External Examining: Using Data to support Effective Quality Assurance and Enhancement at the University of Edinburgh

Nichola Kett
Academic Policy Manager
Academic Services
University Background

- Founded in 1583
- Three Colleges
- 20 Schools
- Wide range of subjects
- ~40,000 students
- ~14,000 staff
- Russell Group
- LERU
What is External Examining?

- Used in the UK to maintain academic standards
- Comparability of standards across the UK
- Operation of the assessment process
- Advise on quality and enhancement
- Key part of quality assurance and enhancement processes at the University
- Governed by UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B7
“The submission of an annual report is arguably the most important duty of an external examiner”

The Higher Education Academy: A handbook for external examining
External Examiner Reports

Challenges

- Institutional oversight
- Extracting themes and issues
- Paper reports
- Variety of templates
- Responses
- Manual distribution
External Examiner Project

- Policy
- Handbook
- IT Tools
- Business process change

- Analysis of reports
- Reporting metrics
- Reflect and act on issues
- Extraction of themes
- Share good practice
External Examiner Reporting System (EERS)

- **Categories**
  - commendation
  - comment
  - issue
  - suggestion

- **Themes**

- **Sub themes**

- **Response**

- **University**

- **College**

- **School Academic Response Coordinator**

Analysis through BI Suite (reporting and analytics tool)
Impact

2014/15 and 2015/16 = 811 reports
Impact

Commendation (3380)

The assessment process (926)

Theme level (222)
Impact

Issue (248)

Provision of information (75)

Assessed work examples (32)
Impact – November 2016

↑
‘assessment process’

issues

Clarity and consistency –
moderation and marking

Action to Colleges and Schools
Evaluation

• All project aims met

Staff Survey

• 75% - system had/somewhat achieved effective qualitative and quantitative analysis of reports
• 67% - system had/somewhat made it easier to process and analyse reports
Evaluation - positives

- Easily accessible repository of reports
- Less paperwork and chasing
- More efficient and streamlined
- Professional system
- More reports completed on time
Evaluation - challenges

- Difficult to make system changes
- No easy system interaction
- Not full lifecycle
- Duplication when sharing outside system
- Multiple course external examiners
Successes

- Accessibility of data
- Institutional oversight
- Evidence base
- Sector good practice
Challenges

- Implementing change
- Structure of the report
- Thematic analysis
Further information:
edin.ac/2zG44Pv
nichola.kett@ed.ac.uk
Discussion questions

• How is external examining (or equivalent/related practices) managed within your institution? What works well? What are the challenges?

• What aspects or approaches outlined in the paper would be relevant/helpful within your institution?