

14 June 2016 Academic & Student Support Services
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Simon Wright LLB



Sent by email to jeni.harden@ed.ac.uk

10 June 2015

Dear Dr Harden,

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

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the Professional Doctorate in Health Studies (DHS)

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. In relation to Academic Standards, the External Examiner notes a 'Lack of critical engagement in concepts particularly among weaker students' and that 'Quality of writing was noted as an issue for a number of students'
2. In relation to the Assessment Process, the External Examiner states that 'It would be useful to have a clearer indication of how the two markers are involved, for example blind marking, negotiation of marks etc. Many of the marks given by the 1st and 2nd marker were identical so it would be useful to know how such accuracy was achieved and how any disagreements are resolved.'
3. In Year on Year Comments, the External Examiner states 'Last year I noted the comment about clearer identification of the process involving two markers but further information about this has not been included this year.'

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

1. Dr Harden has examined four assignments for module SIR019: Community, Sustainable Health and Well Being. Of these two were internally awarded fail grades (below 50%) thus acknowledging the issues highlighted by Dr Harden in relation to these submissions. The other two assignments were internally marked at 68% and at 58% respectively (the latter mark being awarded to a student with an overall module average of 67%). For module SIR022: Research Design, Dr Harden has also examined four assignments which were internally marked at 55%, 62%, 65% and 68% respectively. The threshold for progression from module to thesis stage of the professional doctorate programme is an average module mark of 60% minimum and students whose module marks are wholly or largely within the 50-60% band are not therefore assessed as demonstrating capacity for doctoral level study. It is heartening to note Dr Harden's assessment that 'Overall the academic standards were appropriate for the degree and stage within the degree and there were some very good pieces of work.'

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2. Each professional doctorate module assignment is independently assessed by a first and a second marker who share their comments, engage in discussion and negotiation and agree a final mark in each case. A single, composite set of feedback comments that incorporates the views of both markers and explains the final mark awarded is then provided to each student. Should a first and second marker be unable to reach agreement as to a final mark then a third marker will be asked to assess the submission. The professional doctorate programme assessment process uses the categorical marking scheme and it is for this reason that initial marks arrived at independently by the first and second marker are likely to be identical.
3. We hope that the explanation provided in response to 2. above addresses this and is of help to Dr Harden, whose External Examiner contribution to the DHS degree is very much valued by the programme.

Positive Comments:

1. The quality of the feedback given to students' draft assignments remains very high.
2. Communication from the administrative team was excellent.

I hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your service as External Examiner.

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 Registry web pages and will be available publically.

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