

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Paper No ASQEC/18/39b)

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

30 November 2018

Agenda Item 9.2

REPORTS FROM THE CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS AND RESPONSES FROM
THE CAMPUS CO-ORDINATING GROUPS

COVER SHEET

Action is required of the Committee as indicated below.

To consider the reports and responses.

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM

Campus: Coleraine	Academic Session:2017-18
Name of External Examiner: Professor Jeremy Smith	
Address:	
Name of Campus Director of Combined Studies: Dr Aideen Hunter	

Guidance notes on completion of report form (This form should only be used by the campus Chief External Examiner for undergraduate Honours provision or by the Chief External Examiner for the Certificate of Personal and Professional Development or the Postgraduate Certificate of Personal Development)

You are asked to submit your report using this form, directly to Professor P Bartholomew, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), within one month of attending the meeting of the Progress and Award Board of Examiners.

Your comments are sought on the areas indicated. Specific issues that may be addressed under each heading are itemised, and the University would be grateful if you would respond fully in each case. Please indicate if any comments made in your previous report have not been adequately addressed. Your report need not be restricted to the areas specified, and you should feel free to comment in Section 6 on any other matters that you consider relevant. **Please distinguish between suggestions for consideration and recommendations for action.** If you prefer, you may produce a word-processed report using the headings included in this form instead of using the actual form.

Your report will be considered on behalf of the Senate in the first instance by the appropriate Campus Co-ordinating Group and you will receive a response to the substantive matters that you raise. Your report and the response will be considered subsequently by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The membership of the Campus Co-ordinating Group includes the Subject Directors for the subjects contributing to the combined undergraduate Honours programme on the campus.

Your report in full will be made available to all Combined Honours students.

In addition you may choose to submit a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor.

Final report

At the end of your period of appointment as Chief External Examiner, it would be helpful if your final report would draw attention in Section 6 to any significant developments or changes in standards which you observed during your appointment, and include if appropriate any suggestions for modification.

A copy of your final report will be sent to your successor as Chief External Examiner.

Please send the completed report form by e-mail to: l.mailey@ulster.ac.uk

Your claim form should be sent to the relevant Faculty Office.

1 YOUR ROLE

Please include comments on: the sufficiency of the information given concerning your role as Chief External Examiner; the usefulness of relevant documentation received (including award regulations) and the opportunities provided to enable you to discharge your responsibilities including attendance at and involvement in meetings of examiners.

I was fully briefed beforehand, and received all relevant documentation. I consider myself to have been well-prepared to fulfil my responsibilities.

2 CONDUCT OF MEETING

Please comment on whether the Progress and Award Board was conducted rigorously and impartially, with the regulations for student progress, failure, and final classification being consistently and correctly applied.

The Board was conducted with admirable efficiency in every respect. Preparation for the Board was exemplary, chairing was impeccable, and support from the administrators present was thoroughly professional and palpably highly competent, demonstrating a comprehensive grasp of all regulations. I was impressed by how all colleagues, both academic and administrative, approached the whole event with both humanity and rigour.

3 STANDARDS

Please comment on any issues to which you would wish to draw attention. Please draw attention to any significant indicators relating to overall performance within subjects compared by strand (Major, Main, Minor) or between subjects.

This was a difficult year because of the UCU action on pensions, which had to be taken account of by the university. I should like to put on record how impressed I was by the scrupulous approach taken; the document I was sent beforehand, setting out the mitigating actions to be taken, seemed to me admirable in every way, and a very sensible response to a tricky situation. I was impressed by the demonstrably careful involvement of all stakeholders in the development of this response.

Standards overall seem to me excellent, and I am completely comfortable with all grades awarded. I have a couple of minor comments.

(1) My impression was that some subject-combinations seemed to attract a higher proportion of first-class marks than others, and I have suggested that the university might investigate whether this is actually the case and, if so, whether such a skew is defensible (which it may well be).

(2) I also observed that some papers (because factual) could be awarded very high marks whereas others that were more discursive, even when clearly excellent, could not achieve a comparable grade; in a system where averaging of percentages is used to determine degree-classification, a very high mark can skew an overall result. Other institutions, including my own, have confronted this issue, and I am happy to suggest/share alternative approaches.

