

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

5 December 2019

Agenda Item 9

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2018/19: ANNUAL OVERVIEW REPORT

Presenter: Mr A G Faulkner

COVER SHEET

To receive the report. No action is required by the Committee

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EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2018/19: ANNUAL OVERVIEW REPORT

1 Introduction

The University appoints at least one external examiner for each award-bearing programme or undergraduate Honours subject with specified module responsibilities. They may also have responsibility for credit-bearing short course modules. Their main duties are to ensure that academic standards are maintained and that individual students are treated fairly in the assessment process. Where applicable, external examiners are also expected to have due regard for professional practice standards as they relate to the programme. Chief external examiners are appointed on three campuses to have oversight of undergraduate combined degrees. There are chief external examiners for the frameworks governing the Certificate of Personal and Professional Development and the Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Development. (One person discharges these roles.)

Each external examiner is required to submit a written report electronically to Student Administration for onward distribution within one month of attending the last meeting of the Board of Examiners in each academic session. They are asked in particular:

- to comment on marking standards and assessment criteria, and the general quality of candidates' work (with reference to the academic infrastructure and their comparability with those in other UK higher education institutions);
- to comment on the teaching, organisation, syllabi and structure of the programme with a view to identifying good practice and further opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students;
- to comment on their participation in the moderation process and the sufficiency and timeliness of the evidence made available to them to effectively discharge their responsibilities.

The report is a key component in the University's standards and quality assurance and management processes. It is considered on behalf of the Senate in the first instance by the appropriate course/subject committee(s) who report on action that they have taken in response to substantive matters raised. The Academic Office also reviews all reports.

The reports and responses are considered subsequently as part of the University's ongoing monitoring processes. Reports and responses are also discussed with student representatives and are accessed by all students on the course through the course support area on the VLE. External examiners' reports from the previous two years are provided to revalidation panels.

Further confidential reports may be made directly to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and/or the Vice-Chancellor. At the end of their period of appointment, external examiners are invited to draw attention to any significant developments or changes in standards relating to the programme or subject they have observed during their appointment, and to include, if appropriate, any suggestions for modification to the programme. A copy of the final report is made available to the successor external examiner.

2 Receipt and Acknowledgement

Some external examiners have responsibility for more than one programme and, to date, the number of submitted reports for the 2019/20 academic session totals 306. Upon receipt in Student Administration, reports are acknowledged. They are forwarded electronically to the Examinations Office, Academic Office, Quality Enhancement and to Faculties and collaborative partner institutions for consideration by the relevant course/subject committees and a written response. The acknowledgement letter invites external examiners to inform the DVC if they do not receive a written response addressing any suggestions for consideration and/or recommendations for action. Occasionally, where the external examiner raises matters of significant concern, or matters are explicitly identified which require a response at University level, the DVC addresses the concerns in liaison with the relevant Dean/Head of School, as appropriate. The DVC will also acknowledge course teams and identified individuals where outstanding best practice and exemplary work has been identified by external examiners.

3 General

The annual overview report provides a summary for academic year 2018/19. It does not comment on issues specific to individual programmes nor on follow-up responses or actions taken which are monitored through the ongoing monitoring processes.

As in previous years, most external examiners reported that standards were appropriate. In many cases, they commended specific aspects of programmes but in a few cases, critical comments were made. While these comments are, largely, not serious, course/subject committees must take immediate action to address concerns and respond on a timely basis to the external examiner(s). The following sections highlight specific matters, recurrence of which in 2018/19 reports point to more general issues of which Faculties should take account.

4 Participation in the Moderation Process

The vast majority of external examiners expressed satisfaction with their involvement in the moderation process throughout the year. Most praised course/subject directors and faculty administrative staff on the provision of relevant programme documentation, examination papers and coursework schema, assignments and examination scripts in a timely and efficient manner. Several commended access to materials on Blackboard Learn. One external examiner described it as “a godsend in terms of speeding up the

process” (MA English Literature) with others describing it variously as being “very efficient”, “extremely useful”, “a big improvement”, with the system operating “very smoothly” and the presentation of documentation, “clear and structured”. The external examiner for the MSc Marketing commended “the consistency, clarity and reliability of information ... makes the EE process much more rigorous and much less time consuming”.

