

30 November 2016

**Sent by email to SOCSI Undergraduate External Examiners – Summer 2015:**

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Dear Dr Bradbury, Professor Condor, Dr Hancock, Dr May, Professor O'Connor, Professor Powell, Dr Riley and Dr Uprichard,

**Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Reports 2015–2016 for Undergraduate Programmes in SOCSI**

I am writing further to the receipt of External Examiner Reports for the Undergraduate Programmes in the Cardiff School of Social Sciences.

The Reports have 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 raised.

The School has provided the attached composite response to issues raised by its External Examiners in 2015-2016. The School and University are pleased to note the many positive comments contained in the Reports and summarised by the School.

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, the External Examiner Annual Reports and this Institutional Response, including the attachment 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Wright', written in a cursive style.

Mr Simon Wright  
Academic Registrar

Attachment

## Response to external examiners (undergraduate programmes), School of Social Sciences, 2016

We are grateful to all of our external examiners for their constructive comments, and for their help throughout the assessment process.

We are pleased to note the many positive comments received from all our undergraduate external examiners. They unanimously endorse the standards set and the performance of the students. They are also very positive about the conduct of the examination boards.

All of the external examiners raise issues that we shall wish to address. It is our annual practice to convene a post-exam board of studies meeting very shortly after the summer assessment period, and several of the issues raised here have already been fed back to the Board of Studies. All substantive issues discussed below will be referred to the Board of Studies. This response has been prepared by the Chair of the Examination Board.

This is a composite response, based on all the externals' reports, rather than a series of individual responses. In this manner, all the external examiners can have access to each other's comments and the School's response. The following table summarises where external examiners have raised particular concerns under each of the following headings. This report then goes on to respond to any concerns raised under the relevant headings.

1	Programme Structure	Powell; Condor
2	Academic Standards	Powell; Uprichard
3	The Assessment Process	Powell; May; Bradbury; O'Connor; Hancock; Uprichard; Riley
4	Year-On-Year Comments	Powell; May; Uprichard
5	Preparation/Induction Activity (for new External Examiners only)	
6	Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement	
7	Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)	Uprichard
8	Annual Report Checklist	

## **SUMMARY OF RESPONSES FROM EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

### **Issue(s) Raised by Martin Powell (Social Policy)**

1. I would still like to see a more common approach considered for two issues across modules. First, the degree of choice of both examination and coursework questions (choose x from y) varies significantly. Second, 'effort' in the form of a 'x word assignment' or a 'y hour examination' comprising a different percentage of contribution towards total marks varies.
2. Basic descriptive statistics (e.g. means/ medians/ standard deviations and coefficients of variation) that allow a comparison between modules should be available to the Examination Board.
3. Some concerns over marking being perhaps a little over generous at the 'bottom end', especially for truncated/ note form examination answers, and some coursework material with high similarity scores (Turnitin) was perhaps marked too generously. This is not a question of plagiarism, but of value-added. For example, a similarity score of 50% suggests that half the essay is not the student's original work (e.g. quotations). I did have some concerns that some students with good marks (e.g. 2i) had higher similarity scores than I would have expected for such a mark.
4. My concerns from last year remain: some elements of the 'literature review' ('pure' narrative; lacking structure) and 'qualitative analysis' (lack of discussion of coding: 'the following themes emerged.....') were disappointing (even from otherwise good students).
5. The process of agreement/ moderation was a little variable. As External Examiner, I would IDEALLY like to see limited variation between internal markers. However, where there is a significant difference I would like to see a clear explanation of how the difference was resolved (i.e. not simply splitting the difference), While this was clear in some courses, in others I did not receive any 'moderation' material. In the case of one course, I appear to have been sent scripts that had not been moderated.
6. In my view, any penalties for over-length or lateness need to be clearly on reading lists (assessment section) and perhaps on the electronic system at the point of submission (perhaps 'I understand....') rather than only being buried away in the Handbook (which may not always be consulted for every assessment).
7. I still struggle to some extent with the new electronic marking system. The amount of 'within text' feedback varied between courses. I realise that this is very time consuming, but suggest that particular attention should be paid to 'fails' and to students with a high 2i (what do they need to do to push their future marks into a 1<sup>st</sup>?).
8. The administrative arrangements have not been as smooth this year compared to previous years. It has not always been fully clear (with the mixture of coursework and exam scripts) what work needed to be done at what time and via what system (e.g. via the problematic IT system). With the appointment of several new External Examiners next year, it is vital that arrangements are clear.
9. With the move towards a more mechanical approach to marks and the reduction of discretion by Examination Boards, you may wish to consider if the formal 'full meeting'