4 COMPARABILITY WITH PROGRAMMES OF STUDY AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Based on your experience, please indicate whether you consider that the standards of the awards and of student performance are comparable with those at other institutions. Please include reference to the national qualifications framework.

Coleraine's range of programmes is very wide, and comparable I believe with other HEIs. Standards are in line with those achieved in my own institution and with others of which I have experience.

5 ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Please comment on the procedures followed and the administrative arrangements and their effectiveness.

Please see above. I was hugely impressed by the way in which a highly complex logistical task was delivered.

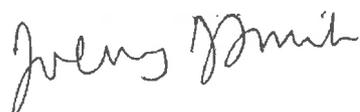
6 OTHER COMMENTS

Please indicate what you consider to be the best features of the combined Honours scheme strengths and weaknesses. Add any other comments which you would wish to make including its possible

improvements based on your experience elsewhere. Please distinguish between recommendations and suggestions for consideration.

I enjoyed my visit to Coleraine, and commend my colleagues there to the university, in the most positive terms.

Any use or publication of the report is the sole responsibility of the University of Ulster.



Signature:

Date:

15th June 2018

Academic Office
November 2016

Prof. Jeremy Smith

23 November 2018

Dear Prof. Smith,

Thank you for your diligence officiating as Chief Examiner for combined programmes during the past academic year. It was with great pleasure that I received your recent Chief Examiner report for combined programmes at Coleriane. The report has been circulated to the Coleraine Campus Coordinating Group who have discussed and approved this response which will be formally presented and approved at our first meeting of the academic year 2018-19. The team is delighted and heartened by your comments on the quality of the decision-making process, the rigour and humanity of the application of regulations:

‘The Board was conducted with admirable efficiency in every respect. Preparation for the Board was exemplary, chairing was impeccable, and support from the administrators present was thoroughly professional and palpably highly competent, demonstrating a comprehensive grasp of all regulations. I was impressed by how all colleagues, both academic and administrative, approached the whole event with both humanity and rigour.’

We note with due consideration your comments regarding degree classification and marking frames for factual based subjects as opposed to discursive subjects.

‘(1) My impression was that some subject-combinations seemed to attract a higher proportion of first-class marks than others, and I have suggested that the university might investigate whether this is actually the case and, if so, whether such a skew is defensible (which it may well be).

(2) I also observed that some papers (because factual) could be awarded very high marks whereas others that were more discursive, even when clearly excellent, could not achieve a comparable grade; in a system where averaging of percentages is used to determine degree-classification, a very high mark can skew an overall result. Other institutions, including my own, have confronted this issue, and I am happy to suggest/share alternative approaches’.

Both these points are well made and will be fully explored by the campus co-ordinating group. We would welcome guidance from your own experiences of similar issues.

Again, we would like to thank you for your very positive report, highlighting good practice in the preparation and running of our Campus Progress and Awards Board and the decision making around student profiles.

Standards overall seem to me excellent, and I am completely comfortable with all grades awarded

We look forward to your continued attentive and reassuring input to the monitoring of the provision and assessment of the Combined Studies Provision at Coleraine over the forthcoming academic year.

Kindest regards,

Dr Aideen Hunter

Director of Combined Studies (Coleraine Campus)

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM

Campus: Jordanstown	Academic Session: 2017/18
Name of External Examiner: Professor Stephen Sinclair	
Address:	
Name of Campus Director of Combined Studies: Dr. Catrin Rhys (Acting)	

Guidance notes on completion of report form (This form should only be used by the campus Chief External Examiner for undergraduate Honours provision or by the Chief External Examiner for the Certificate of Personal and Professional Development or the Postgraduate Certificate of Personal Development)

You are asked to submit your report using this form, directly to Professor P Bartholomew, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), within one month of attending the meeting of the Progress and Award Board of Examiners.

Your comments are sought on the areas indicated. Specific issues that may be addressed under each heading are itemised, and the University would be grateful if you would respond fully in each case. Please indicate if any comments made in your previous report have not been adequately addressed. Your report need not be restricted to the areas specified, and you should feel free to comment in Section 6 on any other matters that you consider relevant. **Please distinguish between suggestions for consideration and recommendations for action.** If you prefer, you may produce a word-processed report using the headings included in this form instead of using the actual form.

