

Academic & Student Support Services
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Simon Wright LLB



Sent by email to s.j.rippon@exeter.ac.uk

05 April 2016

Dear Professor Rippon,

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

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner Reports for the BA (Joint Hons) in Archaeology and the BSc in Archaeology and for MA in Archaeology / Early Celtic Studies / Early Medieval Society & Culture (Archaeology modules).

Your Reports have 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 raised in your report on undergraduate provision (there appear to be no substantive issues raised in your report on postgraduate provision).

Issue(s) Highlighted:

1. your observation of a “marked bunching of grades in the 60s”, of weaker assignments being marked a “little too generously” in some modules and of cases where students have done considerably better in the coursework than the examination;
2. your observation that in “a number of cases (mostly practical modules) the quality of the presentation of assignments relative to their academic standard was poor” and suggestion that “students and markers should be reminded that even in practical modules a high standard of presentation is required in the written assignments as this is a core academic and transferable skill”.
3. Your indication that “Feedback to students was generally excellent although the amount varied considerably between modules.”
4. Your suggestion that “greater attention should be given to the [Dissertation] topics that students are allowed to study: a topic should only be approved if it forces a students to engage with primary data rather than allowing them to slip into simply summarising literature”.

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

1. New Undergraduate Marking Criteria have been developed by the School in response to the University requirement to implement criteria-referenced marking framework. These criteria include Approach to Question, Knowledge and Understanding, Quality of Argument and Conclusions, Use of Evidence and Scholarship, Organisation, Style and Presentation.
2. There are clear guidelines in the module handbook on the presentation of project reports and these are talked through with the students at the start of the module. Individual guidance is also offered during supervision meetings as the students' progress with their projects. In future the guidelines will be reiterated during later sessions of the module and examples of good practice will be presented;
3. New Undergraduate Feedback Forms have been introduced. All feedback now include a 'feedforward' element, which explicitly addresses how students might improve in their future assessment.

The tick-boxes on feedback forms are used as an adjunct to more extensive written feedback. These tick-boxes are used to identify areas of strength, competency, and deficiencies. If any element of work is marked as 'Deficient', then some explanation of this judgment must be provided in the comments space.

4. The dissertation modules have been extended from 20 to 40 credits from 2016/7 to allow students to more fully engage with independent research. Students are now required to engage with their research topics earlier in the academic cycle (e.g. during the summer before the third year) and the module now includes an assessed presentation element in the autumn semester. The presentation will provide additional feedback to that supplied by the supervisor, and in particular the expectation of students to engage with primary data, will be highlighted.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. your particular commendation of the "dissertation preparation module" leading to "the excellent standard of some dissertations", of the support you received from the School and of the "strong commitment to practical work".

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

As this is your final year as External Examiner, we would like to thank you for your service 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 website 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