Conversely, a small number of examiners reported less positive experiences. The external examiner for the BA Hons Drama complained, “There is a good deal of variation in the way Blackboard module sites are organised which means I am obliged to spend a good deal of time digging around looking for things”. In a similar vein another stated, “This sounds like a good idea ... but only if ... we are suitably conversant with the portal to be able to find all the necessary documents easily (which in my case was problematic and rather frustrating)” (BEng Hons / MEng Hons Safety Engineering and Disaster Management). Another (practitioner) external examiner for the same provision stated, “I found the box files of documents preferable to trying to work with an unfamiliar electronic Blackboard system”. The external examiner for Engineering provision recommended that “a short training session on the use of the online system be organised for external examiners during their induction day”. This recommendation has been brought to the attention of the relevant University department for consideration.

The usefulness of the external examining induction event was again praised. Many stated how impressed they had been with the overall moderation process and commended the organisation and conduct of the Board of Examiners that in many cases was described as “impressive, “efficient” and “exemplary”.

In only one case (MA Product Design) were concerns raised by external examiners about late appointment being a factor limiting involvement in prior approval and moderation of material. A number did however express regret at not having been given the opportunity of approving assessment schema and examination scripts in advance: FdEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering (NRC); FdEng Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering (NRC); BSc Hons Architectural Technology and Management; BSc Hons Biomedical Science (DL); BSc Hons Business Administration; BSc Hons Business Studies with options; BEng Hons/MEng Hons Engineering Management; PgCert/PgDip/MSc Communication and Public Relations; PgCert and PgDip/MSc Advancing Practice in AHP Specialisms; MSc Global Capital Markets and MSc Professional Services Operational Delivery.

In the case of the BEng Hons/MEng Hons Engineering Management, the external examiner complained, “Unfortunately, *as has been the case for the previous two years*, examination papers arrived too late for me to provide feedback and comments before the examination period, particularly in the second semester. The adoption of an online system has served to highlight the fact that UoU staff are not meeting the deadlines for paper submission and internal moderation. This is a totally unacceptable situation”.

The most common complaint again concerned incompleteness in the provision of documentation and inconsistency in presentation. The following are extracts from reports suggesting improvements and consistency in its presentation of information.

- It would be very useful if all module breakdowns were supplied as a matter of course, not just overall module marks. (BMus Music)
- I expected to see module reports as well. This helps considerably to get a bigger picture and to conduct simple statistical checks on a per-module basis. Student profiles showed module grades only, not award outcome. (FdEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering (NWRC); FdEng Mechanical Engineering (NWRC))
- Several modules included internal moderation forms and responses from module leaders with the scripts, but these were not universally complete. (BSc Hons Biomedical Engineering)
- It would have been helpful to have [a] list of all module marks and selected samples of each band for individual modules when looking at the student's work. (Computer Science, Software Systems Development, Games Development and Information Technologies Honours provision)
- It was disappointing not to see any moderation forms. (Electrical, Electronic and Renewable Energy Engineering Honours provision)
- Only some of the module boxes had moderation forms. (Mechanical, Manufacturing and Renewable Energy Engineering Honours provision)
- Module review reports are really important to see how the module has performed overall. While there is some reflection within them, it is inconsistent between modules with some having very little information on reflection. (BEng Hons Architectural Engineering; BEng Hons Energy and Building Services)
- My only quibble is that marking schemes do not accompany draft examination papers. (FdSc Applied Industrial Sciences (SRC))
- In future, it would be useful to have access to the handbook for all modules. (BSc Hons Football Coaching and Business Management)
- My main recommendation is for the School to consider the information provided to external examiners. I think it would be useful if externals were provided with information that shows overviews of student performance in module assessments - I believe this is now common practice across the sector. I would like to see that module and course teams and hence the School has data to evaluate student performance in different aspects of the courses. One thing that would improve the externals' scrutiny would be to provide material in the module boxes in a common pattern and include certain standard material. (BSc Hons Pharmaceutical Sciences; MSci Hons Pharmaceutical Bioscience; Master of Pharmacy)
- It would be of value if all module co-ordinators provide the external examiner with a short module evaluation to include students' feedback. (PgDip/MSc Advancing Practice in AHP Specialisms)
- It would be helpful to provide module summary statistics indicating overall marks, average mark and standard deviation in the samples provided to the external examiner. (FdSc Business Services Management (SWC))
- It would be useful to also get the following information: mean, percentage of students achieving the different levels and performance from the previous year. (BSc Hons Business Studies)

