



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:	Vanessa May		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Manchester		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report	Sociology/School of Social Sciences		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2016-17	Date of Report:	5 July 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 structure of the programme is appropriate, with the core modules covering theory and method, and an impressive range of optional modules. Learning outcomes for all modules are helpfully documented in the Undergraduate Module Catalogues that are published for each level of study. The content of the programme reflects the latest developments in the field.

2. Academic Standards

The programme maintains relevant subject benchmark standards. The quality of paperwork was overall good, particularly the Undergraduate Module Catalogues and the Assessment Handbook for staff and students. I also note that the quality of module outlines has also improved during my tenure as external examiner. The quality of student work on the modules that I examined was overall high. As in previous years, I was particularly impressed by the fact that all of the modules required students to apply sociological thinking to 'real world' issues of their own choice. The quality of student work is comparable with other institutions that I have worked in.

This is my fifth year as external examiner for Cardiff University, and once again I can note that module convenors put a lot of work into keeping their modules fresh, and that each year, new modules are offered that reflect the cutting edge of sociology. In discussions with staff it was clear that members of staff are continuously striving to improve their modules so as to ensure that pedagogical and academic aims and objectives are met. This is a sign of active engagement with teaching. All modules also engaged with current social developments, most notably developments in ICT and social media, as well as the recent political upheaval in the UK and beyond (Brexit, Trump). I

was also glad to note that ethnography is being kept so well alive in the Social Sciences at Cardiff; quite a few of the modules I examined had some ethnographic elements to the coursework. Teaching undergraduate students ethnographic skills is no easy task, and the willingness of so many module convenors to embark upon this task is further testament to how dedicated staff are to delivering a meaningful programme of undergraduate studies.

3. The Assessment Process

I was impressed by the variety of types of coursework assessment available to students: group work, set essay questions, projects (in some cases involving small-scale empirical research). This is testament to the creative ways in which staff at Cardiff University approach assessment. Much of the coursework allows students to tailor their essays and group work to issues/topics that are of interest to them. No doubt this helps maintain student interest in the work they are doing, and much of the work submitted by students has a clear sense of enthusiasm to it, because they are allowed to make sense of sociological theories in relation to issues that are close to their hearts.

I was not always sure what form of formative feedback students received on the modules. Perhaps this could be expressed more clearly in the module handouts.

The quality of marking was overall very good, with students being given a clear sense of why they received the mark they did. In some cases however, I would urge caution in terms of wording used in feedback, i.e. not to say 'this is a good essay' for essays both in the 2:2 and 2:1 categories. I understand the wish to be encouraging in our feedback, but this can sometimes lead to feedback that is not fully clear in terms of the quality of the work. I am happy to note that most of the modules used a wide range of marks, many of them up to the lower 80s (and on the modules that did not reach these highest marks, this reflects the quality of student work on that module rather than any reluctance on the part of staff to use the full range of marks).

This year, most of the necessary paperwork related to marking and moderation of the modules was easily accessible in a folder on Learning Central (though perhaps the existence of this folder could be more strongly emphasised to external examiners – I found it rather late in the day). Moderation reports and list of marks were provided for all modules, first marker reports were available for most modules – I can confirm that the moderation process is rigorous and meaningful, e.g. there is evidence that first markers have taken the moderation comments into consideration and tweaked their feedback accordingly. I was also grateful for the opportunity to look at overviews of module results over the last three years (as has been requested by externals in past years). In my mind, the variation across years is within a normal range.

The quantity of feedback provided on coursework varied somewhat across the modules. On some modules, sparse feedback was provided (only a few sentences) and this tended to be at a rather general level, while on other modules, students received both annotated comments and extensive text feedback. I have raised this issue with the relevant module convenors, and I also note that this had been picked up in the moderation, but this might be something that could be discussed among colleagues to reach an agreement as to some minimum standard regarding the length and quality of feedback. The style of feedback differs between modules. Some markers provided comments in relation to marking criteria, others did not. There is also uneven use of 'feed forward' comments that tell the student how they could in the future improve on their work.

I would like to repeat my suggestion from last year that the School consider adopting the use of the 'rubric' function on Grademark, whereby each piece of coursework is numerically graded in relation to key learning outcomes. This can be set so that it appears as a default on all coursework submitted via Grademark. Such a rubric would serve two functions. First, it would be a quick and easy way for staff to give feedback related to the marking criteria, without having to write this in their general comments, thus giving them more time to give specific comments on each essay. Second, this would be an easy way for students to gain an overview of which marking criteria they did well on and which they need to still work on.

I would also like to repeat a comment from my report last year, namely that it is a shame that the good practice involved in the old essay feedback sheet, which provided a section on things to commend and things to improve in future work, as well as an indication of how well the student did on the key assessment criteria. Some markers have kept up this good practice even after the transfer to online marking, but I fear that it is at risk of being lost. I would therefore reiterate my suggestion from the past two years that the teaching and learning committee consider ways in which aspects of the old feedback form could be incorporated within Grademark (e.g. by utilizing the rubric function as suggested above). In addition, an agreement that all staff include in their general essay comments sections highlighting things to commend and things to improve ('feed forward') would also be helpful.

