

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

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

## CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM

|   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Campus: Coleraine                                   | Academic Session: 2014 / 2015 |
| Name of External Examiner: Professor Patrick Crotty |                               |
| Address:  |                               |

**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 D A McAlister, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Student Experience), 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.

For Combined Honours degrees, 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.

The 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: k.douglas1@ulster.ac.uk**

If you prefer to post your report, please send to:

Professor D A McAlister  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and  
Student Experience)  
University of Ulster  
Shore Road  
NEWTOWNABBEY  
BT37 0QB

*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 and involvement in meetings of examiners and any viva examinations.*

As indicated in my 2013 and 2014 reports, my role is substantially different and in key respects less demanding than that of a Subject External Examiner. The information supplied by the University was exemplary in its timeliness and detail and I was given every assistance to discharge my duties effectively.

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## 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 meeting was conducted in a highly efficient manner. Once again, I was impressed by the way Professor Jedrzejewski combined competence with courtesy in his chairing of proceedings. The tutors and course leaders from across the disciplines displayed admirable concern for the students, along with a secure grasp of the regulations. Keen appreciation of the importance to graduands of their final degree grades was in evidence. There was a notable reluctance to give U1s without exhausting all avenues of enquiry. I was particularly struck at one point when Drs Hancock and Keanie intervened to supply important missing bits of 'back story' in relation to a particular student. This is NOT to say that there was anything sentimental or indulgent in the attitude of the Board. Rather, commendable care was taken to ensure that all the evidence was weighed before final classifications that might disadvantage the future of a student were awarded. The boundaries between grades appeared to have been conscientiously patrolled by the individual markers and by the subject boards that had taken place before the Board I attended. It was notable that a number of students from across the disciplinary spectrum had had borderline marks raised in discussions between staff and subject externals in a way that impacted positively of their final degree classification. This was one of many earnest of the thoroughness of procedures at Ulster.

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## 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.*

Occasional discrepancies between students' performance in different subjects and between their attainment in individual modules for the same subject are to be expected. A few such discrepancies were in evidence in the marks scrutinised by the Board but I could detect no pattern or trend that gave cause for concern. As my role does not involve sight of written work or participation in oral or viva examinations, it is difficult to make detailed observations with regard to standards other than to remark that there seemed to be an approximate parity across disciplines and that marks appeared to have been very thoroughly considered at subject boards and internal panels before they arrived at the Board for Combined Honours.

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## 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.*

Specifically as opposed to statistically informed comment on comparability of standards at UU with those of other institutions is difficult, for reasons outlined in 3. The range of grades seemed appropriate in the light of the Qualifications and Credit Framework. As far as I could determine, the work under consideration by the Board was all at the appropriate levels for a first degree (Levels 4, 5 and 6). There was no evidence of grade inflation or of 2.1s and Firsts being awarded with undue liberality. It was gratifying to see such a wide range of subject combinations offered by the University and availed of by the students.

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**5 ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

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

The administration and assessment process was of an exemplary standard. The procedures and arrangements were thoughtfully designed and competently carried out. The individual subject representatives displayed a thorough familiarity with the work of the students, along with a firm command of systems and procedures. The documentation was in order and the business of the meeting was presided over and despatched by Professor Jedrzejewski with his customary cheerful efficiency.

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**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 combined Honours scheme is notable for the way it offers students a wide diversity of subject combinations – an increasingly unusual feature of university provision in an age of specialisation. I had been a little concerned in 2013 by the way some students' final marks came up just short of one grade boundary or another. This is clearly not a problem that can be directly addressed by the Board for a combined degree, as marks are finalised at the individual subject boards. This year and in 2014, however, there appeared to be a much lower proportion of students hovering at the margins of grades, which may indicate that marking has become more decisive.

It was evident at all points of the Board's deliberations that staff at Coleraine take an extremely conscientious approach to their duties. I think everybody involved in the combined Honours programme is to be congratulated for their idealism and professionalism.

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

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Signature: Patrick Crotty

Date: 23 June 2015

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Academic Office  
August 2014

Professor Patrick Crotty

11 November 2015

Dear Professor Crotty,

On behalf of the Coleraine Campus Co-ordinating Group I would like to thank you for your report and for another successful year as Chief External Examiner. I am pleased that your overall experience has been a positive one and we were delighted that you were impressed with the procedures and administrative arrangements as well as the knowledge and engagement of staff in the process.

The Group have taken on board your concern in previous years about students marks on the margins of grade boundaries, and appreciate your recognition of our attempts to ensure that this occurs as infrequently as possible.

Once again I would like to record our appreciation for your engagement in the role as Chief External Examiner and for your supportive report. I have enjoyed working with you over the last three years, am grateful for your helpfulness and efficiency in your role and I trust that your final year will be as positive as the previous ones.

Yours sincerely



Dr Leanne McCormick

Director of Combined Studies, Coleraine Campus

16<sup>th</sup> July 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

This is my Chief External Examiner's Report (Faculty of Social Sciences) for 2014-2015 and specifically for the Exam Board which took place, and which I attended, on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

As in my previous two years, I remain highly impressed with the conduct of the Exam Board, which is conducted with efficiency but also with a sense of taking into account the particular circumstances of the individual students being discussed.

The Board was chaired appropriately and was conducted impartially and with due regard for the University's procedures. I have no concerns with the way in which the Exam Board's business was carried out.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Wilkinson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Prof. Ray Wilkinson

Professor Ray Wilkinson

30th October 2015

Dear Professor Wilkinson,

Thank you for your report in respect of your role as Chief External Examiner on the Jordanstown Campus of the University of Ulster and the exam board which you attended on 11th June 2015.

The Jordanstown Campus Co-ordinating Group were delighted by your very positive report highlighting all the good practice in the preparation and running of the Progress and Award Board and the decision making around student profiles.

Thank you again, on behalf of the Campus Coordinating Group, for your input to the monitoring of the provision and assessment of the Combined Programmes at Jordanstown.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Catrin S. Rhys  
Director of Combined Studies, Jordanstown Campus

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

|   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| Campus: Magee                               | Academic Session: 2014/15 |
| Name of External Examiner: Dr Sean de Burca |                           |
| Address:                                    |                           |

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

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Professor D A McAlister  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and  
Student Experience)  
University of Ulster  
Shore Road  
NEWTOWNABBIEY  
BT37 0QB

*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 and involvement in meetings of examiners and any viva examinations.*

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.

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**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 Board of Examiners was at all times exemplary.

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**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.*

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**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.

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**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.*

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**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.*

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Signature: **Dr. Seán de Búrca**

Date: **26/6/2015**

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Academic Office  
August 2014



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E: l.bradley@ulster.ac.uk  
ulster.ac.uk

6<sup>th</sup> October 2015

Dear Dr. de Burca,

On behalf of the Campus Co-ordinating Committee for Modularised Programmes at the Magee Campus I would like to thank you for your recent report and your supportive comments. We are particularly grateful that you were able to take up duties at very short notice due to the unfortunate personal circumstances of Prof. Pollard.

As there were no issues raised we would like to thank you again for your support and encouragement in the report and on your visit and I look forward to working with you in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Larry McCurry', written over a horizontal line.

Larry McCurry  
Director of Combined Studies  
Magee Campus