



Academic & Student Support Services
Academic Registrar Simon Wright LLB
Gwasanaethau Academaidd a Chefnogi Myfyrwyr
Cofrestrwydd Academaidd Simon Wright LLB

Cardiff University
McKenzie House
30-36 Newport Road
Cardiff CF24 0DE

Tel *Ffôn* | +44(0)29 2087 9189
www.cardiff.ac.uk

Prifysgol Caerdydd
Tŷ McKenzie
30-36 Heol Casnewydd
Caerdydd CF24 0DE

Sent by email to claire.williams@reading.ac.uk

19 December 2016

Dear Professor Williams,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2015–2016

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the BSc in Psychology / BSc in Psychology with Professional Placement / Graduate Diploma in Psychology.

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. Possible overassessment linked to the numbers of essays required in the examinations and suggested use of other assessment methods.
2. Encouragement for moderation to be conducted by a single moderator per module and informed by some descriptive statistics per question rather than just for the module as a whole.
3. Tendency for students to recapitulation lecture material in exam essays and suggested consideration of approaches to limit this approach and top performing students an opportunity to shine and gain marks at the top end of the scale.
4. Reiterated comments on the use of the full mark range and suggested adoption of a 'step-marking' system at the top-end.

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

1. The teaching staff shared many of your views and a decision has been taken to reduce the number of exam essay questions in Level 5 exams by one essay and to replace the essay with MCQ questions.
2. The School agrees that having an individual moderator would be optimal to ensure that the marks and indeed the questions are fair and appropriate. The oversight of the moderation process typically falls to the module coordinator and this is considered an efficient process, but it is appreciated that the module coordinator should have module and question statistics available to them to inform their report. The process of compiling statistics on each question for each module is challenging within the time frame allotted for the exams and Exam Boards. Nevertheless, the School will investigate ways in which this can be achieved with the development of University recording and reporting tools.
3. The School is currently discussing the issue of inflexible approaches to writing exam essays and feels this is largely a product of both open notes being allowed in some examinations and the availability of lecture recordings. With the introduction of MCQs at Year 2 in 2016/17, there has been a substantial reduction in the number of modules that now permit the use of open notes in exams. The School feels, therefore, that the negative impact of open notes will be reduced in coming years. In contrast, open notes remain available in the final year exams. The School has now put in place formal tutorials for the 2016/17 academic year that will advise and illustrate to students the best way to use lecture recording and open notes to aid in revision and learning. In addition, the School will be considering the future of open notes in the final year at its forthcoming teaching plenaries.
4. The Board of Studies noted the potential issues of compression in exam grades that was raised by you and other external examiners. At its Post Examining Board meeting and subsequent Board of Studies meeting, the School agreed to revise its marking scale to encourage greater use of grades at the top end of the scale. Thus, the School has accepted and implemented your suggestion to reduce the range of possible grades at the top end to three: 75, 85 and 95.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. Your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. Commendation of feedback practices including the requirement that students have to respond to/reflect on the feedback they have previously received on their essays and practicals. The School has also decided to augment existing processes at Year 2 with the introduction of one-to-one personal feedback on coursework with students, including essays and practical reports. This

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additional interaction with students has been adopted to ensure that students engage fully with the feedback process, something that the feedback forms did not encourage with a high degree of compliance;

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