



## EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Professor Henrietta O'Connor		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Leicester		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report:	Sociology (UGR) <i>BA/BSc/BSc(Econ)/LLB (Sociology and Social Science modules)</i>		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2014/5	Date of Report:	24/6/15

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 programme structure is appropriate for the degree being awarded. The modules offered are varied, wide-ranging and provide students with an excellent insight to current debates within the discipline. Students are offered a variety of complimentary elective modules and are given the opportunity to pursue their own independent research where appropriate. The programme and the department both provide a stimulating learning and teaching environment for the students which is very much under-pinned by current research activity at Cardiff and beyond.

### 2. Academic Standards

The academic standards are appropriate for the degree programme being examined. The standards of student performance are comparable with those of other students in UK HEIs. Indeed much of the work I viewed was of a very high standard and both staff and students are to be congratulated on the high standard of much of the work produced.

### 3. The Assessment Process

Processes of assessment, examination and the award of the degree are sound and were fairly conducted. Guidelines on assessment and examination and issues such

as academic conduct are presented clearly in a number of accessible places (course handbooks, university regulations).

Last year, (my first year) I commented that I found the marking procedures relating to double marking, blind marking, moderation and so on confusing. This was addressed by the course team at the time of the last exam board but has been comprehensively followed up by the Board Chair and Registry. This response was impressive and I'm pleased to say that the procedures were extremely clear this year. The process of moderation was transparent, logical and robust.

One area in which would benefit from additional attention concerns the feedback to certain students. Overall the feedback was good, however, in cases where the student was struggling to achieve a pass grade or achieving quite low grades very little guidance was provided on how to improve this. In other HEIs I have seen feedback that invites students to arrange a meeting with the marker or suggests that the student make an appointment with student services for help with assignment writing skills. At the other end of the scale I saw a number of students achieving marks of 68/69 but sometimes little concrete guidance was given on how to make that crucial step to 70%. I would like to see more examples given that relate explicitly to the specific piece of work.

In some cases I wonder if students are given too much choice in terms of the number of questions used in examinations. For example, I noticed a few cases where students were asked to answer two questions from a list of 10. This seemed a little excessive and perhaps creates additional work for the course leaders with little return – as most students tended to select the same questions anyway (i.e. using up only 3 or 4 of the 10 choices).

The exam scripts uploaded on to Grademark were useful to see but proved quite hard to moderate without the inclusion of the marker comments. I would like to see a brief comment that explains the mark awarded being made available to the external examiner.

The process by which dissertations are assessed is slightly problematic and this has been recognised by the team. The current system means that the supervisor plays no role in assessing the dissertations and this omission led to what were quite harsh comments and grades being awarded in some cases – because the main supervisor was not involved in the assessment of work. I believe that this issue is in the process of being addressed and the outcome of this is that the supervisor will automatically act as second marker. This will facilitate discussion between the markers and ensure that the first marker is fully informed about each individual student. I support this change whole-heartedly.

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

As commented on above the team have addressed the comments made last year and done in an exemplary way. I found the reports outlining the department and institutional response very clear and comprehensive in explaining how the feedback had been acted upon.

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

N/A

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

The practice of arranging meetings between the course teams and the external examiners is excellent. This was an outstanding feature of practice at Cardiff and very welcome. The course teams were without exception enthusiastic, engaged and clearly very committed to their modules and to the students.

The module guidelines (handouts) are also exemplary. These are detailed, high quality learning guides which should be invaluable to all students. The Undergraduate Module handbook is also of high quality.

Some of the assessment methods were innovative and carefully designed to not only 'assess' students but to also deepen their learning and develop transferable skills (e.g. the use of reflective journals, group work, short report style assessments) and to engage the students fully in the learning process. I would encourage staff to share their successes with more innovative methods with colleagues where appropriate.

I was impressed by the range and breadth of the assessment methods. Staff are very imaginative in the types of assessment adopted and it is evident from discussions with module leaders that considerable thought is given to this process and staff constantly reflect on what has worked well and what needs further refining.

It was pleasing to learn that Cardiff offer students the opportunity to undertake a work placement during their degree studies and that the development of transferable 'employability' skills is supported and encouraged by the department.

The range of dissertation topics selected by the students is impressive and reflects very well on the staff and the course design which seems to encourage the students to develop their sociological imaginations in a very impressive way. The practice of requiring students to present their dissertation work in a conference style environment (and the inclusion of external examiners in this process) is further evidence of noteworthy practice which I would hope to see emulated by other Sociology departments.

The administrative side of the examining process is very efficient and I would like to thank Karen Chivers and the team for all their hard work in making sure everything runs smoothly.

## **7. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)**

N/A

## 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)
<b>Programme/Course Information</b>				
8.1	Did you receive sufficient information about the Programme and its contents, learning outcomes and assessments?	x		
8.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?		x	
<b>Draft Examination Question Papers</b>				
8.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?	x		
8.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?	x		
8.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	x		
<b>Marking Examination Scripts</b>				
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?	x		
8.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	x		
8.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	x		
8.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	x		
8.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?	x		
<b>Coursework and Practical Assessments</b>				
8.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	x		
8.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	x		
8.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	x		
8.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	x		
<b>Clinical Examinations (if applicable)</b>				x
8.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			x
<b>Sampling of Work</b>				
8.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	x		
<b>Examining Board Meeting</b>				

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

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:

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