

REF: IFB/RS

21st January 1982

Professor Baroness McFarlane of Llandaff,
Department of Nursing
Stopford Building
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PT

Dear Baroness McFarlane,

Marian Ferguson has suggested that I might usefully answer your queries about your responsibilities as external examiner. May I, therefore, answer your questions as you put them. But first, may I say on my own behalf how grateful we would be for your support at this critical period.

(1) London does not issue instructions to visiting examiners in the ordinary way but it so happens that the Academic Council has promulgated a statement recently and I enclose a copy of this. I should explain that the term "visiting examiner" includes both internal examiners and external examiners from any school of the University. The principal reason for this statement was a desire by the University to save and perhaps in consequence it understates the role of visiting examiners. We, in the Department, have always taken the view that an external examiner has an absolute right to read every script and alter any mark he wishes to. Certainly, during the first year or two of a new degree, we would like the external to pass comment upon the course as a whole as well as upon the standard reached by particular students.

(2) The degree will be the responsibility primarily of the Sub-Board of Examiners in Sociology which is in essence a Departmental committee of which I am Chairman. It is responsible for all the degrees offered in the Department and, because like Nursing Studies, these are course-unit degrees it is responsible to the College Board of Examiners which includes all other departments in the College taking course-unit degrees. The College Board generally rubber-stamps the decisions of the Sub-Boards but is there to deal with unusual and difficult problems as well as with any issues of overall policy.

(3) You will be sent the draft paper together with the official syllabus. It is our practice in the Department to adopt, without question, any suggestions required by our external examiners.

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(4) External examiners are entitled to attend the proof meeting but do not generally do so. Their comments are sent by post or sometimes more conveniently over the telephone. I take responsibility for seeing that they are fully informed of anything they should know.

(5) The nature of a course-unit degree is such that there is little occasion for the moderation of marks at an examiners meeting. Each external moderates the marks for the courses referred to him either by post or through a meeting if that is convenient. We leave it to the externals how they want it done. The final examiners meeting is principally concerned with the classification of finalists. There would be no need for you to attend until there are finalists to classify. We can give an oral examination to any candidate by university regulation but so far we have never done so. The degree in Nursing Studies has to be an honours degree and there are, therefore, a number of borderlines. Because of the limited number of candidates we would send you all the scripts, perhaps drawing your attention to any that were exceptionally difficult.

(6) Yes, I will send the marking scheme which is slightly complicated because the marks have to be translated into honour points to promote the operation of a course-unit degree.

(7) The proof meeting of the papers will be on Wednesday 24 February at 10 a.m and the final meeting on Wednesday 30 June at 11 a.m. The scripts should arrive about the second week in June and agreed final marks must be communicated to me by the 28th. In an emergency this can be done by telephone.

(8) No formal report is required in writing but an informal report to Marian Ferguson can be communicated in any way you wish.

If you are able to help us you would be welcome to come, perhaps when we moderate the marks, when we could show you around and offer you some hospitality.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. I.F. Burton
Head of Department

ACADEMIC COUNCIL STATEMENT ON DUTIES OF VISITING EXAMINERS

The Academic Council considers that there is an unacceptably wide variety of practice among Boards of Examiners in the number of Visiting Examiners employed and in the use made of their services, which cannot be justified by the different requirements of subjects or individual courses. It has therefore prepared the following statement of policy:

1. The primary duty of an External Examiner is to ensure that the standard of the Degrees of the University of London in his field of study is consistent with that of the national university system.
2. This is also the primary duty of an Intercollegiate Examiner, who has the additional duty of ensuring consistency in the standards of degrees of the University of London awarded as a result of School-based or School-sponsored examinations.
3. The resources of the federal system should be exploited by making wider use of the services of Intercollegiate Examiners where unitary universities might prefer to use External Examiners.
4. Visiting Examiners should have regard to the totality of the degree in respect of both syllabus and examination. The major part of their time should be devoted to those courses and examinations which are the main determinants of the degree classification.
5. Visiting Examiners should be invited to participate in the setting of examination papers, and each individual paper should be approved by at least one External or Intercollegiate Examiner where this is feasible without appointing further examiners.
6. Visiting Examiners should have the right to inspect any script, and should be asked to review borderline cases. They may be asked to sample scripts or other assessed examination material and to take part in oral and practical examinations.
7. To carry out these duties effectively Visiting Examiners (ie External and Intercollegiate Examiners) should not be overburdened with duties such as second marking of scripts.
8. The Chairman of the Board or Committee of Examiners shall determine the distribution of duties between Visiting Examiners in accordance with these principles. He shall also ensure that Visiting Examiners are invited to attend meetings at which effective decisions on degree results are taken. (For Course-Unit Degrees where a College Board of Examiners wishes to alter the recommendation of a Sub-Board the matter should be referred to the Sub-Board and the Visiting Examiner advised and invited to comment.)

(Special considerations apply to degrees in the Faculty of Medicine and to the Degrees of BA, BSc, BH and BEd (Revised Regulations) based on Course-Units, courses for which are provided in colleges and departments of education associated with the Institute of Education, and they are not covered by this statement.)