Board over two days remains a good use of people's time. You could perhaps consider a smaller Board; or use External Examiner's time more in discussion rather than simply noting a long list of marks that require no discussion/ action.

Positive comments:

- impressed to see a variety of assessment methods, including a good balance between coursework and examinations.
- the practice of having two markers for pieces of work is to be commended
- I am very pleased to note that new social policy appointments are being made, which will mean that the current small team may be under less pressure, and could increase both the variety of topics and approaches of teaching, and allow students to see some more 'faces'.
- I am impressed by the 'Institutional Report' which shows that the University takes External Examiners' comments seriously, and deals with them in a transparent fashion.

### **Issue(s) Raised by Vanessa May (Sociology)**

1. I did not receive paperwork regarding the moderation process until I arrived in Cardiff.
2. I also only received tables with mean marks given for each module – it would be very helpful to receive these automatically for each module we examine well ahead of time.
3. The style of feedback differs between modules. Some markers provided comments in relation to marking criteria, others did not. There is also uneven use of 'feed forward' comments that tell the student how they could in the future improve on their work.
4. I would like to repeat my suggestion from last year that the School consider adopting the use of the 'rubric' function on Grademark, whereby each piece of coursework is numerically graded in relation to key learning outcomes.
5. I would therefore reiterate my suggestion from the past two years that the teaching and learning committee consider ways in which aspects of the old feedback form could be incorporated within Grademark (e.g. by utilizing the rubric function as suggested above) and an agreement that all staff include in their general essay comments sections highlighting things to commend and things to improve ('feed forward') would also be helpful.
6. I wonder if the School might be willing to consider a policy whereby markers write, at the end of each script, a sentence or two to summarise reasons behind the mark given (or, if such a policy already exists, to enforce it). Such comments would make it easier for moderators and external examiners to judge how marking decisions have been reached.
7. There is only one major outstanding issue, namely ensuring that all external examiners receive all the necessary paperwork related to the moderation process.

## Positive comments:

- The quality of paperwork was overall good, particularly the Undergraduate Module Catalogues and the Assessment Handbook for staff and students.
- Module convenors put a lot of work into keeping their modules fresh, and that new modules are offered that reflect the cutting edge of sociology. In discussions with staff it was clear that members of staff are continuously striving to improve their modules so as to ensure that pedagogical and academic aims and objectives are met. This is a sign of active engagement with teaching. All modules also engaged with current social developments, most notably developments in ICT and social media.
- I am happy to note that most of the modules used a wide range of marks.
- Cultural Sociology: Excellent use of Blackboard, containing lecture notes and several readings in PDF form per lecture. The main assessment, which consisted of a small research project, also worked very well and produced some interesting essays that allowed students to apply sociological theories to their everyday experiences. The essay writing guidance was detailed and gave students step-by-step and exhaustive advice on how to go about conducting and writing up their research project. The lectures were centred around particular 'real life' questions that the theories were aimed to answer. In lectures, students are also asked to apply these theories to their everyday lives – this is good both in terms of getting students to apply their sociological imagination, but also in preparation for the assessment. Thus the lectures are able to demonstrate the relevance of sociology to students' everyday lives, and I appreciate how much work has gone into designing the lectures in this way.
- Digital Sociology: The logic of the module works well, starting out with theories of information/digital society, followed by digital methods of research. The module handout was well structured and gave students all the key information in one place. Each lecture was structured around a key question, sparking students' interest in the topic. The assessments were well structured, with the second piece of coursework building on the first. The seminars were geared towards the assessment, and it was very clear from the module handout and from the convenors feedback on students' coursework, that she was making herself very available for the students to offer them guidance on the coursework. The module taught students important research skills, and I noted that in their coursework, students had made use of a wide range of analytical software, including Ncapture and NVivo. It is great that students can play to their strengths by choosing the topic of their project. This really shows though in the level of engagement that is present in some of the essays. The feedback provided on coursework was very good, patient and detailed.
- New Frontiers (Autumn): The module handout is excellent, containing well written lecture blurbs that read like a detective novel and detailed advice on the assessment. It was very clear what students had to do in order to gain a high