Regarding exam marking, I repeat my suggestion from last year, namely that the School might want to consider a policy whereby markers write, at the end of each script, a sentence or two to summarise reasons behind the mark given. Such comments would make it easier for moderators and external examiners to judge how marking decisions have been reached.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

Most of the issues I have raised over the past five years have been responded to and taken on board (apart from the issues I raise again above). For example, a wider range of marks is generally being used, and the module handbooks have become more streamlined, containing most of the necessary information. And this year, external examiners received all the necessary paperwork related to the moderation process.

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

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

I examined a fascinating collection of modules that introduce students to classical sociological theorising and make it relevant to current societies. What is particularly striking is how many of the modules are able to bring in topics and materials that no doubt speak to students' lives and experiences, thus allowing them to develop their sociological imagination and analytical skills in relation to their everyday lives.

The quality of feedback on coursework was particularly good in Ethnography and Everyday Life; Digital Society; and Science, Risk and Resistance.

There are some examples of good practice that I would like to particularly commend (the fact that I have more to say about the first three modules merely reflects the fact that I have been examining

these for some years now and have got to know them very well, while the latter three were new modules for me):

Cultural Sociology: Excellent use of Blackboard, containing lecture notes and several readings in PDF form per lecture. Exemplary module handouts with aims and learning outcomes, contact details, assessment information and lecture blurbs and reading lists. The module content has changed quite a bit in the last couple of years, probably to reflect the new module convenor's interests – evidence of research-led teaching. The main assessment, which consisted of a small research project, also worked very well and produced some interesting essays that allowed students to apply sociological theories to their everyday experiences. The essay writing guidance was detailed and gave students step-by-step and exhaustive advice on how to go about conducting and writing up their research project. The lectures were centred around particular 'real life' questions that the theories were aimed to answer. In lectures, students are also asked to apply these theories to their everyday lives – this is good both in terms of getting students to apply their sociological imagination, but also in preparation for the assessment. Thus the lectures are able to demonstrate the relevance of sociology to students' everyday lives, and I appreciate how much work has gone into designing the lectures in this way. I understand that this one of the modules that will be discontinued in the programme restructure. While I understand the need for such a restructure, I hope that future modules are able to offer students a similar ability to applying theories to empirical data and to hands-on ethnographic research.

Digital Sociology: The logic of the module works well, starting out with theories of information/digital society, followed by digital methods of research. The module handout was well structured and gave students all the key information in one place. Each lecture was structured around a key question, sparking students' interest in the topic. Each lecture began with a recap of the previous week's lecture and a look ahead to the next week(s) – this ensures a sense of continuity and coherence across the module. The lectures in the Spring contained 'practical' examples of recent or ongoing research projects by guest lecturers. This assures that students are being taught by the experts in the methods in question, which also allows for a variety of methods to be covered in one module. The assessments were well structured, with the second piece of coursework building on the first. The seminars were geared towards the assessment, and it was very clear from the module handout and from the convenors feedback on students' coursework, that she was making herself very available for the students to offer them guidance on the coursework. The module taught students important research skills, and I noted that in their coursework, students had made use of a wide range of analytical software, including Ncapture and NVivo. It is great that students can play to their strengths by choosing the topic of their project. This is then reflected in the level of engagement that is present in some of the essays. The feedback provided on coursework was very good, patient and extensive. The module convenor makes use of the rubric function on Grademark, offering detailed feedback relating to each of the learning outcomes.

New Frontiers (Autumn): The module handout is excellent, containing well written lecture blurbs that read like a detective novel and detailed advice on the assessment. It was very clear what students had to do in order to gain a high mark in the coursework. I noted the use of relevant contemporary moral dilemmas as basis for seminar discussions – making the module content come 'alive' for students. Students were also provided with lists of questions to consider for the seminars, which will have helped them come to grips with material that is no doubt challenging for many undergraduate students. Learning Central was well organized and contained, for each lecture, slides and a list of required of readings. The lecture slides were fantastic: they told a story in engaging language. I was impressed with how clearly moral philosophy was explained. The feedback provided on coursework was exemplary: detailed, tailor-made feedback was given for each essay. The essays were annotated to show students where they did well and where they could improve their work, and it was clear that the module convenor had taken the time to really engage with what the students were writing. I was impressed by the fact that the level of feedback remained constant across the mark range – the comments provided on first class essays were just as detailed as those

provided on essays that failed or gained a third class mark. This means that students will have gained a clear idea of what they did right, as well as what they could have done differently. The full range of marks was used for this module (highest mark 92). Even the somewhat weaker students in the 2:2 range have written quite good essays. In other words, I am impressed by what students have learnt during this module.

