Title: **Developing staff for marking and external examining: using the research and thinking creatively**

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Plan creative educational development opportunities for existing and aspiring internal and external examiners which take into account relevant research;
- Debate the conflicts between techno-rational and interpretive approaches to standards in university quality assurance.

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

The assurance of academic standards in higher education has led to considerable external oversight. Within this context, external examining is still seen as a key tool in assuring assessment standards despite on-going criticisms. The QAA Quality Code outlines requirements for the induction and training of existing and aspiring examiners as a key part of addressing these criticisms. A key issue for this paper is how that induction and training can address the difficult challenge of examiners' understanding and use of academic standards; can examiners hold and consistently apply a shared understanding of academic standards across programmes and institutions?

This will be discussed within the broader research on marking which consistently emphasises the individualised, tacit, interpretive nature of standards with consistency emerging through 'intersubjectivity' (Bruner 1996) despite quality assurance frameworks which adopt a techno-rational approach to assessment. The paper will draw on the evidence of a recent study by the presenters which aimed to investigate how individuals' standards for judgement are shaped by their experience and personal assessment histories. Using experimental repertory grid and social world mapping methods, it also investigated the consistency of standards between examiners within and between disciplines.

Initial results indicate that the variety and range of influences on individuals' standards explains the limited power of 'intersubjectivity' to achieve a consensus over standards. Indeed, whilst examiners in the same field focused on some roughly common criteria, the judgements made about those aspects of students' work and their overall assessment of assignments varied enormously.

In the context of this evidence, how can we ensure that educational development for examiners, and for markers in general, alerts them to the individualised nature of standards and the challenges of representing community standards. How can development opportunities help academics calibrate standards across programmes and universities.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The session will commence with approximately 20 minutes summarising the research and its findings followed by 25 minutes of discussion/activities.

Is our quality assurance of assessment based on a false understanding of academic standards in use?

Can examiners hold and consistently apply a shared understanding of academic standards across programmes and institutions?

How can educational development build academics' awareness of the varied provenance of standards, the influences upon them and the risks associated with drawing largely on personal and local experience in applying standards to student work?

How can development opportunities help academics calibrate standards across programmes and universities.

References

Bruner, J.S., 1996, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press).