

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE: EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS 2012-2013 - Master of Education Practice (MEP)

Dear Mr Cavan (SC), Dr Redford (MR) and Mr Wynne (GW) (External Examiners for the MEP – 2012-2013)

I am writing further to receipt of your External Examiner's reports for the MEP for 2012-2013. All reports have been considered by the School in accordance with our approved procedures and the School has asked me to provide you with the following single response to the main issues raised.

"The MEP Team would like to formally thank the three External Examiners for their positive and constructive reports. We were pleased that the Examiners found their visit to Cardiff, and the meeting with students and mentors in particular, useful and informative. We were also pleased to note the various aspects of the programme which have been identified as good practice.

We look forward to working with the External Examiners further during the coming year.

To deal with each of the points raised by the External Examiners in turn:

1. SC - [1, third para] the External Examiner's report of concerns raised by students "over clarity regarding the functional support provided by mentors for the induction elements of their mentor role and the MEP support elements of their role" and related comments;

The External Examiner has raised an important and interesting point in respect of the relationship between mentoring for Statutory Induction and mentoring for the MEP. Since the Examining Board in October, one new Handbook and one revised Handbook have been produced for the use of mentors. A new Handbook for mentors in terms of the role in Statutory Induction has been produced by colleagues in Welsh Government. A revised Mentor Handbook for the MEP has been produced by the MEP team. It is hoped that the provision of this extra guidance will help mentors to differentiate, where appropriate, the two elements of their role.

In respect of the relationship between the MEP and the Practising Teacher Standards (PTS), the MEP Programme Co-ordinator has undertaken work with WG to explicitly map which elements of the MEP overlap with the PTS, particularly in Module 1. It is hoped that this is now made much more explicit in the revised version of Module 1 which is currently being delivered to the second cohort of students.

2. SC - [1, fourth para] the suggested possible enhancement of the "role of the mentor" through an awareness "of the outcomes of students' assessments" and related comments;

The External Examiner has touched upon an enhancement which had already been brought to the attention of the MEP team both by mentors and also by students. The MEP team agrees that the mentor relationship would be enhanced if the mentors were directly aware of the assessment performance of their mentees. We have therefore taken steps so that students will be made aware that their marks will be shared with mentors and to provide them with an opt-out should they object to this. Students will be further encouraged to share their feedback with their mentors so that appropriate mentoring support might be given.

3. MR - [1, fourth para] the comment that the "mentoring relationship is a particular strength of the programme and would benefit from a more formal link between the mentors and the institution" and related comments;

We thank the External Examiner for these comments which are very pertinent. We have described in the response above the steps that we have taken to try to involve the mentors more directly in the assessment process. In addition, we ensure that mentors are fully briefed on the assessment for the modules as part of their training.

We would like to enhance the relationship between the Universities delivering the MEP and the mentors during the coming year, particularly as we look towards the mentors' role in supporting the Action Enquiry Project in Year 3. In preparation for this the Cohort 1 mentors will be undertaking a small piece of Action Enquiry of their own and will be supporting them in undertaking this.

Further plans include involving mentors in the materials development process so that they might provide early feedback on the appropriateness of learning materials.

**4. SC - [1, sixth and seventh paras] the reported “concern...regarding the timing and scheduling of the modules” and related observations;
MR - [1. 3rd para] the External Examiner’s indication that the “module structure did not fit easily with the school year, in particular the tasks in module 3” and related recommendation for reconsideration of “the timing of the provision and the relationship between the tasks within each module and school year”;**

The External Examiners comments on the programme structure were considered at the MEP Board of Studies held on 13 November 2013. The proposal to alter the structure of the first year to swap the sequencing of Module 2 (Child and Adolescent Learning and Development) and Module 3 (Behaviour Management) was discussed fully with the student representatives present. The outcome of the discussion was that the timing of the proposed changes made it difficult to make amendments for 2013/2014 academic session but that the matter would be kept under review for the 2014/2015 academic session.

The content and structure of Module 3 has also been altered to facilitate students being able to complete the classroom-based aspects of this module in good time before the summer recess.

Amendments to the timing of modules had already been made prior to the October 2013 Examining Board. These amendments include standardising the length of modules and aiming to reduce the overlap between modules which had been commented upon at the Staff-Student Panels. The assessment deadline for Module 2 has been brought forward to May so that it does not fall during the summer holidays. The assessment task for Module 3 will be due in September but we hope that the clear period following the submission of Module 2 will allow for the Module 3 tasks to be completed without any conflicting deadlines. In addition, students will receive more explicit guidance regarding the Module 3 assessment task.

