



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	James Wakefield		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Exeter		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report:	BSc in Biochemistry / Genetics / Biotechnology / Molecular Biology		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2014-15	Date of Report:	22nd June 2015

For completion by External Examiner in the spaces provided. Please extend spaces where necessary. **Please note this Form will be published online.**

1. Programme Structure

The structure and content of the programmes I cover (variants of Biochemistry, Genetics, Biotechnology, Molecular Biology) are well aligned with their aims. The course materials and Handbook are clear (see Section 6 for best practice associated with Course Literature).

The material and taught techniques are appropriate at the different levels - 1st year Programme structure is compulsory and provides your students with the core material required for their degrees, while the 3rd year courses generally provide a good level of choice, with an emphasis on small group teaching and critical analysis.

The optional Professional Placement Year (PTY) provides students with an opportunity to secure a year in a research environment that would undoubtedly be beneficial for their future careers and should be encouraged. However, see below for comments on the robustness of assessment associated with this Programme variant.

2. Academic Standards

Based on the available evidence (exam scripts, project reports, other assessments) I am confident that the academic standards at Cardiff are similarly high to those at my own Institution (Exeter).

3. The Assessment Process

Similarly to last year, I was impressed with the level of feedback, both on coursework and on exam scripts for the majority of modules I looked at, and have no concerns with the robustness of marking. The marking criteria are really very good - clear and helpful, with a good distinction of assessed qualities between years. However, I have some points I wish to raise:

(i) *Assessment associated with the PTY:* This Programme has grown considerably in the last three years and I would suggest that now is the time to look in depth at its organisation, administration and assessment procedures. In terms of assessment, the Placement Supervisors' reports are generally very high (mean = 79%) - although I am sure this mainly reflects the enthusiasm and competence of the Cardiff students. Conversely, however, there were a substantial proportion of lower marks (2.2s, 3rds) associated with the major assessment - the Project report. There was at least one example where an otherwise 1st class student who received >90% from their supervisor, nonetheless achieved <40% for their report. Although guidance for writing up these project reports is generally good and laid out in the PTY Handbook, it is clear there can be a dis-connect between the actual work put in to the project, the ability of the student, and the final report mark. Upon examination of several project reports I believe there is room for improvement in the clarity of the marking criteria, for students, their Placement Supervisors and for those academics within the School marking the projects.

(ii) *Recurrence of Final Year Examination Questions:* The Biosciences Office kindly provided the set of exam questions for the Biomolecular programme modules over the last 4 years. This confirmed that the vast majority of questions vary from year to year, as would be expected. However, it did highlight one module in particular that relied very heavily on questions set the previous years - this included an example where the same question, worded identically, was set 4 years in a row (2012-15 inclusive), and an example where 3 out of 5 questions set in 2014/15 were identical to 2013/14. I realise students do not get access to previous year's papers, but I would question the prudence of setting exactly the same questions year on year.

(iii) *Weighting of Final Year Elements:* As in previous years, I will articulate my opinion that an 20%:80% split for course assessment: examinations is too high in the final year. I personally would like to see a 30%:70% or even 40%:60% split, to minimise the effect a single poor examination has on a student's overall degree classification.

(iv) Related to the above point, and that the vast majority of Final Year Examinations still require a student to answer 2 questions (i.e. each question is worth 40% of the module mark), I would encourage the School to consider second marking all failed Examination questions, in addition to scrutineering.

(v) *Resitting examinations* - I understand that the University has a regulation where students who achieve between 35-39% for a module are automatically condoned and not offered the opportunity to re-sit an examination. In practice, this means that, while a student who achieves less than 35% has the opportunity to re-take the examination and obtain a capped mark of 40%, the student who does better, but still fails, does not. This therefore appears to unfairly penalise a student who narrowly misses a pass grade, in comparison to someone who does more poorly. I would be grateful of

clarification as to whether this regulation is correct and, if so, a very clear response as to how the University intends to address this apparent discrepancy.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

Points 3. (iii) and (iv) were articulated last year. I would appreciate the School's reflections upon these once more.

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

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

The Biosciences Student Office and Education Staff are to be highly commended. They are committed, conscientious individuals who have the student's interests at heart. This year, the External Examiners received information and statistics on final year modules upon arrival and additional information as required in a very timely fashion.

I focused this year on the literature of the 2nd and 3rd year Handbooks and was struck with how helpful they must be to your students. Issues such as use of non-human living organisms and religious holidays, and the detailed guidance for signing up to modules all help to engender a sense that the Department understands its students. One recommendation would be to add the Plagiarism notes that appear elsewhere in your literature into these Handbooks - to re-inforce to students how crucial independent work is, and how serious the penalties of plagiarism are.

I was also impressed with the orientation students get prior to organising their PTY placements and particularly the re-orientation they get with a 2 day Gregynog retreat as a cohort of returning students, where they present their placement work.

A future issue for the PTY is undoubtedly the tension between students finding placements outside of Cardiff University and those who choose to remain in the School for their placement year. My understanding is that over the last 3 years the number of students staying in Cardiff has increased from 0 to 25%. There is a clearly a discussion to be had with regards to whether undertaking the PTY in the home School provides the breadth of professional training opportunities that external placements have, in terms of developing interpersonal skills. It also opens up questions such as whether it is appropriate for the PTY supervisor can also be the final year project supervisor, and whether the Department's researchers can find the time and space to cope with final year students and PTY students simultaneously. My understanding is that this is something that is being discussed internally and, as an External Examiner with another year at least to serve, I would be happy to be involved in those Discussions.

Finally, I understand that the School has restructured its Education team, with a new position of Strategic Director of Education. As a previous Director of Education in my home Department, I see this as a very positive move, and an opportunity to bridge the sometimes perceived divide between teaching and research priorities. Again, I offer my support in this endeavour.

7. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)

8. Annual Report Checklist

Please include appropriate comments within Sections 1-7 above for any answer of 'No'.

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
Programme/Course Information				
8.1	Did you receive sufficient information about the Programme and its contents, learning outcomes and assessments?	Y		
8.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?	Y		
Draft Examination Question Papers				
8.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?	Y		
8.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?	Y		
8.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	Y		
Marking Examination Scripts				
8.6	Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?	Y		
8.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	Y		
8.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	Y		
8.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	Y		
8.10	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				
8.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	Y		
8.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	Y		
8.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	Y		
8.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	Y		
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
8.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
Sampling of Work				
8.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
Examining Board Meeting				

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
8.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	Y		
8.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	Y		
8.19	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)				
8.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			N/A

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:

Clive Brown, Registry Officer, Registry & Academic Services, Cardiff University,
McKenzie House, 30-36 Newport Road, Cardiff, CF24 0DE