

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE: EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2012-2013 - MSc/Diploma in Social Science Research Methods

Dear Professor Holdsworth,

I am writing further to your External Examiner's report for the above programme(s). Your Report has been considered by the Cardiff School of Social Sciences in accordance with our approved procedures. I am, therefore, now in a position to respond on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor to the main points you had raised.

Issues Highlighted

Your Report raised issue(s) which have been referred for consideration by the School. The following response has been provided on behalf of the School.

1. *The External Examiner's observation that "students do not always match their understanding of methods with that of theory" could be partly explained by the sample of dissertations which she was sent to review. As there are two External Examiners for the SSRM, each has a different focus on students' work (Professor Holdsworth examines the quantitative modules and receives dissertations that employ primarily quantitative methodological approaches, whereas Professor Sharland examines the qualitative modules and receives dissertations that employ primarily qualitative methodological approaches). Perhaps qualitative dissertations more fully engage with theory in comparison to quantitative dissertations? We will certainly monitor this and report this concern back to members of the Board of Studies, as a reminder to dissertation supervisors of the importance of students demonstrating a thorough knowledge of both method and theory within the dissertation.*

2. *Professor Holdsworth is right to indicate that "there is scope for some standardisation" of feedback issued to students. The SSRM Board of Studies has since agreed a policy for all feedback to be produced in typewritten form on a feedback form which is then provided to students. This should help ensure more standardisation across modules and across markers from different Schools.*

3. *Professor Holdsworth's comments on second marking and final marks have been addressed within the new SSRM Assessment Handbook for Students and Staff, 2013-14. This document clearly outlines the marking procedure to be undertaken for each type of assessment task in an explicit way (see pages 17-20). This document was made available and discussed at a Board of Studies prior to the commencement of marking for the 2013-14 academic year.*

4. *The indication that the External Examiner would have liked to have been introduced to the teaching team is a reflection of both the logistical complexity of her first day at Cardiff, as well as the lack of experience running such events by the Programme Director. On the day in question, both a Board of Studies as well as an Examination Board were convened in a back-to-back fashion. This was to enable both of the (new) External Examiners to attend both types of meetings since so much development work had gone into the restructuring of the SSRM and new 20 credit modules. The aim was to receive their feedback on both the business of the BOS as well as to confirm the marks and assessment practices in the EB. However in hindsight this meant there was a long and full agenda to manage, along with members of the BOS arriving and leaving and various points, as well as the two different arrival times of the External Examiners into Cardiff. The External Examiners were properly introduced but time was not taken to ensure that all members of the teaching teams were introduced to the External Examiners (especially Professor Holdsworth as she arrived somewhat late due to her train being delayed).*

Nevertheless her point is well taken and more care and attention will be paid in future.”

Positive Comments

The School and University are pleased to note your positive comments on the School's provision including:

- a. **[1, 2 and 3] your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;**
- b. **[6] your indication that graduates of the programme “will have an excellent grounding for careers in social science research both within and outside of academia”.**

I hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your service as External Examiner.

In order to meet the expectations of the QAA Quality Code, both the External Examiner Annual Report and this Institutional Response will be published on Registry web pages and will be available publically.

The University's provision of the formal Institutional Response is not intended to constrain direct communication between schools and their External Examiners. Schools are encouraged to discuss with their External Examiners any matters of detail raised in their Reports and, more widely, any issues impacting on the quality and standards of awards, including possible changes to programmes.

We are most grateful for your comments and for your support in this matter.

Mrs Jill Bedford
Director of Registry and Academic Services