



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:	Dr Einar Thorsen		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Bournemouth University		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report	MA Journalism, Media and Communication <i>MA in Journalism, Media and Communications</i>		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2015/2016	Date of Report:	18/08/2016

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

This is my second year as external examiner for MA Journalism, Media and Communications, and again I have been really impressed by the overall quality of the degree. The programme provides a robust and rigorous approach to the study of journalism and broader media contexts, suitably reflecting the outstanding research expertise of staff teaching on the degree.

It seems evident in assignments I have read that students are both inspired and enthused by the environment fostered by the team.

The programme core is provided through five 20 credit modules, with additional flexibility for students to explore a range of contemporary topics through 10 credit specialist option modules. This provides students with a great variety of subjects and ability to opportunity to define their own pathway within the degree.

2. Academic Standards

Quality of student work is for the most part very impressive, and it is possible to discern a clear progression in work from the first to second semester. The standard of work is comparable to that of other institutions, but as I noted last year too, the breadth of research expertise demonstrated is outstanding.

Student work also covered a fascinating range of topics, from the “junior doctors’ strike” to “russian assassinations”.

Some of the essays tackling emotion and journalism provided some really fascinating insight (Cologne New Year attacks, and the Paris attacks both great case studies). There is evidence of students being creative in how they approach their critique too - e.g. using peace journalism as a way of analysing news reporting of the Scottish Independence referendum(!) Even if this particularly essay was not the strongest one, it shows a determination to think outside the box. Another essay worth mentioning offered a great analysis of journalistic objectivity, really demonstrating the level of critical thinking students develop on the course.

3. The Assessment Process

I was provided with an appropriate range of sample work for consideration.

Assignments were marked consistently and in accordance with marking criteria. The grading applied is commensurate with external benchmarks and similar courses at other institutions.

Students are provided excellent guidance on structure, there is clear marking criteria, and they are suitably briefed on what is expected of them. Several units also contained special workshops designed to prepare students for the assignment, which is commendable.

Assignments were marked consistently and in accordance with marking criteria. The grading applied is commensurate with external benchmarks and similar courses at other institutions. The fails were clear fails, and appropriate levels of feedback provided to ensure students understood the reasoning for their grade. Second marker reports are excellent summaries of student performance and marking consistency.

Feedback provided to students was comprehensive and constructive. In most instances there was feedback against generic marking criteria (tick boxes), a small paragraph of summative feedback, and markup on essay itself. Particularly impressed by the level of markup on assignments that did not do so well - there is ample advice here for students about how to improve in future work, from conceptual points to minor corrections to grammar and spelling.

In some instances I felt feedback was perhaps too lengthy (3-4+ paragraphs of text in addition to comments on the assignment text itself. Important here to strike a balance between the student's need for guidance and staff time spent on marking.

Language is clearly an issue for some students, with some assignments having significant issues in terms of grammar and word choice errors. It is nevertheless good they are rewarded for critical thought / depth of analysis and not failed outright simply because of the way they communicate their ideas and research findings.

Students do not always use the most up to date sources, and it was reassuring to see them picked up on this in feedback provided. Particularly pertinent when assignments are describing "current" trends in online news, for example, using 15-20 year old sources. But it does highlight the need to impress on students to go beyond reading lists and be a little more diligent in their search for relevant literature.

I've praised the approach to research on this degree, but there seemed to be two recurring issues with their research design: the research question and the sampling strategy.

Research questions that students set are often very broad and generic, even if the objects of analysis are narrowly defined. The sampling strategy meanwhile, did not always match the argument the student put forward (as noted with examples during the exam board). Students might benefit from additional guidance on how to formulate succinct research questions and developing realistic / appropriate sampling strategies, which in turn might also aid their focus in carrying out the research.

The sample size is also sometimes very small, which is fine for qualitative analysis, though the students for the most part then fail to provide sufficient depth of critique. They appear to perform better in quantitative analysis. Indeed some students conducted fairly extensive analysis, with pilot studies and samples of 200 odd newspaper articles for example, even for assignments weighting 40% of a module.

