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Sent by email to stephen.pickering@nottingham.ac.uk 23 January 2018

Dear Professor Pickering,

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

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the MSc Advanced Mechanical Engineering including the Dissertation Stage Report.

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. Examination scripts were provided for all modules but the exam papers and solutions were not available. It is requested that these be provided in future.
2. The External Examiner was not provided with any responses to the comments made on reviewing exam papers earlier in the year. In addition, the exam board highlighted that there was a problem in this examination and the marks had to be adjusted to bring them into the accepted range of 55% to 75%. Whilst the process taken to adjust the marks was described, it would be better if this was fully documented in writing and presented to the exam board.
3. The University regulations do not allow an MSc student to proceed with their project until there has been satisfactory progression from Part 1.
4. It was noticed that about a third of the cohort of students had failed a significant number of modules and these students could not proceed without

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- taking resits. Further consideration of whether the entry standards for students to the MSc programme are appropriate.
5. Justification of mark reconciliation for projects where there was a significant difference between the first and second markers.
 6. The request for module average marks to be made available during my visit.

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

1. This was an oversight, for which we apologise. It will be taken care of for the forthcoming academic session.
2. The Year Tutor or Module Leader would normally be responsible for plotting the assessment data graphically for review by the Exam Board, and making a proposal as to how moderation might take place. Depending on the specific circumstances, distribution of marks, incidence of “zeroes”, etc., then the Exam Board will come to a group decision on how best to moderate the full set of marks to bring the average within the bounds of 55–75%. This mechanism of adjustment will therefore vary depending on the background to the low/high marks. It is our preference to leave the decision about the precise mechanism to the Exam Board, advised by the External Examiner(s).

We do not routinely make a structured response to External Examiners about the exact actions that were taken in response to specific exam feedback. But the responses from module leaders to these comments are recorded and stored in the School, and would be available for follow-up at any point should an External Examiner particularly wish to do this.

3. Progress from Stage 1 (achieving 120 credits) to Stage 2 is required within the current University Regulations before submission of the dissertation can take place. The University is currently undertaking a review of its Academic Regulations and this will feature as part of this review.
4. Admissions standards for all our programmes are constantly under review and we will take into consideration of the points raised.
5. The final mark is normally reached by discussion between the supervisor and the examiner, after each has marked individually. If their two marks differ by a few per cent only, the final mark would normally be an arithmetic average of their marks. Where the two initial marks differ by more than 5%, the procedure is that a third academic member of staff will be asked to examine the dissertation and provide a third mark to compare with the first two. This would normally be discussed at the Exam Board.
6. Our IT system for marks, SIMS, calculate module averages at the end of the assessment process, just before the Exam Board which can present timing difficulties. We do endeavour to provide the data to the meeting, although it cannot be provided on the Marks Sheets.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. Your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. Feedback on the individual and group case study project coursework available for was excellent and the students also commented positively on this.

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