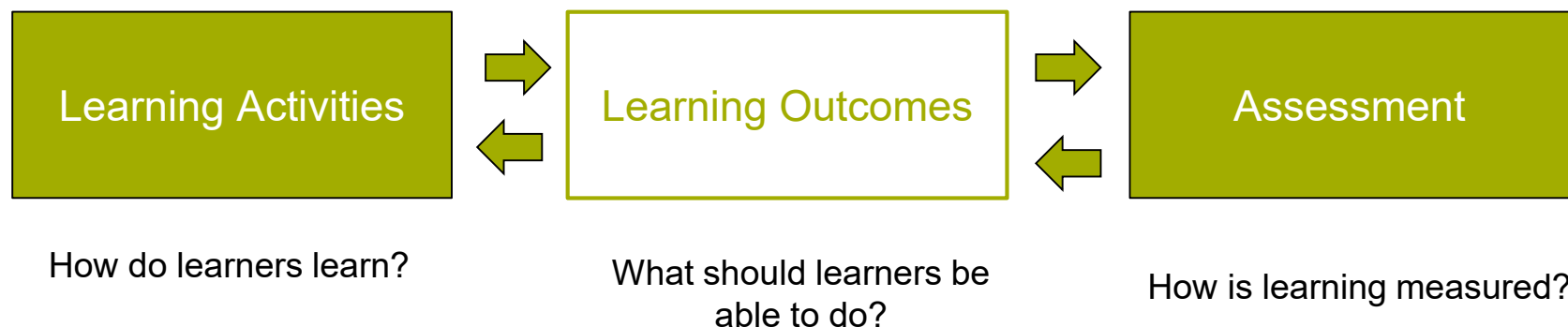


# Brookes Assessment policy

For each programme an assessment and feedback strategy maximises the opportunities for students to engage deeply with assessment and feedback to support their learning and development.

This strategy outlines assessment and feedback practices that are:

- ❑ fair, inclusive and accessible;
- ❑ appropriate to disciplinary and/or professional contexts;
- ❑ designed to measure when intended learning outcomes are met, by aligning learning outcomes with the teaching and learning methods, the assessment criteria and the marking rubrics



# What does inclusivity mean for assessment?

Assessment criteria and standards are set

Inclusion does NOT mean adjusting the criteria or standards

It is NOT about making assessment easier

Inclusive assessment *is* about designing accessible assessment and the scaffolding to enable students to achieve each assessment to the best of their ability

# Equality, Equity, Inclusivity

## EQUALITY VERSUS EQUITY



In the first image, it is assumed that everyone will benefit from the same supports. They are being treated equally.



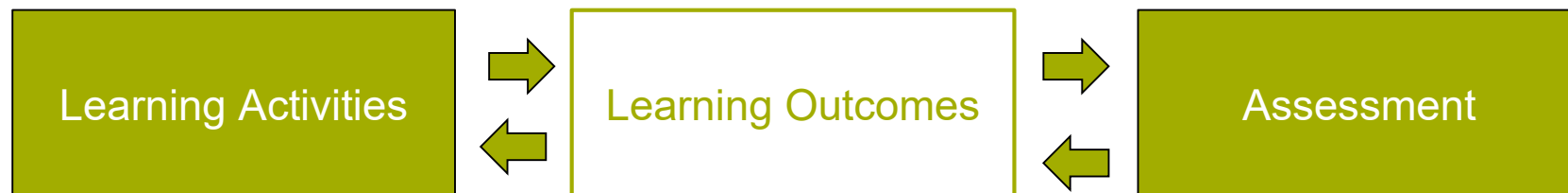
In the second image, individuals are given different supports to make it possible for them to have equal access to the game. They are being treated equitably.



In the third image, all three can see the game without any supports or accommodations because the cause of the inequity was addressed. The systemic barrier has been removed.

Inclusivity is about removing inequity and giving everyone a fair chance

# Brookes Assessment policy



From a pedagogic perspective, with your disciplinary expertise:

- Are the 'right' things being measured, at the correct level, for the appropriate number of credits?
- Are the demands of the assessment in line with National Standards and Professional Body requirements?
- Do the assessment briefs provide a clear outline of the task(s), actions and parameters?
- Do the marking rubrics: reflect the assessment tasks, offer clarity, transparency, and delineate clearly between grade boundaries?
- Is there consistency between markers?
- Does the feedback highlight strengths and areas for improvement, and clearly outline ways to enhance future learning and submissions?

# THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S ROLE AT OBU

**Liz Turner**

Deputy Director (Academic Policy & Regulation)  
Academic & Student Administration

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/staff/apqo/external-examining/>



# OUR EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

- At the last count, we have **221** external examiners on our books (UG, PGT, CP, short courses);
- Mostly academics in other HE providers, but...
- ...also includes small number of practitioners (PSRB requirements)
- ...and a handful of examiners with 'other' affiliations
- ...and small group of bilingual EEs examining on the portfolio of programmes offered in partnership with Metropolitan College, and taught in Greek
- Your primary ongoing relationship is with the relevant academic department, but our central operations team processes appointments, fees and expenses, and can answer HR/finance-related queries;
- Sometimes seek EE views on major University initiatives, e.g. new UG framework; University calendar

# Sector expectations

- EE system previously thought of as '**jewel in the crown**' of UK HE QA, but...
- **OfS** does not consider the external examiner system to be an essential element of the assurance of award standards, but...
- **QAA** - recently published 'new' external examining principles re-stating the value of the role, and...
- Providers generally consider EEs as an important way of showing we meet the OfS B conditions, especially...
- **B4 Assessment and awards:**
  - students are assessed effectively;
  - each assessment is valid and reliable;
  - academic regulations are designed to ensure awards are credible;
  - effective assessment of technical proficiency in English language at the appropriate level;
  - awards granted to students are credible at the point they are awarded, and when compared to those granted previously.
- **B5 Sector recognised standards:**
  - qualifications appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards (FHEQ, degree classification descriptors, PSRB requirements);
  - awards only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards.

# WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

- Approve draft examination papers and coursework briefs
- \*Review samples of assessed student work, from across the grades
- Attend examination committee
- Write annual report (may include comment on End Point Assessment for integrated apprenticeships)
- (maybe) Attend exhibitions, performances, practical exams or visit students on placement
- (maybe) Visit delivery partner organisations
- (maybe) Meet with students
- (from time to time) Comment on changes to the curriculum
- \***Continuing to operating remotely** - except where it is essential (for pedagogical or professional accreditation reasons) that an assessment is reviewed in person.

# THE ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

EEs have a multi-faceted role:

- **guardian of the University's standards:** assurance on consistent application of standards, in line with sector/discipline reference points;
- **checking assessment processes** are rigorous and fair (marking standards, quality of feedback, regulations applied), and measure achievement against learning outcomes;
- **guardian of national standards:** assurance of comparability of award standards and levels of student achievement between institutions (to the best of their knowledge);
- identifying good practice and opportunities for enhancement of the learning experience, as a '**critical friend**'

***Reflection:*** what's the most important aspect for you..?

# ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

*“It is my firm belief that an external examiner should be a critical friend and there have been times when I have challenged the [examination] committee, hopefully in a constructive way. I would therefore like to thank all members of the [examination committee] for their patience and good humour when subjected to my opinion...”*

- EEs often comment on the willingness of our programme teams to engage in conversations with them about how to make improvements to teaching and assessment.
- Programme teams use EE reports as evidence for annual quality monitoring reports, and we welcome critical analysis/commentary in your report - we use it to improve our provision, and not to discipline anyone!

# THINGS TO ASK YOUR PROGRAMME LEAD

- Where can I find programme and module information, and the previous EE's reports? How will I be updated on changes to the programme/in the Department? How will I be supported in my role? What time commitment is involved, and when?
- At what stage/s will I be involved in the assessment process?  
When will I be asked to approve draft assignment briefs/exam papers?  
When, and how, can I expect to receive samples of assessed work?
- What information will accompany the samples (module stats, marking schemes, module guides, etc)?
- How will I review non-written assessments (e.g. presentations, performances)?
- Will I be visiting partner organisations, placements, or meeting with students on-campus?
- What processes are in place to ensure the consistency of marking across the programme? How is the internal moderation process documented, and what insight into the moderation processes should I expect?
- When is the examination committee meeting?