A lack of timeliness in the provision of materials was also raised by a small number of external examiners (FdSc Leadership and Management (SERC); BSc Hons Criminology and Criminal Justice; BSc Hons Management, Leadership and Development). The external examiner for the BDes Hons / MA Animation suggested, "I

think it would really benefit future examiners if a timetable was put in place for when work could be expected, and templates/responses required”.

Of particular note are the following comments by external examiners.

“The assessments provided for evaluation were split between hard copy examination packs and sharepoint files. The former were complete and well organised but lacked comparative statistics on the performance related to previous years and breakdown of performance by assessed tasks. Similarly, the information was not available for the sharepoint evaluation. SharePoint files were less standardised (than the examination packs). Some modules provided all student assessments whereas others provided scanned examples of work that did not always cover the range of marks. Lists of grades for students by task were provided but it was not given within marked and annotated scripts making it difficult to see how the marks had been derived. Some modules files provided complete information, some of which was not formally assessed, thus requiring some time to identify correct folders for viewing. Other folders would not open with the external examiner log in.” (BSc Hons Biomedical Science)

“Unlike previous years, I was never sent or asked to complete a module report pro forma for any of the modules I was asked to review. Dates of exam boards were not always provided to me ahead of time and I found myself having to contact members of the teaching team to check dates and times in order to ensure my availability. Arrangements for staying over and getting to and from the airport were also not always discussed prior to my arrival which at times proved stressful. What I did not always receive were module evaluations and some module co-ordinators did not identify a sample for me to review despite my requesting this. I also seldom received a comparison of this year’s marks with those of the previous year(s).” (BSc Hons Nursing (Adult))

“I have had to prompt for information and relevant documents. I have been less impressed with the administration arrangements and the support I have had over the last two years.” (BSc Hons / PgDip Specialist Community Public Health Nursing)

5 Structure and Content

There was almost universal confirmation that the content and structure of programmes and subject strands were coherent and appropriate to the qualification level, the subject area, and the aims of the course/subject. The structure and content of provision were described variously as “well-structured”, “coherent”, “impressive”, “innovative” and “commendable”. In most cases, there was acknowledgement of underpinning research and scholarship.

The following positive comments are worthy of mention.

“Ulster University has an excellent history faculty conducting pioneering research; there is ample evidence of how it infuses the curriculum.” (History Honours subject)

“The aims of the course are met and surpassed with the level of scholarship which incorporates a significant focus on research-led teaching which is commendable.” (Irish Language and Literature Honours subject)

“The content is based on cutting edge research and scholarship in the field of TESOL and language teacher education.” (MA TESOL)

“There are some novel approaches of note including the entrepreneurship and skills building programme where links are made to community development.” (BSc Hons Environmental Health)

“The course structure and content is not just fit for purpose, it is an exemplar.” (BSc Hons Environmental Health)

“The team should be commended on their working modular structure that has evidence of essential direct linkage to this environment of study and working ethically in the real world.” (FdSc Sport, Exercise and Fitness (NWRC))

“The teaching excellence is informed by outstanding discipline-specific and pedagogic research and scholarship. The clear programme specification and professional practice standards underpin an outstanding student experience that offers high added value and returns on investment. (MEd Education with specialisms)

“This is a comprehensive, well-structured and thought-out course with clear and coherent learning outcomes. The team is to be commended for regular updates to the course content and reading lists to cover topical and contemporary issues that affect money advisers.” (AdvDip Money Advice Practice)

In the few cases where there was adverse comment by external examiners regarding content, the comment was always in the form of a recommendation designed to support improvement and/or currency of the curriculum.

