**Form Name:** External Examiner Report

**Submission Time:** July 1, 2019 2:02 pm

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|  | WM Pan Blk U | | External Examiner Report | 2563 |
| External Examiner: | | Professor X | | |
| Year of Appointment: | | 3 | | |
| Institution: | | University of Y | | |
| Programme: | | (UG) BA/BSc/MSci Programmes in Geography (Physical) | | |
| School: | | Geography, Earth And Environmental Sciences | | |

**Personal Details and Programme Information**

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| **Academic Session** | 2018/19 |
| **DB\_ID** | 2563 |
| **Name** | Professor X |
| **Email** |  |
| **Programme(s) (or modules if examining at modular level)** | BSc/BA/MSci Geography |
| **Name of School** | School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences |

**Section 1 - Programme / Curriculum**

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| **1a) Did you receive programme handbook(s) including learning outcomes?** | Yes |
| **1b) Did you receive module descriptions including learning outcomes?** | Yes |
| **1c) Did you receive assessment briefs/marking criteria?** | Yes |
| **1d) Overall, did you receive sufficient evidence to enable your role to be fulfilled?** | Yes |
| **1e) Do the programme learning outcomes align with relevant level descriptors in the QAA FHEQ\* and any applicable subject benchmarks?** | Yes |
| **1f) Overall, is/are the programme(s) coherent?** | Yes |
| **1g) Are there any curriculum issues (in terms of currency or PSRB\* requirements, if applicable) that you wish to bring to the University’s attention?** | Yes |
| **1h) Please elaborate on your responses to the above questions (as appropriate).** | The breadth of possible pathways open to BSc students is a real positive of the degree programme. Furthermore, the range of assessments used both enable specific skills to be developed and the full programme to be assessed.   It is however not apparently clear that the same benefits exist for 4th year students. After meeting with students (reported later) the same positive experience was not reported (admittedly only 1 student). However, the concerns were of the same tone to those raised last year; the 4th year was not academically challenging; restricted in choices; and lack of communication through the 4 years about possible pathways. This was especially true for module run between departments where multiple members of staff provided conflicting advice.  This year I was particularly interested in the dissertation module and the development of in GGM 216 and 218 which I anticipate I will see the benefits of in the dissertations next year. These two new modules seem to be a real positive and provide good fundamental research skills (I particularly liked the PCA practical but did not understand why it was in written SPSS and not R). Out of interest I would have liked to have seen a justification of why the dissertation module had changed to the 8000 word paper style report. |

**Section 2 - Assessment**

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| **2a) Did you receive all the necessary draft assessments for comment?** | Yes |
| **2b) Were the nature and level of the questions appropriate?** | Yes |
| **2c) Were suitable arrangements made to provide feedback on your comments?** | Yes |
| **2d) Please elaborate on your responses to the above questions (as appropriate). We would also welcome comments on: the rigour and appropriateness of the methods of assessment used in relation to the levels of study and the stated learning outcomes; the comparability of assessment (e.g. method of assessment or assessment load) in modules of the same level.** | Overall I believe that all assessment was undertaken correctly and to a high standard. As I have reported in the past range of different assessments a positive and not the reliance on a single form. However, an observation is that there does appear to be a drift towards the 'academic paper' form of report (note comment about dissertation above). As so few undergraduates ever need to write in this style post degree I would encourage you maintain the breadth of assessment.  CANVAS has improved feedback considerably. I reported last year that the introduction of CANVAS was been used by some, but not all, modules. This has certainly improved and there is a great use across all modules. I particularly like new cover sheet used when submitting assessments. Section 1 (reflection) and section 2 (action) are standard approaches but I believe section 3 (Feedback on the following aspects of this assignment would be particularly helpful to me) is a really positive and 'brave' question. I would like to see more evidence of this question being addressed in the feedback. I believe that if you ask the question you need to answer the question and this was not always clearly evidenced.  The final point on assessment that I would like to make is on the dissertations. When I started acting as the external this module provided the best feedback but in my opinion this has not kept up even though of its significance in overall credits (1/4 of degree). The six boxes are useful but the amount of text can be minimal; a sentence in each box. Furthermore, I found some of the comments in the 1st markers box require better justification. I am not convinced that 'needed little help / worked independently' should be seen as a positive and 'didn't ask for feedback' as a negative. I would suggest you consider whether after advising a dissertation for a year the first marker is too close to the dissertation to mark it and whether you have considered two independent markers who have not been involved in the dissertation process. |

**Section 3 - Marking and Moderation**

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| **3a) Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts for your scrutiny?** | Yes |
| **3b) Did you consider the standard of marking and moderation procedures to be appropriate and consistently applied?** | Yes |
| **3c) Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?** | Yes |
| **3d) Were the marking criteria used suitable?** | Yes |
| **3e) If applicable, were the supplied model answers and/or other information appropriate?** | Yes |
| **3f) Please elaborate on your responses to the above questions (as appropriate).** | I believe that the marking was undertaken to a high standard. Following a request from last year a cover sheet of the general statistics of every module was provided and this provided an invaluable steer when looking at marking and moderation. The mean module mark ranged from 75.3 to 58.8%. A 16.5% range may initially appear large but on some of the module summaries convenors provided the mean marks for the last 5 years. I would encourage that all module convenors are required to provide the mean marks for the last 5 years on the module summary just to confirm there is no drift or one module constantly been marked higher than another. Although I have no concerns with the mean marks I would like to draw your attention to the standard deviations. I believe that these to be narrow and may indicate that the full mark range is not being fully applied.    As mentioned above I spent some time looking at the dissertations. On the BSc side there was a good range of firsts and the mark reflected the high quality work undertaken by the student. However, most marks were low firsts, <75%, and it appeared that in several occasions the mark was an average of the 1st and 2nd marker. I would suggest some of the top work is not being rewarded as high as it may be. As I have in previous years I would suggest that a mark menu is considered for the dissertations in order to reward your top students and increase the range of marks. |

