

Academic & Student Support Services
Academic Registrar
Simon Wright LLB
Gwasanaethau Academaidd a Chefnogi Myfyrwyr
Cofrestrydd Academaidd
Simon Wright LLB



Sent by email to philip.j.day@manchester.ac.uk

10 December 2015

Dear Dr Day,

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

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

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. Your observations on the structural complexity of the degree programmes;
2. Your comments on the graduate entry medicine scheme and on the progression of students;
3. Your report of concern regarding communications between the standards panel and module leads;
4. Your observation of the complexities of the marking system;
5. Your comments regarding the inclusion of that "there is little evidence of bioinformatics in the current degree curricula and your related concerns about a need to increase investment in computational facilities;
6. Your concerns regarding increasing student numbers which may make the maintenance of high standards of the final year research projects more challenging.

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

1. The School proposes to revise its degree scheme structures for the UCAS entry in 2016/17. These plans are currently being processed for potential validation in January 2016. The new format of our degrees is envisaged to have fewer modules in Year 2 and Year 3 of the BSc course. These modules are planned to be larger (40Cr and 30Cr respectively) in order to allow a complete study of a subject area, reduced assessment load and increased

Cardiff University
McKenzie House
30-36 Newport Road
Cardiff CF24 0DE
Tel Ffôn I +44(0)29 2087 9189
www.cardiff.ac.uk

Prifysgol Caerdydd
Tŷ McKenzie
30-36 Heol Casnewydd
Caerdydd CF24 0DE
Tel Ffôn I +44(0)29 2087 9189
www.caerdydd.ac.uk

parity of challenge, and also accommodate flexibility of staffing within a broader topic area.

2. The low numbers of students accepted onto the GEM scheme in 2014/15 was unusual. However, all of the students on the scheme were accepted into other medical schools across the country if they were unsuccessful at Cardiff. This suggests that the GEM students were not disadvantaged by their training. The School has raised the low numbers of students accepted onto the Cardiff course with the College Dean of Learning and Teaching.
3. The Standards Panel did not communicate directly with module leads at the end of 2013/14. This was an oversight. Concerns over those modules with unusually low or high averages for assessments were highlighted in the 'Unified Schemes Board (Board of Studies) and at the Schemes Board level (sub-committees of the Board of Studies for the three degree scheme areas of the school).
4. The School has made simplifications in the process for 2015/16, reducing assessment load in Year 2 and moving to electronic-only submission for coursework in the vast majority of assessments. The School feels that it is important to maintain the current model for assessing Final Year Projects in order to maintain reliability of marking for such a large component of the degree. Further reductions and simplifications of assessment will be an integral part of the revisions to modules and degrees mentioned above.
5. Bioinformatics teaching was introduced to students of the 'Biological' version of Year 2 research Techniques in 2014/15 (c.80 students). There is already a Bioinformatics component for the 'Biomolecular' version of this module (c.100 students).

The School currently offers a full Bioinformatics module in the Final Year which is optional for a large number of our degrees. However, the School does not currently have the computer resources or personnel to support more-extensive teaching to all students. It is hoped to include aspects of Bioinformatics into all versions of the Year 2 Research Techniques module (it is currently within 2 of the 5 versions, which cover Biological and Biomolecular students). The School has made a bid for funding to redevelop an area of the School into a large computer facility which, if approved, will enable Bioinformatics teaching to higher numbers of students in the near future.

6. The School's plans for revised degree schemes will hopefully address this issue. Students in the Final Year of the BSc course will maintain the same level of Research project experience. Students on the Masters course will have a more-generic project experience in Year 3, but then a highly-focused and extensive project in their 4th year. This approach should address the resource issues whilst maintaining the high quality of projects offered to students.

Noting your comments on the time available to External Examiners, the School confirms that External Examiners are welcome to attend the School for a longer period and that it would be pleased to arrange for this if requested.

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 commendation of the high number of stimulating projects. The School confirms that it has revised the application process for Final Year Projects this year, with students being able to choose specific project titles; hopefully enhancing choice and maintaining the high quality of projects offered;
3. Your appreciation of the support you have received from academic and administrative staff;

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