

EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

Guidance notes are available to support the completion of this Report and are available at <http://learning.cf.ac.uk/quality/review/external-examiners/reports/>.

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Dr Graham J. Holloway		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Reading		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report	BSc Biology, Zoology, Ecology <i>BSc in Biology / Zoology / Ecology (Whole Organism Biology, Zoology and Ecology)</i>		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2015/16	Date of Report:	17/11/2016

For completion by External Examiner in the spaces provided. Please extend spaces where necessary. **Please note this Form will be published online and should not make any reference to any individual students or members of staff.**

1. Programme Structure

The programmes offer a range of content appropriate for the stated aims and learning outcomes. There is a good range of options offering opportunities for specialization, particularly in the third year, and students are provided with the opportunity to leave with a number of useful transferable skills. With respect to this latter point, the placement option is particularly useful.

2. Academic Standards

The range of grades achieved by students at Cardiff compared well with other universities that I am familiar with. The best students were indeed very good. I had the opportunity to read a number of theses during my stay and some of them were outstanding. The majority of students leaving Cardiff are a credit to the University and to the academics that provided the learning platform.

There was a comment by some students last years that class sizes were too big, especially in the third year. I note that this has been addressed during the current academic period by delivering lectures twice when required.

3. The Assessment Process

The assessment process was very rigorous and the amount of feedback provided was, on the whole, very good. The assessment measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended learning outcomes of the programme and is conducted

in line with the University's policies and regulations. Getting students to read feedback continues to be an issue. Only 50% of students on average view feedback on Grademark. This is clearly not good for student progress and learning but also must be a concern when student comment on feedback is such a significant component of student satisfaction the future TEF. It was noted that some academics are unwilling to use the marking descriptors. This produced, on occasions, clear discrepancies between the feedback and the mark given. This needs to be addressed.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

The university system used to allocate degrees is very complicated and, as such, is likely to generate issues. The practice of rounding-off marks will produce the same cohort mean (pretty much) but individually there will be winners and losers. Some students will end up with a slightly higher mark than their unrounded mark whilst other students could finish with a slightly lower mark. Cardiff operates a strict algorithm to allocate the final degree classifications. By rounding-off it is possible to push some students up a classification (by entering them into a 'grey zone') whilst others could drop down a classification. This must be the case and operating a system that disadvantages some students is not acceptable. Perhaps this is another problem thrown up by SIMS but either way it needs to be considered and addressed.

I studied more carefully the issue mentioned in the previous section about descriptors to consider what might be the driver behind reticence to use the list. I found that the descriptors were very wordy and perhaps markers were finding them too long to write out each time. The other problem was that each descriptor spanned an entire classification. It is easy to tell the difference between, for example, an essay worthy of 62% and another worth 68%. That being the case using the same descriptor is inappropriate and I suspect that some markers were uncomfortable using the same wording to justify such differing marks.

Another practice that has the potential to cause problems is the condoning of some failed modules. Here students who just fail a module find that their efforts have been condoned and they are unable to take a resit. If, however, a student fails the module badly they are able to take a resit. This produces the situation that a student doing very badly first time round could end up with a better mark for the module (a capped mark from the resit) than a student who fails by a relatively small margin. I believe that this issue was raised by an examiner last year and has not been acted upon.

The final issue that I would like to raise is the discounting of entire modules when one component has been affected by extenuating circumstances. It would seem sensible to discount the affected part but instead the entire module is discounted. If the subject is one of the student's strongest areas they will clearly have been disadvantaged.

My feeling having completed four years at Cardiff is that the school is trying to work within more and more restrictions/rulings coming down from central administration. Couple that with the vagaries of SIMS and you have a recipe for real problems to develop. The school needs to be allowed to simplify the procedures followed.

5. Preparation / Induction Activity (for new External Examiners only)

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

7. Comments on the Examination of Master's Dissertations (External Examiners for postgraduate Master's Programmes only, see also 9.23-9.29 below)

8. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)

It has been a real pleasure coming to Cardiff over the last four years. The staff within BioSciences have been most accommodating and approachable. Material has been dispatched very efficiently and all exam scripts/thesis have been made available for my visit. I have no complaints at all about the way I have been looked after during my period as examiner. Over the four years I have been aware that procedures do not appear to be running more smoothly, in fact to the contrary to the continual frustration of the BioScience staff. There needs to be a rapid overhaul of the restrictions being placed on the School of BioSciences by central administration to award degrees (I have written about this in more detail above). The concerns of the staff working within the School of BioSciences need to be listened and responded to. There appears to be a detachment between the individuals imposing these restrictions and an awareness of the possible consequences for awarding degree classifications.

9. Annual Report Checklist

Please include appropriate comments within Sections 1-8 above for any answer of 'No'.

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
Programme/Course Information				
9.1	Did you receive sufficient information about the Programme and its contents, learning outcomes and assessments?	✓		
9.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?			✓
Draft Examination Question Papers				
9.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?	✓		
9.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?	✓		
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	✓		
Marking Examination Scripts				
9.6	Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?	✓		
9.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	✓		
9.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	✓		
9.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	✓		
9.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?	✓		
Coursework and Practical Assessments				
9.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	✓		
9.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	✓		
9.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	✓		
9.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	✓		
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			
Sampling of Work				

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	✓		
Examining Board Meeting				
9.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	✓		
9.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	✓		
9.19	Cardiff University recognises the productive contribution of External Examiners to the assessment process and, in particular, to the work of the Examining Board. Have you had adequate opportunities to discuss the Programme and any outstanding concerns with the Examining Board or its officers?	✓		
Joint Examining Board Meeting (if applicable)				
9.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?			
9.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			
Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)				
9.23	Did you receive a sufficient number of Dissertations to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?			
9.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?			
9.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?			
9.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?			
9.27	If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?			
9.28	Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?			
9.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?			

Please return this Report, preferably in a Microsoft Word format, by email to:

ExternalExaminers@cf.ac.uk

Your fee and expenses claim form and receipts, should be sent electronically to the above email address or in hard copy to:

External Examiners, Registry, Cardiff University, McKenzie House, 30-36 Newport Road, Cardiff, CF24 0DE

SAMPLING OF TAUGHT MASTER'S DISSERTATIONS BY EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

External Examiners shall be expected to see prescribed numbers and ranges of Dissertations, but not to mark them, on the following basis:

At least 10% of Dissertations for a postgraduate taught Master's Programme, or a minimum of 10 (whichever is the higher figure) must be seen by the External Examiner(s). Where the total number is less than 10, all Dissertations must be seen by the External Examiner(s) #.

Dissertations seen by External Examiners should include examples from across the whole range of achievement (i.e. Pass with Distinction, Pass, Fail).

External Examiners will retain the right to see other Dissertations at random.

Where more than one External Examiner is appointed on a Programme, at least 10% of Dissertations, or a minimum of 10 (whichever is the higher figure), should be seen collectively by the External Examiners.