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Sent by email to dyj@aber.ac.uk

23 October 2017

Dear Dr Jones,

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

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the BSc in Biology / Ecology / Zoology.

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. Provision of dissertation feedback on both the feedback sheet and on Grademark/Turnitin.
2. A need for greater consistency on the extent of feedback to be delivered via Turnitin to achieve a consistent approach across modules and markers.
3. Consistency in annotations, feedback and marks on examination scripts.
4. Low engagement of students with feedback.

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

1. Grademark/Turnitin was used as a means of distributing electronic versions of dissertations and performing plagiarism checks, but was not supposed to be used to mark and comment on them. This will be clarified for the forthcoming Academic Year.

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2. The School will consider how much feedback should be given and notes that there are considerable variations across the School. It is notoriously difficult to get agreement on such matters between 100+ academics but the School agrees that there is a need to develop some consistency of approach.
3. The School is pleased to note your observation that annotations and comments were comprehensive and matched the marking criteria and marks awarded. As for point 2 above, the School will aim to get more consistency between modules and markers on the amount of material written on scripts.
4. This is a source of continual frustration within the School particularly in the light of negative student survey comments on feedback. The School will continue to emphasise to students, through Grademark, the importance of utilising their feedback and will discuss the broader topic of engagement with feedback at staff-student panels.

Additional comments / observations

Your comments on University conventions on the rounding of marks have been noted and the School are currently being supported by their College Education Officer to allow the School to work within the current definitions of generic terms used in Senate Regulations. These provide the basis for rounding marks used to classify awards for all Schools within the University. The following definitions are used:

Module Mark: The total mark for an individual Module, calculated according to the weightings for each component summative assessment specified in the Module description, rounded and recorded as a whole number. The marks for the component summative assessments will be whole numbers between 0 and 100.

Year Result: The combined average of the marks for Modules / Units of Study contributing to a year of study calculated, rounded and recorded to a whole number.

Final Mark: The combined average of the Module Marks contributing to the final award, weighted according to the Classification Set for the Programme and Credit rating of the Modules calculated, rounded, and recorded as a whole number.

The above definitions, approved by the Senate, establish the process for the calculation of module marks, the final mark used to classify the award and the year result. One of the reasons for adopting the above rounding conventions was to enable students to use module marks to calculate the final mark and the degree classification. If unrounded marks were used this would not be possible.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. clear evidence that teaching is informed by research activity within the School;
3. Improved use of the upper mark range;
4. continued improvement in referencing by students.

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