mark in the coursework. Learning Central was well organized and contained, for each lecture, slides and a list of required readings. The lecture slides were fantastic: they told a story in engaging language. I was impressed with how clearly moral philosophy was explained. The feedback provided on coursework was exemplary: detailed, tailor-made feedback was given for each essay. Students were also given general feedback in the form of slides uploaded to Learning Central. Even the somewhat weaker students in the 2:2 range have written quite good essays. In other words, I am impressed by what students have learnt during this module.

- **Science, risk and resistance:** Excellent module outline with very clear and detailed learning outcomes, comprehensive reading lists and detailed guidance on assessment. The seminars were clearly tied to the assessment in the autumn. Very patient and in-depth feedback was provided on coursework, where the marker was trying to figure out unclear points and provide ways in which these could have been improved or further developed.
- Every year, I have tried out some aspect of good practice that I have come across at Cardiff in my own teaching.
- The curriculum is constantly being refreshed to reflect changes in teaching staff, but also developments in society.
- Many of the modules require students to apply sociological thinking to 'real world' issues of their own choice, which, in my mind, is translated into high levels of student engagement.
- I have also enjoyed the fact that external examining is taken seriously by the School of Social Sciences.

### **Issue(s) Raised by Alice Bradbury (Education)**

1. There is less transparency in relation to the awarding of exam marks, particularly where separate marks are allocated to two questions.
2. As mentioned in last year's report, it would be useful to have marking criteria for all methods of assessment including reflective statements, to ensure that grades are fair across the year group and from year to year.
3. Dissertations are thoroughly assessed, although the quality of feedback is variable, with some responses clearly not proof-read.

#### Positive comments:

- The programme team are keen to continue to make adjustments to modules based on their previous experiences and student feedback
- The range of different tasks involved in assessment is impressive.
- The overall quality of work remains high with some excellent studies and exam answers.

### **Issue(s) Raised by Henrietta O'Connor (Sociology)**

1. I have found communication this year very sporadic and I have been confused by what was expected of me. It appears that there have been some changes in the administration team and this has translated in to a less efficient level of service. The team have responded very quickly to my queries but I had to send emails to ask when I might expect to receive my course samples etc.
2. I was not able to attend the meeting in person this year and I did inform the team of that well in advance but I did not receive any information on what I was required to do in my absence (e.g. when materials would be available, whether a report was needed). I suspect this change is due to a lack of staffing cover more than anything else as I would like to stress that when I did make contact I was responded to quickly and efficiently.

#### Positive comments:

- I was impressed by the range of depth of assessment types.
- The team are always swift to act on comments provided by the external examiners and the changes made are reported back in an efficient and timely manner.
- The one to one meeting with each module leader is a noteworthy practice and is very useful and informative.
- The dissertations I saw were good and I suspect this reflects the good training provided at an earlier stage (research methods etc.).