5. SC - [1, ninth para] in the context of positive comments regarding meetings of the external examiner with students and mentors, the indication that the participants “all felt it would be useful for us to meet with the same group of students and mentors next year as well as students drawn from the new intake”;

As noted above, we’re pleased that the External Examiners found the meeting with students and mentors useful. We would be pleased to arrange for the External Examiners to meet again with the same group of participants and also with a group drawn from the new intake.

6. SC - [1, final para] the External Examiner’s strong recommendation “that the University provide appropriate incremental increases in support, both in terms

of staffing and in terms of University processes, for example in the scheduling of VLE and other system downtime”;

MR - [1, final para] in the context of the “successful establishment of the programme by a small team of tutors, across four institutions” the suggested consideration of “appropriate increases” in staffing “as the number of students grows”.

We thank the External Examiners for their comments in respect of the resourcing of the programme. The School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University has invested in the programme by providing the following:

- A further Lead Mentor post;
- An additional Clerical Officer position.

Since the Examining Board in October 2013, Bangor University have also appointed a full-time lecturer with responsibility for the MEP.

7. SC - [2, second para] the indication that “referencing can be a problem for a number of students” and recommended provision of “more overt guidance”;
GW – “Try to draw candidates’ attention to the importance of using correct referencing methods when recording evidence from further background reading in the bibliography.”

The MEP team would agree with the External Examiners in identifying this as an issue for concern. We have attempted to address these concerns by:

- Highlighting the importance of good referencing at the Learning Events directly to students and indirectly via Mentors and Mentor Training.
- Improved communications with students prior to the assessment deadline to emphasise the importance of good referencing.

8. SC - [3, second para] in the context of positive comments on feedback provided to students, the report of “some small variations in the amount of written feedback for assignments” and related comments.

GW – “Ensure consistency as regards markers’ comments when providing candidates with written support on the assessment sheet.”

GW - “Incorporate the terminology presented in the Generic Marking Criteria when providing constructive feedback to ensure that tutor comments are consistent and equal across the programme.”

As was discussed with the External Examiners when they visited in October, the MEP team sets a high importance on the feedback that is provided to students as this is one of the few occasions where academic tutors communicate directly with students. Therefore, we welcome the constructive comments made by the External Examiners and will incorporate this into the training of markers for the coming year.

9. GW – “whether it would be possible to receive a login name and password name from the website supporting the degree in order to glean an understanding of the pastoral and communication processes which are provided to candidates across the programme?”

We will make the necessary arrangements for External Examiners to have access to the VLE. The details will be communicated directly to colleagues.

10. GW – “When evaluating the academic year it might be worth considering practical processes and communication methods in the context of point 3 above by developing communication systems for practitioners by means of a social forum gateway supervised by the University.”

The External Examiner raises an interesting point and one which we will aim to consider further in the context of a wider discussion regarding the MEP engagement with social media and other tools.

We trust that the External Examiners will find this response acceptable. Should any of our colleagues wish to discuss any of the points above, or any other issues, then please contact either Professor Mark Hadfield or Matthew Turner.”

Positive Comments

The School and University are pleased to note your positive comments on the School's provision including:

- a. **[1, 2 and 3 (all three Reports) positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;**
- b. **[1, Mr Cavan] particularly positive remarks on the student representative system, the recruitment of “a motivated group of mentors” and the “dedicated team of academics and administrators who are delivering a complex, demanding and high quality programme”;**
- c. **[3 Mr Cavan] commendation of feedback in general and of “generic feedback” in particular as providing “an excellent and non-threatening approach to encouraging meaningful self-reflection on assignment performance”;**
- d. **[3, Dr Redford] commendation of the “feed-forward comments to students” and “use of “generic feedback”;**
- e. **[5, Dr Redford] the indication that Preparation/Induction activity “was excellent and gave the group of examiners a good understanding of all aspects of the programme;**
- f. **[5 and 6] further commendation of induction activities and of the working relationships between mentors and teachers and the Programme's supporting documentation and support systems.**

I hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your service as External Examiner.

In order to meet the expectations of the QAA Quality Code, both the External Examiner Annual Report and this Institutional Response will be published on Registry web pages and will be available publically.

The University's provision of the formal Institutional Response is not intended to constrain direct communication between schools and their External Examiners. Schools are encouraged to discuss with their External Examiners any matters of detail raised in their Reports and, more widely, any issues impacting on the quality and standards of awards, including possible changes to programmes.

We are most grateful for your comments and for your support in this matter.

Mrs Jill Bedford
Director of Registry and Academic Services