



## EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

Guidance notes are available to support the completion of this Report and is available at <http://learning.cf.ac.uk/quality/review/external-examiners/reports/>

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Dr Steven M Sait		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	School of Biology, University of Leeds		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report including any dissertation stage reports	MRes Bioscience (Taught Stage 1 and one dissertation)		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2015/16	Date of Report:	16/05/16

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 taught Stage 1 of the Master of Research in Biosciences is well-designed and well-organised. It comprises a broad range of teaching methods and assessments, which are appropriately challenging for students and tests a suite of core scientific research skills. These include academic writing and critical analysis, practical lab and field techniques and generic skills, such as giving presentations. Teaching methods include lectures, tutorials, seminars and workshops, as well as a high proportion of self-directed learning that is suitable for this level. The objectives of the programme are clearly aligned with the aims, learning outcomes and programme specifications as detailed in the programme handbook. The administration of the assessments and the provision of feedback is generally very good. For all taught modules staff have developed a comprehensive and detailed set of marking criteria that clearly define the standards associated with a particular grade. Additionally, staff use a transparent process of mark moderation and adhere to the clear marking guidelines and assessment procedures for the most part. Hence, it is clear why a mark was awarded and how improvements could be in most cases.

### 2. Academic Standards

The standards achieved by the students are high and are appropriate for an advanced programme. The standard of work across the range of Stage 1 modules is comparable with my own institution and with a similar programme I have examined in another institution.

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

Across the Stage 1 modules the average marks and spread of marks are appropriate for teaching at this level and indicate that the students are being assessed appropriately. Importantly, there is sufficient subtlety and finesse in the assessment process that the range of marks properly reflects the relative abilities of the individual students. Good practice is demonstrated consistently by moderation of the marks. The quantity of comments and feedback is generally very good and it is clear that staff spend a great deal of time on this key aspect of the assessment process. The marking criteria are clear and unequivocal. The range of assessment methods is varied and designed to test and develop a broad range of skills. Importantly, there are no apparent systematic differences between modules that employ different assessments and sets of marking criteria.

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

The exam board meeting, including the provision of the full set of materials and the provision of adequate time to assess samples of work, was carried out in a well-organised and professional manner and the efforts of the staff involved are to be acknowledged. A critique from last year was that it was not clear why a particular mark was awarded. This has been greatly improved upon because of the widespread use of clear and unequivocal marking criteria for each kind of assessment. This has also gone a long way to dealing with some inconsistency in marks awarded. The marking criteria are provided in the programme handbook so that students can see the details how different assignments are assessed in advance and so strengthen different aspects of weakness as appropriate. Nevertheless, clearly identifying areas of weakness and what students can do to improve is an aspect of the assessment process that could still be improved upon in some areas. With multiple assessments, for example, more rapid formative feedback after each assessment could help students improve their performance in other related assessments. This has been greatly improved upon since last year and the efforts of the staff involved should be acknowledged. Overall, the comments, feedback and the marks awarded are now more transparent both for the students and examiners and they are more closely aligned with the marking criteria. From the group and individual interviews it is clear that the students found Stage 1 intense, but value the fact that it is challenging in terms of teaching and assessments. They recognise that it provides a solid foundation for their research projects, but also beyond when they embark upon a research career. Also arising from the interviews there is some concern about the imbalance in the amount of work required and time available for different components of modules, especially where multiple assessments are set in quick succession and/or are bunched at the end of the module. This may require a reassessment of the organisation of the taught modules, particularly with respect to the timeliness of feedback for multiple assignments. There is also some uncertainty about expectations with respect to assessments and further guidance here would be valued (e.g. examples of previous work). Students would value an indication of their progress through the programme. This cohort of students had the opportunity to meet last year's students and they found this extremely helpful in appreciating expectations from the programme. The students requested that they be permitted to attend the seminars of the preceding students. This would require some careful consideration of the timing of the seminars with arrival/induction events.

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

N/A.

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

The wide range of teaching and assessments tests a broad suite of academic, practical and generic skills. This provides an excellent foundation for a research-focused career in biosciences.

Marking is clear and closely aligned with comprehensive marking criteria.

Moderation of marks is routinely applied when appropriate, which helps to maintain rigour of the assessment process.

## **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)
<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>				
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>				

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

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