UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER                                   Paper No ASQEC/17/37c)

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE
23 October 2017                                            Agenda Item 9.3

ANNUAL REPORT ON EXTERNAL EXAMINER NOMINATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS 2016/17

1    INTRODUCTION

This report deals with the nomination and appointment process during 2015/16 and 2016/17 for appointments to take effect in 2016/17. Under Senate's Delegated Authority Framework external examiner nominations are considered by the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee for recommendation for appointment by Council. The Council's authority to approve nominations for appointment is delegated to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education).

In November each year, Student Administration provides each faculty the following listings and advises them of the process for nominations for the following year:

   i)   external examiners who finished in the previous academic year;
   ii)  external examiners due to finish in the current academic year;
   iii) external examiners who have resigned;
   iv)  courses for which no external examiner is currently appointed.

Nominations should be submitted by faculties for consideration no later than the June meeting of the Committee preceding the year of appointment. The relevant documentation is reviewed by the Academic Office to ensure compliance with the University's Code of Practice on External Examining. The Committee receives at each meeting a report of nominations that accord fully with the Code. In line with the decision of the Learning and Teaching Committee in December 2009 (min 09.146 refers), those that do not accord, with brief details of the departures, are forwarded upon receipt to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) for consideration for approval or otherwise by Chair's action. Those approved are reported to the next meeting of the Committee. Nominations not received in time for consideration by the June meeting are classed as late nominations and, to facilitate attendance at induction and fulfilment of moderation duties, are considered by Chair's action and, if approved, reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

The process and practices for nomination and appointment were last considered at the June 2016 meeting of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Committee noted the situation regarding departures, late and incomplete nominations and agreed that faculties ensure the timely submission of external examiner nominations and that responsible staff were aware of the contents of the Code of Practice and of the importance of providing all necessary information.

2    SUMMARY DATA FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS (2014/15 TO 2016/17)

Table 1 provides a summary of nominations over the last three years. A breakdown of submitted nominations for 2016/17 is in Table 2. To facilitate an accurate

comparison of nominations next year for 2017/18, the figures for 2016/17 nominations have been reconfigured into the new faculty structures in Table 2.

Table 1

| YEAR | NOMINATIONS SUBMITTED | DEPARTURES | LATE (Foreseeable) | INCOMPLETE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2014/15 | 105 | 36 (34%) | 42 (40%) | 25 (24%) |
| 2015/16 | 124 | 49 (40%) | 41 (33%) | 29 (23%) |
| 2016/17 | 111 | 46 (41%) | 35 (32%) | 23 (21%) |

Table 2

| Academic Year 16/17 | No of Noms | Not Approved | Accords | DNA | No Previous Experience | Extension | Other | Incomplete | Late Foreseen | Late Unforeseen |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dec 15 | 2 | | 2 | | | | | 1 | | |
| Mar 16 | 16 | | 9 | 7 | 6 | 1 | | 6 | | |
| Jun 16 | 47 | 1 | 29 | 18 | 11 | 7 | | 5 | | |
| Oct 16 | 29 | | 15 | 14 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 7 | 24 | 5 |
| Feb 17 | 13 | | 8 | 5 | 4 | 1 | | 4 | 8 | 5 |
| Jun 17 | 3 | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | 2 | 1 |
| Oct 17 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| Totals | 111 | 1 | 65 | 46 | 30 | 14 | 2 | 23 | 34 | 12 |

Table 3

| ACADEMIC YEAR 2016/17 | NOMINATIONS SUBMITTED | TOTAL NON-COMPLIANT (Departures/Late) | PERCENTAGE NON-COMPLIANT |
|---|---|---|---|
| ADDL | 3 | 1 | 33% |
| AHSS | 36 | 17 | 47% |
| CEBE | 21 | 13 | 62% |
| LHS | 35 | 24 | 69% |
| UUBS | 16 | 7 | 44% |
| TOTAL | 111 | 62 | 56%* |

3   ISSUES ARISING

a)   Departures from Code of Practice

2014/15 – A total of 36 (34%) nominations did not accord fully with the Code and three were not approved.

2015/16 – A total of 49 (40%) nominations did not accord fully with the Code of which four were not approved.

2016/17 – A total of 46 (41%) nominations did not accord fully with the Code of which one was not approved.

In academic year 2016/17, by far the main reason for non-accordance with the Code remained a lack of previous *external* examining experience. Of the 46 non-accordance nominations submitted, 30 (65%) involved this factor. The high percentage reflects the situation in 2015/16 (76%) and 2014/15 (69%). It should be noted that the Code permits the exceptional appointment of nominees without external experience, which supports the supply of new external examiners in the sector. This is provided for under the Code's 'Exceptions and

Special Cases' subject to a nominee possessing the extensive experience and standing within their field. It is therefore important that faculties highlight these areas when proposing a nominee without previous external examining experience.

