

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Paper No ASQEC/20/33b)

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

3 December 2020

Agenda Item 10.2

COVER SHEET

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

Presenter: Ms C Hegarty

Action is required of the Committee as indicated below.

To consider the reports and the responses from the Campus Co-ordinating Groups.

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM

Campus: Magee	Academic Session: 2019/20
Name of External Examiner: Dr Gill Waugh	
Name of Director of Combined Studies: Clodagh Hegarty	
Address: Department of Global Business and Enterprise, Ulster Business School	

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 to Professor Colin Turner, interim Dean of Learning Enhancement, within one month of attending the meeting of the Progress and Award Board of Examiners. **Please send the completed report form by e-mail to: l.mailey@ulster.ac.uk**

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 Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement 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 Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or 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.

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 of the examiner guidelines/handbook and assessment handbook in a timely manner. The information provided through the Examiner handbook regarding regulations and assessment criteria and associated documentation was clear and appropriate.

I did not receive any further information regarding any adjustments made in line with Covid19 but understood that this had been agreed as part of the assessment decisions.

Unfortunately due to Covid19 restrictions I was unable to visit the campus and meet colleagues face to face but hope to be able to do this during the next academic year.

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 Progress and Award Board and associated processes were conducted in a professional and efficient manner in line with UoJ regulations and procedures. The process was rigorous and in line with the regulations documented. Amendments/clarity to records were made and agreed in the Board in a small number of cases.

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 performance of individual students was considered and the decisions recorded regarding progress and final classification was correctly and consistently applied in line with the regulations and guidance. Application of procedures appeared to be fair and equitable. Student profiles considered in detail. Profiles re upgrades discussed and rationale provided. Also good to hear discussions re profiles to support students to completion.

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 standards of the awards and student performance are in line with those in other organisations. Covid19 has impacted on completion results across the sector.

5 ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

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

Administration of the process was effective and clear throughout the process. Changes to student

Assessment decision recording (not changing the actual marks but the accuracy of the record were made in the Board where necessary and the reason for this stated again in line with regulations.

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 range of subject combinations provided in these joint honours degree is worthy of note. The range of programmes offers students opportunity to study areas that are not always available in university and helps to support opportunities into a range of employment.

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

Signature: Dr Gill Waugh

Date: 20/7/20

Academic Office
April 2020

26/11/2020

Dr Gill Waugh,
Dean of Faculty of Professional Studies
University of Bolton
Deane Road,
Bolton BL3 5AB

Dear Dr Waugh,

Re: Combined Studies

Thank you for your comments in respect of these combined study programmes. The Campus Co-Ordinating Group have considered your report and your comments have been noted, we endeavor to build upon the positive comments and address issues raised in your report. The Campus Co-Ordinating Group would like to thank-you for your positive comments and support during this unusual time.

Once again, on behalf of the Campus Co-Ordinating Group, I should like to thank-you for your comments, they have been much appreciated. We value the work undertaken by our External Examiners and look forward to continuing our relationship in 2020-2021.

Yours sincerely,

Clodagh Hegarty



Clodagh Hegarty FCCA, CTA, AITI, SFHEA

Lecturer in Accounting

Course Director BSc (Hons) Business Analytics

Course Director BSc (Hons) Business with Computing/Irish/Drama/Education

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**The Department of
Global Business &
Enterprise**

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM

Campus: Coleraine	Academic Session: 2019/20
Name of External Examiner: Professor Jeremy Smith	
Name of Director of Combined Studies: Dr Aideen Hunter	
Address: English Language & Linguistics, University of Glasgow/112 Prestonfield, Milngavie, Glasgow G62 7PZ	

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 to Professor Colin Turner, interim Dean of Learning Enhancement, within one month of attending the meeting of the Progress and Award Board of Examiners. **Please send the completed report form by e-mail to:** l.mailey@ulster.ac.uk

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 Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement 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 Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or 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.

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.

In response to the COVID-19 emergency, I was asked to extend my term of office as this programme's External Examiner for an extra year, which I was very pleased to do. Before the meeting I was sent documentation about the programme and the procedures involved, including a very helpful statement on how the University was mitigating the issues arising from the lockdown, to ensure that students did not suffer any detriment. I was also able to discuss these latter issues with Ulster colleagues, so that I could have their perspective on matters. I consider myself to have been fully enabled to carry out the tasks required of me.

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 can report with complete confidence that the whole Board was conducted with rigour, impartiality and propriety, and in accordance with regulations. Chairing was impeccable, and the lead for the Board (David Barr) was clearly in full command of the proceedings. I was especially impressed by how the dedicated administrator, Jane Boylan, handled not only the very complex spreadsheets, which brought together disciplines across the university, but did so in the context of the current emergency. Ms Boylan is in my view to be commended for outstanding professionalism.

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 Board, I noted with pleasure, was scrupulous in observing degree classifications; I was impressed by the considerable care taken with those tricky borderline places. I also like the custom of Dean's Lists for non-finalists, which seems to me a lovely touch that my own institution could profitably adopt.

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 programme is broadly comparable with the interdisciplinary joint Honours programmes that are a common feature of Scottish HEIs, including my own institution. Standards, insofar as I can judge, are entirely in line with those achieved at Glasgow.