# THE ANNUAL REPORT

**Chloe Teague**  
**Senior Quality Assurance Officer**  
Academic & Student Administration

# THE ANNUAL REPORT

- **Where** do you find the report template?
- <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/staff/apqo/external-examining>
  
- **When** is it due?
- Check with your Programme Lead or Subject Coordinator
- APQO will send general reminders, with a link to the report template, in advance of the exam committee periods in June (UG) and Dec (PG)
- It is usually due within a month of the examination committee linked to your annual report. Please let us know if you're going to struggle to meet a deadline so we can time any reminders sensitively.
  
- **How** do you complete the report...?



# THE ANNUAL REPORT

- **Section 1:** contextual details
- **Section 2:** Quality Assurance - meeting threshold requirements
  - are you satisfied that standards are set appropriately, assessment practices are sound, exam committees operated with integrity, your involvement has been appropriate, etc.
- **Section 3:** Quality Enhancement - suggestions for improvement
  - currency of the curriculum, and of teaching and learning practices; the extent to which teams are addressing inclusivity and graduate employability;
  - are PSRB standards being met on accredited programmes;
  - collaborative arrangements - comparability of standards across sites.
- **Section 4:** Faculty/institutional issues (mostly referred to Faculty Exec)
- **Section 5:** Feedback on EE experience, at end of term of office (feel free to contact us at any time during your period of office if you have a problem, so we can fix it)
- **Section 6:** External assessors report for integrated EPAs (apprenticeships)

# WHAT DO WE DO WITH YOUR REPORT?

- Pay your fee (please send it to [externals@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:externals@brookes.ac.uk) )
- Circulated to Programme Lead, Faculty Head of QA & Validations, and Associate Dean for Education & Student Experience, for initial response (within a few weeks)
- Followed up by a copy of the full action plan from the Annual Quality Monitoring Report
- Any concerns about academic or professional standards, or the integrity of the assessment process, triggers immediate action by the Faculty
- Response to wider issues - if raised - will come from appropriate member of senior staff in the Faculty or University
- Annual overview report of all EE reports produced for the University's senior quality committee (*this report is also provided to the Board of Governors as an appendix to the annual assurance report*)

# THEMES FROM EE REPORTS

## Commendations:

- breadth and currency of curriculum, incl. interesting specialisms, focus on topical issues, current research, and contemporary professional/industry practice;
- student achievement and graduate employability;
- well-designed assessment strategies and engaging tasks, with focus on assessment for learning; clear briefs, and constructive and supportive feedback;
- enthusiasm and expertise of teaching staff; student centred approaches, and commitment to providing an excellent learning experience;
- rigour and care taken in the assessment process, including marking and feedback, moderation, and the operation of examination committees;
- key role of OBU liaison managers/ buddies in maintaining standards.

## Suggestions for improvement:

- Consistency in levels of feedback given on assessed work;
- Assessment workload;
- Timescales for marking and moderation (comments).

# FEEDBACK ON THE EXPERIENCE...

- *“This certainly has been the best experience (of a number) that I have had as an external examiner. That fact stems from a number of things, including: the way in which my comments or suggestions have always been received positively and treated seriously; the excellent organisation/administration of the marking/exam boards; the wider support for my role as external; and, most of all, the clear commitment of staff to their students, the programme and the standards and rules of the institution.”*
- *“The exam committee meeting was inclusive and I felt welcomed by the team again this year, the meeting was clearly structured and conducted professionally throughout with adherence and constant consideration of academic regulations. Where necessary, regulations were consulted and shared with all in attendance. Throughout, the teaching team demonstrated a passion for supporting their students and the progression and performance of each student was examined in very good detail.”*
- *“It has been a real pleasure. The administration is truly exemplary. I have externally examined in a range of institutions and the support given to external examiners is excellent, exceeding everywhere else I have externally examined. The team has always been helpful and responsive. Thank you all for making my term of office so enjoyable.”*
- **...but please do tell us if you have any issues so that we can address them as soon as possible.**

# Offering a critical perspective

Faculty Heads of Quality Assurance & Validations:

**Sarah Britten-Jones** [sbritten-jones@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:sbritten-jones@brookes.ac.uk)

