MEMORANDUM

To: Or lan Francis, Academic Secretary

From: Professor Georgina Foflett, Dean, DJCAD

Date: 12 November 2009

Subject: External Examiner's Report for 2007/8 and 2008/9

I write in response to item 6 (I) of paper G, tabled at the Learning and Teaching committee meeting of 12 November 2009.

I take exception at the comments raised in the report with regard to the external examiners comments which were framed within a context that the report looses, with regard to the 2009 Degree Show being housed within the Vision Building.

I believe the reports were very specific in that they related to students who were developing site specific works and where this is the case only a small minority of students work in this way; memory of the show would suggest in the region of 6 - 10 students. Nevertheless they should have advanced notice of the venue, which is intended for this year, 2010.

There were a number of other examiners reports on the same aspect which stated their overwhelming support for the move and the better environment in which to view work, Jewellery & Metal Design and Textile Design comes to mind.

I do not like to see proportion lost in reports, in this case say even if 20 students were affected this is a very small percentage of the numbers of students involved, circa 320.

In the absence of this report being amended prior to the Learning and Teaching committee I request that the contents of this memo are tabled at the next meeting.

[Signature]
Further to the External Examiner’s report, dated 29 June 2009 the response and actions undertaken by the School of Engineering Physics and Mathematics are as follows:

1. **Level one and two examination and assessment**
   
   From 2009-2010, each individual Programme Examination Board will oversee the examination of all Level 1 and 2 modules contributing to the Programme.

2. **Conduct of Assessment**
   
   (a)(i) All staff are reminded that anonymous marking will be applied in all cases.
   
   (a)(ii) All staff are reminded that assessment marks are to be displayed on the front cover of the examination script booklet, together with the overall total mark.
   
   (a)(iii) The examination officer will ensure that all coursework provided for inspection must be properly documented and labelled.
   
   (a)(iv) In the event of any typographical errors in the examination papers the External Examiner and the Examination Board will be made aware of this at the outset of the Board meeting for consideration.
   
   (g)(i) Additional examples of coursework for each module will be made available for the External Examiner to inspect.
   
   (g)(ii) In accordance with assessment practice across all undergraduate degree programmes within the School, in order to pass a module students will be required to obtain a minimum of 30% in both the coursework and examination elements of the module. The Examination Board will continue to be able to apply its normal discretionary powers.

Dr M R Jones
27 October 2009

Professor J Calderhead
Vice Principal (Educational Development)
University of Dundee

Dear Professor Calderhead

Response to Professor Blackburn’s comments as External Examiner for the Pharmaceutical Chemistry degree programme 2008-2009

I have consulted with Drs Morris and Norman, conveners for the Pharmaceutical Chemistry programme. The following is my response based upon these discussions and with correspondence from Professor Ferguson.

I welcome the report by Professor Blackburn and regard his comments as being a fair reflection on the state of the pharmaceutical chemistry degree as delivered in 2008-2009. I am pleased to note that Professor Blackburn is in general complimentary with respect to the way the degree is organised, by the procedures used, and most importantly by the quality of the graduates produced.

While not wanting to dismiss any of the criticisms made in his report I note that most are essentially observations on what was, for several reasons, a difficult year all round. In almost every case a specific criticism is followed by either praise for the way in which these difficult situations have been handled or by an acknowledgement that the final outcome has been satisfactory. The significant, but relatively minor, problems with examination scripts, both in terms of question quality and of inadequate editing and error checking, have been examined in consultation with Drs Norman and Morris: every effort will be made to tighten up the quality control process this academic year. The question of variability in difficulty of examination questions and indeed of question style is taken seriously, but we believe that the discriminatory powers of the examinations are enhanced by this variability and that the overall quality of the questions is good. Due to the research led nature of this degree programme, many of the staff delivering material in the form of lectures, assignments, projects and examination questions, have very little teaching experience. Individual performance in all these teaching areas is monitored and steps are taken to assist the delivery of teaching by inexperienced staff, as well as to enhance the quality of the examination questions.

The high level of moderation used within this degree programme is another facet of the significant involvement of research active staff with little teaching experience. I
am happy to note that the external examiner, although commenting on the level of moderation, found it to be "fairly and transparently carried out". The recommended "examinations subcommittee" is essentially Drs Norman and Morris, although other members of the board do play a significant part in the assessment of student projects and presentations. I believe that in a highly research-led degree such as this there will always be a need for a high level of moderation, however I am pleased to see the high level of transparency that is maintained in the process. Without such documentation, consultation and transparency the level of moderation would be of great concern, however because these attributes are adequately demonstrated I am not concerned that this level of moderation is in any way problematic.

The issues of uniformity, feedback, communication and accountability would be much ameliorated by a good attendance at the final board and examiners meeting at the end of the academic year. I would urge that any member of staff involved in honours year teaching is strongly encouraged to attend the final board meeting. These meetings are always set well in advance and attendance should be a priority.

The problems identified with the organic chemistry component of the degree are ones that have become apparent over the last few years. Steps have been taken to increase the number of staff available to deliver this teaching by the appointment of an additional person on a 4-month per year contract. It is acknowledged that the level of teaching resource devoted to organic chemistry is, nevertheless, small considering the importance of this area to the overall aims of the degree. Discussions will take place with the new Dean to examine how this might best be addressed.

Yours

Professor Roger Soames
Interim Dean, Life Sciences School of Learning and Teaching

cc Dr Ian Francis