

UNDERGRADUATE EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2020-21

Introduction

This report summarises feedback from reports relating to undergraduate provision in academic year 2020/2021 by External Examiners appointed to BSc, MSci, BEng, MEng, and MBBS programmes in the Faculties of Engineering, Natural Sciences, and Medicine, Horizons modules offered by the Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication, BPES modules in the Imperial College Business School, as well as any relevant undergraduate Intercolated degrees. Postgraduate taught provision will be reported on later in the academic year, due to the timing of Board of Examiners for these programmes.

This report is based on the 104 reports which had been received. Outstanding reports have been referred to the respective Departments, who have been asked to send further reminders. For reference, reports are due within one month of the Board of Examiners, and so would normally be expected by the end of August for undergraduate programmes.

The report template asks a series of questions with the available responses of:

- Yes/always
- Most/usually
- No/never

Except where a simple yes/no/not applicable is required. In addition to the confidence statements at the end of the report an additional option of 'somewhat/in part' is provided. Each section then provides a free comments section for further information or justification of the response given.

2020-21

The academic year to which this report relates saw the second year of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is reassuring to note that the vast majority of externals, where they made specific reference to the College's response to the pandemic continued to be supportive of the measures that had been put in place to ensure the academic standards of the college were maintained. In particular examiners reported on innovative approaches to the lab work and project work which was able to continue.

Programme and Module information

The majority of externals reported that they had received all the programme and module information they needed to carry out their role. However, there were several comments that it would have been helpful to have had earlier access to material to support the assessment process, such as module descriptors, information on previous years exams and access to the papers. Several examiners commented that they would have liked longer to check draft exam papers.

In terms of the content and structure of the degree programmes, all externals considered that the core/compulsory modules in the programmes delivered the stated learning outcomes and that the programme design was aligned with relevant subject benchmark statements. Many very positive comments were received in response to the question on the programme being coherent and up-to-date and that improvements introduced through the Curriculum Review were evident with evidence of links to cutting-edge research through the programmes.

Assessment

External Examiners continued to be supportive of the changes that were made to the normal assessment processes in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Comments include being impressed with the trialling of the timed remote assessments, that alternative assessments had been suitable replacements and that outcomes had not been negatively affected.

However, there also continues to be some negative comments from externals over the transparency of marking practices in place in terms of assessment criteria and model answers being available, a lack of clarity over the arrangements for second marking and moderation of marks.

Several examiners also commented on the assessment load they saw within individual modules and across some programmes and the burden that this places on staff and students alike.

Exam Boards

All externals reported that the Exam Boards were conducted appropriately and many externals complemented the smooth running of the Boards. 95% of examiners considered that the College procedures governing mitigating circumstances and academic misconduct had been appropriately applied but a couple of externals felt it would be helpful for the College to consider identifying the severity of any mitigating circumstances.

Other comments relating to the exam boards and recommendations made by external examiners in terms of overall recommendations will be taken forward by the Regulations and Policy Review Group as part of their continuing work and as part of the response to the NSS comments.

Overall Confidence Statements

External Examiners were asked whether they agreed with three overall confidence statements based on the requirements of the QAA's Quality Code.

99% agreed that "The degree awarding body is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmarks Statements."

96% agreed that "The assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended learning outcomes of the programme and is conducted in line with the College's policies and regulations."

99% agreed that "The academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other degree awarding bodies of which you have experience." For the one or two examiners who did not fully agree that their programmes met the above statements, they did find that these were mostly/usually met.