School of Informatics

Exam Scrutiny Meetings

Background   (Impatient already? Just jump down to "At the Scrutiny Meeting")

The procedure for setting and grading exams in Edinburgh is as follows.

- Lecturer writes exam paper and notes on solutions
- Board of Examiners scrutinizes exam; lecturer makes changes in response
- External Examiner reviews exam; lecturer makes changes in response
- Students sit exam; lecturer marks exam
- Board of Examiners reviews marks and awards grades and degree classes

(The "Board of Examiners" for a given year of study is principally composed of all academic staff running contributing courses)

The complexity of this procedure sometimes surprises new staff and students. Much of it arises from the fact that exams, and whole-course assessment generally, are formally the responsibility of the School as a whole, not just individual lecturers. This is standard practice in the UK; and indeed most of the processes we follow are mandatory for every organisation awarding UK degrees. However, it is, inevitably, different from that followed in some institutions elsewhere.

This collective responsibility is the reason why final judgement on exam grades and degree classification is made by academic staff meeting as a Board of Examiners, not within individual courses. Beyond the School itself, we also appoint External Examiners, senior academics from other departments in the UK, to oversee our assessment and award of degrees.

Oversight of exam setting is carried out by academic staff together at a Scrutiny Meeting. Once exam papers are written, all those who have contributed gather to review the full set of papers. Each exam is scrutinized by at least two other members of staff, who add notes, indicate any corrections or recommendations, and sign to indicate their scrutiny of that paper. Setters are given the opportunity to revise their paper in response to these comments, and all papers are then sent to the External Examiners.

There is a further round of corrections and editing when the External Examiners send back their comments on all papers.

Submission to the Scrutiny Meeting

The main item for a course lecturer to table at a scrutiny meeting is, of course, the exam questions. These are prepared in advance on secured machines in the ITO. In addition to the questions, scrutiny also requires a set of "notes on solutions" --- sample answers and a marking guide. These should be of a quality such that another examiner, competent in the field, could reasonably use it to mark a student's exam script. In particular, this means that a mark guide should not just limit itself to indicating how many marks go on each section, but also give some criteria for the quality of answer required for part or full marks on a particular answer. Note that the target audience for these notes is other examiners, not students.

At the Scrutiny Meeting

Scrutiny meetings for large boards often run for two hours, but it isn't always necessary to stay for the whole period. The meeting is coordinated by the Convenor of the relevant Board of Examiners.

You should expect to scrutinize at least two or three papers at the meeting.

The procedure is as follows.

- Find a paper from a course where you are broadly familiar with the field, and that is not currently being scrutinized by someone else.
- Read through the paper and the solution notes. Highlight immediately any outright errors as well as possible ambiguities, spelling or grammatical mistakes. You can also add comments if you think a question is unduly complex, assigned too many or too few marks, or open to misinterpretation.
- Write a note on the front listing any particularly significant points.
- Initial the front of the paper.
- Find the convenor's form and sign to indicate you have scrutinized that paper.
- Return the paper to the pile and repeat.

The meetings are usually very quiet, but that doesn't mean you cannot speak. If you are uncertain about any point, just talk to other examiners; or, if appropriate, the author of the paper. They'll usually also be there scrutinizing exams.

Similarly, you should expect that others may ask you about details of your paper, for clarification or to discuss a point. Please don't take offence at this; the eventual production of our exams is a genuinely collaborative procedure, aimed at improving the overall standard of assessment.

For more information

See the School policy documents on setting and marking exams, which contains extensive guidance on exam formats, content, sample answers, and much more.

http://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/student-services/ito/staff/exams-boe

You should have also received a link to this when the ITO first approached you to set your course exam.