

# http://t1.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcRgjsNNfe099Qr9AAR2CybDTMMjyIvsxaICmWRkgC_BxdfYve7bCollege of Life & Environmental Sciences

**School of Geography, Earth & Environmental Sciences**

04/10/19

Dear Professor X,

# RE: External examiners report 2018-19

Many thanks for your supportive external examiner’s report for our BSc and MSci Programmes Geography programmes. In light of your report I would like to address some of the issues that you raised for consideration.

## Restricted in choices; and lack of communication through the 4 years about possible pathways

The MSci Geography programmes are being discontinued which restricts our capabilities to develop new programmes and pathways for student to take. However, it is important to recognise that a number of student cohorts are still to undertake the MSci programme and thus we must and will continue to strive to meet student expectations. Lloyd to add here…...

## Justification of change to the 8000 word paper style report

A dissertation is a format that has been developed principally for education, both undergraduate and post graduate. The format is not used widely outside the university education system. There is no clear rational for maintaining this format as it isolates the excellent research that is being undertaken by our undergraduates for the wider research community, and it is not relatable to any future careers. As part of the newly developed (physical) geography degree programme, we aim to develop A-level students into academic researchers. The research paper is a primary communication method for such researchers, with a structure and format that all undergraduates and staff are familiar with. Further, this format (which does not differ substantially from a dissertation) enables open access principles to be easily applied to all undergraduate research projects and for the strong research articles to be submitted to academic journals.

## Addressing areas where students are requesting feedback on their assignments

We are pleased by your positive response with regards to this feedback method that has been newly introduced this year. We recognise there are some teething problems with this in its initial year. We will communicate these concerns with all staff involved in marking to make sure that where students have highlighted areas that they wish to receive feedback on, feedback is directly made, either by directing students to the formal feedback or introducing additional feedback comments on this cover sheet.

***The level of feedback of dissertation projects and the need for independent markers.*** Particularly with the move to new research labs, the supervisor is the expert in the field of research undertaken by the undergraduate. We thus feel that they are the most appropriate

person within the school to mark the research. We recognise the concerns highlighted with regards to their independence and thus see this as an important role of the second marker. A key part of the research project is to act as an independent research. We agree that asking for feedback should not be seen as a negative. However, we also want to see undergraduates take ownership of their project and not to be directed in every activity. We will highlight these concerns with all staff and make sure that this is worded appropriately on the mark sheets.

## Level of feedback on undergraduate dissertations

The sheets presented are not feedback sheets (there are presented separately to students) but are mark sheets. These provide the justification for the mark and are used to support the conversations between staff to come to an agreed mark. We will emphasis to all staff of the importance of these forms to provide a clear justification of the mark provided to those beyond the 1st and 2nd markers.

## Standard deviations of dissertation marks

We will emphasis with staff the need to reward those students who perform exceptionally well in their research projects with the appropriate marks, and to restrict the marks of those who do not perform well (with the aim to increase the standard deviations whilst holding the average mark constant). Given the diversity of projects undertaken by students we do not believe that a mark menu can be developed that effectively support the marking of all projects.

## Restoration of Freshwater systems: moderation of marks

This long running module was taken over at comparatively short notice by a new member of staff. This was as a result of staff changes. This staff member is a probationary staff member without extensive marking experience. During the moderation of this module it was clear that the marks were substantially below those of previous (last 3-4) years. This was thus flagged under section 3 (i) and 3 (ii) in the moderation procedure; previous student performance over an appropriate time period (e.g. 3-5 years); and/or (ii) the range of mean marks in that particular year for all modules taken by a given cohort of students. As a result marks for the module were increased in order to be in line with previous year’s research. In accordance with subsequent analysis of student marks, there is no significant difference between student marks for this module and those of the overall student cohort, and supports this modification in line with section 3(ii) of the moderation procedure.

## Equality in dissertation supervision

Deadlines for submission and the amount of work that can be marked are clearly communicated to all students and staff. We will further emphasis to all staff that these deadlines and limits must be upheld. This results from staff looking to be extra helpful to their students, but not fully recognising the negative impact that this has on the overall cohort.

## Meeting students prior to Easter

We will support this earlier meeting time.

## Restoration of Freshwater systems: support of probation staff

The justifications for the alteration to the marks are referred to above. With regards to support of the member of staff involved. The member of staff agreed to take over this long running module at relatively short notice because of unexpected staff changes. This was a short term resolution to this staffing change. They were provided with marking relief on their other primary module that meant there was no overall change in their workload. In addition, the previous experienced member of staff provided the introductory lecture for the module and was on hand to provide support through the module itself. Formal support measures are also provided for all probationers through their mentors and through their personal

development review (PDR) which is undertaken by the Head of School. The difficulties noted here were discussed as part of this review process. For this coming year, the module has now been passed to an experienced member of staff who will look to develop it around their own research interests.

Thanks again for your help and assistance with our Programmes. We valued your input greatly and we look forward to working with you over the coming year.

Yours sincerely,

Dr S

Head of Education