



# Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

## **RESPONDING TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS – GUIDANCE FOR COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS**

### **Introduction**

External examiners are an essential element of any university's quality processes. Externals can compare the student work done at QMU (and its partner organisations) and confirm that it's at the same academic level as student work from other UK universities. They are also a source of advice and guidance based on their years of experience of teaching a similar programme.

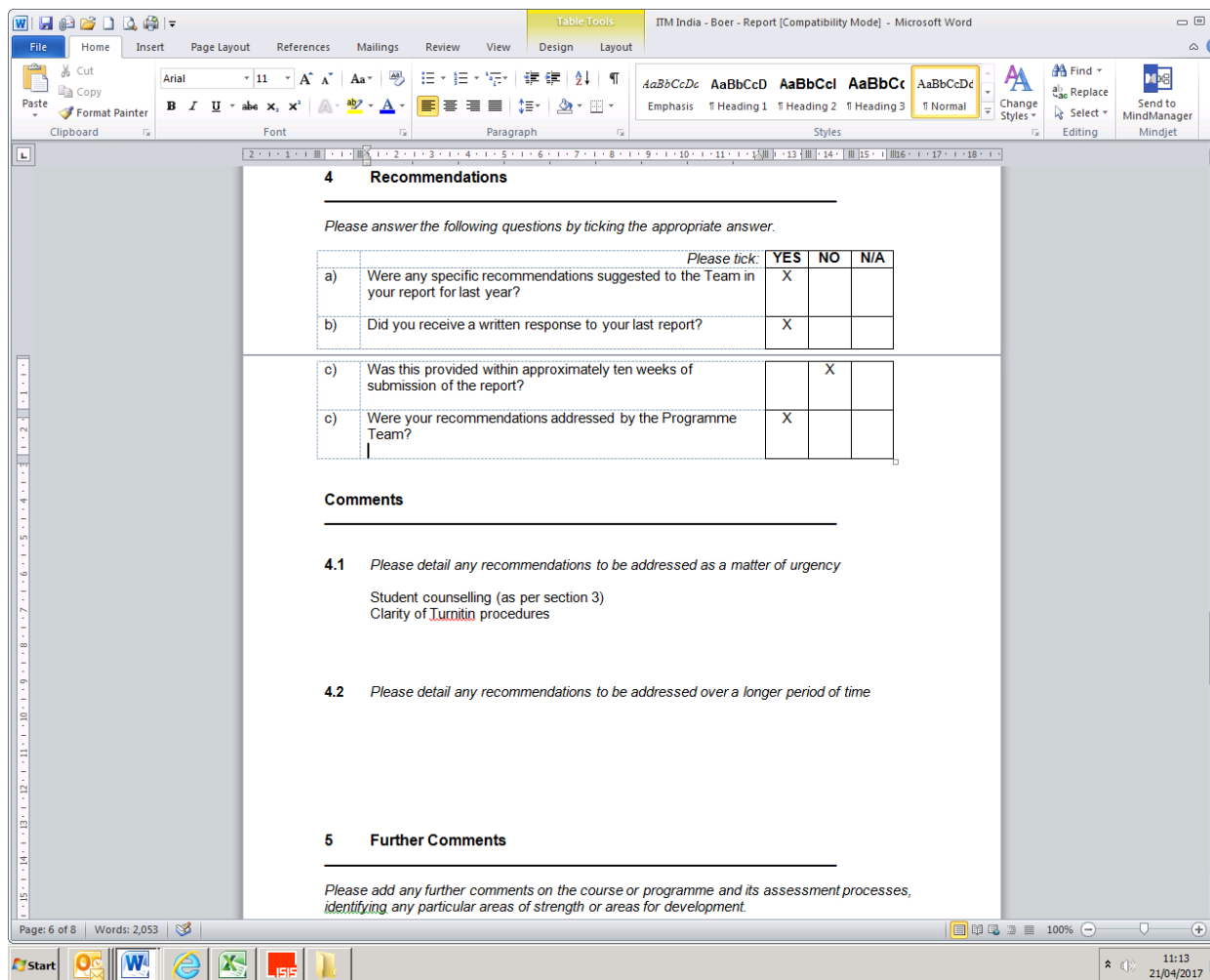
External examiner reports are taken very seriously. All reports go to the Principal and senior managers. If the external flags up an issue, the University needs to know that steps are being taken in response. That is why all Programme Leaders must draft a formal response to the external examiner which is checked by the Dean. The Dean needs to see that any recommendations made by the examiner have been considered properly. If not, this would raise serious questions about the quality of the programme.

### **How to respond to your external examiner report**

First of all, make sure you are looking at the right report. You may receive communications from the examiner throughout the year, including specific feedback on individual assessments. But there is only one formal External Examiner report submitted to the University each year. This usually comes in after the summer exam boards, but some examiners wait until the boards in September before submitting their final report. The report template includes a number of questions that we ask to make sure that every aspect of the assessment process is running smoothly. There are various tick boxes and space for comments. In section 4 of the report the examiner makes specific recommendations for the programme team. These are divided into urgent recommendations that need to be addressed now and less urgent recommendations that may need longer consideration.

The examiner is also asked about the promptness and appropriateness of the response to his or her previous report. As a general rule, examiners don't like it if it takes a very long time for them to receive a response or if they don't get the feeling that anything substantive is going to change as a result of their report.

