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Becoming an external examiner: the Degree Standards project

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Overview

- Aims of the project
- External examiner role
- Professional Development Course for external examiners
- Develop the Developer programme
- Sustainability matters



Aims of the project

- Five year project: 2016 – 2021
- To facilitate a sector-owned process focusing on professional development for external examiners
- Overseen by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment to support better comparability of degree standards
- Design and pilot different approaches to the professional development of external examiners
- Propose evidence-based and cost-effective longer term approaches
- Deliver ongoing professional development for external examiners
- Explore approaches to the calibration of standards, and present recommendations for any future work in this area

External examiner role

- Assessing the standard of academic awards and student performance with regard to internal reference points (e.g. institutional regulations) and external reference points (e.g. subject benchmark statements)
- Ensuring the integrity, rigour and fairness of assessment procedures
- Commenting on the comparability of student performance and standard of awards of the institution in respect to their experience of other higher education providers
- Identifying good practice and providing advice for the enhancement of modules and programmes

Professional development course

The aim of the course is to enable aspiring, new or experienced examiners to:

- understand the role of the external examiner as articulated in the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* and be confident to undertake this
- develop a deeper understanding of the nature of academic standards and professional judgement, and explore the implications for external examining
- use evidence-informed approaches to contribute to impartial, transparent judgements on academic standards and the enhancement of student learning



Course development and delivery

Approach	2016-17	2017-18
Blended course: institutional delivery	Designed and piloted through working with seven higher education providers	Enhanced and established through delivery at 18 institutions
Blended course: regional delivery	Run on a regional basis at five locations	Delivery of the enhanced course (Birmingham, Cardiff, Edinburgh, London)
Online course	Developed and tested, including formative evaluation	Online 'dress rehearsal' and four courses (two open cohorts, two institutional cohorts)

Evaluation work

- External evaluation: Aimhigher Research and Consultancy Network (ARC)
- Focused on outcomes and impact amongst individuals, institutions and the higher education sector
- Reliability, feasibility and credibility of the project activities
- Evaluation methodology involved:
Feedback surveys for the course, reflective logs of external examiners, interviews (longitudinal approach), observation of workshops, development of case studies, comparative analysis across the different modes of the course



Reach of course

- 1,468 participants have completed the blended course
- 651 participants have completed an institutional course
 - Staff from 22 providers
- 207 participants have completed a regional course
 - Representing 100 providers
- 73 participants have completed the online course
 - representing 43 higher education providers



- Various levels of external examiner experience
- Working in a wide range of subject areas

Value of the course

‘Feedback shows that the course has been very well received. Nine out of ten respondents to the mid-term survey said they would recommend the course to others’

‘Overall the feedback from participants in terms of the content, materials, format and facilitation of the PDC has been extremely positive’

ARC (2018)

Credibility of the course

- Importance of having a course that is underpinned by a research-evidence base has emerged as being key

Active learning approach

- This emphasis stands out in the feedback as being important to participants
- e.g., participants valuing the scenarios to stimulate understanding of the external examiner role

Outcomes and impact

- Across the different modes of delivery – learning outcomes are being achieved
- Respondents who had undertaken external examining since the course – nine out of ten agreed they could apply the principles from the course in their practice as an external examiner



‘The evidence of **impact** so far shows changes in knowledge and understanding of the external examiner role, changes in focus and relationships with programme teams’ (ARC, 2018)

Outcomes and impact

- Evidence of shifts in the perception of external examiners about what is required in the role
- Participants paying more attention to:
 - considerations of maintaining standards
 - offering more critique of the provision
 - drawing more on reference points for standards



- Changes have been identified with regard to working with programme teams, such as:
 - Asking for more information
 - Thinking about how to offer critique

Summary of delivery 2018-19

Blended: institutional

- Develop the Developer: further implementation
- Institutional courses held

Blended: regional

- Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as England
- Aspirant new facilitators of the course

Online course

- Larger cohort: to investigate viability, efficacy and costs of large-scale delivery

