

## MATHEMATICAL, PHYSICAL AND LIFE SCIENCES DIVISION

Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Divisional Office  
9 Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PD



To: Academic Administrators in departments in the MPLS Division  
c.c. Chairs of Departmental Academic/Teaching Committees in MPLS;  
Directors of Graduate Taught Courses in the MPLS Division; Katherine  
Brown and Alice Parker, OUDCE

6 October 2015

### Tasks for Michaelmas term 2015 relating to undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses

The purpose of this circular is:

1. to ask you to complete the Undergraduate Quality Assurance questionnaire by Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2015 (*see 1 below*).
2. to remind you of Education Committee's new guidance on undergraduate handbooks and the requirement to make handbooks accessible online to all anyone in the University (*see 2 below*).
3. to remind you to forward to me undergraduate and graduate examination conventions for 2015/16, by week 9 of Michaelmas Term 2015 (*see 3 below*).
4. to remind you to forward to me undergraduate examiners' reports by week 6 of Michaelmas Term 2015, and postgraduate taught reports, by week 1 of Hilary Term 2016. (*see 4 below*). This year, departments are also asked to provide a commentary in their reports on their experience of using a subset of the Examination Boards to consider applications for consideration of factors affecting performance (*see 4 below*).
5. to ask you to ensure that your academic or teaching committee, as well as your JCC(U), scrutinises Student Barometer and NSS data in detail this term; and to let the divisional office know if the department is planning on making any changes that relate to the feedback from these surveys (*see 5 below*).
6. to ask you to consider in your teaching or academic committee the case for re-sits of second year examinations (where you have such examinations). The Department of Engineering is considering requiring second year students who fail their second year examinations to re-take those examinations. The division wishes to gauge the broader appetite for this. We will be asking members of MPLS Academic Committee to discuss the view of their department at its meeting of 6<sup>th</sup> week of Michaelmas term (see document – 'Resits in multi-part FHS Engineering').
7. to draw your attention to Education Committee's new policy on Examiners' dress during examinations (see EdC Circ 16 attached), and to circulate this as necessary.
8. to draw your attention to the final version of the guidance on medical certificates, alongside the template that medical practitioners will be asked to use. This needs to be distributed to relevant staff in the department (see EdC Circ 17 Medical Certificate template for university procedures for

Divisions and CE, EdC Circ 17 Annex A Final medical certificate template sample, Annex B Final Guidance for medical practitioners on medical certificates).

9. to draw attention to Education Committee's new policy the role of faculties and departments in preventing plagiarism (see EdC Circ attached 18). This impacts your handbooks and induction.
10. to draw your attention the new MPLS education policy website at <https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/study/additionalinformation>. This contains all the divisional guidance and key circulars for staff.

**Further information:** Please direct any queries on this circular to me, Bulvinder Gurm [bulvinder.gurm@mpls.ox.ac.uk](mailto:bulvinder.gurm@mpls.ox.ac.uk) / (2)82577

### **1. Undergraduate Quality Assurance Questionnaire**

The Quality Assurance Questionnaire enables Education Committee to confirm that the basic elements of quality assurance are in place and functioning effectively; identify where action might be required to maintain or improve essential QA procedures; and facilitate Quality Enhancement, which is the dissemination of good practice across the collegiate University. This year's questionnaire focuses on QA arrangements to support the standards and quality of Undergraduate Courses. The information provided in this return will play a key role in the preparation for the next QAA visit (now titled *Higher Education Review*) which will take place during Hilary term 2016. The questionnaire can be accessed at <https://oxford.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/2015-quality-assurance-questionnaire-undergraduates>. Please complete this by Friday 20th November 2015.

### **2. Education Committee guidance on undergraduate handbooks**

Education Committee's Policy and Guidance on Course Information is available on the EdC website at <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pandgoncourseinformation/>. This was updated at the end of last academic year. Departments were reminded to update their course handbooks in line with the new and revised guidance over the Long Vacation, to be ready for publication no later than the start of Michaelmas term 2015. All course handbooks should be available either on a public webpage or at minimum should be accessible to anyone with an Oxford Single Sign-On account.

### **3. Examination Conventions**

Education Committee has approved a revised a template for examination conventions at <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pandgoncourseinformation/>. During Michaelmas term 2015, departments are asked to reflect on the previous year's conventions, and apply any changes for the academic year 2015/16. Substantive changes will require approval of the Associate Head of Division (Academic). Please send final versions of the 2015/16 examination conventions to me by week 9 of Michaelmas term 2015 highlighting any changes

### **4. Documentation to submit on 2014/15 examinations**

Please ensure that you send to the following divisional office. Please note the addition in c(vi) to the usual documentation.

A copy of the report of the Board of Examiners.

- a) A draft response to each external examiner, addressing all the substantive points in their reports (this will be used as the basis of the Division's reply to the external examiner).
- b) A report to the Division on the decisions made by the academic/ teaching committee of the department in Michaelmas term following its review of the examiner's report, including:
  - i. any changes which the examination process might have suggested in relation to existing methods of assessment;
  - ii. any changes which the examination process might have suggested in relation to the existing content of the course;
  - iii. any need to review specific options;
  - iv. the overall standard of performance in the examination, including any trends in results or in relation to particular areas of the curriculum;
  - v. any possible changes in examination conventions, procedures or regulations suggested by the examiners' experience of the examination process.
  - vi. a commentary on the Board's experience this year of using a subset of the Examination Board to consider applications for consideration of factors affecting performance, as now required by the University's Education Committee and Proctors. This matter will be discussed at MPLS Academic Committee at its meeting in week six of Michaelmas term.

Reports on undergraduate examinations should be forwarded to me by the end of Week 6 of Michaelmas Term (20 November 2015). Reports relating to joint degree courses, and departmental Academic/Teaching Committee's comments on them, should be sent in the first instance to the relevant joint committee, which should then send me its comments by the above deadline, the end of week 6 of Michaelmas term. Reports on postgraduate taught course examinations should be forwarded to us by the end of Week 1 of Hilary Term 2013/14 (22 January 2015).

## **5. Student Barometer and NSS data**

All full time and part time matriculated students are surveyed through the Student Barometer each year in late November 2014 (with the exception of final-year undergraduate students about to be surveyed in the NSS). Data from the Student Barometer is available at:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/feedback>.

All undergraduate students in the final year of their course were surveyed through the National Student Survey in Hilary term of 2015. Please ensure that your department considers its results at departmental academic committees and JCCs in Michaelmas term. Each division is required by Education Committee to report on actions taken by departments in response to these two surveys and their own internal reviews. Changes will of course be in response not just to one year's worth of survey data, but a sustained trend that concerns the department. Please inform the divisional office of any changes by the end of Michaelmas term in order to inform the division's report to Education Committee.