During the year, fourteen applications for extension to the tenure of current external examiners were made, all of which were approved. Twelve applications were for a 1-year extension and two for a 2-year period. The Code of Practice permits (although does not restrict) the *exceptional* approval of an extension of an external examiner's appointment 'to ensure continuity, for example, where a programme is being discontinued' (Code paragraph 3 [c]). The 2-year extensions related to programmes that are being discontinued.

b)   Late Nominations

The percentage of late (foreseen) nominations saw a fall in 2015/16 from 40% in the previous year to 33%. Albeit marginally, this trend has continued with 32% of nominations submitted late in 2016/17. In terms of numbers, this was a fall from 41 to 35.

While the reduction in the numbers of late nominations over the last three years is gratifying, it still remains the case that almost a third of nominations are submitted late. This is despite the fact that Faculties are reminded in November of each year of those external examiners needing to be replaced for the following year. From May 2018, the Examinations Office has undertaken to circulate a second, updated reminder.

The pattern of submission over the academic year is repeated year on year with the majority of nominations submitted to the final Committee meeting of the year and the second largest number submitted late requiring Chair's action and report to the following October meeting. During 2015/16, only two nominations for 2016/17 had been submitted by the end of the first semester and a further 16 by March 2016, a total of 18 nominations of a final total of 111 (see Table 2).

c)   Incomplete Nominations

The number of incomplete nominations has remained fairly consistent over the last three years at 24% (2014/15), 23% (2015/16) and for the current year, 21%. The vast majority of queries relate to missing or incomplete information regarding departures from the Code (i.e. failure to address the 'non-accordance' issue and to provide a supporting statement). The other prevalent issue was failure to address how a nominee from outside the jurisdiction would meet the appointment criterion regarding knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of quality.

While the figure for incomplete nominations is relatively low, it is important that this issue be addressed as the resulting delays, particularly those relating to late nominations, have implications for the timing of appointments and participation in the moderation process.

4   SUMMARY

Broadly, across the three categories of departures, late and incomplete nominations, nominations submitted in 2015/16 for 2016/17 were on a par with the previous year. Slight percentage reductions in late and incomplete nominations (1% and 2% respectively) are to be welcomed and the departures rose by only a single percentage point. However, the figures are disappointing in that no significant improvement in any of the above categories particularly in the categories of late and incomplete nominations.

In regard to departures, it is acknowledged that a reduction in the overall number is difficult since the majority relate to a lack of previous external experience on the part of nominees (65%+), a situation which is to be expected across the sector. One can only speculate whether the proportion, 27% (Table 2), reflects that for the sector as data are not available. Faculties should ensure that only in exceptional circumstances should applications for extensions be submitted and, in the event, that a convincing case is included for consideration.

Regarding foreseeable late nominations, where a sizeable minority (32%) missed the final meeting of the Committee, greater attention needs to be given to this matter particularly since faculties are reminded early in the academic year of those current external examiners who need to be replaced. A more proactive approach is required. Some improvement however is evident in nominations proposed for 2017/18 with a total of 77 submitted by the Committee's June meeting as compared with the previous year's figure of 65. A further 26 late nominations (25% of those submitted to date) for 2017/18 are to be considered at this meeting.

From 2017/18, Student Administration will provide faculties in May with a list of those external examiners not yet replaced for the following academic year. This will act as a new prompt, in addition to the annual November listing which identifies non-appointments.

While there has been a small reduction in incomplete nominations, faculties must still take greater care to ensure that all relevant information is contained in the nomination form and that all issues, particularly relating to supporting statements in regard to departures, are addressed before submission.

5   RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to consider the following recommendations:

i)      that faculties continue their efforts to ensure the timely submission of external examiner nominations for consideration no later than the June meeting of the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee and that late submissions be avoided. (A submission deadline to Academic Office for consideration by the meeting is published in the Examinations and Associated Activities Calendar. For academic year 2017/18, it is 25 May 2018);

ii)     that faculties ensure that staff responsible for making, processing and checking nominations are aware of the contents of the External Examining Code of Practice;

iii)     that faculties remind such staff of the importance of providing all necessary information and ensuring that all issues and, in particular those regarding 'non-accordance' with the Code, are addressed <u>before</u> submission; and

iv)     that progress in relation to 2017/18 appointments be reviewed in June 2018.


*BMcA/AnnualReport/11.10*