**Dominic Corrywright** [dcorrywright@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:dcorrywright@brookes.ac.uk)

**Rob Hayward** [r.hayward@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:r.hayward@brookes.ac.uk)

**John Jakeman** [jjakeman@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:jjakeman@brookes.ac.uk)

# Developments for the EE report

**EE engagement feeds into...**

**Subject committee meetings**

**Programme development groups**

**Reports to PSRBs**

**Discussions with programme teams**

**Formal vs Informal**

**Ongoing vs revalidation**

# Developments for the EE report

- **The current situation:**
  - **Generally, very positive**
  - **Praise for staff**
  
- **What we'd like:**
  - **All the above**
  - **More criticality**
  - **3 good/bad/areas for improvement?**

# Current faculty priorities

**John Jakeman - HLS**

**Sarah Britten-Jones - TDE**

**Dominic Corrywright - HSS**

**Rob Hayward - OBBS**



# Academic Standards and External Examiner Dilemmas

**Prof. Berry O'Donovan**

Oxford Brookes Business School

# Academic standards and Quality Standards

- **Academic standards:** an *output* measure focusing on student achievement.
- **Quality standards:** *input* and *process* measures focusing on all other aspects of the assessment cycle.
- **Assessment criteria** - attributes of quality
- **Academic standards** - level of performance/achievement
- **Sharp standards** - attributes that are easily measurable (typing speed)
- **Relative standards** - attributes not easily articulated or measurable - matters of degree (critical evaluation)

## Variability in standards

It is easier to gain consistency and effectiveness in quality processes than in relative academic standards, challenges include:

- Opaque or non-existent marking criteria
- Multiple interpretations of key criteria
- Challenge of articulating and sharing 'level' when dealing with 'relative' academic standards.

Hartog and Rhodes, 1935; Laming et al., 1990; Wolf, 1995; Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2001; Elander and Hardman, 2002; Newstead, 2002; Baume, Yorke and Coffey, 2004; Norton, 2004; Read et al., 2005; Price, 2005; Shay, 2004 and 2005; Brookes, 2012; O'Hagan and Wigglesworth, 2014; Bloxham et al., 2015 (this is not an exhaustive list)

# How do Externals get to know the academic standards of their community?

- Experience
- External and Internal Reference Points

# Reference Points

## Key External Reference Points

- Sector Recognised Standards and Qualification Characteristics (recent OFS publication, Nov 2022)
- Subject Benchmark Statements
- Relevant Professional Standards

Plus, of course, *internal reference points* such as assessment policies, regulations, programme specifications, marking criteria etc.

# External Examiner Dilemmas

There are no easy answers to these dilemmas. They are constructed for discussion and all are drawn from real situations. So don't worry that you will get the answer 'wrong'. Most solutions have advantages and disadvantages.

In the 'Chat' you will see a link to a Google Document that contains five difficult situations (dilemmas) for you to discuss in breakout groups. Each dilemma is numbered 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. Discuss the dilemma with the same number as your breakout group (i.e. 1, 2 or 3). If you have time you can then select to discuss another dilemma).

In your breakout group, choose and discuss what you would do in this situation - a number of options are suggested.

You only have 15 minutes, come back prepared to share your thoughts with us all.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1g1OtH2nv2tYriMdFUNtkEWZNXQWR55mx/view?usp=sharing>

# EE Dilemmas: discuss in your breakout group which response you would take & why

## Dilemma 1

After reviewing a selection of student work on a PG module you agree with the marks. However, these are disappointingly low. You agree with the Module Leader that students have not done well in a key criterion, critical evaluation, but you are concerned that the assessment task does not allow students to demonstrate this attribute. The task demands secondary research skills but not for students to critically evaluate the sourced research. Your concern is increased as you know that critical evaluation of research and advanced scholarship is a key Level 7 attribute that is highlighted in the OFS document 'Sector Recognised Standards'.

- A. You decide as it is not students' fault that their marks are low that the assignments should be remarked based on the three other criteria. This does mean that students' final classifications will be delayed.
- B. You suggest that all marks should be lifted by a % that brings the average of this assignment in-line with other module averages across the programme.
- C. As you approved the assignment brief you feel partially responsible. So for this one time you are prepared to allow the marks to stand, but want to ensure that this doesn't happen again by highlighting national reference points with tutors in a professional development session on 'level 7ness'

## Dilemma 2

In a sample of Master's dissertations you have access to the first and second markers' original marks and comments, as well as the final agreed mark and feedback sheet. You begin to realise that where there is a significant difference in marks between the first and second marker the final mark is an average of the two. All dissertations marking is carried out by a small number of markers (all research active staff) in a very busy department.