### **Issue(s) Raised by Lynn Hancock (Criminology)**

1. There was some variability in the quantity and quality of feedback on assessed coursework.
2. I noticed that a significant number of students had not accessed their coursework feedback (via Learning Central), which must be disappointing for the markers who spend time providing electronic feedback. On some modules this amounted to half of the sampled work. In such cases, any feedback provided cannot be acted upon. I would recommend that the mechanisms in place to encourage students to engage with their feedback be reviewed.
3. In my own University, individual feedback is provided to students on their exams. Our feedback sheet shows how each question has been marked and provides feedback/recommendations for improvement. (This applies to modules with registrations in excess of 260 students.) This practice is a little more time consuming, of course, but it does facilitate the moderation process as well as making the rationale for grades clearer for both students and external examiners. As things stand, some modules at Cardiff (e.g. S10204) contained no marks at all on any of the scripts including on the front covers. As a consequence, it takes considerable effort to work out how the overall grade applies to each script by looking at the module marksheet



and working through each script carefully, very much like a first marker. Perhaps this is something that the programme team can look at?

4. Some of the samples were received very late. I understand that some examinations were scheduled late in the assessment period and the university should look at such scheduling to ensure that markers/moderators are not overburdened. Other samples (including dissertations) were also received late and, for some modules, after some chasing. I appreciate that this can happen but informing external examiners about the dates they can expect to receive work to review would be helpful.

Positive comments:

- The programme is coherent and contemporary; the programme's component modules are similarly well-constructed.
- The assessments were appropriate and suitably challenging. Marking was fair and consistent.
- The assessments tested student learning and achievement rigorously and fairly and they were conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations.

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#### **Issue(s) Raised by Emma Uprichard (Sociology)**

1. Descriptive statistics (e.g. means, medians and standard deviations) across modules would be good to have *ahead* of (instead of at) the board meeting.
2. Moderator reports on all modules is strongly encouraged. Sometimes it wasn't clear how the marking between markers was conducted.
3. It is confusing to have some assessments on Learning Central and others not. Could this be made clearer at the beginning of the year maybe? E.g. along with a list of modules, assessments, could it be spelt out ahead of time what is expected to come electronically and what isn't. The mix is confusing and needs a bit more of an explicit set of guidelines.
4. For consistency across the modules, it would be good if this [to use the 80%-90%+ mark range for the best quality work] was followed as a general principle across the programme rather simply to some modules.
5. The role of the external seems at times redundant or tokenistic, since almost all decisions are made by the institutional regulations. Perhaps the externals could be sent more stats across the programme/s? Or asked to look at particular students across the whole degree? Something that provides a bit more of a 'story' about the programme as a whole whilst also getting the external to 'earn their corn' a little differently.
6. There is a real concern that harmonising word lengths for diverse assessments will unfairly dis/advantage particular kinds of assessments. For example, work that requires a lot of practical work even before anything can actually be written (e.g. quantitative analysis and empirical reports) needs to be recognised. Automatic word counts tend to count all words (and numbers) so expecting students to add up 'chunks' of prose and subtracted 'Table counts' or 'Figure Titles' etc. is problematic. I would

encourage Cardiff to be reasonably flexible with these kinds of 'standardisations' in order to maintain the qualitative nuances between assessments that may be absolutely appropriate in terms of assessing specific learning outcomes in a fair and equitable way.

Positive comments:

- The Chair of the board does an excellent job at 'holding the meeting', encouraging discussion, and explaining the university examination regulations.
- I have noticed that my previous comments to encourage markers to use the 80%-90%+ mark range for the best quality work has been followed by some markers.
- I was especially impressed with the 'collective feedback and anonymised comments for individual work that went out to all students on the course. I hadn't seen this done before and I thought it was very innovative from a pedagogical perspective.

### **Issue(s) Raised by Susan Condor (Psychology)**

1. It is slightly difficult for an External Examiner to comment on the programme structure, because the modules are divided between two external examiners, and no one examiner has a general overview. In addition, as a programme that is accredited by the British Psychological Society, first year modules can count towards professional accreditation. In future, it would be helpful if external examiners were presented at the outset with written information on the structure of the entire programme.

