

# The University of Edinburgh

## External Examiner Report

### Moray House School of Education

**Name and Address of External Examiner:**

Professor John C. Smyth
Glenpark
Johnstone
Renfrewshire PA5 0SP

**Degree(s) examined:**

PGD/MSc Outdoor Education

**Course(s) examined:**

Degree programme as above
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**On what dates were you present in the University to act as External Examiner?**

13 January 2004
16 June 2004
5-7 September 2004 (Woodlands Outdoor Centre)
28 October 2004 (Annual Examiners' Meeting)

The following report contains questions where you are invited to answer a series of 'prompting boxes' before providing explanatory narrative comments. You are asked to complete the report normally four weeks after the primary (usually June) examination period in which you were involved, and to return it to:

Head of School  
Moray House School of Education  
The University of Edinburgh  
Old Moray House  
Holyrood Road  
EDINBURGH  
EH8 8AQ

Any additions or amendments you wish to make to this report after the re-sit examination period will also be welcome. Please send additional comments to the above address no later than mid-October, following the examinations.

External Examiner's fees are paid annually, after receipt of your completed report. Payments are made into bank accounts and authorisation must be received from School Offices by the Finance Department by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month for payment to be made by the end of that month. If you have not received payment when expected, please contact:

Mrs Michelle Melrose  
Teaching Organisation  
Moray House School of Education  
The University of Edinburgh  
Old Moray House  
Holyrood Road  
Edinburgh  
EH8 8AQ.

The Head of the School has responsibility for receiving the document and ensuring appropriate action is taken. The report will also be seen by the head of department, or equivalent, for comment. In the interests of openness and accountability, the University's practice is to distribute reports widely to relevant staff. Should you therefore wish to comment in confidence to the Head of School, please do so in a separate letter. Such letters may also be seen by the Director of Quality Assurance, on behalf of the Head of School. If, exceptionally, you wish to comment directly to the Director of Quality Assurance, please write to:

Dr S van Heyningen  
Director of Quality Assurance  
The University of Edinburgh  
Medical School  
Teviot Place  
Edinburgh  
EH8 9AG

**1. Adequacy of Information**

**Was the information provided to you adequate for the purpose of external examining?**

*Please tick one box for each row.*

	Yes	Not entirely	Not Provided
Degree programme syllabus and specifications	√		
Course descriptions or specifications	√		
Programme handbook for students	√		
Aims, objectives, outcomes	√		
Description of course work and teaching methods	√		
Description of assessment processes	√		
Other, <i>please specify</i>			

**Please comment generally on the information you received. If you answered “Not entirely” above, what improvements would you suggest?**

*Please write in.*

I continue to be provided with a great deal of information about the programme and access to whatever I might require in addition. I have not so far felt the need for anything with which I was not already supplied, but have no doubt that any needs would have been met by this very helpful and conscientious team.

**2. Types of Assessment**

**Were the following aspects of assessment appropriate to the course and programme aims?**

*Please tick one box for each row.*

	Yes	Not entirely	Not Applicable
Degree examinations			√
Class examinations and tests			√
Assessed coursework, e.g. essays, practicals, presentations	√		
Dissertations and projects	√		
Placements and fieldwork	√		
Oral examinations	n/a		
Overall mix of assessment types	√		

**Please comment generally on the types, mix and weighting of assessments.  
If you answered “Not entirely” in question 2, what improvements would you suggest?**

*Please write in.*

I continue to have no anxieties about the assessments. They strike me as being devised with meticulous care and attention to fairness and comparability. A great deal of trouble is taken by staff to develop careful and critical working practices among their students, and to allow for divergences in opinion or interpretation where these are appropriate.

The MSc theses which I read were particularly satisfactory and do the programme and the university great credit.

### 3. Assessment Criteria

**Were the marking criteria sufficiently clear to you?**

*Please tick one box.*

Yes

Not entirely

**Were the marking criteria appropriate to the assessment aims?**

*Please tick one box.*

Yes

Not entirely

**Were the marking criteria consistently applied by markers?**

*Please tick one box.*

Yes

Not entirely

**Please comment generally on the marking criteria.**

**If you answered “Not entirely” above, what improvements would you suggest?**

*Please write in.*

I am very happy with the criteria adopted for those parts of the programme for which I was responsible. The moderation policy is applied with rigour and consistency.

