

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Paper No ASQEC/18/45b)

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

5 December 2019

Agenda Item 11.2

REPORTS FROM THE CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS AND THE RESPONSE FROM
THE CAMPUS CO-ORDINATING GROUP FOR COLERAINE

COVER SHEET

Action is required of the Committee as indicated below.

To consider the reports and the response from the Campus Co-ordinating Group for Coleraine.

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM

Campus: Jordanstown	Academic Session: 2018/19
Name of External Examiner: Professor Stephen Sinclair	
Address:	
Name of Campus Director of Combined Studies: Dr. Wendy Saunderson	

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 attended my third (and penultimate) meeting of the Combined Studies programme Board meeting on 13th June 2019. The relevant documentation was provided on the day and well organised. I had the opportunity to ask questions and raise any issues that occurred to me, and the rationale for any decisions taken were articulated carefully and clearly.

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.

As in previous years, I was impressed with the efficiency and attention to detail with which the meeting was conducted. Staff were aware of and applied the relevant regulations appropriately, and gave due consideration to any individual cases or apparent anomalies.

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 that the assessment and performance standards are in line with those expected of a diligent and exacting set of undergraduate programmes. Academic standards and the spread of awards are in line with other UK HEIs with which I am familiar.

The decisions reached by the Progress and Awards Board were reasonable and in compliance with University regulations.

I was not able to identify whether there were any significant changes in students' experiences or performance as a result of the University's new *Learning & Teaching Strategy*.

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.

The change to the algorithm used to determine students' final award is welcome and in line with practice in many other Universities. There was no evidence that this change in policy distorted the overall marks profile nor significantly altered any individual award, but the additional importance attached to students' overall performance is a welcome development.

5 ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

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

Most of the relevant issues were addressed and resolved at earlier assessment boards, so that the work of the Combined Studies Progress and Awards Board could be dealt with quickly and effectively. Any issues that arose were dealt with in an informed and impartial manner. I commend both administrative and academic staff for dealing with such a wide and potentially confusing range of programmes and individual student circumstances both effectively and with alacrity.

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.

The new system for calculating students' final awards is welcome. There was no evidence that it had any significant effect on the awards conferred, but hopefully it will influence students' performance in the second year of their programme in the future.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and professionalism of all staff and commend in particular the Director the Combined Studies Programme.

No issues arose at the Combined Studies Progress and Awards Board that need to be addressed.

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

Signature: 

Date: 29th June 2019

Academic Office
November 2016

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM

Campus: Magee	Academic Session: 2018/19
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

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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 subject areas.

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

Signature: Professor Seán de Búrca

Date: 21/6/2019

Academic Office
November 2016

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM

Campus: Coleraine	Academic Session:2018-19
Name of External Examiner: 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)

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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

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

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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.

As in previous years, 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.

As in previous years, the Board was conducted effectively and efficiently. I was impressed with the evident careful preparation that had been undertaken beforehand to ensure that matters ran smoothly. Colleagues approached the whole event with rigour, but also humanity; I was pleased to note the compassion with which special cases were treated. I have one comment: in my view – given the necessary complexity of this highly flexible programme – it is very important that an experienced administrator from your examinations office is present to assist in dealing with regulations/requirements etc. I hope this assistance may be prioritised going forward.

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.

Standards seemed to be in order, and as already flagged I was pleased with the rigorous attention paid to the rules for marking courses and classifying programmes overall. I am completely comfortable with all grades awarded.

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 of its kind. Standards of marking 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. All Coleraine colleagues are to be congratulated for their careful attention to detail and process. I am especially grateful to Dr Aideen Hunter for her highly efficient advice and assistance, and to Dr Frank Ferguson for his wise counsel.

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.

This is my final report, so it may be appropriate to flag a few general issues.

(1) In previous years I noted that some subject-combinations attracted higher grades than others, but I think that may be a self-selecting problem. There is of course a sector-wide concern about the awarding of degree-classifications, and my own view is that the current system is insufficiently delicate to reflect student achievement. It may be time for a GPA-system to be introduced – a development that I would very much support.

(2) There have been changes over the years I have been working with Coleraine colleagues, and one regrettable development – which of course I quite understand – has been the cutting-back of possibilities for foreign-language study. I know this issue is again sector-wide, but given Coleraine's evident internationalist ambitions it does seem regrettable (especially given the stark challenges facing the sector – especially in Northern Ireland – as a result of Brexit). It may be appropriate to look carefully again at such provision going forward, perhaps emphasising the role of languages as part of the employability agenda.

But I want to emphasise, in conclusion, that Coleraine's programme of study remains exciting, and evidently attractive to its students. It benefits, moreover, from the evident commitment and professionalism of its enthusiastic staff. It has been a real privilege to work with colleagues in the University of Ulster, and I commend them to you most strongly.

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

Signature:



Date: 28th November 2019

Academic Office
November 2016

Prof. Jeremy Smith

23rd November 2019

Dear Prof. Smith,

Thank you for your recent report dated 22nd November 2019. Once again we appreciate your willing 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 Coleraine. 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 2019-20. 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:

‘As in previous years, the Board was conducted effectively and efficiently. I was impressed with the evident careful preparation that had been undertaken beforehand to ensure that matters ran smoothly. Colleagues approached the whole event with rigour, but also humanity; I was pleased to note the compassion with which special cases were treated.’

We note with due consideration your comments noting the officiation of the exam boards by experienced staff from the exams office and will indeed make a recommendation to this effect.

‘I have one comment: in my view – given the necessary complexity of this highly flexible programme – it is very important that an experienced administrator from your examinations office is present to assist in dealing with regulations/requirements etc. I hope this assistance may be prioritised going forward.’

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.

We are saddened to note this is your last year with us in the role of Chief External. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your collegial guidance and friendship over the past four years. Your insights have been invaluable in monitoring the provision and assessment of the Combined Studies Provision at Coleraine. Thank you.

Kindest regards,

Dr Aideen Hunter
Director of Combined Studies (Coleraine Campus)