- A. You find this unacceptable. Giving the student a 'compromise' mark may advantage some students whilst disadvantaging others. The mark should be determined according to the quality of the work. You raise it with the exam board.
- B. It seems inevitable that when a small number of staff must mark all the dissertations they will not have time to have detailed discussions. You know that marking is an inexact science and the average mark is as likely to be as accurate as either of that of the two markers so you do not query the marks and approve them.
- C. The Master's programme offers only pass, merit or distinction in the final award. It seems to you that the inaccuracy in marks created by this approach is not significant enough to affect students' final outcomes, so you decide not to make an issue of it.
- D. You suggest that a section be included on the dissertation form that requires an explanation of how the final mark was agreed, in the hope that your inference is wrong or that it will stop the practice of averaging in the future.



## Dilemma 3

You have some concern about inconsistency in the marks awarded on a sample of work you have seen. The sample has clear evidence of having been through a moderation process. You ask about the moderation process and the module leader explains that each marker ( $n=6$ , four of whom are experienced on this module) is asked to provide information about the average and range of marks for their batch of marking ( $n=25$ ). The module leader compares the averages and ranges, and then moderates the batches that are out of line by raising or lowering all marks in a particular batch. The module leader suggests that because markers have a random selection of work to mark rather than the work of their own seminar groups, this system of moderation is acceptable.

- A. Accept that it is likely that each batch will include a typical set of student work so accept the moderation is appropriate.
- B. Request that the non-moderated marks be reinstated because these are more likely to reflect the quality of the work judged using the criteria.
- C. You wonder whether the marking inconsistency has been exacerbated by the two new markers in the team and ask about the average and range of marks for their batches. Marks for these two batches might be changed as a result.
- D. Acknowledge that moderation can be time consuming and comparing averages might be a starting point. But suggest that moderation should also involve comparing the quality of the work.

## Dilemma 4

There are two assignments for a level 5 UG module. The tasks are quite complex, but well designed, and far more innovative than many others. They both challenge and engage the students who appear to have learnt a lot. The two assignments assess very different learning outcomes, consequently the criteria being used to frame each assessment are very different. You can see from the marksheet that some students failed to achieve a pass on one assignment but did well on the other. All students have gained over 30% on each assignment and all achieved a pass on the module overall.

- A. You find this unacceptable and request that the work not reaching at least a threshold pass on both assignments should be referred and offered a resit.
- B. Averaging the achievement across assessment tasks is common practice in higher education, you do not regard this as an issue.
- C. Accept the marks, but seek reassurance that the learning outcomes not met will have or will be achieved in other modules.
- D. Accept the marks for this year but request the assessment strategy be changed next year to ensure this doesn't happen again.

# Dilemma 5

In an undergraduate programme you review two modules which use student presentations as a summative task. One is in the first year and one in the final year. You notice that the criteria and level descriptors used to mark the presentations are the same. The feedback provided suggests that the students' presentation skills are expected to be a little more developed in the final year but the judgements are still largely based on quite mechanistic factors such as eye contact and voice projection. As a consequence, you think the standard required for the final year module is too low and does not align with the subject benchmark statement.

Consequently, the marks awarded for presentation skills seem to be too high. However, you are concerned that the students may not have understood that an improved quality of work has been expected of them, because the rubric is the same. And you are unaware of any other opportunities that the students have to give presentations between these two instances so you cannot expect the student presentation skills to have greatly improved.

- A. This is too minor an issue to raise. The marks for presentation are unlikely to make a material difference to final honours classifications.
- B. You accept the position for this year as it would be unfair on students to change expectations.
- C. You request that the marks are adjusted (downwards) so that the standards reflect expectations as set out in the benchmark statement.

# Reflections

So what were the key issues that came up in your discussion?

What are your reflections on the dilemma?

Any other questions?

# THANK YOU

## Academic Policy & Quality Office:

- web pages for external examiners

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/asa/apqo/external-examining/>

- email

[externals@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:externals@brookes.ac.uk)