Positive comments:

- The marking criteria are clearly specified and fairly applied.
- Markers use the full range of the scale. Feedback is very clear, with markers taking care to relate their comments to the stated aims and objectives of the module. Markers also provide students with "feed forward", drawing students' attention to specific areas in their work that have potential for improvement.
- The School guidelines on moderation are excellent.
- Unique curriculum, embedding psychology in the social sciences.
- Excellent guidelines on moderation practice.
- Impressive concern for student welfare.
- Exemplary chairing and conduct of the Boards.

### **Issue(s) Raised by Sarah Riley (Psychology)**

1. Where I suggest future developments might be in including 'feed-forward' information in the feedback. I also suggested the moderator/second markers use the marking rubric terminology to justify the mark they give an assignment.

2. Where I see room for improvement is in providing evidence for dissertation marking. It was unclear how agreements and disagreements between markers happened or were managed. Last year I commented on this too, and if anything the process has decreased in transparency as I wasn't given information on individual markers marks, only the agreed mark.
3. There has also been a change in the way the administration is managed for external examiners and this has not been without significant teething problems. The external examiners need to be given a check-list of what they should expect to see and where to find that information.

Positive comments:

- Staff are to be commended: the students produced theoretically informed, intellectually strong work that was able to link theory to practice
- I also note the way all the assignments encouraged the students to engage personally with the material, and again this is quite novel to be so systematic across a programme and also commendable.
- The exam boards were run efficiently and effectively, and demonstrated a duty of care to the students

## **RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

### **Programme Structure**

Professor Powell again raises an issue about common assessment protocols (e.g. the number of questions a student can answer in an examination or the word count for coursework). The School continues to work to implement the guidelines provided by the University to ensure there is equity in these protocols in relation to assessment weightings and module size. We have also recently held a review of all assessment in the School to ensure consistency and equity across modules. Nevertheless there will inevitably be some variation between assessment items – since module convenors develop appropriate assessments against the learning outcomes – but using University guidelines should ensure students are not unfairly advantaged/disadvantaged in how they are assessed according to which modules they undertake.

Professor Condor raises a specific point about the use of two external examiners for our psychology modules and degree pathways. We have decided that from 2016/17 we will only have one external examiner in this area that should enable a better overview of programme structure.

Dr May, Professor Powell and Dr Uprichard all request the use of descriptive statistics for modules and degree programmes. These are routinely examined in the post-exam

board that follows the examination boards with external examiners. We are constrained in preparing such statistics for the examination board since any reports that need to be run to generate these statistics are not possible in advance due to missing marks. Furthermore, marks are not verified until the examination board has met and hence any statistics would not be 'official'. A good compromise might be to provide external examiners with the previous year's statistics at the examination board.

## **Academic Standards**

Professor Powell raises an important issue about the level of originality in students' work. All submitted coursework is checked for originality through Turnitin. The School has a policy of checking every item that has an originality score of more than 30%. Module convenors can then 'initiate' an Unfair Practice Case where they are concerned with the level of originality in the work. The penalties for unfair practice includes the option of giving a mark of zero for the assignment. Indeed this is a frequent penalty for most students where the work lacks originality. However, it should be noted that an original mark (awarded by the marker and independent of the unfair practice) may also be given (and used in the feedback normally given to students). So it is possible that external examiners see the original mark and feedback without knowing whether an assignment has been deemed unfair practice (and a final mark of zero given). With Grademark staff can now check the originality score for an assignment while marking the work – and as a result we are developing guidance to markers about how best to use this information. This includes the key point that Professor Powell makes relating to the 'added-value' of the script.

Professor Powell identifies some concern about the social policy dissertations that he saw – relating to literature reviews and qualitative analysis. These points have been passed on to the Dissertation module convenors and the social policy supervisors.

Professor Powell suggests that the 'rules' relating to word length and lateness be made more visible to students. The School produces a separate assessment handbook that all students are given and have access to (on Learning Central). We believe that a single assessment handbook is the best way of ensuring (a) students are all aware of the 'rules' and (b) that staff are consistent in the use and dissemination of the 'rules'. It also means that any year-on-year modifications to the 'rules' are easily changed without needing a review of all published material to check for consistency. In contrast, perhaps, Dr Uprichard encourages 'flexibility' in the use of word lengths. This is a perennial concern about getting the balance right between equity and choice. However, word limits have other functions, including how we manage marking commitments. Our policy on word lengths will continue to be monitored in light of these comments.

