

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE

11 December 2012

STATISTICAL DATA AVAILABLE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS AND BOARDS OF EXAMINERS

Background

The Teaching and Learning Committee, at its meeting on 20 June 2012, received Paper TLC/12/16 from the Deputy Director Finance and Information Services (Student Administration and Registry) on the statistical data available to external examiners and Boards of Examiners. The Committee noted that responses to a questionnaire to faculties showed that, although reports on means and standard deviations were available, there was variability in the data currently provided by Faculties to external examiners and Boards of Examiners. While a number of comments and proposals had been made by Faculties it was noted that the report did not take account of views of external examiners. The Committee agreed that the minimum dataset should be considered further by the Deputy Director Finance and Information Services (Student Administration and Registry) taking account of the views of external examiners (min 12.70).

Consultation with External Examiners

Following the meeting of the Committee the Department of Student Administration drew up a questionnaire and forwarded it to Heads of Faculty Administration for circulation to external examiners. External examiners were asked:

- if they were provided with statistical information on student performance at module and programme level and if this was routinely provided;
- if they considered that external examiners should be routinely provided with statistical information and at what periods of the year it should be provided;
- where information was supplied was it through the centrally produced means and standard deviations report and/or other reports of analytical data produced by course teams and was the information considered useful;
- if they considered that other reports of statistical data on student performance should be created to assist them in their role.

A copy of the centrally provided means and standard deviations report was included with the questionnaire so that external examiners who had not received this report in the past could still comment on its appropriateness.

The details of the questions asked and the responses of external examiners are set out in the attached tables.

Responses of External Examiners

Responses were received from 48 out of a total of 332 external examiners appointed to courses at Ulster, ie 14%. The responses by Faculty were as follows:

Art, Design and the Built Environment: 0

Arts: 4

Life and Health Sciences: 31

Social Sciences: 3

Ulster Business School: 10

In addition the Faculty of Computing and Engineering provided a composite response on behalf of the 30 external examiners appointed to courses in the Faculty.

The value of the consultation is somewhat diminished by the low response, including the Computing and Engineering responses this is 23%. This may be due to lack of concern about the issue, or satisfaction with data currently provided, or a combination of both. Given the subject area covered by external examiners in the Faculty of Computing and Engineering, they may have higher expectations in relation to the quantity and quality of data provided on student performance and how frequently it is provided, and this would correspond with the information provided by this Faculty in the original survey.

The following are the main points arising from the consultation with External Examiners.

- a) 91% of external examiners expressed the view that the provision of statistical data on student performance is an important issue. For most, this data is considered very useful prior to Boards of examiners to assist in the process of moderation and comparison of performance across modules.
- b) 92% of external examiners (other than those for Computing and Engineering) agree that the centrally produced means and standard deviations report is useful as a minimum dataset. All of the external examiners who received reports of analytical data generated by course teams agreed that these are useful.
- c) The Faculty of Computing and Engineering does not supply its external examiners with the centrally provided report but instead exports data from the Student System to Excel spreadsheets and reformats it to provide the type of statistical data which is expected. Of the 27 other external examiners who receive statistical data 14 are supplied with the centrally provided report either on its own (6) or in combination with reports generated locally by course teams (8) while 13 are provided solely by reports generated by course teams.
- d) The Faculty of Computing and Engineering provides all its external examiners with statistical data on performance routinely for all assessment periods. Only 18 out of the 38 external examiners for other Faculties (47%) receive this data routinely.
- e) The Faculty of Computing and Engineering takes the view that additional reports should be created centrally to assist external examiners in their role. However,

only 52% of external examiners for other Faculties consider that additional reports would be useful.

- f) The following are the principle suggestions put forward by external examiners on additional statistical information which would assist in the review of student performance:
- i) Information which would facilitate comparison of performance for a particular cohort taking a module against all other students taking that module.
 - ii) Means and standard deviation data to compare performance in modules across years to ensure that standards are being maintained.
 - iii) Information on banding within modules (eg number of marks over 70%, 60 to 69% etc) and the minimum and maximum marks scored for each module. (Note: This information is available through a centrally provided Module Evaluation report.)
 - iv) Information at programme level which would allow comparison of performance across cohorts. This is a particular issue for final years where many external examiners wish to see a ranked list of degree classifications.
 - v) The creation of a report which would provide means and standard deviations for modules taken on subject strands for the assistance of subject external examiners (the centrally provided means and standard deviations report provides this information for integrated courses only).
 - vi) Provision of a single Excel spreadsheet for a selected programme and year with all the marks for the current year; to include a set of sheets, one for each module, detailing module quantitative data and a summary sheet with the weighted credits calculated (suggested by Computing and Engineering only).
 - vii) An electronic version of the centrally provided course results sheet report which could be organised into different views would be useful (suggested by Computing and Engineering only).

