

Good Practice in Higher Education Guidance for External Examiners

What is good practice?

The definition of good practice is a much deliberated topic; however a working definition is necessary to inform understanding and identification. Within the context of higher education, good practice is generally defined as practice that is regarded as making a positive contribution, adding value to the provision and student learning experience and which is worthy of wider dissemination. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)¹ is the independent body entrusted with monitoring and advising on standards and quality in UK higher education. The QAA has usefully articulated that a feature of good practice is a process or way of working that makes a particularly positive contribution to the following judgement areas:

- the provider's assurance of its academic standards;
- the quality and/or enhancement of the learning opportunities it provides for students; and
- the quality of the information it produces about its higher education provision.

Good practice is generally defined as being anything that goes above and beyond standard practice or what is required to be done. It is not expected practice such as 'a robust moderation process' or '95% satisfaction in NSS' or 'returning feedback within 20 days'. Therefore good practice may include:

- established ways of working that have been modified and improved;
- innovations that have successfully addressed specific issues;
- identified ways of working that have demonstrable positive outcomes and could be transferred across other programmes/departments/faculties/HE Sector.

An example of good practice

The adoption of the Gurus and Grasshoppers scheme.

The scheme involves level 5 and level 6 students setting tasks for level 4 students that they feel would have been useful for them at that stage in their development. The Gurus are evaluated by the Grasshoppers, and vice versa. The aim in introducing this is to deepen communication between levels, and to give students more and earlier insight into assessment and feedback practices. Feedback from both Gurus and Grasshoppers has been very positive with the Grasshoppers (level 4 students) endorsing the worth of the Guru related tasks.

How to define good practice: identification, verification, dissemination and embedding

The first stage in the process has to be **identification**. All too often colleagues are reticent to put forward examples of their practice as being "good". There is perhaps a view that everyone is doing that already or that upon investigation it will prove to be usual or expected standard practice. Whilst this is perfectly understandable, it is worth remembering that we are not just looking for *exceptional* practice but anything that goes above and beyond ordinary, standard practice. Colleagues are therefore encouraged to identify examples of good practice and potential areas of good practice worthy of investigation.

The following stages of verification, dissemination and embedding can be taken forward by the programme team/subject area/faculty as appropriate including the DMU Centre for Academic Innovation (CAI).

¹ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/>

Examples of good practice identified by existing external examiners

BA (Hons) Drama Studies. Arts, Design & Humanities	Your online coursework is quite extraordinary - from content, to formats, to usability. All excellent. Your online syllabi are unparalleled with what I've seen in the UK. I hope that all faculty staff that are less comfortable with online spaces are getting the support they need, but really I didn't notice anything that was not top notch. The online resources are contemporary, derived from a diverse range of sources and all focused-on students' success.
BA (Hons) Architecture/ BA (Hons) Architectural Studies. Arts, Design & Humanities	The projects in India provide a unique experience to the Year 2 cohort and the course must be commended for the organisation of the projects, the collaboration with architects in India and for providing students with the chance to experience other cultures, albeit only for a week, during their Year 2 studies. I believe this will be invaluable in creating global minds that understand the importance of respecting other cultures and values.
Marketing modules (UG). Business & Law	The students are assessed using a wide range of relevant and innovative assessment methods allowing ground for students to demonstrate their full potential. It is both appropriate and equitable that students are able to demonstrate their knowledge under a variety of circumstances. There is a mixture of individual and group work, reflective pieces of work, reports, essays, exams with practical relevance, presentations, newspaper articles and much more. The use of group work seeks to use the best of contemporary business practice alongside with the individual assessments.
BA (Hons) Politics. Business & Law	Assessment for the modules is well thought through with innovative use of technology – such as the use of pod-casts and posters and data analysis tests...Assessment types are varied. There is a good mix ... with innovative use of other media (pod-casts) as well as posters and presentations. The assessment for the dissertation is well-designed – with the poster enabling students to visualise their work and explain it at the poster presentation session, prior to the more extensive written piece.
MSc Pharmaceutical Quality by Design MSc/ MSc Quality by Design for the Pharmaceutical Industry. Health & Life Sciencesa number of innovative assessments and teaching methods were utilised (e.g. the use of web pages (PSYC5403), discussion boards (PSYC5401), and reflective work (PSYC5406).
BA (Hons) Policing Studies (Practice)/ BA (Hons) Criminal Investigation with Policing Studies/ BA (Hons) Policing. Health & Life Sciences	The programme materials, teaching and assessments follow the UDL concepts of flexible learning and testing. The team use innovative teaching methodology which incorporates learner participation. E.g. Crime scene house exercise and desk top exercises.
BSc (Hons) Media Production/ BA (Hons) Communication Arts. Computing, Engineering & Media	I particularly liked the way the TECH3026 / Creative Media Entrepreneurship module encouraged students to create professional blogs / websites to enhance their employability. This module had a very useful / practical pedagogical foundation that most students seemed to respond to.

FdA Graphic Design & eMedia. Computing, Engineering & Media	The comic project... is a good example of an inclusive assignment that encourages students to be themselves, to bring out the best in themselves, and to participate in a joint endeavour whilst having one's own individual input respected (and respecting that of peers).
FdA Tourism and Events Management. University Wide Learning	Students are encouraged to engage with industry throughout the course and the work-placement trip to Seville remains an example of best practice in terms of exposing students to living and working overseas, to their own independence and to the world of work.
Professional Graduate Certificate Education & Training, University Diploma Education & Training. University Wide Learning	The peer – orientated lesson study module is a real strength as it immerses students in discussion on pedagogy and critical reflective practice.

Examples of strengths/commendations

External examiners make positive comments about a wide variety of topics. Whilst the University would not wish to suppress these positive comments, they are not seen as good practice based on the statement above.

