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:	Alison Gow
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Trinity Mirror
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report	Digital community project; digital investigation *MSc Computational Journalism and the Digital Media module [10 Credit] Module on MA/PgDip programmes in Broadcast Journalism, in Magazine Journalism and in News Journalism*

Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2015-16	Date of Report:	4/7/16

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

Digital community project: The structure of this segment is focused on digital storytelling, audience engagement, and audience growth - three disciplines which are of crucial importance in any newsroom. I note some of those in the samples I was sent changed tack, successfully, following feedback sessions; this should provide valuable learnings around the importance of reading and understanding a brief (from a course tutor or a news editor) before embarking - and also shows an ability to reflect, critically analyse progress and make adjustments as necessary.

Digital Investigation: This course is tightly structured in that it involves a time-sensitive investigation into a chosen topic, with specific benchmarks to determine progress. There were clear requirements of data sourcing and interrogation, interpretation and visualisation, but the course structure also meant team-working, collaboration, brainstorming and collective problem-solving were also core elements; these learning transfer readily to newsroom situations and show the digital investigation course provides both academic and personal development opportunities.

Both projects were well structured in terms of 'real world' journalism techniques, the tools taught would be either expected or desirable for any student entering a mainstream

newsroom, or looking to establish themselves as a freelance or independent media business.

I think aspects of the computational journalism course are increasingly being sought after for those seeking to enter general news roles and there is likely to be more cross-over on these courses in future.

2. Academic Standards

The standard of story structure, writing and grammar was generally of a good standard, although some of the samples in the digital project submissions did suggest a need for authors to proof their work before submission.

I interview a great deal of graduates for journalism roles across Trinity Mirror every year and I do find Cardiff is one of the most progressive and consistent journalism schools in producing high quality young journalists who are ready and equipped to meet the realities of newsroom life, in terms of ability and attitude.

Some details of areas where students can improve: Too many of the community blog posts were uncategorised and untagged; this may seem like a small point but once they are in newsrooms, working directly with content management systems, failure to tag, categorise and home content appropriately will lead to time wasting as the work is done again, a loss of traffic as bots crawling specific sections will not find content and, ultimately, a loss of audience. It's a discipline to get right now, because it's task-oriented skill digital editors will expect you to get right once you are in a newsroom.

The digital investigation requires a high academic standard - students submitting reports dealing with complex subjects and explanations needed to be explicit in their detailing, and I felt they delivered this. English, Maths, coding and computational journalism, critical analysis, project management and the use of quantitive data were used in their projects to good effect. I was impressed by the standards in this module, based on the samples I received.

3. The Assessment Process

I found the marking (which I only looked at after I'd reviewed each submission) to be fair and honest, giving clear feedback and real world advice as to successes and failures of projects and opportunities for future learning.

From the samples I saw, in both the investigation and the community project. there seemed to be a general dearth of research on the participants as they set out to establish their ideas.

This was something picked up during assessment of the coursework, with students being consistently asked "where is the data to back up your statement?"

A number of the samples I saw started down the road of their projects only to find themselves reflecting on whether they'd chosen the right topic, and ultimately admitted they would do things quite differently if they were starting over; some actively abandoned their first idea, took further guidance, and tried a totally different tack - with more success, it has to be said.

As the digital investigation students were creating data, not working with existing datasets, the fact that their ideas were refined 'on the go' is understandable - they were adapting as they acquired more information.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

The samples for 2015-16 showed, as with previous years, that digital storytelling tools and techniques are central to these modules. From sourcing, cleaning and displaying data to making maps, charts, Vines, videos and photo embeds, the efforts that went in to teaching students tools they will certainly need in their professional roles was good to see.

The rich media aspects of those posts was excellent (and I was pleased to see the danger inherent in 'lifting' photographs without considering copyright or ethical issues was robustly pointed out to a student who failed to give credit).

To reflect how user need states are evolving, it would have been good to see projects that experimented more with live storytelling (live blogging, real time visualisations or live streaming) as many newsrooms see it as a required skill now, and also with messenger apps.

With regards social media, in common with previous years, students took quickly to Twitter and were perplexed when it didn't supply vast amours of traffic.

Similarly in common samples of community reports from previous years, students later felt they should have put more work into Facebook.

I note they were advised at every opportunity to channel energies into growing their social media communities, and all took this to mean "get more Twitter followers". Any newsroom analytics board would show them that, in the social media traffic matrix, Facebook is going to drive around 85% of your uniques, so the prize for getting it right is high. Everyone struggled with audience growth and seemed discouraged by it. I would say:

- Make FB a priority for video, live streaming and conversations so you can quickly grow reach

- Take advantage of free short-term trials for paid-for products (such as Spike, to monitor what's about to go viral) to capitalise on audience-attracting content

- Use Twitter for brand growth - but make it your personal brand as well as your chosen theme. Most 'Twitter famous' people accrue followers because they are funny/interesting/outspoken - not because they post links. But when they do post links, their followers share them a lot.

- Reddit and Instagram are often missed opportunities - these are hugely engaged platforms with vast audience opportunities and it's worth any hack starting out acquiring these skills, as it will give them an edge in the newsroom.

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

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

The digital investigation project continues to develop innovating ideas for new ways of connecting with audiences and telling stories - this is an exciting and forward-looking course, and the story lines being explored are interesting and diverse.

It demonstrates effectively how to combine data, trends and tools to make compelling content.

The ability to critically assess an idea, consider the data, and evaluate the worth/audience of it is something they will need in newsrooms, and they needed to be more mindful of the advice their tutors gave around this - the project is a microcosm of what they can expect in the working world of a newsroom.

However, a student, referring to the emoji project, did admit: "No one on the team was entirely sure what kind of product we would develop and who the end users would be, but we didn't feel like this was necessarily a problem".

This open-ended approach may not be a problem in a student project setting but to operate on a sound footing as a freelancer, or within a newsroom under commercial pressures, this approach is not likely to win support as a pitch.

Certainly in regional newsrooms journalists increasingly some understanding of the commercial operation and how it pertains to content - whether programmatic, native or other forms of supporting their work; I think it would be helpful for students to encounter these realties before they leave college - possibly by inviting digital advertising representatives to come and speak to a class, in the same way an editor or news editor is invited.

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)**

Cardiff has, in my opinion, continued to cement its reputation as one of the most proactive journalism schools in delivering real world digital training alongside the more traditional routes. The digital skills acquired by students undertaking the community project, computational and data courses, are much in demand in newsrooms of my experience, where the ability to seamlessly tell stories across different mediums, curate and engage an engaged, participating community, and to gather, interpret, present and draw conclusions from data - either for specific or more broad roles - is considered a Must Have.

My time as external examiner has been a fascinating one, and I have also found it extremely useful as a measure by which we can - as employers - hone our recruitment and training programmes.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to have been involved, and would like to thank the Journalism school, and wish everyone involved with it the sincerest best wishes for future successes.

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?	x		
9.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?			x
Draft Examination Question Papers				
9.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?			x
9.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?			x
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	x		
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?	x		
9.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	x		
9.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	x		
9.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	x		
9.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?	x		
Coursework and Practical Assessments				
9.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	x		
9.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	x		

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
9.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	x		
9.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	x		
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?			
Examining Board Meeting				
9.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	x		
9.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	x		
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?	x		
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)				x
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?			
9.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?			

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
9.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?			
9.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?			
9.27	If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?			
9.28	Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?			
9.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?			

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.