Regional consortium

- Integrated courses: fully evaluate this model
- Further explore viability, sustainability, portability

Calibration activity

- Support activities of those subject associations currently engaged; disseminate resources

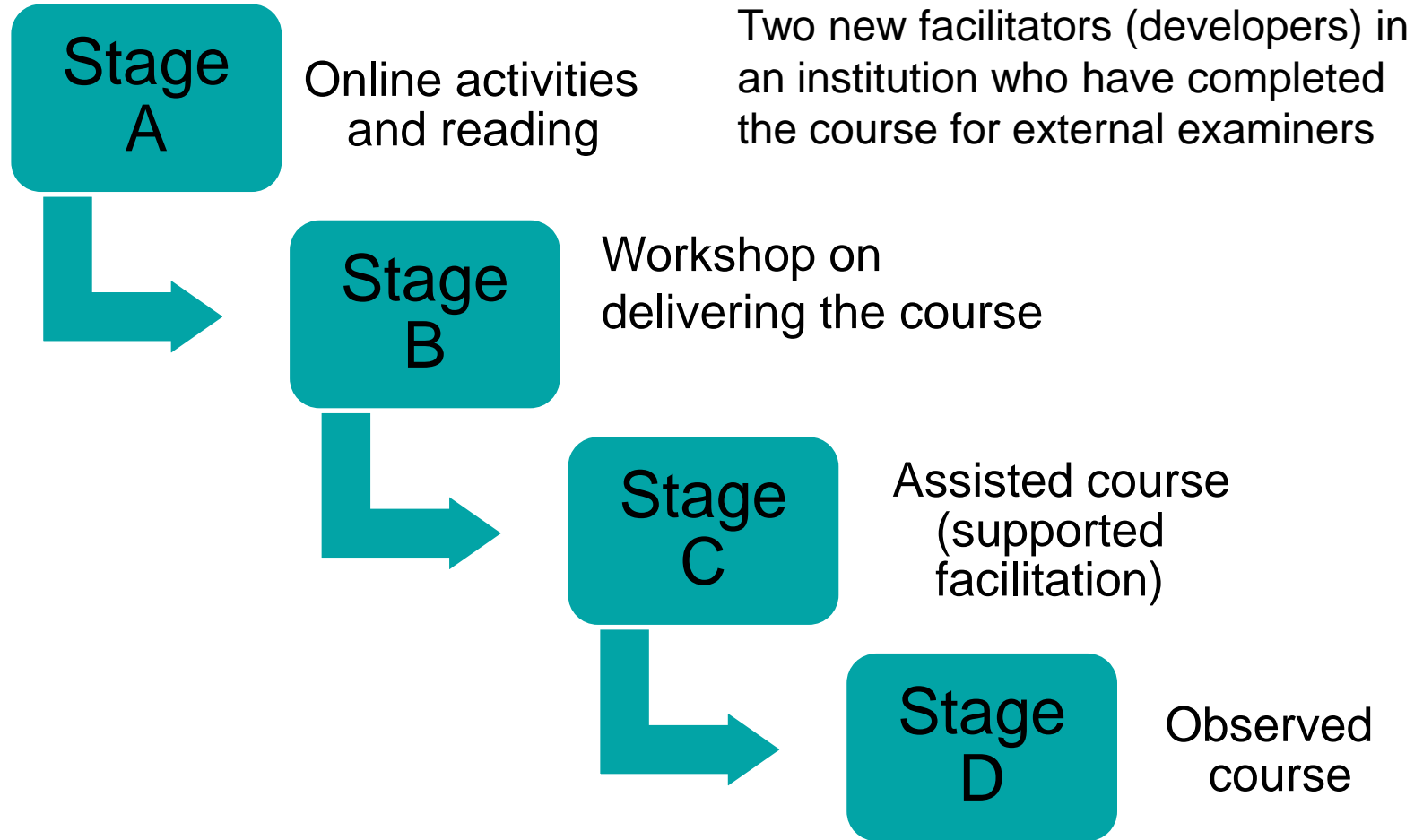
Develop the Developer programme

- 25 higher education providers trialled the programme in 2017-18
- Designed to support staff in institutions to deliver blended courses on an on-going basis
 - Involves regional workshops for new facilitators
 - A mentoring process for becoming a recognised facilitator of the course



