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Sent by email to s.m.sait@leeds.ac.uk

15 June 2017

Dear Professor Sait,

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

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the MRes in Biosciences.

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. Need for written justification for final dissertation marks where the marks of assessors differ significantly.
2. Inconsistent levels of support to students on Grant proposal project outlines and suggested provision of guidance to supervisors on the expected level of engagement at this stage.
3. No current marking criteria for the Grant proposal.
4. Need for a clear process for when students are not making satisfactory progress by the mid-stage review of the dissertation stage.

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

1. For the Academic session 2016-17 the School will introduce a Pro-Forma for assessors to complete, this will give the two assessors the option to a) agree

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on a mark that must be supported by a clear jointly prepared justification statement or b) request a third report assessor.

2. The programme team and module lead for BIT014 acknowledge the issue of inconsistent input from supervisors. For the Academic Session 2017-18, amendments will be made in the handbook giving clear guidelines to supervisor and students on the minimum input required. From initial discussion, the programme team suggest a minimum of three formal meetings, the submission of a draft proposal to Learning Central and a Pro-forma outlining a list of formal feedback points for each section of the grant proposal to be addressed by the supervisor. The supervisor will be asked to upload the completed Pro-Forma to Learning Central and indicate if the proposal was based upon an existing grant proposal or was a 'new' grant proposal.
3. Currently, assessors of the Grant proposal are given very useful guidance on what to consider in each section of the proposal. This can be easily converted to a set of marking criteria. The programme team will implement this change for the Academic Session 2017-18.
4. In the School of Biosciences if a postgraduate student is not making satisfactory progress at anytime during their period of study there is a clear procedure in which a supervisor can report this at any time during the course of study to the Director of Postgraduate Research or for the MRes programme to the Director of Masters.

In Stage 2 of the MRes programme of study, student progress is monitored by completion of a Mid-Progress Form and it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the form is completed with the supervisor. This form will remain in place but we will add an additional section to the form that will address the issue you have raised. The section will specifically ask the supervisor to allocate a preliminary assessment of student progress as GOOD, ADEQUATE or POOR. Supervisors will be asked to use the Supervisor component of the BIT014 module mark, to guide their decision. If a POOR is recorded at this Mid-Progress Stage, we will implement the Unsatisfactory Progress procedure and a Warning of Exclusion as set out in our procedures for Postgraduate Research students. A formal interview with the student and supervisor (if necessary) will be held with the Director and Deputy Director (optional) of the course. Following the interview a formal letter indicating unsatisfactory progress and any mediating actions that need to be undertaken by the student within a month (an effective Warning of Exclusion) will be issued. The supervisor will report on the progress of the student with a one-month follow-up form, which will either indicate that student progress is satisfactory and the warning can be lifted or the student will be asked to withdraw from the course.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. comprehensive and detailed set of marking criteria that clearly define the standards associated with a particular grade and a transparent process of mark moderation;
3. wide range of projects available to the students enabling them to do a project that is matched to their particular interests and plays to their strengths;
4. the process of designing a programme of hypothesis-driven research and presenting the research as a seminar is an especially valuable “real research” experience;
5. positive School response to the suggested inclusion of a feasibility assessment for the Grant proposal;
6. well-organised Exam Board meetings;
7. your commendation of the fine tuning of marks and feedback through specific reference to the marking criteria;
8. positive student perceptions of the programme and support received from staff, including facilitating meetings of former students with new cohorts;
9. proactive School responses to issues raised by the student/staff panel;

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,



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