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Sent by email to j.g.wakefield@exeter.ac.uk

27 February 2017

Dear Professor Wakefield,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2015–2016

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the BSc in Molecular Biology / Genetics / Biotechnology / Biochemistry.

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 Highlighted

1. Suggestions to strengthen the scrutiny and assessment of the final Year Research Project (BI3006).

The following response has been provided in consultation with the School:

1. Guidance concerning the project report will be reviewed and revised to avoid differences in terminology and potential ambiguities.

You noticed a difference in guidelines for general level 6 oral presentations and those for the level 6 oral presentation associated with the project. It is indicated on the general guidelines that these may be modified for specific purposes, which is what has been done for the project oral presentation.

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In respect of the suggested consideration of additional end of year scrutiny of marks, the School recognises that the project module can skew results, particularly with its influence on profiling (secondary rule). You suggest the addition of an extra scrutiny step for students for who a small change in project mark could affect their degree result once we have the results from SIMS. The School does look at borderline students and re-examine their various project marking and feedback forms to ensure that the mark matches marking criteria and feedback comments, although this is not reported to the Board.

Additional comments / comments

You also commented on the quality of the data and data analysis provided to external examiners. It was a University decision that all student data processing should be managed through the formal SIMS record to ensure that results are held and released from the one consistent system. To facilitate Exam Board discussion, a suite of data with statistical information has been made available to the Boards. The composition of the data requirements was assessed as part of the *Assessment Matters* project in 2013-2014 which consulted widely with Schools to understand the requirements of Boards. The reports can be extracted either in excel or PDF format and made available to the Exam Board. If the Exam Board believes there is an additional data requirement then they should raise this with the University Assessment Working Group. The University is conducting a formal review of the SIMS system as part of the Student Data Lifecycle project and if the School has specific data requirements they should bring this to the attention of the project group.

Your comments on the relationship between the “School and the higher University Administration” and detailed comments on the clarity of “*regulations on removing modules that students register on and then change, in the same year or in the next year (due to IOS and the same module not running in the following year, or changing programmes)*” have been noted.

Where appropriate, Registry staff attended the Exam Board when requested. The usual time allocation is one hour and in this situation, staff remained at the meeting for approximately 2.5 hours. You will appreciate that at this very busy time of year it was not possible for staff to attend the entire meeting given the ranges of Exam Boards in operation. Where Schools would like to extend the time spent with Registry staff either before or at the Exam Board meetings, there are opportunities available however this must be negotiated in advance of the meeting in order to provide specialised advice and guidance.

The rules on removing option modules where students have attained marks were clarified as part of the *Assessment Matters* project 2013-2014 in which Schools were consulted – these rules have not been changed and are operated by all Schools. Schools are only permitted to remove modules from

the calculation of the award in a situation where students have returned from IOS and the module is no longer running. In the case presented at the Exam Board, students had not returned from interruption of study but transferred during the year therefore all modules were brought into the new record. The School is not permitted to remove modules in these circumstances.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process
2. particular commendation of feedback provided to students, of the marking criteria for the different levels, of the Biosciences Student Office and Education Staff;
3. support for revisions to some final year modules and their assessment, including the new Advances in Stem Cell and Development Biology module;
4. further commendation for the "Draft Report Feedback Form" provided to students by supervisors.

I hope that you will find this response satisfactory and we 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 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