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**Sent by email to [f.r.laughton@bath.ac.uk](mailto:f.r.laughton@bath.ac.uk)**

**06 February 2020**

Dear Dr Laughton,

**Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2018/19**

I am writing further to the receipt of your report for all BSc and MPhys degree programmes in PHYSX.

Your report has been considered by colleagues in the School and is the basis of this Institutional Response on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor. The School will also use its contents to help inform their [Annual Review and Enhancement](#) process and where appropriate, [Periodic Review](#).

**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 programme structures are well designed, with an appropriate range of teaching and learning activities and assessments that progressively develop students' knowledge and understanding of physics and mathematics, as well as their skills, competences and attributes (both discipline-specific and more generally). There is an appropriate distinction between the BSc and MPhys programmes, and a good level of student choice, particularly with the range of optional modules offered in Years 3 and 4.
3. The (necessarily small) amount of module choice in Years 1 and 2, including the opportunity to study a free standing module, is commendable.
4. The programmes are of a high academic standard, are well defined, with appropriate and clearly defined learning outcomes and assessment criteria laid out for each module.



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5. There are good project opportunities for students, with a wide range of types of project offered.
6. Good care and attention is generally given to the setting and moderation of exam papers, along with the marking, checking and 'green penning' processes.
7. There are good project assessment processes, with evidence of careful marking and moderation, including generally clear justifications for the marks awarded.
8. The new system of providing a log file for each exam, collating the information about all stages of the moderation process, including the responses from the Module Organisers to External Examiner comments is welcome.
9. The School continuing to diversify its assessment methods, reduce the overall number of coursework assessments, and move towards more synoptic assessments is to be commended.
10. It is particularly impressive that student satisfaction and retention rates have remained high despite increased student numbers.

#### **Issues highlighted in your report and response provided by the School:**

1. ***The Assessment Process:*** *Concerns about the comparability of standards between modules of the same level, and the recommendation to consider whether a Business Objects report could be created to enable scatterplots of students' marks for a particular module against their average marks.*

We agree with the comments of the External Examiner that it would be very helpful to have such scatter plots available during the exam processing period and for inspection by External Examiners. We will be requesting the creation of a suitable Business Objects report as a matter of urgency, hopefully in time for the summer exam board.

2. ***The Assessment Process:*** *Issues with final year projects around the consistency of practice across all staff in the procedures for identifying and dealing with potential cases of plagiarism.*

Staff were reminded of the procedures for identifying plagiarism in an all-staff teaching briefing at the start of the semester. We will be double checking that cases are identified, suitable penalties applied, and that the actions taken are properly documented in the notes and feedback returned with the marks. In particular all project dissertations will be double checked to ensure no excessive similarity with online sources.

3. ***The Assessment Process:*** *Given that all "Section A"-style exam questions are compulsory, is there any need for them to all be worth the same number of marks, and/or for them to be equally easy? Might it be useful to relax this stipulation, so that setters could include a wider range of questions in these sections?*

We are already setting questions of varied difficulty level in section A of our exams. In the standard 10 credit module paper, the maximum number of marks permitted for a question in section A is 10/80 and a question could therefore be 1/8 of the whole exam. That is a good upper limit for this compulsory section, where we are trying to give students the opportunity to demonstrate a basic level of understanding of the learning outcomes. Alternatively, a setter might set 5 easier 2-mark questions on the same topic.

Multiple choice questions are increasingly being used in year 1 and 2 exams, and these all must have the same number of marks per question. In year 1 we have 20 2-mark questions, but in some year 2 modules we have a smaller number of higher value questions, to reflect the increasing difficulty level of the learning outcomes being probed. Generally, though, the multiple-choice questions vary slightly in difficulty level despite having the same number of marks per question.

We hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your continued support of the programme.

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's [Public Information website](#) and will be available to all students and staff.

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

Yours sincerely,



Mr Simon Wright  
Academic Registrar