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Sent by email to Professor Helen Fielding

26 November 2018

Dear Professor Fielding,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2017/18

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's report for the Physical Chemistry modules on undergraduate programmes.

Your report has been considered by 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](#).

Issues highlighted in your report:

1. Academic Standards: There were a large number of students failing to graduate with an honours degree in the BSc class. It may be worth investigating this to see how to address it. As mentioned last year, perhaps requiring students to pass the written exam component of a course, in order to pass the course would be one way of getting rid of the very weak students.
2. Academic Standards: The amount of coursework must be given careful consideration, since there seems to be a move in universities towards double marking coursework where it is a substantial fraction of the assessment.
3. Master's Dissertations: Regarding Master's Dissertations, the idea that in future years the presentation of the MChem project may be delivered to,

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and marked by, just two members of staff who will also carry out the viva is troubling. The presentation and viva are assessing very different qualities and it would be preferable (timetable and staff-time permitting) to keep them separate.

Response provided by the School:

1. We thank Professor Fielding for these helpful comments. We recognise that the number of weaker students in the BSc is a point of concern and will be addressed. It should be noted that this number is exacerbated by a number of students with long running extenuating circumstances. However, we note these students with poor examination performances and to this affect, we are currently changing weighting to the components of the year 1 and year 2 modules, to ensure that students are not reliant on coursework marks to pass modules. We are monitoring student performances with respect to the changes made and hope to further decrease coursework weighting to ensure students place a suitable focus on their examination performance.
2. Related to the first point, as well as reducing the weighting of the coursework component in a module, we are reducing summative coursework in a module by a significant amount. We are monitoring how this affects student's performance. We are now exploring the separation of the practical components of modules, into a singular practical based module entirely, so the core module have more weightings on the examinations.
3. The marking of the project viva and presentation is typically marked by two members of staff, often the same two, but also each assessment will have a chair who will attend many other talks or viva to ensure consistency in marking. Nevertheless, we will investigate the timetabling of differing staff for the two pieces of assessment, as well as possibly increasing the number of markers for the presentations.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. Having seen the value of providing face-to-face feedback on the interim MChem reports at Cardiff, a similar process was introduced at UCL and it has been well-received by students
3. The problem-solving nature of the computational chemistry questions is particularly impressive to see
4. The exam coordinator did an absolutely fantastic job of coordinating the exam papers and exam results in the unfortunate absence of the Director of Teaching and Learning. The fact that everything ran so smoothly shows how the Department must have worked well as a team to cover the work usually carried out by the Director of Teaching and Learning.

We hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your continued support of the programme.

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.

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.

We are most grateful for your comments and for your support in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Simon Wright
Academic Registrar