#### 4. Quality and Standards

**Were the following aspects of the educational provision of appropriate quality and standards in relation to comparable institutions of which you have experience?**

*Please tick one box for each row.*

	Yes	Not Entirely	Cannot Comment
Course aims	√		
Course structure and content in relation to the aims	√		
Degree programme structure	√		
Teaching methods	√		
Students' work in relation to their level of study	√		
Opportunities for students to develop communication and other transferable skills	√		
Internal marking	√		
Profile of degree classifications or grades	√		
Mechanisms for course monitoring and review	√		

**Please comment on the quality and standards of the educational provision. If you answered "Not entirely" above, what improvements would you suggest?**  
*Please write in.*

On this second year's experience I continue to find the programme very impressive, and undoubtedly demanding by MSc standards. Diploma and MSc Graduates should leave it extremely well equipped for the kind of work it is designed to supply. The teaching methods appear to be both varied and rewarding, the internal marking efficient and consistent, the grading well merited and monitoring and review systems well in place. I was delighted to have opportunities to meet with groups of students on several occasions happy and to find that my view was enthusiastically shared by them.  
 Please note, however, my comments on staffing under 'General Comments' below.

**5. Administration**

**Was the administration of the assessment process effective?**

*Please tick one box for each row.*

	Yes	Not entirely
Time available for marking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Operation of the Board of Examiners	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of data presented to the Board of Examiners	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handling of special circumstances, e.g. medical, at the Examiners' meeting	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, <i>please specify</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Please comment on the administration of the assessment process.**

**If you answered "Not entirely" above, what improvements would you suggest?**

*Please write in.*


**6. This question refers to placement only in undergraduate programmes.**

	Yes	Not entirely
<b>Were you satisfied with placement assessment arrangements?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Please tick one box.*

**If you answered "Not entirely" above, what changes would you suggest?**

*Please write in.*

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	Yes	No
<b>Did you have an opportunity to see an appropriately representative range of students' placement activities?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Please tick one box.*

**If you answered "No" above, what comments do you have?**

*Please write in.*

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## General comments

**The University would welcome your views on any relevant issues that you would like to address. You are not expected to cover all issues in each report. Fuller remarks in the final year of your appointment would be appreciated. In particular, you are invited to comment on:**

- the comparability of standards with other institutions;
- the extent to which the degrees and courses examined meet their stated aims and objectives;
- whether the standards set are appropriate for the awards, or award elements, by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the national qualifications frameworks, institutional programme specifications and other relevant information;
- the whole programme of study from first year to graduation, if appropriate
- any cases of innovative or particularly good practice which you wish to highlight from any aspect of the provision covered above, i.e. information received, types of assessment, assessment criteria, administration or quality and standards.

*Please feel free to attach additional sheets.*

The standards of this programme continue to be very high indeed and, I suspect, well above average, meeting their stated aims and objectives and certainly appropriate to the awards.

The programme has been blessed with an able, conscientious and devoted staff who give it far more than its official share of their time. Its most notable success, in my view, is its creation of a learning community between staff and students, a vulnerable structure which does not necessarily get the credit it deserves within the normal mechanisms of an academic institution, but which is ideally suited to the nature and objectives of a programme of this sort. This key property makes the recent departure of several staff members a serious concern. The replacement of one (on a three year contract) and the appointment of a temporary lecturer (effectively a sessional contract) has made a significant improvement. However until this second post is filled on a long-term basis there must be concerns regarding the quality of student experience. I do not doubt that the surviving two members of the team and the new appointee will do all in their power to maintain standards in the interim. I welcome the news that an appointment is due to be made later this year.

It is satisfactory to learn that library and computer access are at least acceptable to most students. It is a pity that the relocation of the programme to the Holyrood Campus has led to essential equipment being located to several places. Nonetheless the retention and refurbishing of Woodlands Outdoor Centre demonstrated University commitment to the programme and the Centre retains its central significance to the programme. In September I was invited by the staff to visit the Centre whilst they were working with groups of students. I am very grateful for this opportunity as it gave further insight into the programme, the facilities, staff skills and commitment, and most of all to the 'learning community' I referred to earlier. In all regards I was deeply impressed with the commitment and abilities of staff and the opportunities they provided for the students, who are indeed fortunate to experience this learning environment.

As well as at 'Woodlands' I was particularly grateful for the opportunity to meet the students on two occasions in the year. At the end of their period of study, programme staff arranged for me to meet informally with students to discuss their insights and views on the programme; an experience which I have been given nowhere else in an External Examiner capacity. As noted in my report for 2002-3, their main concern was the pressure that the programme was putting on the staff, and the thought that it might become too much for them to sustain – in my view a reflection of their maturity and insight as well as the seriousness of the situation, which has thankfully now been at least partially addressed. As in the previous year the students were a mature and experienced group who clearly brought an additional quality to the programme experience, and the learning community which is such a central and precious aspect of this programme.

*Please feel free to attach additional sheets.*

External Examiner's Signature .....	Date .....
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**Thank you for completing this form.**

**Please return it to the Head of School at the address on page 2.**