



## 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:	Adam Benham		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Durham University		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report	Biosciences (Biomolecular modules; BSc in Biochemistry, BSc in Genetics, BSc in Molecular Biology and the BSc in Biotechnology)		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2015-16	Date of Report:	28-06-15

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 course programme is coherent and relevant to the needs of modern biological scientists. Course materials were provided in good time and the handbooks provided to the students are user friendly and clear. There is a broad based compulsory programme at first year, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to develop a strong foundation across the biological sciences. There is a considerable range of options for students in their final year, although this diversity of choice results in fluctuating numbers of students across the different modules, which has implications for staff:student ratios and staff workloads. The move to a more streamlined degree programme (Biology, Biomedical Sciences, Biochemistry and Neurosciences) should help address this. It is pleasing to see the School showcasing the Neurosciences, as this is an area of training need and opportunity. Students have the option to undertake a professional training year, which is sensibly weighted. The programme reflects the expected regulatory standards.

### 2. Academic Standards

In my opinion, the Biosciences degree programmes maintain the threshold academic standards in accordance with QAA. The academic standards achieved by undergraduate Biologists at Cardiff are comparable with those at my home institution (Durham) and other Russell Group Universities.

I enjoyed the opportunity to meet students on the programme when I visited the School in February. The students were engaged with their studies and most were very

complimentary about the School and University. Some concern was raised that not all students had the opportunity to do a laboratory project, and for those doing a project, it was suggested that some students were able to extend their period of laboratory work, whereas other were not. Although these comments are anecdotal, consideration should be given to overtly specifying the time period that students spend in the laboratory (or field) and in ensuring that all supervisors comply with their supervisory responsibilities to the project students. Some students expressed concern over the relevance of statistics teaching and would have preferred training in the use of SPSS rather than (or alongside) R. It was felt that the statistics lectures did not fully prepare the students for their workshop and that more group work would have been beneficial. The students that I spoke to would appreciate a standardisation of the materials provided online through Learning Central. In terms of library facilities, some students felt that desks were too small in the newly refurbished lecture theatre and that the Biomed library didn't have enough space to sit in. Overall, the students were very appreciative of lecturers who showed a passion for their subject, engaged in a dialog with the students and provided mid-session feedback.

### **3. The Assessment Process**

The assessments are appropriately designed. The assessment process is suitably applied and is conducted in accordance with the Universities policies and regulations. Assessment is rigorous, varied and consistent, comprising written examination papers, practical assessment, oral/poster presentations, group work, project work and other continuous assessment exercises e.g. data handling. Assessment criteria and marking schemes are available and adhered to. There was clear evidence of scrutiny of exam papers. Award classification boundaries are set appropriately; however, I think there is a tendency to be quite tough on students at the higher end, resulting in the award of fewer first class degrees than might be expected. Assessments in modules at the same level again were broadly comparable, but there were one or two discrepancies: for example, in oral presentations being worth different marks across level 3 modules.

I was asked to comment on the exam papers and model answers in advance, in accordance with regulatory procedures. The provision of these second and third year papers and model answers by the School was somewhat piecemeal and could be improved. It would be better for external examiners to receive all the papers and model answers at the same time in November, for both the May and resit papers. The scope of questions that I saw was appropriate and a breadth of topics was examined for most modules. I did have some concerns that the topics covered in one module (BI3221; Membrane Biochemistry and Dynamics) were rather narrow and I was not clear why this module exam required 2 answers from 6 (instead of 2 from 5). However, this did not appear to negatively influence exam performance; in fact, this module attracted a relatively high number of first class examination marks.

Some questions on the examination papers that I looked at attracted far more answers than others (e.g. for BI3126 Human Infectious Diseases). Although there did not seem to be any underlying structural reason for this, the School should be mindful of this going forward into next year.

It was good to see Registry engaging with the Examining Board, which helped to clarify procedural points in a time-effective manner. However, it was disappointing that the Registry staff left the exam board before the external examiners delivered their verbal reports. It would be beneficial if the Registry representatives remained for the entire

exam board, to help the external examiners understand procedural matters, and to respond to any questions or comments that the external examiners may have about Registry. I also felt that some procedural issues and discussions of mitigating circumstances could have been dealt with prior to the final exam board.

There does seem to be an issue with the user-friendliness of the SIMS system that the centre uses for data processing, which resulted in the inability of the School to provide excel spread sheets to enable the external examiners to drill down fully into student datasets. The habit of “rounding” student marks also appears to be driven by software issues, rather than on academic grounds; I would like the University to consider and comment on whether this procedure is in the best academic interests of Cardiff students.

#### **4. Year-on-Year Comments**

This is my first year as an external examiner and therefore I have not previously reported to the University or School. However, a written response was received to my predecessors report. The School and University has either responded to or acted on most of the comments raised by the previous external examiner, although there are some ongoing issues with access to work and the provision of spread sheets.

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

I attended the induction day in January 2016. I found this to be a useful exercise that allowed me to familiarise myself with the Universities structures and regulations. The induction event was well organised, with appropriate content and clearly presented information. Resources on QAA and academic standards were made available. The opportunity to meet other external examiners and Biosciences staff in the afternoon was particularly useful.

#### **6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement**

Providing external examiners with the opportunity to meet students on the course is to be commended. Meeting students in advance of their examinations meant that they were relaxed and their opinions of the degree programme were not skewed by exam stress.

The level and clarity of annotation on exam scripts and the consistency of annotation of exam scripts was noteworthy.

The School also has impressive professional training year opportunities, although ensuring that students have equal opportunities in terms of laboratory/fieldwork time and PTY supervisor access remains a challenge.

In terms of enhancement, the School is implementing an MBiol programme that will provide additional learning opportunities for students, and I look forward to seeing this take shape during my time as external examiner.

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

N/A.

**8. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)**

N/A.

## 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)
<b>Programme/Course Information</b>				
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	
<b>Draft Examination Question Papers</b>				
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?	Y		
<b>Marking Examination Scripts</b>				
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?	Y		
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		
<b>Coursework and Practical Assessments</b>				
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		
<b>Clinical Examinations (if applicable)</b>				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
<b>Sampling of Work</b>				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
<b>Examining Board Meeting</b>				
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		

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
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?	Y		
<b>Joint Examining Board Meeting (if applicable)</b>				
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
<b>Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)</b>				
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?			N/A
9.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?			N/A
9.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?			N/A
9.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?			N/A
9.27	If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?			N/A
9.28	Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?			N/A
9.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?			N/A

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

[ExternalExaminers@cf.ac.uk](mailto: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.