**Section 4 - Award**

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| **4a) Were you invited to attend the relevant Board of Examiners’ meeting(s)?** | Yes |
| **4b) Were you able to attend the meeting(s)?** | Yes |
| **4c) If you attended, was/were the meeting(s) conducted to your satisfaction?** | Yes |
| **4d) If you were unable to attend, were you consulted via other means?** | No |
| **4e) Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board of Examiners?** | Yes |
| **4f) Please elaborate on your responses to the above questions (as appropriate). We would also welcome comments on the equity of procedures at the Board of Examiners’ meeting(s) (in terms of e.g. consideration of candidates affected by extenuating circumstances, matters of academic integrity (e.g. plagiarism cases) and borderline candidates).** | I was able to attend the meeting. I would like to commend the department on the efficient manner that the process was undertaken. The change of location and the use of the lecture screen went without a hitch. The nuances of the procedures were clearly described although most of the complex points had been resolved in the pre-board. There was a very good turnout at the meeting. |
| **4g) Please comment on the overall academic standards and the achievements of students (e.g. proportion of 1st/2(i)/2(ii), etc. for UG programmes, or proportion of Pass/Merit/Distinction awards for PGT programmes) in comparison with other higher education institutions of which you have experience.** | I only have experience of my own institution. Birmingham awards far fewer 1st class degrees than I am used to. However, I believe the proportion of 1st/2.1/2/2 were appropriate |
| **4h) If you also examine an equivalent programme(s) delivered at our University of Birmingham Campus in Dubai, or as a Degree Apprenticeship, please comment on the comparability of quality, standards and achievements across the different cohorts.** | NA |

**Section 5 - Students**

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| **5a) Were you offered the opportunity to meet with a representative group of students?** | Yes |
| **5b) If a meeting was offered, were you able to attend the meeting?** | Yes |
| **5c) If you were able to attend the meeting, how many students were present?** | 7-9 |
| **5d) Please comment on any issues arising from this meeting (or any other issue related to the student experience arising from another source) you wish to communicate to the School. This may include comment on the following (not exhaustive): Assessment scheduling / load; Feedback on assessment ; Academic tutorial support; Curriculum issues (e.g. module choice and equality of access); The experiences of distance learning students, international or direct entry students, joint honours or major/minor students, students on collaborative programmes, students on a placement** | In April this year we were given the opportunity to meet with 7 students (all MSc/BSc, 1 4th year, 4 final year students and 2 2nd years - 2 students were part of the group we met in 2018). As with previous years, overall the students were very positive about the department, the degree and the support received. The opening comment from the student was 'You get out what you put in' and 'staff are approachable and accessible' which should be taken as real positives. They were also extremely complimentary about the feedback that they received, the range of assessment and careers support. These positives outweighed any negatives.  Grumbles that were raised included; equality in dissertation supervision especially in time deadlines and the varying interpretation of amount text to be marked; pathways into field classes; the use of 1 day field classes; modules run between departments; and the MSci (reported above). There was also some quite strong criticism of GGM311.     The students were extremely positive about field work and hands on experience including laboratory work. This was part of the degree programme that they would like developed further to broaden their skill base.    This year, for the first time, we met the students before the examination period. I believe that it is a better time of year to meet students before the pressure of exams really start. Could I suggest that next year we meet the students before the Easter vacation? |

**Section 6 - Enhancement of Provision**

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| **6a) Are there any particular strengths or distinctive or innovative features in relation to learning, teaching and assessment that would be worth bringing to the attention of others within the University?** | As I have already mentioned I believe the breadth of modules a real positive and one the students clearly enjoy this. I would encourage the range of assessment types to be continued. |
| **6b) Do you have any suggestion to enhance the quality of learning opportunities provided to students of the programme(s)?** | There have been one or two comments regarding the dissertation throughout the report that I would suggest need to be considered. |

**Section 7 - Closing Remarks**

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| **7a) Are there any recurring issues that you feel have not been addressed satisfactorily since the previous academic session?** | Although I may not be fully aware of all the circumstances I would like to flag issues around GGM311 Restoration of Freshwater systems. I have noted above that after moderation (by the previous convenor) a 6% increase was added to mark. This was a reflection that the assessment covered material that was not taught on module. The students raised concern that the lecturer was not familiar with all the material nor had a full understanding of the purpose of the field class. However, from the module paper work the convenor reports themselves as a probationer. I raise this point for several reasons. Primarily post module alterations have had to be made, but more importantly for support for new members of staff. It is not easy to start teaching but it is even harder to teach someone else's module which has been developed over a period of time. To reiterate there may be circumstances that I am not aware of but I believe it is necessary to note.    Finally, I would I would like to commend you on the degree programme. I believe it is a strong programme which offers the students a great range of choice. I also believe the assessment, marking and examination procedure to be carried out to a high standard. |
| **7b) Are there any comments you wish to make to the School and/or the University that have not already been covered elsewhere in this report form?** | No |
| **7c) If you are in the final year of your appointment, we would welcome any comments that you might have regarding your overall experience as external examiner for the University.** | N/A |