

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

Dear Dr Sharland,

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.

1. [3, 3rd para] your observations on the clarity, nature, length and consistency of "markers' feedback";
2. [4, second para] your suggestion that the two External Examiners might be offered "the opportunity for informal discussion" in advance of the Examining Board;
3. [5, 2nd para] your suggestion that new External Examiners would benefit from an opportunity to meet their co-External Examiner and the Programme Director before the Examining Board;
4. [5, third para] your request for an early indication of when scripts would be received and related suggested enhancement of the "Programme Handbook";
5. [6] your recommendation "that feedback is more closely tied into outcomes and marking criteria, to enable students to understand the reasons for the summative mark received, and to learn formatively".

The following response has been provided on behalf of the School.

"1. The External Examiner's observations on the clarity, nature, length and consistency of "markers' feedback has largely been addressed. This academic year we have introduced a policy requiring typewritten feedback for all assessment tasks (and enforced this policy when it was breached); thus, no students are receiving handwritten feedback any longer on the SSRM. Regarding SIT070, the portfolio tasks have been both reduced and revised this year allowing for an improved assessment framework for that module. The need to provide feedback that is directly linked with the learning outcomes is a useful suggestion that will be reiterated to staff marking on the SSRM.

2. The suggestion that the two External Examiners might be offered "the opportunity for informal discussion" in advance of the Examining Board is a sensible suggestion. We will offer this ahead of the June exam board.

3. Likewise, the suggestion that new External Examiners would benefit from an opportunity to meet their co-External Examiner and the Programme Director before the Examining Board is sensible and will be offered ahead of the next exam board.

4. The External Examiner's request for an early indication of when scripts would be received and related suggested enhancement of the "Programme Handbook" has been noted. The schedule of key dates is provided to Externals ahead of time, but as the 2012-13 session was quite challenging for a number of reasons (change of Programme Director, restructuring into 20 credit modules, appointment of two new External Examiners, etc.) perhaps this was not as clear as it otherwise might have been. Going forward, we will ensure that 'busy' periods are highlighted to both

Externals before the commencement of the academic year. We will also ensure the Programme Handbook includes this information.

5. The recommendation “that feedback is more closely tied into outcomes and marking criteria, to enable students to understand the reasons for the summative mark received, and to learn formatively” is noted. Marking criteria are being looked at across the different degree programmes offered at Cardiff University (including the SSRM) with the aim of making these more closely aligned to the feedback that is provided to students. We will reinforce the importance of providing feedback that is closely tied to learning outcomes and marking criteria, as well as the necessity of ‘feed-forward’ so that students may improve their learning.”

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.**

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