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Sent by email to Mr Eoghan Mortell

03 April 2020

Dear Mr Mortell,

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

I am writing further to the receipt of your report for MA in International Public Relations and Global Communications Management.

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 increasing emphasis on developing reliable performance indicators and metrics to measure the effectiveness and success of communications programmes has been noted and welcomed.
3. In addition to the solid academic and theoretical content of the MA programme, many practical skills have been built into the modules and this element appears to be growing year-on-year.
4. The explicit link made by module leaders between course content and resulting employability skills is a valuable aspect of the programme that focuses minds firmly upon the purpose of the learning.
5. The use of the grademark report by most markers allowed comments to be made on specific parts of the submitted text and this was helpful in understanding the markers' approach to assessment.
6. Use of feedback from external 'clients' towards the final mark in the digital communications module.



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7. High quality module handbooks giving students clear perspective from the outset of what they should be seeking to achieve during their master's programme
8. High calibre, relevant speakers from the PR industry and related sectors, enabling students to connect their learning to professional practice and to contemporary developments in the industry.
9. Mutually supportive elements of the programme delivered in an order that optimises their value – eg research skills grounding that feeds into assignment and dissertation requirements
10. Work placements with a broad spectrum of consultancies and organisations

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

The whole teaching team would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and valuable input in continually developing the course over the last few years. We very much appreciate your understanding of our aims and the constructive dialogue we have had with you.

1. **Programme Structure:** *Consider additional focus in the following areas:*
 - i. *More attention to media writing skills, media relationship building, wider networking and stronger news awareness.*
 - ii. *Skills such as understanding news cycles, tracking particular journalists' current topics of interest, plugging clients in to running stories and monitoring/interacting with journalists who use online platforms to complement their stories on mainstream channels.*
 - iii. *Practical crisis communications and reputation protection would also be welcome.*
 - iv. *Further emphasis on applying appropriate budgets to campaigns.*

The professional practice module is very new and constantly evolving as a result of your very helpful comments as well as other insights from industry. More emphasis on media writing and news awareness have been added and we are looking at ways in which we can collaborate with our journalism colleagues to benefit from their experience alongside their students' training. Student numbers on the MA IPR&GCM course will make this challenging but we are considering some group exercises and/or workshop sessions.

The module this year will include further elements of budgeting, specifically related to real-life pitches for business, and will include students costing their own time. We are pleased to note your acknowledgement of the developments within this area on the course.

In terms of crisis communications, training was provided in 2018-19 for the first time in the shape of a one-day training session at a professional level for all students, a CIPR crisis communications training opportunity for those who elected to attend and also provided 10 students with the opportunity for crisis communications work experience. This has been extended to all students in the form of a half-day live crisis simulation this year but

continuing this will be a challenge given the currently full timetable and high student numbers.

2. **Academic Standards:** *Language skills continue to be an issue with some students; consider if language support offered by the University is sufficient to achieve the standards required, or if tighter screening of applicants is required.*

We continue to work closely with English Language Support who provide excellent workshops and one-to-one sessions for students. They have been very flexible and are willing and able to tailor sessions around specific assignment requirements. We also work with the resident Royal Literary Fellow within the School to provide guidance for all students, not just those for whom English is not their native language.

Both applications and admissions have risen significantly over the past three years and this has had a huge impact on the course. We are meeting with the central admissions team in the coming weeks to find ways in which we can ensure sufficient quality of admissions while maintaining strong recruitment.

3. **Academic Standards:** *Over-generous marking of press releases that didn't really contain news value and would, in reality, not have achieved much coverage in mainstream media.*

Comments on the quality of the press release per se are welcomed and have been noted. This was part of the professional practice module and marks were representative of the range of assessment points, of which the press release was only one aspect. The press release wasn't marked as a standalone, so there has perhaps been some misunderstanding of the assignment from an external perspective.

4. **Year-on-Year Comments:** *Consider if it could be possible to provide students with anonymised access to examples of successful and unsuccessful bid documents from industry or public sector.*

This is an excellent idea and one that we are implementing this year. We have a new Associate Lecturer with considerable senior management experience and she will be using some of her own anonymised work to illustrate a variety of pitches within different sectors.

5. **Year-on-Year Comments:** *Look at recruiting a wider spectrum of 'clients' to campaign element of the programme; perhaps including manufacturers and professional service providers alongside the not-for-profit and micro businesses who currently participate.*

The range of clients is currently wholly dependent on local availability and organisations who are prepared to support student learning initiatives, as well as the time taken to build these relationships. With the current set-up this cannot be controlled due to increasing student numbers, and a limited

pool of clients. Should the university put in place a support mechanism for this type of learning in the future, then a broader range of potential clients could be on the horizon.

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.

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.



Mr Simon Wright
Academic Registrar