

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM (TAUGHT PROGRAMMES)



External Examiners are required to complete and submit Reports at least annually and within one month of the programme Examining Board.

Completed External Examiner Report Forms should be sent to:

ExternalExaminers@cardiff.ac.uk

Arrangements for the payment of fees and expenses will be made upon receipt of this Report Form and upon receipt in hard copy of a completed External Examiner Claim Form for Reimbursement of Fees and Expenses and expenses receipts. This Report Form and the associated Claim Form may be downloaded at:

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/regis/ifs/exex/rep/index.html>

Please note that External Examiner reports are circulated widely in order that any necessary action can be taken. A copy of the final report of an External Examiner will also be passed to their successor.

Cardiff University prefers External Examiners to complete their Report Forms electronically and to submit them by email as indicated above. If, for any reason an External Examiner prefers to provide their report in hard copy it should be sent to *Mr. Clive Brown, Registry Officer, Registry, Cardiff University, McKenzie House, 30-36 Newport Road, Cardiff, CF24 0DE.*

**PAYMENT OF FEES CANNOT BE AUTHORISED UNTIL RECEIPT OF THIS COMPLETED FORM
AND THE ASSOCIATED CLAIM FORM**

Name of External Examiner: Clare Bryant

Institution: The University of Cambridge

Programme of study and subject(s) examined: MRes in Bioscience

Academic Year/Session to which this report applies: 2014-2015

Freedom of Information Act

The University is a public authority and therefore subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The University may therefore be required to publish the whole or parts of any reports and correspondence submitted by its External Examiners. The University also reserves the right to choose to publish the whole or parts of any reports submitted by its External Examiners.

SECTION A

1.1 Programme Structure

Comment upon the appropriateness of the structure and content of the programme in relation to its stated aims, learning outcomes and programme specification (if available).

The program is well organised and meets the aims as stated in the course handbook. The course provides a strong background in basic research techniques including experimental design, statistical analysis and experimental methodologies. The poster, grant writing and public communication sections are important skills for the students to acquire in order to develop a research career. This year the students all performed extremely well in this section of the course such that new marking criteria will need to be introduced to discriminate the candidates from each other! The dissertation section of the course is well organised and the students all submitted documents which were generally of a good standard this year. The oral presentations ran smoothly and this year were of a consistently good standard. It would be useful for the new cohort of students to meet the outgoing students and hear these presentations. The MRes students from 2014-2015 were a good cohort who worked very well together. There appear to be a few organisational issues this year, that I have not encountered before, amongst the MRes management structure that need to be solved for the 2015-2016. These mainly seem to be due to the increased pressure on the staff from the undergraduate course meaning they were short of time particularly because of the tight time-table at the end of the MRes course between dissertation submission and the final marking deadline.

The MRes course remains very popular with the students and all of them felt their job prospects were very much enhanced by the course. It was notable that all except for 1 of the students wanted to do a PhD, many already have PhD places and the remaining student had chosen a career path as a direct result of his studies in Cardiff. The students would all recommend the MRes course to others who may be considering a masters degree. The students felt there was an excellent choice of projects available and all of them were able to choose one that fitted their interests. The students felt the standards of project supervision were generally excellent. In particular the students felt very well supported by the MRes staff. They commented how valuable the staff student committee was and really appreciated that the staff listened to and acted upon student concerns. The examining process is fair and excellent.

██████████ and her team of staff continue to work well together and to run an outstanding MRes course that exceeds all the student expectations. There were some organisational issues this year due, I think, to staff being over stretched with undergraduate commitments. It is essential that there is parity in support for the teaching staff for undergraduate and postgraduate courses and this does not appear to be the case at the moment. Despite this the MRes is still an outstanding success for the students and the staff should be congratulated on running a successful flagship Masters course for the University of Cardiff. A particular strength of the MRes course is that the students can complete project work in the UK or abroad. The final marks of the MRes students this year are again very good and reflect the fact that these students worked very hard. This suggests that the admissions process and course design are working very well.