Professor Powell identifies ‘a little’ variation in internal marks and/or moderation. We feel that some variation is sometimes to be expected and hence ‘a little’ variation is perhaps acceptable. However, it is important to note that most of the variation Professor Powell refers to is in the process of moderation. This is not a formal assessment and only relates to sample of assessment items. We are in the process of updating our moderation procedures and this will include how moderators are meant to record their judgements about the appropriateness of the marking undertaken by the first marker. We are very aware we do not want to give the impression to external examiners (or students) that they have been given a ‘second’ mark where there is no second marking being applied. Furthermore, in reviewing our moderation procedures we will continue to tighten up on how moderation outcomes are reached and justified – even where there is no discrepancy in the first marking. This will also include a focus on the reporting (and transparency) of moderation, which Dr Uprichard, Dr Bradbury and Dr Riley also noted as a concern.

Professor Powell and Dr Uprichard also note their concerns about the full use of the marking range, at the bottom end and at the upper end. The School is developing more detailed marking criteria that should be more closely aligned to the assessment task. This will hopefully further encourage staff to use the full range of marks appropriately, but it should be noted that some progress on this has already been made in recent years.

### **The Assessment Process**

As last year six external examiners raise concerns about the assessment process but the number of issues raised this year is smaller. These concerns are primarily about the process and auditing of moderation and variability in feedback to students. As a School we continue to develop best practice in the use of feedback to students but these observations are helpful to us in identifying variability in our practice. Furthermore, we have clear moderation guidance and proformas that staff should use in moderating assessment. The School will consider tasking either the Board of Studies or the Quality and Standards Committee to ensure there is compliance with existing policies.

Dr Bradbury and Dr May raise concerns about transparency in the awarding of examination marks. We provide this in a number of ways for coursework – marking criteria, feedback, moderation form. For exams, beyond a marking criteria, we also undertake a formal process of moderation, but this is a process of quality and assurance and itself does not provide the basis for the awarding of a mark. In addition Dr May and Dr Hancock suggest that we adopt a policy of writing at the end of each script a reason for mark given. We do now collect reasons for why we award the mark for every exam question answered. These are recorded as brief notes for the module convenor to communicate verbally to any students should they come and see us for more feedback and are also passed on to the moderator during the marking

process. We also provide feedback on model answers to questions to the whole module cohort (either in a lecture or as written feedback on Learning Central). This is all in line with the school-wide marking policy. However, the School will ask its Quality and Standards Committee to look at how exam marks and feedback are recorded in way that support assessment practices for students and examiners.

Dr Bradbury highlights the issue of how a mark is determined for an assessment item based on separate questions. It is the School's marking policy that a categorical mark is given to each question on an assessment item and that the arithmetic mean of these (weighted were necessary in accordance to any weightings in the question paper) and rounded to the nearest whole number. This calculated mark is then returned as the mark for the assessment item. We are aware that this procedure may not be always followed by all staff. However, if adopted properly this should avoid any issues of transparency.

Dr Bradbury also notes a concern about marking criteria. The School currently uses a single marking criteria framework for all its modules. However, we recognise that this does not always provide the most useful (and detailed) set of marking criteria for different assessments. Therefore, some modules have begun to develop the generic criteria to create bespoke criteria for their modules, and this is the model of best practice that we are rolling out across the School. We are looking to balance consistency in the use of marking criteria with having criteria that are more relevant to the way students are being assessed.

