Dear Professor Borysiewicz

**NST Pharmacology Part II Examinations**

I was pleased again to act as external examiner for this year’s Part II Pharmacology examinations in the Natural Sciences Tripos. There were thirty-six candidates split between Medical and Natural Sciences undergraduates.

I perused the draft examination papers in February supplied by the Senior Examiner, Professor Edwardson, and reported that I was satisfied with their coverage of the course.

The examination consisted of four three hour papers, two in Molecular and Cellular Pharmacology, and two in Systems Pharmacology. In addition, students submitted a dissertation outlining an experimental project they had carried out over the course of one term. Students had previously given an illustrated oral account of their project to the Examiners, for which I was not present.

Furnished with the mark sheets, I looked over the written scripts and experimental project write-ups over two days in Cambridge between the 15th and 16th June, with particular emphasis on those of the ten candidates selected for viva voce examinations. The quality of the answers was of a high standard. With the four internal examiners, I conduct viva voce examinations of ten students. These had been selected by prior discussion with the Senior Examiner. Two were examined to confirm the winner of the Pharmacology Prize for the top overall performance in the examination, and eight for consideration for placement in the First class. At the end of our deliberations, eleven candidates were placed in the First Class, and twenty-five in the Second Class Division 1. There were no candidates placed in either the Second Class Division II or Third Class. In addition, I read the dissertation from the candidate awarded the Dissertation Prize, and this was of a particularly high standard.

The Senior Examiner provided me with extensive information, including copies of past papers. This was most useful and showed a great deal of thought and organization.

The standard this year was higher than that of last year in which three candidates were placed in the First Class from a similar number of candidates.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the examiners, Professor Edwardson (Senior), Professor Cooper, Dr Henderson, Dr Sarnyai, Dr Rahman and Dr Venter for making my task so enjoyable and rewarding. They were exceptionally helpful, insightful and judicious
in their deliberations with me. The comprehensiveness of the material made available to me is a testament of their professionalism as examiners. I would also like to record my thanks for their excellent hospitality, and for my enjoyable stay at Christ’s College.

This was my third and final year as external examiner, and I have found it a most interesting and rewarding experience, and would like to thank all the examiners I have worked with over my term of appointment for their outstanding work.

Yours sincerely,

Antony Galione

Professor Antony Galione FMedSci
Professor and Head of Pharmacology
University of Oxford
Moderating External Examiner Report
MDT1, Medical and Veterinary Sciences Tripos Part 1B
Easter Term 2011

- Mechanisms of drug action

Herewith I address my report to the Vice-Chancellor:

I visited the department on 13th and 14th June, 2011, having viewed and approved the exam papers in advance. I was presented with a clear synopsis of assessment procedure. This included the method for scrutiny of individual questions in terms of average marks versus the whole, distribution of marks (SD) and, for MCQs, the preponderance of correct marks for individual questions. The process for determining the pass mark (quasi Hofstee plot) was explained carefully.

I was provided with two samples of scripts – a good sample of those essay papers immediately above and below the cutoff, and an example of a good first, upper second, etc. I was given ample time to examine these scripts.

I prepared four pages of notes and questions then met with five members of staff. The outcome was that I was very satisfied that the pass mark was appropriate. The use of essay-plus-MCQ tests different skills, and the final outcome, combining the two sets of marks, was very pleasing.

The standard of work was impressive. I focused most closely on an essay topic (angina) that I teach at my institute (KCL). The top first was quite outstanding. The examples of other grades were in keeping with my expectations based on standards at KCL.

I conducted a detailed audit of marking accuracy, focusing on one question (practical paper Q2 part 1). I was very pleased with the accuracy and, additionally, the criteria used to assign a mark to this complex question.

We discussed in detail several MCQ questions that had generated an unexpected preponderance of ‘wrong’ answers. In almost all instances I felt that the questions and outcomes were perfectly reasonable. In two instances a solution was required to obviate the possibility that some students may have been disadvantaged by a mismatch between what was written in handout material and what was deemed the correct answer in the exam. A satisfactory solution was found in each of these instances.
The staff were most helpful and hospitable. I very much appreciated being guided through the issues without feeling that staff were attempting to influence my judgment. I was particularly impressed by the cohesive, coherent, honest and collegiate way in which the staff operated. This is clearly a department committed to its teaching, thoughtful and reflective with good balanced judgment, and that is open and accessible to my scrutiny.

Best regards,

Michael J Curtis PhD, FBPPharmacoIS
Reader in Pharmacology
Herewith I address my report to the Vice-Chancellor:

I visited the department on 26th September, 2011, having viewed and approved the exam papers in advance. I am familiar with assessment procedure from my previous encounter.

We focused primarily on MCQ answers, and three questions with a high preponderance of wrong answers. I was impressed by the willingness of staff to disregard a question where the entire class gave a wrong answer. However I was not inclined to encourage a similar action for two other questions with a low preponderance of correct answers. I noted that 96 out of 125 questions were answered correctly by 50% or more of the class, and the spread of the apparent difficulty of questions, some of which were answered correctly by almost all students and others by very few, is perfectly reasonable, and indicative of a good examination overall.

The demarcation between passes and fails was very clear, with very few students on the cusp. We looked at the two scripts where students just missed a pass (47 and 46%). I was completely satisfied that these students were fails.

Once again the staff were most helpful, hospitable and co-operative.

Best regards,

Michael J Curtis PhD, FBPharmacolS
Reader in Pharmacology