In reviewing the responses of external examiners to the consultation, and in consideration of the numbers who responded, the Teaching and Learning Committee may wish to consider the following:

- a) that the importance of providing external examiners with statistical data on student performance be emphasised to Faculties, with attention drawn to the centrally provided means and standard deviations report;
- b) that this report should be generated automatically as an appendage to each set of course results sheets produced for Boards of Examiners;
- c) that consideration be given to a core set of reports which should be supplied to external examiners and issuing advice to Faculties on this;

- d) that a new version of the course results sheet report be created to rank award candidates by classification mark;
- e) given that a small number of externals indicated the desire to have additional statistical information provided to them, the committee may wish to consider the provision of a minimum dataset of information, while balancing this with prioritisation of the work involved in this provision, along with discussions with ISD and other staff on the feasibility of providing the enhancements suggested and the availability of resources to take these enhancements forward.

Ruth Wasson
4 December 2012

CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL EXAMINERS ON THE PROVISION OF STATISTICAL DATA ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The tables below represent the responses of 78 external examiners to the consultation out of a total of 332 external examiners appointed to courses at Ulster.

Table 1: Summary of External Examiner Responses (all faculties)

1. Are you provided with statistical analyses on performance for each student cohort (at module and programme level)?	Yes	No	Total
	57	18	75

If YES, how is the information provided?	Routinely	Occasionally	On Request	Various Means	Total
	48	6	2	1	57

2. Do you take the view that this statistical data should be routinely provided to external examiners and Boards of Examiners?	Yes	No	Total
	71	7	78

3. If you receive statistical data on student performance how is it provided?*	
a) solely by the centrally provided means and standard deviations report	6
b) solely by other report(s) of analytical data provided by the course team	13
c) by a combination of a) and b)	8
Total	27

**The Faculty of Computing and Engineering did not respond directly to this question but stated that centrally provided data is saved to Excel spreadsheets and reformatted.*

4. Are reports provided useful in undertaking your role as external examiner and in assisting Boards of Examiners in considering student performance?	Yes	No	Total
a) The centrally provided means and standard deviations report	23	32	55
b) Other report(s) of analytical data provided by the course team	25	0	25

5. Should other reports of statistical data on performance be provided to assist you in your role?	Yes	No	Total
	50	22	72

Additional question for external examiners appointed to modular subjects – Should a report be provided to produce means and standard deviations to assist subject external examiners and Subject Boards of Examiners?*	Yes	No	Total
	41	6	47

***A centrally provided report is not available for modular subject provision.*

Table 2: Summary of External Examiner Responses by Faculty

Question	ARTS	C & E	LHS	SS	UBS	Total	Comments
1 Are you provided with statistical analyses on performance for each student cohort (at module and programme level):							
a) routinely	1	30	13	1	3	48	Only the Faculty of Computing and Engineering provides external examiners routinely with statistical data for all assessment periods in the academic year. Where this data is provided by other faculties it is usually issued for the main assessment periods (end of Semesters 1 and 2 and autumn (postgraduate)).
b) occasionally	0	0	4	1	1	6	
c) on request?	1	0	1	0	0	2	
d) by various means	0	0	1	0	0	1	
e) not provided	2	0	11	1	4	18	
f) no response	0	0	1	0	2	3	
2. Do you take the view that this statistical data should be routinely provided to external examiners and Boards of Examiners?							
	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	
	3/1	30/0	26/5	3/0	9/1	71/7	The great majority of external examiners across the faculties expressed the view that statistical data on performance would be useful or very useful prior to Boards of Examiners to assist in the process of moderation and comparison of performance across modules. External examiners for Computing and Engineering consider the information to be important for all assessment periods. Some external examiners considered statistical information on performance to be important in reviewing marking patterns across cohorts and across years.

3. If you receive statistical data on student performance how is it provided?							
a) solely by the centrally provided means & standard deviations report	0	0	4	0	2	6	
b) solely by other reports(s) of analytical data provided by the course team	0	0	10	1	2	13	
c) by the centrally provided report and data provided by the course team	2	See note	5	1	0	8	Note: The Faculty of Computing and Engineering responded to this question by stating that centrally provided data is saved to Excel spreadsheets and reformatted.
4. Are reports provided useful in undertaking your role as external examiner and assisting Boards of Examiners in considering student performance?							
	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	
a) The centrally provided means and standard deviations report	0/2	0/30	20/0	1/0	2/0	23/32	Two external examiners commented that the centrally provided report was only useful when supplemented by local reports produced by the course team.
b) Other reports(s) of analytical data provided by the course team	2/0	See note	18/0	1/0	4/0	25/0	Note: The Faculty of Computing and Engineering did not provide a response to this question.
5. Should other reports of statistical data on performance be provided to assist you in your role?							
	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	
	2/1	30/0	12/16	1/0	5/5	50/22	Seven external examiners did not provide a response to this question.
Additional question for external examiners appointed to modular subjects – Should a report be provided to produce means and standard deviations to assist subject external examiners and Subject Boards of Examiners?							
	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	
	1/1	30/0	5/4	1/0	4/1	41/6	Only a small number of external examiners (aside from the Faculty of Computing and Engineering) responded to this question. Of those who wished to receive statistical data for modular subjects the majority were of the view that this should be provided by a subject version of the centrally provided report for integrated course provision (3a) above, supplemented by other reports.