6 Assessment and Feedback

The vast majority of external examiners were satisfied with the assessment strategies employed. In general, reports provided evidence of module teams making good use of assessment criteria and many external examiners described themselves as impressed with the range, variety and appropriateness of assessment methods including essays, case studies, practical exercises, reflective logs, reports, presentations, class tests and written examinations. The range, innovative, imaginative and stimulating nature of assessments were commended in many programmes.

The introduction of the University’s *Curriculum Design Principles* and *Assessment Workload Equivalence Guide* appear to have had a significant impact in continuing the downward trend of recent years of over-assessment. However, the issue persists with most concerns raised relating to collaborative provision (FdSc Business Services Management (SWC); FdEng Civil Engineering (BMC); FdSc Computing (SRC); FdSc Planning, Property and Housing (BMC); BSc Hons Business Technology; Food

provision (FdSc / BSc Hons) (CAFRE); BSc Hons Human Resource Management); PgCert/PgDip/MSc Construction Business and Leadership. Overall, over-assessment appears to be reducing as an issue.

While there were only very few reported instances, it was disappointing to note that external examiners continue to report concerns expressed by students relating to assessment by group work whereby each member of the group receives a group mark which students perceive as unfair (BEng Hons Clean Technology; BSc Hons Environmental Health; BSc Hons Pharmaceutical Sciences; PgDip/MSc Construction Business and Leadership; PgDip/MSc Construction Business and Project Management; MSci Hons Pharmaceutical Bioscience; Master of Pharmacy).

The University policy on assessment by group work, which has been in place since 2010, is clear on this point: where group work contributes to an award classification, an individual element shall be included in each group member's mark for group work (TLC min 10.76).

Regarding feedback, across all faculties there were again many cases of external examiners praising the level, depth, quality, timeliness and comprehensive and personalised nature of feedback as well as the emphasis on formative feedback to improve future performance. External examiners were effusive in their praise of staff in many cases recognising the demands in terms of time and effort involved in providing high quality, consistent feedback for a large student cohort. The following examples are worthy of note:

“It was also very encouraging to see valuable formative feedback being provided to students even where the test concerned was a part of the summative assessment. It is unusual to see this type of evaluative feedback being provided to students in this discipline area for work that is being graded for final assessment purposes and I would commend this as an example of very best practice.” (Undergraduate Accounting provision)

“I continue to be very impressed by the rigorous, transparent nature in which assessment is marked. It is a credit to staff and must be a considerable burden given the large student numbers. It is exemplary and one of the best systems I have observed anywhere”. (BSc Hons Sport and Exercise Sciences) and,

“The degree of feedback provided by staff, the quality and extent of written comments, plus the amount of time staff give to students is impressive, so impressive that it is somewhat unusual”. (MSci Hons Planning, Regeneration and Development).

There were however a number of reports regarding inadequacy in the level, quality, timeliness and/or consistency of feedback (FdEng Civil Engineering (BMC); FdEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering (NRC); FdEng Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering (NRC); FdSc Agriculture and Rural Studies (CAFRE); FdSc Agriculture and Technology (CAFRE); BDes Hons Interaction Design; BSc Hons Property Investment, Appraisal and Development; BSc Hons Radiography; BSc Hons Real Estate; PgCert Prescribing for Allied Health Professionals; PgCert and PgDip/MSc Sensory Integration).

A lack of alignment between language used and marks awarded was again highlighted:

“[There is] some confusion with some off the language used in the feedback to students. If something, for instance, is described as excellent, then the mark should reflect this. The language used needs to meet the marks given.” (Cert in Counselling (College network))

“In text annotations have been used but I would question the value to students of commenting ‘good, ‘ok’ etc. These comments could be more specific to the body of work being marked.” (FdSc International Culinary Arts Management (SRC))

“An area for consideration is that assessment commentary (feedback) and marks need to align well; one or two instances had poorly aligned comments/marks.” (BSc Hons Biomedical Science (DL))

“Annotation of exam scripts is generally a little thin, and for the exam formats used this is appropriate. I would however suggest the use of standardised terms as I saw on two different exams 10/10 annotated as being both “Good” and “Perfect” which can confuse students.” (Master of Pharmacy)

It should be emphasised that the above comments were exceptions rather than the rule and related to only a very small number of programmes.

