

T... #) ' O 'responses to 2017- - - - -
updates to actions from 2016- - - - - applicable

a. Update to actions from previous year:

Question	External Examiners comment	CD's response & Action	Update in 2017/18
<p>3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)</p>	<p>The assessment methods throughout the courses are and different years are appropriate and have been performed with rigour. A wide range of methods were employed, including short answers questions, problem-solving questions, multiple choice questions, project presentations, etc. In most modules and papers, there were essay-style questions. Whilst some of the questions had some structure and hence provided some guidance for the structuring of the answer, there were many instances when the essay questions were very open-ended and brief. Whilst the very best students frequently provided very good answers to this style of question, those students with less ability often seemed to perform poorly. I would encourage discussions between the teaching staff to decide whether such questions are appropriate for all subject matter.</p>	<p>CD takes note of this and will bring it up for discussion at the next Course Management Committee, to ensure that all module papers are balanced. We will also seek advice from the Director of Assessments</p> <p>Action Required: CMC secretary to include item on Autumn 2017 CMC Agenda for verbal report from CD on use of structured vs open ended and brief essay style questions in exams</p> <p>Action Deadline: 06-Nov-2017 CMC Secretary & Course Director</p>	<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>1st and 2nd year papers no longer have essay style questions and the 3rd year papers are varied formats and can include open book elements as well as more straightforward essays and problem solving questions.</p>

1.3 Teaching methods

All programmes make use of a wide range of teaching and learning methods, including lectures, projects (including extended data-generating and data-handling research projects in Year 3 BSc and Year 4 MSci), directed private study, directed group activities and practical work. We also note the extensive provision of learning support materials and processes (e.g. online resources, lecture capture, tutorial support etc).

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.G

Informal conversation with staff and a student representative suggested that students are tending to substitute the

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

Response from college requested: NO

Student performance

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

2.1 Students' performance in ~~ce is~~ per

2.3 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the students' performance

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Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

In all programmes, there is a good range of assessment procedures; this variety provides students with a number of ways to demonstrate knowledge and learning, and there is no reliance on a single method of assessment. The balance between in-course assessments and formal written examinations in modules is broadly consistent across programmes and is in line with wider practice in the sector.

We do note, with concerns, the heavy reliance on the essay as a vehicle of examination in all programmes and modules. This strikes us as being disproportionately high in comparison with practice in natural sciences programmes in other comparable institutions (i.e. Russell Group universities outside of Oxbridge). One concern is that the reason for this reliance on the examination essay is unclear; it may well be articulated in a general assessment philosophy which we have not seen. However, there are a number of questions to be addressed to justify continuing inclusion of (usually more than one) essay for practically every module examination. A key question is, what is the essay examining that cannot be examined by in-course assessment, short-answer or MCQ format? If it is factual information, then that is clearly inappropriate. However, many of the model/indicative

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

The procedures on the whole are rigorous, but the examiners identified a few issues that could be improved.

We note the sampling approach for moderation that is in place for all programme assessments. Part of this moderation is that no further action is taken on discrepancies between the first and moderator markers unless the moderator has selected "yes" on the form. It may be worth considering additional actions such as moderating an expanded sample of scripts if more than two discrepancies are noted. This would provide additional assurances for individual students to whom a difference of a few % could make a very significant difference.

The objectivity of the marking scheme for essays is not always evident and including more MCQs and FIBs to increase the validity and robustness of the assessment may be a future alternative to the majority of long answer / essay questions. We observed in several instances that the words used by the examiner to summarise the essay standard ("very E tion an

3.4 Standard of marking

The standard of marking is good overall and a number of developments in recent years have continued to demonstrate improvements in clarity and consistency. For example, indicative answers with indications of mark allocation, have been helpful and application of these marking schemes is consistent, particularly in short-answer format questions.

A general comment is that the quantity and quality of annotation on the scripts was variable, although there has been a clearly improving trend during the last few years. In some instances the handwriting of markers was illegible (pharmacology has a particularly notable culprit whose pencilled commentaries were almost entirely illegible), and there were many instances where a summary statement (useful for feedback to students and a guide to other examiners) was completely absent at the end of a long answer / essay script. These deficiencies must be corrected to facilitate the quality assurance of the assessment process and to aid feedback to students.

A particular issue was noted in the Principles of Pathology paper 2: the absence of scale bars on pathology images, when students were required to comment about organ/lesion size for defined marks within the marking scheme, clearly disadvantaged all candidates. This necessitated adjustment of the marking scheme – but only after intervention of the external examiner at a very late stage; we were surprised that the issue had not been addressed earlier.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for these comments and for highlighting the need to ensure that all figures and tables are appropriately annotated including scale bars for specimens and micrographs. We will ask exams officer to remind examiners of the need to include this important information when preparing questions and that it should form part of the scrutiny during exam paper setting meetings.

The instructions for examiners includes the need to provide written comments on the scripts they mark. CD will ask the exams officer to also include instructions to ensure that these comments are legible! It is noted that some examiners provide their written comments on a sticker. Although this may be time consuming to set up it may be helpful where handwriting is a known issue

Action Required:

course director will highlight the need for legible comments from examiners on scripts and will ask colleagues for their ideas on how to achieve this during our course management committee meeting
exams office will add the need for comments to be legible to the instructions for examiners
chair of exam board and exams officer to ensure that all figures and tables used in papers are suitably annotated at the paper setting meeting stage

Action Deadline:

01-May-2019

Action assigned to:

Course director; exams officers; chair of exam board

3.5 In your view, are the procedures for assessment and the determination of awards sound and fairly conducted? (e.g. Briefing, Exam administration, marking arrangements, Board of Examiners, participation by External Examiners)

The procedures are absolutely sound and fair. Determination of final degree results follows an agreed algorithm which is applied consistently and fairly.

Given the volume and complexity of contributing assessments (e.g. several dozen discrete components contribute to a 3-year Biological Sciences programme), administration of the assessment procedures is very efficient. We would like to commend and thank the administrative staff who assisted us so ably. However, this scale of activity does raise questions about sustainability in relation to the academic and administrative staff workload, and recognising the increasing number of students. Multiple component in-course assessments coupled with multiple examination papers for multiple modules across an entire degree programme, pose considerable risks for the College. We have a strong impression a high assessment load which may not be appropriate or academically

3.6 Opinion on changes to the assessment procedures from previous years in which you have examined

We are not aware of major changes to the assessment processes or marking conventions since last year.

Response from college requested: NO

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

Response from college requested: NO

Completion

If you have identified any areas of good practice, please comment more fully here. We may use information provided in our annual external examining report:

5.1 Do you have any suggestions for improvements based on experience at other institutes? We may use information provided in our annual external examining report:

No further comments

Response from college requested: NO

5.2 External Examiner comments: For College information only (Responses to External Examiners are published on the College's website. Please only use this box to add any comments that you wish to remain confidential, if any)

No further comments

Response from college requested: NO