Professor Powell, Dr May and Dr Hancock comment on the quality and variation in feedback provided through Grademark – our electronic marking system. Powell suggests that more attention is given to students who have failed or who get upper second marks. This is interesting advice and the UG Board of Studies will discuss it. However, the critical point is to ensure that the use of feedback is useful for learners in whatever form it is provided, and the School continues to support academics in providing high quality ('feed forward' – see comment by Dr Riley) feedback. Dr May also suggests using the rubric function in Grademark so that marks can be provided against each of the marking criteria (as Dr May notes we used to do before Grademark was introduced). The group tasked with revising marking criteria will consider this alongside their review.

Dr Hancock also notes that not all students had accessed the coursework feedback (via Learning Central). This has been noted previously by the School and we continue to encourage all students to read and reflect on their feedback. We will consider alternative ways of encouraging this. It should be noted that prior to using Learning Central students would have to collect their feedback from the Undergraduate Office. But 'collection rates' were even lower than they are now using Learning Central.

Dr Uprichard notes that it is confusing to have some assessments on Learning Central but not others. It is the School policy that all assessments should be administered through Learning Central where they can. However, this can still be a little constraining and we believe it is more important that students are assessed appropriately for their learning outcomes rather than what the technology can provide for. However, we will continue to encourage the IT developers to improve functionality where needed.

Dr Bradbury notes that the quality of feedback on some of the dissertations she saw was variable. This has been passed on to the Module convenor and the education supervisors.

### **Year-On-Year Comments**

A number of external examiners comment on the use of Grademark under this section – particularly in its recording of marks and feedback. We have addressed each of these comments above. However, we also note that this seems to be a year-on-year concern. As a result we propose to adopt a more rigorous process of monitoring outcomes that emerge from the external examiner reports. This will be led by the Quality and Standards Committee and the School will produce a list of recommendations on the basis of this response that can then be fully actioned and monitored. This should helpfully avoid any further inconsistencies in our practices.

Professor Powell and Dr Uprichard also reflect on the purpose and organisation of examination boards. Whilst we fully acknowledge that the role of examination boards has changed in recent years we discussed the possibility of changing the way we run these boards in 2015/16. The decision taken was to continue with separate examination boards and to continue with the ‘ritualistic’ process of going through every student in turn even though for the vast majority of cases no further discussion or action is necessary. We will continue to review this periodically but there remains a strong sense of duty to ‘award’ and note each and every student outcome. Relatedly, Dr Uprichard suggests giving external examiners more information about the programmes they are examining. As noted above we will attempt to send more module statistics to each examiner ahead of the examination board (but based on the previous year’s outcomes). Hopefully this will give examiners the basis of making an even greater contribution.

Finally, a number of external examiners (May, Powell, O’Connor, Hancock, Condor and Riley) raised concerns about the administrative procedures this year, particularly for the external examiners. We can only apologise for any inconvenience caused during 2015/16 and are grateful to their patience in their role for the School. The School has undergone quite significant restructuring of its professional support services, including how it administers assessment and examination boards. We have also experienced a significant level of unexpected staff absence during the academic year. The restructuring of professional services was, perhaps ironically, designed to improve

the experiences of students and professional support colleagues and to mitigate the impact of staff absence. We just didn't expect this to occur in the first year of the changes. Nevertheless we are fully aware that the administration of the examination process has not been as smooth as it has been in the past – and perhaps this only highlights how well the administration of the examination process has been previously. This year has highlighted a number of missing 'links' in the new process and we have already begun to address these for next year, including the idea of producing more thorough checks and using a priori checklists. It should be noted, however, that one of the reasons for the administrative changes is to mitigate the possible impact of key individuals being absent. Perhaps as Chair of the Examination Board I should have alerted our external examiners of these changes and explained to them why our administrative support was changing. Clearly it is essential that we continue to communicate effectively with our external examiners, particularly as we have a relatively large number of 'new' external examiners starting with us during 2016/17. We also note too, the request by May and O'Connor, to receive paperwork on the moderation process before the examination board.

Where external examiners have made comments about specific modules these have been passed on to the relevant module convenors to consider.

As always, we are very grateful for the help and support our external examiners give us. We are delighted they undertake their roles so diligently and with such enthusiasm.