Your report will be considered on behalf of the Senate in the first instance by the appropriate Campus Co-ordinating Group and you will receive a response to the substantive matters that you raise. Your report and the response will be considered subsequently by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The membership of the Campus Co-ordinating Group includes the Subject Directors for the subjects contributing to the combined undergraduate Honours programme on the campus.

Your report in full will be made available to all Combined Honours students.

In addition you may choose to submit a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor.

Final report

At the end of your period of appointment as Chief External Examiner, it would be helpful if your final report would draw attention in Section 6 to any significant developments or changes in standards which you observed during your appointment, and include if appropriate any suggestions for modification.

A copy of your final report will be sent to your successor as Chief External Examiner.

Please send the completed report form by e-mail to: I.mailey@ulster.ac.uk

Your claim form should be sent to the relevant Faculty Office.

1 YOUR ROLE

Please include comments on: the sufficiency of the information given concerning your role as Chief External Examiner; the usefulness of relevant documentation received (including award regulations) and the opportunities provided to enable you to discharge your responsibilities including attendance at and involvement in meetings of examiners.

I attended the Combined Studies programme Board meeting on 14th June 2018. As in my first year as Chief External examiner for the Combined Studies programme, I was provided with all the necessary and relevant information about the programme and Board meeting at the appropriate time. I required no additional information; but based on my previous dealings I am confident that any issues which I may have raised would have been dealt with by the programme office with alacrity.

2 CONDUCT OF MEETING

Please comment on whether the Progress and Award Board was conducted rigorously and impartially, with the regulations for student progress, failure, and final classification being consistently and correctly applied.

I am happy to confirm that students across all subjects were treated impartially and fairly by the programme Board and in accordance with University regulations. Any issues relating to particular programmes or individual students were considered by the Board consistently and with due professional care and diligence.

3 STANDARDS

Please comment on any issues to which you would wish to draw attention. Please draw attention to any significant indicators relating to overall performance within subjects compared by strand (Major, Main, Minor) or between subjects.

I am happy to confirm the results and progress and award decisions reached by the Board. Marks appeared to be consistent across subject areas in the Combined Studies programme. The programme maintains and enforces academic standards rigorously.

4 COMPARABILITY WITH PROGRAMMES OF STUDY AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Based on your experience, please indicate whether you consider that the standards of the awards and of student performance are comparable with those at other institutions. Please include reference to the national qualifications framework.

Based on the evidence presented, the marks and grades awarded are in line with the required academic standards. There is no apparent evidence of either 'grade inflation' nor undue harshness nor significant variation across different programme subject areas.

5 ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Please comment on the procedures followed and the administrative arrangements and their effectiveness.

The administration of the Board was dealt with efficiently and professionally. This is particularly commendable as the Acting Director/Programme Leader had to step in at short notice due to staff illness. It is evident that where particular cases had to be considered that staff were fully aware of the relevant circumstances of individual students. Similarly, the Board were fully appraised of the relevant regulations and University procedures and applied these appropriately.

6 OTHER COMMENTS

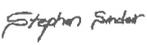
Please indicate what you consider to be the best features of the combined Honours scheme strengths and weaknesses. Add any other comments which you would wish to make including its possible improvements based on your experience elsewhere. Please distinguish between recommendations and suggestions for consideration.

I am pleased to see that the recommendation concerning how students across the Combined Studies programme were considered for the accolade of being commended on the Dean's List was accepted and

acted upon. There are no other outstanding issues that need to be addressed by the Progress and Awards Board nor Combined Studies Programme.

I note that the University is revising its Teaching and Learning Strategy. I will be interested in learning more about the implications of this for the Combined Studies Programme in due course.

Any use or publication of the report is the sole responsibility of the University of Ulster.

Signature: 

Date: 14th July 2018

Academic Office
November 2016

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM

Campus: : Magee	Academic Session: 2017/18
Name of External Examiner: Professor Seán de Búrca	
Address:	
Name of Campus Director of Combined Studies: Dr Lisa Bradley Head of Department, International Business	

Guidance notes on completion of report form (This form should only be used by the campus Chief External Examiner for undergraduate Honours provision or by the Chief External Examiner for the Certificate of Personal and Professional Development or the Postgraduate Certificate of Personal Development)

You are asked to submit your report using this form, directly to Professor P Bartholomew, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), within one month of attending the meeting of the Progress and Award Board of Examiners.

