Academic & Student Support Services
Academic Registrar
Simon Wright LLB

Gwasanaethau Academaidd a Chefnogi Myfyrwyr
Cofrestrydd Academaidd
Simon Wright LLB

Sent by email to s.m.sait@leeds.ac.uk   **27 August 2015**

Dear Dr Sait,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2014 – 2015

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the MRes in Biosciences.

Your Report has been considered by the School in accordance with our approved procedures. I am, therefore, now in a position to respond on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor to the main points you had raised.

Issue(s) Highlighted:

1. The quality of computing teaching space;
2. Consideration of the provision of on-line introductory material/software (e.g. LINEX and R) to help students get up to speed before they arrived;
3. The imbalance in the amount of work required and time available for different components of modules and uncertainty about expectations with respect to assessments; clearer guidance here would be valued along with some idea of progression/achievement through the programme;
4. Consistency of feedback from staff across modules.

The following response has been provided on behalf of the School:

1. The School of Biosciences has only one designated computer room with approximately 40 computer terminals to accommodate the needs of approximately 1000 undergraduate students and all teaching needs. Whilst the School of Biosciences has no immediate solution to this problem for the coming intake of students in 2015-16, staff teaching on this module will take practical steps to prevent disruption of the class by non-MRes students coming in to use the room. Prominent signs will be placed on the entrance clearly stating that a class is in progress and if possible a barrier will be positioned in front of the entrance to the room to inhibit access.

   In the longer term, the School of Biosciences has submitted an outline proposal to the College of Biomedical and Life Sciences for the development of a new IT facility, to be created in the academic year 15-16. The proposal is for a large IT facility, with

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around +150 seats, which has the flexibility in the building fabric to split the room up to cater for various size classes. The needs of the MRes programme have been incorporated into this proposal.

2. The provision of on-line introductory material prior to commencing the course raises a logistics issue, as students do not gain access to the on-line facilities of the university until they have registered on the course. However, the Programme Team will discuss and consider sending out an information pack to students that have accepted a place on the course or alternatively placing some guidance on preparatory reading on the University and School of Bioscience MRes course web-pages.

3. The programme team note the comments regarding workload and a request from students for guidance for progression/achievement through the programme. In part this has been addressed (in response to past External Examiners) as students are expected to produce a Gannt Chart on workload (BIT011) as part of formal training and discuss this with their Personal tutor. However, as the modules for Stage 1 of the programme are very diverse and different in their content and assessment requirements often students can misperceive the imbalance in the amount of work required and time available for assignments in each module to achieve the learning outcomes of each of the modules. We will endeavour to place guidelines in the handbook and address the diversity of each module during the introductory talk, which can then be reemphasised by the individual module teams.

4. The MRes staff are in the process of reviewing the quality and consistency of feedback in all modules. Consultation with the student representative for the course has been used to gain insight into feedback from the perspective of the student and this will be used alongside the comments noted from the external examiners at the exam board to incorporate 'best practice' for feedback appropriate for assignments within each module. These changes will be implemented for the cohort of students commencing the course in 2015-16.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. Your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. The standard of work across the range of Stage 1 taught modules, which employed a variety of assessment approaches and skills, was high and reflected the good quality of students recruited to the programme
3. The arrangements for the External Examiner were well organised and professional

I hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for you continued support of the programme and we are most grateful for your valuable input into this process.

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 the University Student Intranet and will be available to all students and staff.

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.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Simon Wright
Academic Registrar