7 Marking Standards

Marking standards overall across all faculties were considered appropriate and, in many cases, were described as “high quality” and “consistent” with “clear evidence of moderation”. Examples from each faculty are as follows.

“There was evidence of detailed consultation between the first and second marker as well as intervention from the MA coordinator. I was particularly impressed by the decisions made re: failing work, as well as the discussion of borderline grades in the upper degree classification. There was a sustained conversation over grading which was both responsible and thoughtful.” (MA English Literature)

“There was clear evidence of first marking and moderation and clear consistency in marking.” (Electrical, Electronic and Renewable Energy Engineering Honours provision)

“[Marking standards] are extremely high.” (AdvCert/PgCert Non-Medical Prescribing)

“There was clear evidence of second marking and where there was disagreement, a clear explanation on how this was resolved was provided.” (Accounting and Business Honours provision)

There were however some concerns expressed, some recurring from previous years although not necessarily in the same programmes.

A perennial issue raised by external examiners is staff unwillingness to use the full range of marks, particularly at the upper end of the scale. While there is evidence of improvement in this area across all faculties, several external examiners still raised this as an issue (BA Hons Drama; English Honours subject; BA Hons Media Studies and Production; Sociology Honours subject; BSc Hons Speech and Language Therapy; MA TESOL; MSc Sport and Exercise Psychology). Regarding the MA TESOL and MSc Sport & Exercise Psychology, both were cited in this category last year.

Over generous marking continues to be raised (although in smaller numbers this year): BA Hons Photography with Video; BSc Hons Nursing (SAAD) and BSc Hons Optometry. In the case of the first two programmes, the same issue was raised last year.

Allied to this issue, two external examiners commented on the high number of 'firsts' awarded in their respective programmes. The external examiner for the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts stated, "I find there are too many firsts, something that the team may think about to ensure they are not over-grading next year". The external examiner for the BSc Hons Quantity Surveying and Commercial Management stated, "It was pleasing to see a reduction in the number of first class Honours degrees awarded. It is still 23% of the total however, which I consider to be too high". (This programme was similarly highlighted in the 2018 report.)

While many external examiners praised the moderation process, there were exceptions highlighted in a very few cases:

"I would like to see a clear audit trail of first and second marking across modules". (FdSc Computing (SERC))

"The moderation and markings exist for some modules but not all". (FdEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering (NRC); FdEng Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering (NRC))

"I did not see much evidence of double marking in the samples I reviewed". (BSc Hons Building Surveying)

"Moderation forms confirmed that moderation had taken place but, with limited exception, provided little information on this process as generally comments were not provided". (Sociology Honours subject; BSc Hons Social Psychology)

Concerns were raised by external examiners about a lack of anonymity in marking. The external examiner for the BSc Hons Sport Studies complained, "I have raised in my previous reports my surprise that it is not a University requirement to use anonymous marking". (This programme was highlighted in last year's report). "Staff may wish to explore using anonymous marking" suggested the BSc Hons Occupational Therapy external examiner. The Master of Pharmacy external examiner stated, "As the department is small, it is possible that unconscious bias may influence marking. As I understand it the university does not employ exam/candidate numbers to allow for anonymous marking".

The comment regarding the Master of Pharmacy related to coursework. It was suggested that since the coursework had been submitted through Turnitin, anonymity

had not been possible. However, Turnitin *does* support anonymous marking and, where there is uncertainty as to how this can be employed, course teams should consult with the Office for Digital Learning. Generally, the (long-standing) University policy is clear that written examinations are subject to anonymous marking (anonymity only being lifted after the marking process is completed) and that “while anonymous marking is not always feasible for coursework, it is encouraged where appropriate and practicable. Faculties are expected to have their own methods for safeguarding student anonymity during the process ...” - Assessment Handbook; section 14.6.

There was praise for the use of marking schemes in a small number of programmes; FdSc Applied Industrial Sciences (SRC), FdSc Paramedic Practice and PgDip/MSc Renewable Energy and Energy Management. However, there were indications elsewhere of their not being employed or not being employed correctly.