The second summative assignment for *Putting Research Into Practice 1* asks students to submit a draft literature review - clarified as "a draft of the chapter you will use in your dissertation". Whilst it is good to prepare students for later work, this implies they are assessed twice for the same (or similar) piece of work, effectively under assessing them at dissertation stage. May be to do with how it is worded, but this needs to be looked into. The literature reviews they produced, incidentally, were mostly of a high quality.

In terms of assignment submission, the need for students to submit both paper and electronic copies seems superfluous - and the programme team may want to consider options for online marking and feedback.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

I was pleased to see summative marks awarded for participation, that we discussed last year, has been either removed (Mediatized Conflicts) or converted to to a in-class writing exercise worth 10% of the mark (Introduction to Journalism Studies).

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

N/A

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

It was great to see students are given the option to pitch their own ideas for assignment topics, in addition to the prescribed questions (IJS). The international nature of the cohort shines through in the topics / subject matter they choose to pursue, and giving students this additional level of creative freedom no doubt gives them further intellectual stimuli.

The expectation on students engaging with research - and providing their own empirical evidence - is evident throughout; including in assignment briefs, where students are directed to engage with content analysis (Nexis UK) or to critique theoretical approaches (peace journalism). Methods used: semiotics, textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, content analysis, framing analysis and so forth.

I remain convinced that one of the core strengths of the programme is the systematic approach to research, which evidently equips students with the requisite skills for their dissertation and research work beyond their degree.

The suggestions outlined in the above sections are all relatively minor issues, and overall the teaching and administrative staff should be congratulated for a truly impressive postgraduate degree programme.

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

These are my comments submitted in advance of the Dissertation board in December 2015:

It was great to see the clearly articulated practical guidance given in the module handbook. Advice on structure is succinct and accessible, which is a real strength. Ethical and methodological concerns were addressed, but also guidance to independent learning, time management, and working with your supervisor.

The significant variance in lower and upper word-length limit is unusual. Whilst the handbook explains that marks are not awarded for length, it is not clear why such a large variance is allowed.

Quality of student work was for the most part very impressive, and of comparable standard to that of other institutions. The breadth of topics covered made for very interesting reading. Agricultural reporting in Ghana and the Chinese newspaper reporting of the "Under the Dome" both made for fascinating dissertation topics. Discussing the sociology of food culture through "A bite of China" was another interesting approach, though the best work was the analysis of UK press representation of welfare claimants.

It was also great to see a range of methodological approaches - including semiotics, discourse analysis, content analysis, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups.

Some students struggled to express their thoughts and this was reflected in the feedback from the markers. It is a reflection of the international cohort, though it is good to see that those students are nevertheless awarded for their depth of analysis and merit of their argument.

The Dissertation analysing reporting practices pertaining to the MH370 disappearance was awarded a Merit, but appeared to have a fairly limited evidential basis with only seven brief interviews. Whilst I'm not suggesting the mark should be

revisited, it seemed like the student could have pushed the interviews further and been more in-depth with their critique.

Feedback provided to students was overall exemplary, and as with the previous modules I looked at, more detailed than I would ordinarily expect. The grading applied is commensurate with external benchmarks and similar courses at other institutions.

Consistency in marking is impressive - in fact, surprisingly so. For all the dissertations I looked at the first and second marker were within just a couple of marks of each other. This may be coincidence, but it implies work has been second marked rather than double-blind marked. Whilst the feedback from both markers is present, I would be interested to know how the individual grades were arrived at and the final mark negotiated. Does the second marker view the feedback and mark from the first marker before arriving at their own conclusion, or are they individually marked and then a final grade negotiated? There is no question about the appropriate marks being awarded in the sample I read, but just clarity about the process for which marks are arrived at.

These are all relatively minor issues, and overall the teaching and administrative staff should again be congratulated for a truly impressive postgraduate degree programme.

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)
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	
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?	Y		
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	Y		
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?	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		
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?			N/A
Sampling of Work				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
Examining Board Meeting				

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
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 opportunities to discuss the Programme and any outstanding concerns with the Examining Board or its officers?	Y		
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	
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?	Y		
9.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?	Y		
9.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?	Y		
9.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?		N	
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?	Y		
9.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?	Y		

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.