



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/>.

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|--|---|-----------------|--|
| | For completion by External Examiner: | | |
| Name of External Examiner: | Professor Jim Deuchars | | |
| Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner: | University of Leeds | | |
| Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report | Bioscience (Biomedical) <i>BSc in Biomedical Sciences and the BSc in Biomedical Sciences (Intercalated) (Neuroscience, Physiology)</i> | | |
| Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report: | 2015-16 | Date of Report: | |

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 programme is well structured, in my opinion having improved over my tenure as examiner. It has a common year 1, allowing students to gain experience of different specialisms before making more specific choices in year 2. Since students often have an incomplete understanding of each specialism before beginning university, this is an excellent approach. This also ensures that all students have sound background knowledge before moving into year 2. A potential outcome of this core curriculum is that the background knowledge for final year research-led modules is not as embedded as in specialist programmes. However, the School are clearly aware of this as this year's intake will encounter a revised programme in Year 2, with a choice of 3 x 40 credit modules which could provide the necessary depth. In addition, an integrated Master's degree has now been implemented, permitting students to undertake an in depth further study and a significant research project. These changes will enable the Cardiff graduates to remain competitive with those from other UK universities with similar schemes.

2. Academic Standards

I have found the academic standards to be high as the work demanded of and produced by the students is broadly equivalent to that I have observed in duties

as external examiner in other Universities and at my own institution. The courses appear to meet the appropriate benchmark statements.

3. The Assessment Process

Overall, students have sufficient opportunity to express their knowledge and understanding in a broad range of assessments. The process of scrutineering applied to exam papers appears to provide the basis for quality assurance of assessment. Overall module marks are subject to particular scrutiny by Chairs of Exam and Scheme Boards when average marks fall outside of 55-65 range. This helps set appropriate academic standards.

Marking of exam scripts and scrutineering is generally well done by staff. In my initial years as external examiner I had commented that effective comments and scrutineering helped the externals have confidence in the process of exam assessment. I did find some modules in which such comments and scrutineering were sparsely applied, meaning that myself and other externals had to pay significantly more attention to scripts in these modules. It is pleasing to note that this did not re-occur in this module. However, this year I found answers to some questions in some modules were sparsely annotated, making it harder to assess the fairness of the grades and no doubt making the scrutineering more difficult. Since the School has already shown itself capable of remedying such inconsistencies, I expect this can be resolved for the next external examiner.

I note that some modules gave 10% of the module mark for a presentation (BI3316) whilst another (BI3315) was allocated 20% and yet another (BI3326) ended up at 30% (it apparently did not start at this but was changed for some reason during the module). In some modules (Plants for the Future) in other degree programmes in the School, presentations are allocated 6% of the module mark. I could not find reasons in module descriptions and marking criteria for there being such differences. A potential explanation from a participant in BI3315 teaching was that the complexity of the papers the students were asked to present was more than in other modules. This did appear to be the case in this particular instance, but it perhaps needs to be made clearer in the module paperwork.

I found similar potential disparities in other coursework. BI3318 has a newspaper style summary of a research paper that is 20% of the module mark, whilst in other modules (e.g. BI3316) a summary of a paper is 10%. It is not clear how similar assessments can be valued differently. If it is writing in a newspaper style that is the differential then it will be important for the students to gain some experience before being assessed in it.

In the final year a late submission of a project results in a mark of 0. Since this is worth 30 credits, this is a significant penalty. I have not encountered such stringency previously and suggest that the school considers a penalty system where e.g. every day late in submission results in 10% of the mark being deducted.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

Spreadsheets to Facilitate Analysis

A frustration for me over the years has been the lack of a spreadsheet with all of the marks that contribute to the final degree class of every student. I and other examiners asked for this in 2013-14 reports. This enables examiners to determine if a module which they may feel has particularly low marks would influence a degree outcome if the marks were higher. As it is we have a print out from SIMS that we have to leaf through and then make our own calculation if we feel it necessary. This wastes significant amounts of time and may even impact on our ability to properly perform our duties as externals.

The School does have some analyses available (e.g. modules are reviewed every 3 years and if their average marks are outside of the 55-65 range) and in general this has provided good quality control. However, some of the issues I have spotted over the years could have been dealt with earlier if greater analysis was available.

Application of Marking Criteria

In 2013 and 2014 I and my fellow external encouraged examiners to consider greater use of the upper end of the marking scale. Reading the criteria indicates 70-79 requires 'good coverage of nearly all the issues', 'possibly with some independent reading'. I have read scripts with comments along the lines of 'excellent answer with IR', yet the marks achieved were around 72-75. In my opinion the criteria provide a basis for a realistic expectation of what students who have been studying a subject for 3 years can produce in a limited time exam, but the top end of the scale needs to be used more. I suspect this has contributed to a compression of degree classifications, in particular with limited numbers of 1st class degrees awarded to non-intercalated students, as I noted in 2014. In my experience this is not restricted to Cardiff, but applies to other Universities at times too. However, I understand from this year's visit that there is an ongoing University initiative to examine if this is an issue.

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

N/A

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

I would like to praise the staff for providing written feedback on a draft of the final year report, since this is worth 30 credits. It reflects scientific practice as it is rare that a submitted manuscript is accepted without comments from the reviewers.

I have previously noted that annotation and scrutineering of exam scripts provides a good foundation for externals to compare the marks with the marking criteria and commend the School and staff for this practice.

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

8. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)

High Quality Academic Standards and Student Experience

The role of external examiner necessarily results in making criticisms and suggestions for improvements of practices and processes. I have found the School staff that I have interacted with to be very open to receive and consider such comments. This is a reflection of their desire to provide a high quality education to their students. In my view, shared by students, this is achieved. I have met representatives of students on two occasions and their enthusiasm for their studies reflects very well on the School and the University. It is clear that they get significant pleasure from their time at the University and intellectual satisfaction from their studies. They receive a very good grounding in their chosen specialisms and can count world experts amongst the staff that teach them.

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? | y | | |
| Draft Examination Question Papers | | | | |
| 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 | | |
| 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? | | | x |
| 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? | | | x |
| 9.21 | If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees? | | | x |
| 9.22 | Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules? | | | x |
| 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? | | | x |
| 9.24 | Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)? | | | x |
| 9.25 | Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners? | | | x |
| 9.26 | Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board? | | | x |
| 9.27 | If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures? | | | x |
| 9.28 | Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied? | | | x |
| 9.29 | Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate? | | | x |

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.