Your comments are sought on the areas indicated. Specific issues that may be addressed under each heading are itemised, and the University would be grateful if you would respond fully in each case. Please indicate if any comments made in your previous report have not been adequately addressed. Your report need not be restricted to the areas specified, and you should feel free to comment in Section 6 on any other matters that you consider relevant. **Please distinguish between suggestions for consideration and recommendations for action.** If you prefer, you may produce a word-processed report using the headings included in this form instead of using the actual form.

Your report will be considered on behalf of the Senate in the first instance by the appropriate Campus Co-ordinating Group and you will receive a response to the substantive matters that you raise. Your report and the response will be considered subsequently by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The membership of the Campus Co-ordinating Group includes the Subject Directors for the subjects contributing to the combined undergraduate Honours programme on the campus.

Your report in full will be made available to all Combined Honours students.

In addition you may choose to submit a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor.

Final report

At the end of your period of appointment as Chief External Examiner, it would be helpful if your final report would draw attention in Section 6 to any significant developments or changes in standards which you observed during your appointment, and include if appropriate any suggestions for modification.

A copy of your final report will be sent to your successor as Chief External Examiner.

Please send the completed report form by e-mail to: l.mailey@ulster.ac.uk

Your claim form should be sent to the relevant Faculty Office.

1 YOUR ROLE

Please include comments on: the sufficiency of the information given concerning your role as Chief External Examiner; the usefulness of relevant documentation received (including award regulations) and the opportunities provided to enable you to discharge your responsibilities including attendance at and involvement in meetings of examiners.

I received all relevant documentation (including regulations and assessment criteria) during my visit. I had the opportunity to talk and discuss with colleagues the details of the documentation to enable me to fully understand the regulations. I was given simple explanatory sheets to explain the various codes used during the meetings of examiners.

2 CONDUCT OF MEETING

Please comment on whether the Progress and Award Board was conducted rigorously and impartially, with the regulations for student progress, failure, and final classification being consistently and correctly applied.

The conduct of the Process and Award Board was at all times exemplary.

3 STANDARDS

Please comment on any issues to which you would wish to draw attention. Please draw attention to any significant indicators relating to overall performance within subjects compared by strand (Major, Main, Minor) or between subjects.

The marking standards were conducted rigorously and impartially. *The overall performance for student progress, failure, and final classification was consistently and correctly applied.*

4 COMPARABILITY WITH PROGRAMMES OF STUDY AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Based on your experience, please indicate whether you consider that the standards of the awards and of student performance are comparable with those at other institutions. Please include reference to the national qualifications framework.

Standards with respect to subject structure and content and assessments are comparable with those at other institutions I am associated with.

5 ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Please comment on the procedures followed and the administrative arrangements and their effectiveness.

The administration of the assessment process was conducted efficiently and professionally.

6 OTHER COMMENTS

Please indicate what you consider to be the best features of the combined Honours scheme strengths and weaknesses. Add any other comments which you would wish to make including its possible improvements based on your experience elsewhere. Please distinguish between recommendations and suggestions for consideration.

I believe the combined Honours program main strength is that it provides students with the opportunity to explore a range of different areas.

Any use or publication of the report is the sole responsibility of the University of Ulster.

Signature: Professor Seán de Búrca

Date: 4/7/2018

Academic Office
November 2016



23 November 2018

Dr Seán de Búrca

Dear Dr de Búrca

Thank you for your report in respect of your role as Chief External Examiner for the Combined Studies provision on the Magee campus of Ulster University, and the Exam board which you attended on 14th June 2018.

The report has been circulated to the Magee Campus Coordinating Group who have discussed and approved this response which will be formally presented and approved at our first meeting of the academic year 2018-19, scheduled for the 28th November 2018. The team is delighted and encouraged by your very positive report, highlighting good practice in the preparation and running of our Campus Progress and Award Board and the decision making around student profiles.

Thank you again, on behalf of the Campus Coordinating Group, for your attentive and reassuring input to the monitoring of the provision and assessment of the Combined Studies Provision at Magee.

Kindest regards

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Lisa Bradley'.

Dr Lisa Bradley
Chair of Combined Studies (Magee Campus)
Senior Lecturer in Finance
Ulster University

ulster.ac.uk