

## **SUMMARY OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS FOR UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES IN 2009**

### **A Note by the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)**

#### **Summary of general issues arising from the reports of External Examiners' on the 2009 Undergraduate Examinations in Science, Engineering and Medicine.**

#### 1 Overall conclusions

1.1 External Examiners reported that the quality and standards of undergraduate degree programmes at Imperial College compare favourably to other institutions within the UK. Programmes are coherently structured and appropriately taught for the level and subject area. The standard of assessment is high and results, in some instances, are outstanding. In most cases, departments apply rigorous assessment criteria and programmes have clear learning outcomes. There is a good balance between theory and practice.

#### 2 Good practice

2.1 Conduct of oral examinations within the department of Humanities is to be commended with students often producing outstanding oral speeches.

2.2 The department of Materials tailors its mathematics courses so that they are relevant to materials engineers. This is something that students particularly benefitted from.

2.3 Double marking within the Business School, Biotechnology / Biochemistry, Biology and Humanities should be seen as examples of good practice.

2.4 External examiners for Bioengineering were particularly impressed with the availability of online examination materials, answers, projects etc which was very helpful to students. The use of clickers for students to indicate level of understanding during some teaching was an interesting exercise and this innovative method has also been adopted within the department of Mathematics.

2.6 Team assessment of student project work, within the department of Computing, sets a standard and makes the projects a robust indicator of student achievement.

#### 3 Other issues

##### *Feedback*

3.1 Although external examiners reported cases where departments provided excellent feedback to students, in some cases, the quality and timeliness of feedback still remains an issue.

##### *Marking of Student Work*

3.2 Some external examiners reported that marking schemes could be made more explicit so that students are clear what is expected of them. Other externals

commented that not all departments made it clear how marks were agreed upon, in particular, where 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> markers disagreed. Internal markers should make more effort to clearly annotate scripts which will also help to make the assessment process more transparent. On a related issue, externals reported that the extent to which students incorporate wider reading into their examination answers should be identified and rewarded in the marking scheme.

#### *English Language Skills*

- 3.3 In some cases, external examiners were concerned with the poor level of written English displayed by those students whose first language is not English. These students need extra support and guidance and should be made aware of the courses that are available to them on a regular basis.

#### *Group Projects*

- 3.4 Some external examiners reported that several students obtained consistently low examination marks but considerably higher group project marks. It would seem that the group project marks may be distorting the final individual marks of several students by artificially pushing them upwards. This should be carefully monitored by departments.

#### *Viva Examinations*

- 3.5 Some students work to an agenda during their viva examination which some externals reported hindered students from thinking outside the curriculum and being able to apply their learning in a free-thinking way.

#### *Exam Boards*

- 3.6 In some cases, academic representation at Boards of Examiners was poor. Departments should address this as a matter of priority.

#### *High Weighting of First Year*

- 3.7 Some external examiners were surprised that some programmes gave such a high weighting to the outcome of the first year of studies as this means that a student who reaches a high level by their final year might not obtain such a high class of degree as elsewhere.