

Academic & Student Support Services
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Simon Wright LLB



Sent by email to timminsf@tcd.ie

29 June 2015

Dear Professor Timmins,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2014 – 2015

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the MSc in Critical Care.

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.

Issue(s) Highlighted:

1. The external examiner was not invited to attend the examination board in person and could not personally witness the process;
2. The independent observer did not attend the meeting;
3. Direct contact with students was not facilitated;
4. The external examiner did not receive any training in order to use the online marking system and that access was difficult

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

We are committed to maintaining the highest possible academic standards and were very concerned by the comments. Unfortunately, the relevant exam board chair is on leave at the moment, so it has not been possible to fully investigate these problems. However, we will organise a practice review meeting as soon as possible. In the meantime, we can provide the following reassurance in response to the specific issues:

1. We are aware that Cardiff University policy states that external examiners should be invited to attend the University prior to their first examination board and should be invited to attend each examination board. We are concerned that this did not happen and will ensure that invitations are made to attend future exam boards.

We do recognise that attendance may not always be possible and that virtual attendance through audio/video conferencing may also be appropriate, provided this is acceptable to the external examiner;

2. Within the School of Medicine, we encourage the attendance of an independent observer at all exam boards in order to share good practice and improve transparency. However, while this is not University policy we will continue to encourage independent observers to attend all exam boards;
3. While we encourage all external examiners to engage with students, we do recognise that this is difficult where courses are entirely distance learning. However we would expect programme

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directors to facilitate contact through available electronic means and will ask the programme director to make sure that this happens in the future;

4. We note the team have made great efforts to ensure you were provided with access to the marking process and will try to ensure that you are provided with timely access and that guidance and practice are consistent.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. Staff appear highly motivated towards programme management and development, and were very responsive to comments;
2. Detailed feedback is provided to students and is done so in a very encouraging way leaving students very clear as to the deficits (if any) in their responses;
3. MSc Dissertations were of a very good standard. There was also a lot of attention to detail by the students such as good presentation and references

I hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your continued support of the programme 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 Student Intranet 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