Again this year we discussed with the staff about how the marks were awarded for the project part of the MRes. I think it is now essential that a marking criteria rubric is completed for every dissertation project such that a clear explanation is available as to how the two internal markers arrive at their thesis marks. This year there was some disagreement between the external examiners and the internal markers. A clear annotation of the marking criteria would have helped to clarify how the internal mark was achieved. These problems arose with students who had clearly worked outstandingly hard in the laboratory but there were issues with the quality of their dissertation write up resulting in some marks that appeared a little high. It is essential that the examiners received pdf not word versions of the dissertations for assessment.

It would be very interesting to see what happens to the graduates from the MRes course. It is important now that the statistics of the graduates from the last 5 years could be examined to see how the students have progressed in their careers. This information could then be available for prospective applicants to the Cardiff MRes course.

1.2 Comparability of Standards

Comment upon the comparability of the standards of the programme with similar programmes nationally and the performance of the students in relation to their peers on similar programmes. In those subject areas where a subject benchmark statement is available, have the students demonstrated achievement of the appropriate benchmark standard?

The students were very good again this year.

1.3 The Examination Process

Comment upon the appropriateness of the assessment methods and balance between them (i.e. unseen written papers, essays/dissertations, orals, etc), the marking scheme, procedure for the classification of the award and the overall conduct and fairness of the examination and assessment processes.

The assessment methods for the dissertations were broadly appropriate and fair, but in some cases it was not clear how the final mark had been awarded. This was a problem in two cases where the marks for the written dissertation were a little higher than my assessment of the documents and without marking criteria it was not clear to me how the final grade had been achieved. My assessment of the orals largely matched with the internal assessment.

SECTION A (Continued)

1.4 How did procedures/arrangements compare this year with previous years? Have any or all of the recommendations made by you or your predecessor last year been actioned?

My recommendations from last year have largely been implemented. A particular concern of the students in January was the lack of a dedicated computer laboratory facility for the MRes course work. A new facility is being considered by the centre and it is absolutely essential that the students have access to a quality computing teaching facility for their course work.

1.5 If this is your first year as External Examiner please comment upon whether the school induction activities (if applicable), External Examiner Handbook and other documentation provided helped you to fulfil your role and responsibilities as an External Examiner. Are there any ways in which the process could be improved?

N/A

1.6 Please give examples, if appropriate, of good or noteworthy practice in the following areas which you wish to draw to the wider attention of the University:

- (i) alignment of learning outcomes with assessment tasks;
- (ii) methods of enhancing consistency of marking;
- (iii) explicitness of information relating to assessment;
- (iv) other practice in the structure, delivery and assessment of the programme.

The design of the course makes the students uniquely placed to follow a research career and this is reflected in the fact that over 50% of this year's student cohort have already secured PhD places. The bioscience, ecology and public health components give the student a broad base to work from. The experimental design and mathematical elements of the course are unusual and useful in shaping how a student thinks about a research project. The biomedical spread of techniques, communication and technical skills will be very helpful to students when thinking about their research projects and how they may address the questions they are attempting to answer in their practical work. The length of the project period is a particular strength as it allows the students to perform a proper, in depth, research study. The dissertations and oral presentations were generally of an excellent standard. The dissertation stage is particularly well run.

1.7 If this is your final year as External Examiner please provide an overview of your period of office which may be passed on to your successor.

The MRes course was already well established by the time I was appointed as an external examiner. It has been clear to me from the first that this is an excellent MRes course with a challenging, but very valuable, taught component followed by an excellent project module. The students come to the Cardiff MRes course usually to gain a research training to facilitate their admission to a PhD program. Those students who are unsure as to whether or not they wish to do a PhD use the MRes course to help them determine whether or not research is for them. On every visit the examiners have been given plenty of time with the students, without the presence of the staff, to fully discuss the course and explore any issues or difficulties. In my experience the students are happy to give constructive feedback to us on the course. All the students are very happy with the MRes course which exceeds their expectations and cements their career choices. In short the Cardiff MRes does what I think a masters course should do and prepares the students for their future careers.