What the external examiner report looks like:



Sometimes the examiner will have no recommendations. In this case, your response can be quite short, simply thanking the examiner for their positive feedback. However, there are usually some recommendations to consider.

Here are some dos and don'ts for responding to external examiner comments.

- DO be as specific as possible. The examiner doesn't want to hear that you will 'endeavour to improve feedback practices'. They want to know what you will do to encourage that improvement. (For example, hold marking workshops, make greater use of Grademark, run sessions with students to ask them about what types of feedback they find useful.)
- DO try to make your proposed action measurable so that it will be possible to track what has been done.
- DO consult as widely as possible before finalising your response. Discuss it with the programme team, your Academic Link Person and student representatives. If the timing is suitable, bring the report to the programme committee for discussion.
- DON'T feel that you have to agree with everything the examiner proposes. If you, the team and the Academic Link Person believe there is no need for change, then you can say so. But you must provide a rationale.
- DON'T be afraid to admit that you don't know why a certain problem is recurring. In this case the best action in response might be to conduct more research so that you can find out more about the causes of the issue.
- DON'T be afraid of change! Sometimes external examiners bring completely new ideas or make you look at something in a different way. That's what they're for.

Some examples of appropriate responses to common recommendations are set out below. You can use this template for your own response but it isn't mandatory. Sometimes a letter will be a more suitable format.

**Please draft your own responses and don't simply copy what is in the table. These are just suggestions to let you see the type of response that is expected.**

## RESPONSE to EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT

External Examiner:

Programme/Award:

Date report received:

A summary of issues reported by the External Examiner and the response of the Programme Team is provided below.

COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS	MODULE / UNIT (IF APPLICABLE)	SUGGESTED ACTION	BY WHEN	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
The examiner noted some over-generous marking, particularly at the weaker end of the scale	All	The Programme Leader will hold a marking workshop with all markers prior to the Semester 1 assessment period. This will include cross-marking exercises. Additional staff development from QMU will be provided.	January 2018  September 2017	Programme Leader  Academic Link Person / Centre for Academic Practice
The examiner supported the use of Grademark and TurnItIn and made recommendations around its use, in particular around developing clear marking criteria and ensuring consistent quality feedback.	All	Module co-ordinators will liaise with their QMU counterparts to develop clearer marking criteria for assignments.  Additional staff development from QMU will be provided.  J Cobb has been identified as a TEL champion and she will provide training and mentoring to other module co-ordinators on the use of these technologies.	December 2017  September 2017  On-going	Programme Leader / Module Co-ordinators  Academic Link Person / Centre for Academic Practice  TEL Champion

<p>The examiner made recommendations around preventing plagiarism and academic misconduct and following plagiarism procedures</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>The Programme Leader and Academic Skills Tutor will review the content and delivery of academic writing and referencing workshops. A refresher session will be built into timetabled lectures prior to each assessment period. A full review of plagiarism detection and investigation procedures will be conducted to ensure compliance with QMU expectations.</p>	<p>August 2017  End of each semester  October 2017</p>	<p>Programme Leader / Academic Skills Tutor  Programme Leader / Academic Skills Tutor  Programme Leader / Programme Administrator</p>
<p>The examiner notes that students are not reading widely enough.</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>The Programme Leader will liaise with library colleagues to ensure library induction sessions take place during induction week.</p> <p>The Programme Leader and Module Coordinators will work with the liaison librarian to ensure all relevant reading materials are available in the library or electronically.</p> <p>Additional academic skills workshops will be build into the longitudinal induction programme to ensure students understand the expectation for independent study.</p>	<p>September 2017  September 2017  On-going</p>	<p>Programme Leader/liaison librarian  Programme Leader/Academic skills tutor/liaison librarian  Programme Leader/Academic skills tutor/liaison librarian</p>
<p>The examiner recommends improved communication between module leader counterparts at QMU and partner organisation.</p>	<p>Programme Team and Academic Link Person</p>	<p>Module coordinator counterpart contact details have been circulated. This list will be updated throughout the year in line with any changes in staffing.</p>	<p>September 2017</p>	<p>Programme Leader and Module Coordinators and the Academic Link Person</p>

		The Academic Link Person and Programme Leader will liaise between colleagues at QMU and the partner organisation to resolve any communications issues that occur.	On-going	Academic Link Person and Programme Leader
The examiner recommends improvements in standard data set provided to ensure s/he has adequate information to undertake role	All	<p>The Programme Leader will create a checklist for all module coordinators to use when compiling samples for external examiners. The Collaborations Administrative Officer will recirculate this checklist at the time that the BoE date is agreed as a reminder to module coordinators preparing samples for external examiners.</p> <p>The Programme Team will review feedback form to ensure all information is available to External Examiners to undertake their role. Feedback forms will also be aligned across modules to ensure consistency of information provided.</p>	October 2017	<p>Programme Leader and Module Coordinators</p> <p>Collaborations Administrative Officer</p> <p>Programme Leader and Module Coordinators</p>
The examiner noted student performance was generally comparable with equivalent programmes in the UK but noted knowledge levels and attainment of students at the weaker end of the scale required continued attention.	All	The Programme Team will review the assessment pattern and make changes as necessary to ensure student acquisition of core knowledge.	October 2017	Programme Leader and Module Coordinator
The examiner recommends a change to a module or assessment.	All	The Programme Team will consider the recommendation in the context of reviewing the programme in	For following academic year	Programme Leader and relevant Module Coordinator