New Frontiers (Spring): New Frontiers continues to introduce students to cutting-edge social scientific issues. This year, the module 'On the move and on foot' introduced students to substantively and methodologically fresh and exciting thinking about cities, mobility and the senses, based on a recent edited collection edited by the module convenor. The module involved lectures by several staff members whose research involves various forms of mobility in/through urban spaces. This is research-led teaching at its best. A variety of teaching methods were used in a creative fashion, including readings, lectures, walks, and films. The module combined theory with empirical application, leading students on a number of walks through the city and asking them to consider the various sensory experiences that these give rise to. I was also glad to see so many readings uploaded onto Learning Central.

Science, risk and resistance: Excellent module handout with very clear and detailed learning outcomes, comprehensive reading lists and detailed guidance on assessment. Learning Central was clearly organized with lecture slides and copies of key readings provided for each week. The lectures covered timely topics, e.g. in relation to the recent 'post-truth' culture and a general denigration of 'experts'. The seminars were clearly tied to the assessment in the autumn. Very patient and in-depth feedback was provided on coursework, including both detailed annotated comments and equally detailed text feedback, where the marker was trying to figure out unclear points and provide ways in which these could have been improved or further developed. The quality of the teaching is reflected how well the students did also in the exam, which covered quite difficult theoretical material.

Power, Culture and Identity: The module handouts were clear and well structured. Quite a number of readings were uploaded to Learning Central. Very interesting lecture materials – fascinating material covered that is both theoretical (classics such as Goffman and Foucault covered in detail) and empirically interesting (topical issues such as poverty porn and disability). Student engagement was clearly high on this module, as evidenced by the fascinating coursework submitted by the students. The feedback provided on coursework was good, including both annotated comments on the essays and text feedback outlining what each student had done well and what could be improved in their work. It was also clear that the module convenor was very accessible for student support.

Ethnography and Everyday Life: The module handout is written in a clear and engaging conversational style, avoiding jargon-filled lecture blurbs. This is a well thought through module: in the autumn, students are introduced to ethnography as a sensibility, and in the spring, they are taught ethnographic fieldwork techniques to apply to their own micro-study. Students were also taken out into the field – and I thought that the observation in public undertaken by students, whereby they observed students on another module doing a 'doing noting' experiment in public space, was a stroke of genius (and one that I hope to be able to copy in my own teaching). It is also an excellent idea to get students to write a book review of an ethnography in the autumn semester – this is good preparation for the spring coursework which entails conducting and writing up a micro-study of their own.

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)

I have immensely enjoyed my experience of external examining at Cardiff University – this is indeed the reason I agreed to extend my tenure by one extra year. The quality of teaching and of student work is consistently high. Much thought goes into teaching: content of modules, learning outcomes, lectures, seminars and assessment, including feedback. Every year, I have tried out some aspect of good practice that I have come across at Cardiff in my own teaching.

I have noted over the years that the curriculum is constantly being refreshed to reflect changes in teaching staff, but also developments within sociology as well as in society. I have been particularly impressed by the fact that many of the modules require students to apply sociological thinking to 'real world' issues of their own choice, which, in my mind, is translated into high levels of student engagement. Students are also taught how to argue a point clearly, and I have been impressed with the quality of writing among students at Cardiff.

I have also enjoyed the fact that external examining is taken seriously by the School of Social Sciences. I have valued the opportunity to meet module convenors to discuss their modules. These conversations have felt meaningful, and have offered an opportunity for dialogue about good teaching practice. It is also clear that the exam boards are run in a rigorous and student-centred way. Staff have ample opportunity to voice any concerns and regulations are clearly explained. Any discussions that have been required, for example regarding decisions surrounding policy and procedure, have been allowed sufficient time and consideration.

Looking back, I remember my first year as being a bit bumpy in terms of learning the ropes, and I felt like I was frequently pestering [REDACTED] with practical questions relating to when I would expect to receive coursework/exam scripts, when these would have to be read by, and whether any feedback was expected from me before the exam boards. Given the restructuring of the administrative office of the School, it would be worth considering whether some kind of template could be prepared for external examiners that sets out what the role entails, and which tasks are expected to be done when. Even as an 'old hand', I would have welcomed occasional reminders from the School to indicate when coursework is available for me to review.

And finally, external examiners are looked after extremely well by the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. The hotel we have usually been put up in is very comfortable and within easy access of the university, and the hospitality shown towards external examiners by the School is exemplary. My yearly visits to Cardiff have been the high point of my June for the past five years, and I will miss them.

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?	Y		
9.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?			N/A
Draft Examination Question Papers				
9.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?	Y		
9.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?	Y		
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?	Y		
9.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	Y		
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	
9.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	Y		
9.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?	Y		
Coursework and Practical Assessments				
9.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	Y		
9.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	Y		
9.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	Y		
9.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	Y		
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			
Sampling of Work				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
Examining Board Meeting				
9.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	Y		
9.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	Y		
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	Y		

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
	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?	Y		
9.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?	Y		
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?	Y		
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.