



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:	Mary Ann Steane		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Cambridge		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report	MArch Dissertations <i>MArch (dissertations)</i>		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2016/2017	Date of Report:	April 2017

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 external examiners were agreed that broadly speaking, the programme introduction, timetable, and guidance offer students a clear framework within which to develop their thinking and yet some modifications, as suggested in previous years, but not yet taken up, could be helpful. This concerns the introduction of an alternative thesis model to the one currently outlined - which seems most suited to technical or social science topics - and further discussion of the applicability of different methodologies to different research area during both introductory guidance sessions, and subsequent reviews of progress. This year the external examiners agreed that several students – weak, middle ranking and strong - were hampered by their choice of methodology in building a more nuanced and persuasive argument, communicating the key threads and insights of their research.

2. Academic Standards

I can confirm that the work I saw was generally of a satisfactory standard for an MArch level programme (there were only two fails), with the strongest dissertations a pleasure to read, and the weakest passing dissertations sufficiently coherent to pass. I was only sent two of the first class dissertations, but looked at and discussed others with my fellow examiners. Both the failing dissertations were inspected by all examiners during our moderation meeting, in order to agree their failing status and mark. I do however feel that some of the

upper middle ranking work, while meeting the ambitions of the marking criteria as currently framed, lacks topicality/originality as regards the research areas/questions the students seek to address, in comparison to other schools.

3. The Assessment Process

The Cardiff MArch dissertation examining process is thorough, but it was agreed that this year's examination has indicated that there is definitely room for improvement. At the moment the external examiners are expected to read and reach a view on the relative strengths of a spectrum of dissertations (around 13 in 2016/2017) before they attend the examination vivas in Cardiff, following an internal assessment process that involves double marking of each dissertation - by the supervisor and one internal examiner - after which an internal mark is agreed. The external examiners are sent these internal marks ahead of time along with key course material. After the viva the final mark for each dissertation is agreed by the internal and external examiners.

The viva process this year has indicated that the internal assessment procedure is not as rigorous in all cases as it should be, and I would like to suggest that the School considers how it can be improved through a stronger internal marking moderation procedure, involving fewer members of staff. It is hoped that the participation of fewer members of staff, each reading more of the dissertations, would generate greater consistency in marking, allowing external examiners more time to carry out their principal task of reviewing the programme and the standard of work to which it leads, while also assessing more closely any work whose marking has been contentious. Perhaps it is also time for the School to consider running an internal viva process for the dissertations, rather than one involving external examiners. The external examiners could then be invited to review a spectrum of the dissertation work, marks and feedback, while having access to all of this work/information for the year in question.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

This year I did not receive a timetable for the external examination ahead of time, which led to some unhelpful uncertainty about when I/we were expected to start and finish the tasks each day.

It would be helpful if the School could summarise how they have responded to previous year's comments by external examiners at the start of their next visit to the School in March, as I am unclear whether any of my/our more detailed previous comments have been taken up or not. I have commented previously on the significance of dissertation illustrations and their captions, and how this issue is handled in the programme guidance, also on how the School frames its guidance on choice of methodology/dissertation structure referred to above.

In our moderation meeting we could not locate some key information on the MArch Programme – concerning how much the dissertation module is worth as a percentage of the overall mark. It would be helpful if this could be included in future at the start of the guidance document on the MArch Dissertation, and/or in a summary of the whole course.

I agree with my fellow examiner that the criterion of originality should be emphasised more strongly in the marking and classing criteria for MArch dissertations.

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

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

While I have already expressed doubts about aspects of the current assessment process above, I would like to note here that the students generally performed well in the vivas, several of them demonstrating a more comprehensive grasp of their topic than they had conveyed in the documents handed in, while for others the viva highlighted weaknesses or degrees of confusion. The chance to discuss possible future directions for research interests as well as to address omissions or inconsistencies etc. was valuable.

While only a few students had made clear reference to their own ambitions as designers in their dissertations, the issue of motivation emerged several times, enabling a number of them to communicate the relevance/applicability of their findings more effectively by outlining how they were also being explored in current design projects.

It was agreed amongst the examiners that further attention might be given to how the dissertation module is taught. I am sympathetic to the idea, suggested by a fellow examiner, that small group sessions attended by students and supervisors at mid-stage to review progress (aims/methodology/scope/focus) has the potential to generate a helpful cross-fertilisation of ideas. Last year I suggested that an event at which students are expected to outline their research projects via brief PowerPoint presentations might stimulate useful intra-unit discussion about the relevance and significance of such work. Events of this kind have been student led in my institution, although supervisors can attend if they wish.

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

See remarks above, particularly section 3.

In reporting on the health of the MArch Programme I feel it would be useful for external examiners to be able to see assessment feedback from the internal examiners, particularly if the internal assessment moderation process suggested above is adopted. This point is raised under coursework in the table below, but applies equally to dissertations.

8. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)

I have enjoyed acting as external examiner of the MArch dissertations at Cardiff for the last four years. The School has always made me feel welcome, and the event has been well organised, with enough time scheduled to address the key issues before, during and at the end of the process. Discussion of the merits of the work under consideration has always remained constructive. Most of the students display an enjoyable enthusiasm and thoughtfulness in commenting on the aspirations behind - and insights of - their research.

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?	No, see remarks above		
9.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?			No
Draft Examination Question Papers				
9.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?			N/A
9.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?			N/A
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			N/A
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?			N/A
9.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?			N/A
9.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?			N/A
9.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?			N/A
9.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?			N/A
Coursework and Practical Assessments				
9.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?			N/A
9.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?			N/A
9.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?			N/A
9.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?			N/A
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
Sampling of Work				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Yes		
Examining Board Meeting				

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
9.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	Yes, but only the Exam Board for Dissertations		
9.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	Yes		
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?	Yes		
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?			N/A
9.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			N/A
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?	Yes		
9.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?	Yes		
9.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?			Yes with the standard, no with the consistency
9.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?	Yes		
9.27	If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?	Yes		
9.28	Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?	Yes, in general,		

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
		but see remarks above		
9.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?	Yes, in general, but see remarks above		

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.