

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>

External Examiner Reports are made available in full to students. For this reason, and in accordance with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, individual staff and students should not be named within the Report.

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: Dr Steven Sait

Institution:

Programme of study and subject(s) examined: Master of Research in Biosciences

Academic Year/Session to which this report applies: 2014/15

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 Master of Research in Biosciences is well-designed, demonstrating imagination and innovation, well-structured and benefits from a broad range of teaching methods and assessments. In terms of the objectives, which are aligned with teaching advanced biological concepts and practical training, the programme achieves the objectives outlined in the module/programme handbooks. The programme employs a broad range of teaching methods, including tutorials, seminars, workshops and lectures, which are augmented by autonomous, self-directed learning that is appropriate for advanced masters level. The broad range of assessments is suitably challenging for students in different ways and thoroughly tests a suite of academic, practical and generic skills. In terms of the structure and design of the whole programme, Stage 1 offers a very sound and firm basis from which the students are very well-placed to embark on their research projects.

The standards achieved by the students are to be expected and appropriate for an advanced programme and to some extent reflects the high quality of students attracted to the programme. The administration of the assessments and feedback was generally good overall, and was facilitated by a clear process of mark moderation. The administration of assessments followed clear guidelines and procedures, which were adhered to throughout. The institutional policies and procedures for assessment are detailed and appropriate for advanced masters and help deal with any issues in a clear and unequivocal manner.

The students, without exception, enjoy Stage 1, having only minor issues, and they value the fact that it is challenging and broad-ranging in terms of teaching and assessments, and provides an excellent foundation to the extended research project. It was clear from the both the group and individual interviews that the students are all enthusiastic and highly motivated about their projects and eager to get started. Arising from the interviews, it is clear from the student perspective that there is an issue concerning the quality of computing teaching space, which is currently shared with non-MRes teaching/students. This needs to be addressed or there is a risk of undermining what is currently an excellent programme. For some students the provision of on-line introductory material/software (e.g. LINEX and R) before they arrived would help them to get up to speed when the course started. There was some concern about the imbalance in the amount of work required and time available for different components of modules and, at least to begin with, uncertainty about expectations with respect to assessments; clearer guidance here would be valued. Some idea of progression/achievement through the programme would also be appreciated.

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 standard of work across the range of Stage 1 taught modules, which employed a variety of assessment approaches and skills, was high and reflected the good quality of students recruited to the programme. Overall the standard of students and their work was comparable with my own institution and with a similar programme I have examined in another institution.

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.

Across the Stage 1 modules the average marks and spread of marks were appropriate for masters level teaching and assessment and were commensurate with my own institution. The students were clearly being assessed appropriately. Good practice was demonstrated consistently by moderation of the marks where appropriate. The amount of comment and feedback was generally very good, in some cases outstanding, but consistency among staff and across modules is required, in particular with respect to clearly identifying areas of weakness and what

students can do to improve. For example, with multiple assessments, more rapid formative feedback after each assessment can be used to help the students improve their performance in other related assessments. The link between the comments/feedback and the mark awarded could be more transparent both for the students and examiners and more aligned with the marking criteria in some cases. The marks were awarded in accordance with the marking criteria, which were clear and unequivocal. The range of assessment methods was well-balanced, varied and designed to test and develop a broad range of skills, both discipline-specific and generic, including experimental design, writing skills, critical analysis and oral presentation.

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?

This was my first year and I found that the arrangements were excellent. The whole process was carried out in a well-organised and professional manner.

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?

The External Examiner handbook, MRes student handbook, previous External Examiner reports and other documentation were all very helpful in helping me to understand the programme structure, aims, learning outcomes, etc, and so have enabled me to adequately assess the programme. At this stage I don't see a need to change the process.

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 programme demonstrates imagination and innovation in design and structure. The broad range of teaching and assessments is challenging for students in different ways and tests a suite of academic, practical and generic skills; this sets an excellent foundation for embarking on a research-focused career. Marking is clear and unequivocal and aligned with comprehensive marking criteria. Moderation of marks is routinely applied when appropriate, which helps to maintain rigour of the assessment process.

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.

N/A

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

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				
The amount of comment and feedback was generally very good, but there needs to be more consistency among staff and across modules. Feedback on assessments that suggest/highlight aspects for improvement in subsequent assessments would be very useful.				
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				
<p>Signed:  Date: 7th July 2015</p>				
Please return this report by email 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.				