During my time as an external examiner some issues have arisen that we have discussed with the exam board. As an external we have made some recommendations all of which have been carefully considered and acted upon by the MRes management. This has meant the course has made minor modifications often at the request of the students to allow the course to continue to improve and meet the student needs. At no time have I ever met with anything other than enthusiasm from the Cardiff MRes staff to consider and implement constructive suggestions. When the examiners have disagreed with the MRes staff a constructive discussion has followed and compromises have been reached to the satisfaction of everyone. I would recommend to my successor to openly express any concerns to the MRes staff at the Exam Board meeting and to discuss potential strategies for course improvement.

In my last year I have been a bit concerned that the MRes staff are under a massively increased work burden from the large increase in undergraduate student numbers. The staff are already very busy and this extra work burden may impact on whether they can continue to maintain the levels of excellence in the delivery of the MRes course. My final session as an examiner suggests that this is the case with staff struggling to meet the tight autumn deadlines between submission of the dissertations and the final exam board meeting. Hopefully this situation will be resolved for the next academic year.

There have been major problems for me with the registry such that I was not paid for my January exam board work and I did not receive my expenses despite submitting my examiners report in February. This is a particular problem when the University will not pay for the hotel accommodation so examiners are expected to carry both travel and accommodation costs on their credit cards. When I queried the costs in August I found that the centre had lost my travel costs submission and had forgotten to pay me. This is completely unacceptable and was totally due to problems in the registry and not to do with the MRes staff or organisation. I would advise my successor to keep copies of all paper work submitted to the centre and follow up after sending in their paperwork to ensure they are paid in good time following the submission of their claims.

In conclusion my time as an external examiner for the Cardiff MRes course has highlighted that this is an excellent course that delivers precisely what it sets out to do. The course exceeds the student expectations (for both home and international candidates) and the MRes staff should be congratulated on running a flag ship masters course for Cardiff University. My concern is that the MRes staff are now under increasing pressure from the large increase in undergraduate student numbers. I hope that the centre will ensure that the MRes management staff receive full support such that they can continue to run an excellent course that is both popular and extremely useful to its students.

SECTION B

Please respond to the following questions by ticking the appropriate box. Please make appropriate comments if your answers are 'No'.

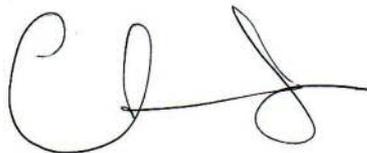
Programme/Course Information		Yes	No	N/A
2.1	Did you receive sufficient information about the programme/course contents, learning outcomes and assessments?	X		

2.2 Comments				
The early receipt of the dissertations was very helpful.				
Examination Question Papers		Yes	No	N/A
2.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?			X
2.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions satisfactory?			X
2.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			X
2.6	Were you afforded access to a sample of in-course assessments?	X		
2.7 Comments				
Marking Examination Scripts		Yes	No	N/A
2.8	Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?	X		
2.9	Were the methods of assessment well balanced and fair? Did they reflect the programme's objectives?	X		
2.10	Were examination/assessment procedures and the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?	X		
2.11	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	X		
2.12	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?	X		
2.13	Were satisfactory arrangements made for you to conduct any necessary <i>viva voce</i> examinations?			X
2.14 Comments				

SECTION B (Continued)				
Coursework/Dissertations/Projects		Yes	No	N/A
2.15	Was the choice and assessment of coursework/dissertations/projects satisfactory?	X		
2.16	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	X		
2.17 Comments				
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)		Yes	No	N/A
2.18	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			X
2.19	Was the assessment of such work satisfactory?			X
2.20 Comments				
Examining Board Meeting		Yes	No	N/A
2.21	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	X		
2.22	Was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?	X		
2.23	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the programme?	X		
2.24	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(s) of Study and any outstanding concerns with the Examining Board or its officers?	X		
Joint Examining Board Meeting (if applicable)				
2.25	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board (i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees)?			X

2.26	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			X
2.27	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			X

2.28 Comments

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Clive Brown', written in a cursive style.

Signed: _____

_Date: Sept 20th 2015 _____

Please return this report by emailing to: ExternalExaminers@cf.ac.uk

Your fee and expenses claim form, and any reports which cannot be emailed, should be sent to:

[Mr. Clive Brown, Registry Officer, Registry, Cardiff University, McKenzie House, 30-36 Newport Road, Cardiff, CF24 0DE.](#)