

External Examiner's Report for the MA Education, Wednesday 9th June 2010

I viewed written work by 23 students, of which 7 were final Dissertations.

Programme/Subject design, content and standards

- **The extent to which standards are appropriate to the qualification or qualification element under consideration on comparable UK Higher Education programmes**

I am satisfied that standards are comparable to other UK HE Masters Programmes. Where written work was weak, this was marked appropriately and where work was strong, this was reflected accurately in the grade. Where students were awarded a high grade there was clear evidence of a sound research question, critical engagement with the literature, and a full analysis. Where lower grades were awarded there was often a weak research question or lack of understanding of the task.

- **The curriculum, its aims, content and development**

School based modules returned, on the whole, low grades. This was discussed at the Examination Board and my advice is to undertake an analysis of the written submissions. Are the students supported in crafting a good research questions in school? Are students taught to write well at Masters level? Is the issue to do with data generation or data analysis?

Student performance (please avoid reference by name to individual students)

Of the 7 Dissertations I viewed, one student achieved a Grade 17, one student a grade 16, one student a grade 13 two students were graded at 12, one student graded at 11 and one graded at 4. The grades indicate that students for this Exam Board have not achieved highly, but there was only one Fail.

- **student performance in relation to their peers on comparable courses**

The grades across modules are similar.

- **student performance in modules taught at different campuses including overseas MU campuses and modules on franchised and joint validated programmes**

There was a discussion, as is mentioned above, about students on school-based programmes and the challenges of high quality input in terms of masterly writing and empirical work.

- **effectiveness and quality of feedback to students**

Feedback to students is honest and indicated areas for improvement.

- **strengths and weaknesses of the cohort**

All participants were engaged in research that was intended to make a difference to their practice and this is very powerful, even where high grades were not achieved. The engagement with professional foci is a strength of the work I viewed, and the challenge for the tutor team is to ensure that participants have the opportunity to craft and present their work in a Masterly fashion.

- **factors that the External Examiner is aware of that have positively or negatively affected student performance (e.g. resources, field trips etc).**

none as far as I know

Assessments: structure, design and marking

This should include comment on:

- **appropriateness of assessment for measuring achievement of standards**

I am satisfied that the approach taken is appropriate.

- **standards of marking and moderation**

Marking was undertaken with the student in mind. Students were provided with clear feedback that will support future work.

Assessment Boards

(Please confirm attendance at assessment boards and in the event of non-attendance whether you were fully involved in the assessment process.)

This should include comments on:

- **organisation and conduct of Assessment Boards.**

I attended the Exam Board on 9th June, and had a meeting before hand with Dr. Ian Terrell and Kevin Morris.

The Exam Board was well organised with all paperwork present and the information presented on line as well as paper copies. All administrative colleagues were very well informed about student progress. The Board was Chaired impeccably, and run in a most professional fashion.

Role of the External Examiner

This should include comments on:

- **quality of the information you received concerning your role as an External Examiner**

I have been provided with excellent information, from the initial training day, through the documentation and meetings and conversations with colleagues from Middlesex.

- **quality of information you received concerning the modules for which you are appointed**

I have been provided with ample documentation that has enabled me to undertake my role well.

- **access to and availability of material needed to make required judgements**

Access has been unproblematic.

- **the extent to which comments in your previous report have been considered and appropriately acted upon**

Conversations have taken place and I am hopeful that I can soon meet students.

Collaborative Programmes

Please add any comments relating to the links between the University and the collaborative institution.

Recommendations or actions

I recommend that the team looks at the overall profile of grades and then identifies the key factors that inhibit students gaining higher grades. The team would then be in a position to target specific issues. This might of course simply be that students are incredibly busy professionals working in hugely challenging circumstances, and the grades they achieve represent wonderful achievements under pressure, but it would be an interesting study.

Good Practice

The range of assignments I viewed has convinced me that this is important work that makes a difference to teachers in schools. There is passion and commitment in much of this work. The team should be proud of the ways in which they support students, provide a critical context and feedback on submitted work.

Dr Hazel Bryan
12th June 2010