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Sent by email to r.m.gillett@qmul.ac.uk

20 October 2017

Dear Dr Gillett,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2016–2017

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the Undergraduate German modules on single and joint honours programmes and integrated programmes.

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.

Issues Highlighted

1. Students taking School-wide modules at the expense of modules in German.
2. Information missing from reports received by the 'languages board'.
3. Poor attendance by External Examiners and senior School staff at the 'languages board'.
4. Your report of discounting of a language module for a significant number of students on the grounds of extenuating circumstances.
5. Anomalies in marks between coursework and examinations in language / overlap between coursework essays and exams.
6. Reiterated concerns regarding the examination for ex-beginners.
7. Encouragement for the School to appoint a native speaker of English to the new post in German.

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

1. The German Section is addressing this issue and will present a case for one compulsory option module in the German section for German joint honours students. Discussions about final year modules will take place in the academic year 2017/18.
2. Thank you for drawing our attention to this. The School believes that missing information was from subjects outside of the School. There is a tight turnaround between running the reports (after the mark entry deadline) and the exam boards and it is not always possible to resolve all outstanding issues before the exam boards meet. Newly-appointed Education Officers based in Registry will be providing ongoing support in this area in future years.
3. The School makes concerted efforts to communicate with external examiners well in advance of the date of the exam board and other related meetings at which they are required to be, with the hope that it makes it easier for them to schedule and attend the exam board around their other commitments. We believe the information was made available before the exam boards were due to be scheduled in the 2016-2017 academic session and will continue this practice to allow External Examiners to attend.

The School's Examining Board members represent each language section and programme offered in the School. Those exam officers that were chosen have appropriate qualifications and are supported with extensive input by Professional Services. The School will, however, take on board your feedback and when the board membership is reviewed.

4. The case to which you refer involved reports of disturbance from construction noise in an exam venue during the exam. The matter has been thoroughly investigated and sought assurances that there will be no repeat of the problem. Acting on the advice of colleagues in the University Registry, the matter was handled under provisions for extenuating circumstances for those students who reported that they had been affected by the disturbance.
5. With regard to anomalies in marks between coursework and examinations in languages, the School has a double marking system in place whereby all coursework with a difference of 10% is remarked. However, this mostly shows the same result so the School will investigate a change of the percentage distribution allocated to coursework. To minimise the overlap between coursework essays and exams the School will investigate whether slight changes in the marking scheme with a penalty system in place might be helpful in this respect.
6. The School has changed the exam paper to enable the examiners to adopt a more rigorous approach to marking this particular exam next year.

7. A native speaker of English has been appointed to the new post in German.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. impressive and well-balanced curriculum, including specialist courses in Business language and language for professional purposes;
3. some “truly outstanding” student dissertations supported by a careful procedure of vetting potential candidates for their dissertation topic.

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