The external examiner for the BDes Hons and MA Animation stated, “The case of students being aware of assessment schemes and criteria, there could be some further effort made to clarify how work will be assessed formally”. In addition, the external examiner for the BSc Hons Property Investment, Appraisal and Development and BSc Hons Real Estate reported, “There are inconsistencies in the provision of marking/assessment criteria across modules”. It was suggested by the external examiner for the Biomedical, Electronic and Mechatronic Engineering provision (UG and PG), the PgDip/MSc Advanced Composites and Polymers, and the PgDip/MSc Manufacturing Management, that an area for improvement would be “the production of detailed marking schemes to protect the University in cases of litigation”.

It should be noted that from the current academic year, assessment rubrics for all modules will form part of the supplementary material required to be provided by course/subject teams for the information of evaluation and revalidation panels.

8 Quality of work, student learning and comparability with other institutions

Quality of work and student learning

The quality of students’ work and student learning generally attracted favourable comment with standards described variously as “excellent”, “very impressive”, “commendable”, “of very high standard” and “exemplary”. Programmes where the quality of work produced was described as at or near publishable standard included: BSc Hons Food and Nutrition; BSc Hons Mental Health Nursing; BSc Hons/MSc Health & Wellbeing; BSc Hons/PgDip Specialist Nursing with pathways; PgDip Professional Practice (Social Work) and MSc Nursing.

The following external examiner comments are worthy of note.

“Candidates’ work was of a very good quality and their achievements commensurate with, if not better than, those at top research universities”. (BSc Hons Accounting with pathways; PgDip/MSc Advanced Accounting)

“The quality of work is above what I have seen at other universities”. (BSc Hons Building Surveying).

“The work I viewed was of a high quality, equivalent to, and in some cases surpassing the quality of work in other universities across the UK and Ireland that I have familiarity with”. (BMus Music)

“The calibre of the students is very high and a credit to the course team. The quality of the research projects is outstanding”. (BSc Hons/MSc Dietetics)

“The reputation of the PGCE at Coleraine is exceptional. I would like to record the passion for teaching and the relationships with pupils from student teachers I saw is the best I have witnessed”. (PGCE Primary)

“This programme is outstanding as a professional CPD post-qualifying programme and has much to inform other jurisdictions such as ROI, England/Wales and Scotland”. (PgDip Professional Practice (Social Work))

“The photographic work is exemplary and is above the national standard”. (MFA Photography)

Placement

As in previous years, a number of external examiners commented on the benefits of the placement year in improving student performance in final year (BA Hons Textile Art, Design and Fashion; BDes Hons Interaction Design; BSc Hons Building Surveying)

Academic Skills

Although relating to only a very small number of programmes, primarily collaborative provision, once again, over-reliance on websites and poor referencing skills were highlighted as the main areas for concern: FdEng Civil Engineering (BMC); FdSc Building Tech and Management (NRC); FdSc International Culinary Arts Management (SRC); FdSc Marketing (BMC); FdSc Sport, Exercise and Fitness (NRC); FdSc Sport, Exercise and Fitness (NWRC); BSc Hons Culinary Arts Management; BSc Hons Interactive Multimedia Design; BSc Hons International Hospitality Management and PgCert Education for Health Care Professions.

Comparability

It was once again pleasing to note that in regard to comparability with other institutions, all external examiners were positive in their comments with several stating that the standard of Ulster programmes exceed that of similar programmes in other UK institutions. Noteworthy examples are as follows.

“There is no doubt in my mind that [the programme’s] quality is at a minimum equivalent to that of most HE institutions and, in my opinion, exceeds that of many”. (FdSc Applied Industrial Sciences (SRC))

“The professional standards of the programme are among the best I have witnessed and, in my judgement, in the top quartile of similar programmes available”. (BSc Hons Construction Engineering and Management (SWC))

“I am aware of few courses directly in line with this but am satisfied that as a leader in the field, UU are setting standards for others to follow”. (BSc Hons Criminology and Criminal Justice (Applied Practice))