In 2017-18, 66 new facilitators took part in the programme, engaging in co-facilitating the course run at their institution with the support of a mentor

Develop the Developer: stages



Sustainability matters

- The importance of ensuring quality and integrity of the provision and the delivery of professional development for external examiners over time
 - Participants issued with course completion certificate
 - Establishing longer-term processes for monitoring delivery and evaluating outcomes of courses
 - Establishing a community of practice for recognised facilitators
- Longer-term incentives
 - Course is currently aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)
 - Institutions incorporating the course within their provision of continuing professional development for staff

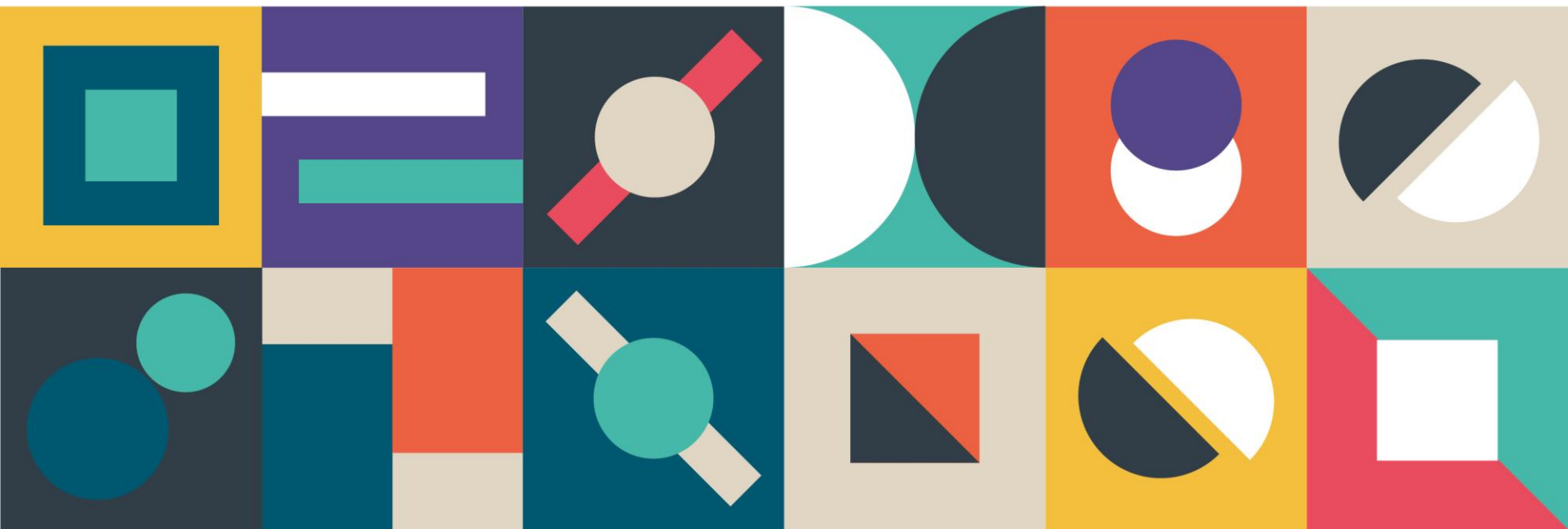


For more information
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Further information

www.heacademy.ac.uk/degree-standards

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References and further information

Aimhigher Research and Consultancy Network (ARC) (17 August 2018)
Degree Standards Project External Evaluation: End Year 2 Report. Report to Advance HE.

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Available at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/external-expertise>

Advance HE: Degree Standards project –
<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/degree-standards>

Qualifications and Credit Frameworks. Available at:
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Subject Benchmark Statements. Available at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment – <https://ukscqa.org.uk/>