

Specialist Paper 5

Reporting Academic Standards: Guide for External Examiners and Centres

This paper relates to the External Examiner report Sections 1 and 2

Good reporting involves making evaluative statements supported by clear and non-contentious evidence. The aim of this paper is to provide guidance on reporting aspects related to sections 1 and 2 of the visit report form (Academic Standards). The main evidence source for both these sections is sampling.

Academic Standards and Assessment (section 1)

For this section it is assignment briefs that are sampled and the outcome is to decide whether or not the design and nature of assessments permits the achievement of programme aims and objectives at the appropriate level. Guidance on general programme aims can be obtained from the Guidance and Units document published by Edexcel for each of the Higher National programmes under the section entitled 'Higher Level Skills'. Subject specific aims for the programme are the sum of the individual unit outcomes (and related assessment criteria). The main points to consider in reporting this section are:

- Are assessment tasks clearly expressed and closely linked to the programme/unit aims and outcomes? If so what is the evidence? If not what is needed to satisfy this linkage?
- Do assessments promote development of higher-level skills? (eg evaluation, analysis, application, review, literature searching, independent thought, etc, as listed in the Higher Level Skills section of the Programme Guidance document?) It is likely that a development of a range of skills would require a diversity of assessment methods. Is such diversity evident?
- Are assignments and tasks sufficiently challenging? Is the workload realistic? Do the assignments allow students to take responsibility for their own learning and have some freedom of choice for areas to be explored within the assignment (deep learning)? The opposite of this would be assignments that are over structured and over-prescriptive in task detail and do not extend the student beyond their lecture notes (surface learning).
- Do assignments offer equality of opportunity for all students, including those with particular needs, irrespective of study mode? Is the policy on equality of opportunity applied consistently across the programme?
- Are **all** assessment criteria for pass fully addressed in the **total** unit assessment package? Are grading descriptors for M and D components appropriately contextualised and are the requirements for achieving these grades clearly stated? Are marking criteria available and fully understood by students?

Academic Standards and Student Performance (section 2)

The judgement to be made here relates to achievement by students of programme aims and objectives at the appropriate level. Clearly the evidence for any decision here is based on sampling assessed work in relation to the grade(s) awarded by the assessor. Providing the assignment briefs are judged fit for purpose the main points to consider are:

- Does assessed work satisfactorily address the scope of the assessment criteria/grading descriptor statements to justify the component grade(s) awarded by the assessor? Does the work demonstrate achievement at the appropriate level?
- Is there sufficiency of content at the level indicated by the grading statements to justify award of the component grade(s)?
- Is there evidence of progression in achievement of higher-level skills/subject specific skills/employment skills between assessed work for H1 and assessed work for H2 units?
- Is there a range of achievement in terms of P, M and D grades **for each unit overall**? If there are units with little spread of results (eg all students are referred or have achieved D grades), is there some underlying reason? If sampling suggests there is no cause for concern, then obviously there is no problem, but a note to this effect should be included in the report.

Reporting observations

- Specific comments (positive or negative), relating to each assignment brief and learner work sampled, are included under the 'Comments' heading in the 'Assessment Sampling' section of the report. This section of the report should not be restricted to simply confirming or restating the assessor's grade.
- A summary covering the key points from sampling comments should be made in section 1 (relating to assignment briefs) and section 2 (relating to assessed work).
- From comments in sections 1 and 2 appropriate aspects of good practice are extracted and **listed** under 'Areas of good practice' on the report form. Any concerns are listed in 'Major Issues' and recommendations for addressing these expanded in the 'Action Points' section.

Additional guidance on features of assessment can be found on the QAA website in the *Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*; Section 6 *Assessment of Students*.