“Given that students on the [accounting] modules were not accounting/finance students, the performance was impressive. This level of achievement is comparable to, if not higher than, the level of performance in non-accounting students in finance modules in the institutions with which I am familiar”. (International Travel and Tourism, Leisure and Events, Consumer, Food; Culinary Arts, Hospitality Management, Hotel & Tourism Honours provision)

“This programme is a front runner amongst SLT programmes in the UK. It not only meets the standards but could be said to set them due to the innovative and highly applied approach taken by the programme team”. (BSc Hons Speech and Language Therapy)

“The work I reviewed was comparable to, or exceeding, that of other institutions with which I am familiar”. (PgCert and PgDip/MSc Advancing Practice in AHP Specialism)

“The reputation of the PGCE at Coleraine is exceptional. I would like to record the passion for teaching and the relationships with pupils from student teachers I saw is the best I have witnessed”. (PGCE Primary)

“The ETI evaluate schools, not through the performance of teachers but through an evaluation of the quality of learning taking place. It is no surprise therefore that student learning on the primary PGCE at Coleraine has been evaluated as ‘outstanding’ by the ETI this year”. (PGCE Primary (practitioner))

“This programme is exemplary from an international perspective as a post-qualifying programme for professionally qualified social workers”. (PgDip Professional Practice (Social Work))

Student Consultation / External Examiner General Comments

Many course/subject teams across all faculties attracted high praise for their professionalism, expertise, enthusiasm, dedication, commitment and support for students. In several cases, the team was described as the strongest feature of the programme. Many programmes attracted fulsome praise for their high standards, content, innovation, relevance to industry, underpinning research and scholarship and the quality of the student experience. Students’ comments reflected those of external examiners. Students were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of their programme, appreciative of the commitment and dedication of teaching teams and the level of support provided by them, and the overall quality of their learning experience.

Staffing levels

A number of external examiners expressed concern over staffing levels. The primary reasons offered were staff attrition and an increase in student numbers without a

concomitant increase in teaching staff. Staffing issues were raised in relation to the following provision.

- BA Hons Fine Art
- BSc Hons Cinematic Arts
- BSc Hons Community Youth Work
- BSc Hons Construction Engineering and Management (SWC)
- BSc Hons Environmental Health
- BSc Hons Property Investment, Appraisal and Development
- BSc Hons Real Estate
- BSc Hons Sport and Exercise Sciences
- PgCert Higher Education Practice
- MEd Higher Education Practice
- MSc Sport and Exercise Psychology

The BSc Hons Cinematic Arts and BSc Hons Environmental Health were highlighted regarding staffing concerns in the 2018 report.

There appears to be an increasing tendency for external examiners to identify staff members by name. Indeed, in two instances, the external examiners for the FdA Digital Arts and Technologies at South West College and the BA Hons Media Studies and Production not only identified staff by name but also named individual students and compared their performance. The External Examiners' Handbook (July 2019), in Section 6, External Examiner's Report (page 34), makes clear, "External examiners are asked not to identify individual students or staff by name in the report". External examiners should be advised accordingly.

9 General Administration

The overwhelming majority of external examiners praised administrative arrangements around the assessment process with many describing the process as "exemplary", "outstanding", "rigorous" and "thorough". The support and hospitality provided was in many cases described in similar terms.

10 Concluding Remarks

The overall picture which emerged again this year was one in which the University's standards and related processes were wholeheartedly endorsed. Of note was the frequency with which University staff were praised for their professionalism and dedication. The University's quality management and standards assurance processes were again affirmed as aligning well with best practice in the sector. It was again pleasing to note effusive praise from so many external examiners regarding the quality of programmes.

There were, however, as indicated, a few notable exceptions, and in these instances, closure on all the substantive issues raised by the external examiners must be quickly addressed by the relevant course/subject teams and/or University line management.

While some issues were raised in previous years, their reappearance is often in different programmes. Faculties should therefore be mindful of the general points highlighted in the report and ensure that action is taken to prevent recurrence. In only a very few cases have concerns around standards been raised.

It should be highlighted that the recurring issues raised by external examiners and highlighted in this report relate to only a small minority of programmes, in numerical terms, most issues total only in single figures.

The key general lessons for Faculties are the importance of good communication with external examiners and the consistent application of the best practice.

27 November 2019