It was clearly disappointing that students on a 'placement' course had this opportunity curtailed because of the COVID emergency; this is a distinctive and very welcome feature of Coleraine's programme, and I hope that it can swiftly be reinstated. I also picked up that the University is encouraging internationalisation opportunities; in the light of my general comments below about modern languages, that is a very welcome feature of your offering.

5 ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

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

Please see above for my comments on the operation of the Board. The programme has always seemed to me very carefully managed, and the Director, Aideen Hunter, is to be commended for her evident and efficient commitment to its overall administration.

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.

Since 2018-19 was to be my final year of service as External, I included in my report for that occasion a general reflection on my experience. I stand by those comments, and reproduce them here, for convenience.

'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: 25th June 2020

Academic Office April 2020

Prof. Jeremy Smith
R408 Level 3,
School of Critical Studies,
4 The Square
University of Glasgow

23rd June 2020

Dear Prof. Smith,

Thank you for your recent report, 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 2020-21. 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, I noted with pleasure, was scrupulous in observing degree classifications; I was impressed by the considerable care taken with those tricky borderline places. I also like the custom of Dean's Lists for non-finalists, which seems to me a lovely touch that my own institution could profitably adopt.

It is also gratifying to see the administrative business support so highly commended in your report. Our wonderful colleagues support us in so many ways and this is often over-looked, thank you.:

I can report with complete confidence that the whole Board was conducted with rigour, impartiality and propriety, and in accordance with regulations. Chairing was impeccable, and the lead for the Board (David Barr) was clearly in full command of the proceedings. I was especially impressed by how the dedicated administrator, Jane Boylan, handled not only the very complex spreadsheets, which brought together disciplines across the university, but did so in the context of the current emergency. Ms Boylan is in my view to be commended for outstanding professionalism.

We note your comments in relation to the restructuring of provision on the Coleraine campus and the closure of some courses. Especially those related to languages and courses with international components. It is hoped that new developments in Coleraine such as the new undergraduate course BSc Education with Digital Learning will help to rejuvenate the student offering.

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)

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

CHIEF EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM

Campus: Jordanstown	Academic Session: 2019/20
Name of External Examiner: Professor Stephen Sinclair	
Name of Director of Combined Studies: Dr. Jennifer Hamilton	
Address: W517, Hamish Wood Building, Glasgow Caledonian University, Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow, G4 0BA	

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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 can confirm that I received all of the relevant information for the Campus Progress and Awards Board at the appropriate time. I was very ably supported by administrative and academic staff in fulfilling my duty of ensuring that the conduct of the Awards Board was impartial and that its decisions complied with University regulations.

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 held online on Wednesday 24th June and conducted with the same high standard of efficiency that I have come to expect. The Chair, Director Administration Officer and other staff dealt ably with a large number of student records (272 pages) across a variety of programmes - ensuring that due processes were followed, academic standards maintained, and that particular circumstances were considered carefully. This diligence was particularly commendable in light of the unprecedented disruption caused by the Coronavirus pandemic and lockdown.

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 University put in place appropriate measures to take account of the unique circumstances and the academic and administrative challenges raised by the Coronavirus pandemic. These included introducing alternative forms of assessment where appropriate, carefully considering mitigating circumstances, and comparing marks to previous years to ensure consistency. These procedures were implemented effectively by the Board. In fact, it appeared that there were some slight improvements in assessment performance despite the difficult circumstances which students faced, which is testimony to the support which staff provided.

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 Programme continues to maintain high academic standards. There were some impressive coursework marks and awards in the Business Economics programme in particular, for which students and staff should be commended.

5 ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

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

As in previous years, the Awards Board liaised efficiently with the relevant Subject Boards and was well prepared to address any regulations which related to the circumstances of particular students.

I commend all staff for the apparent ease with which the assessment process was dealt with and completed under extremely difficult conditions. I am sure that this involved considerable additional effort on their part.

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.

There were no issues to address from my previous report(s), and no issues were raised by staff which are relevant to this Report.

I was pleased to accept the invitation to extend my tenure as Chief Examiner for one more year, in accordance with University regulations. I look forward to working with the academic and administrative staff team, and will prepare and submit my final report in 2021.

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

Stephen Findor

Signature:

Date: 2nd July 2020

Academic Office
April 2020

Prof. Stephen Sinclair
W157
Hamish Wood Building
Glasgow Caledonian University
Cowcaddens Road
Glasgow
G4 0BA

22 October 2020

Dear Prof. Sinclair

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 Jordanstown. The report has been circulated, and this response will also be circulated to the team.

We were pleased by your comments concerning the conduct of the meeting and that you received all relevant information at the appropriate time, especially 'in the light of the unprecedented disruption caused by the Coronavirus pandemic and lockdown' and that 'the meeting was conducted with the same high standard of efficiency' as in the past. The team were also pleased that you noted the 'high academic standards' and that the improvements in performance among students was a 'testimony to the support which staff provided'. It was especially pleasing to read that the work of the Business Economics students, was impressive with both staff and students being commended for their work.

We note that there were no issues raised and delighted that you have accepted the invitation to be Chief Examiner for a further year. We look forward to working with you again during the 2020-21 academic year.

Kindest regards,



Dr Jennifer Hamilton
Director of Combined Studies (Jordanstown Campus)