



**Academic & Student Support Services**  
**Gwasanaethau Academaidd a Chefnogi Myfyrwyr**  
**Registry**  
**Y Gofrestrfa**  
Academic Registrar Cofrestrydd Academaidd  
Simon Wright LLB(Hons)

**Cardiff University**  
McKenzie House  
30-36 Newport Road  
Cardiff CF24 0DE  
Wales UK  
Tel please see below  
Fax +44(0)29 2087 4130  
www.cardiff.ac.uk

**Prifysgol Caerdydd**  
Tŷ McKenzie  
30-36 Heol Casnewydd  
Caerdydd CF24 0DE  
Cymru Y Deyrnas Unedig  
Ffôn gweler isod  
Ffacs +44(0)29 2087 4130  
www.caerdydd.ac.uk

**Sent by email to Dr Benjamin Maughan**

**10 September 2019**

Dear Dr Maughan,

**Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2018/19**

I am writing further to the receipt of your report for BSc Physics & MPhys.

Your report has been considered by colleagues in the School and is the basis of this Institutional Response on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor. The School will also use its contents to help inform their [Annual Review and Enhancement](#) process and where appropriate, [Periodic Review](#).

**The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:**

1. Your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process.
2. Good examples of innovations in teaching, including well-designed multiple choice sections in exams (unusual in Physics) and some creative coursework assignments.
3. The lecture recording technology is very popular with the students.
4. The quality of the teaching and assessment and feedback that was apparent from the exams, coursework assignments, projects and lab work.
5. The impressive range of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year projects available and the quality of the work done by the students.
6. The use of electronic notebooks for practical work is a very positive development.
7. The opportunity for Astrophysics students to plan and make observations with robotic telescopes is commendable.



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## Issues highlighted in your report and response provided by the School:

1. ***The Assessment Process:*** *Variation in the difficulty of some of the 3rd and 4th year exam papers.*

We are bringing these comments to the attention of the leaders of those modules specified.

2. ***The Assessment Process:*** *Difficulty of assessing ability of students to tackle unseen material if it's only found in coursework.*

The requirement for some unseen material in all 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year exams will be emphasised in briefing for all teaching staff.

3. ***The Assessment Process:*** *Little or no information provided in the model answers on the nature and difficulty of the questions.*

We do feel that progress is being made here, though we still have not reached a level which the external examiners are happy with. The new exams officer has been appointed. He will be asked to adjust the exam logs to include the checkboxes as helpfully suggested by the external examiner.

4. ***The Assessment Process:*** *Exam setters should also be given guidance on the type of commentary to include with the model answers.*

We will also include this guidance at the top of the exam log proforma.

5. ***The Assessment Process:*** *There were a few examples of coursework where the similarity with other sources as flagged by TurnItIn was higher than I would have deemed acceptable. In some cases this was poor academic practice that should have been flagged and reflected in the mark and feedback. In other cases there was clear plagiarism that had either been missed or not dealt with in a formal and consistent way.*

Although the external examiner found some examples where plagiarism appeared not to have been spotted, we did have several formal investigations of plagiarism this year, in projects and coursework, where students lost marks and/or were required to undergo training. We do require assessors of written coursework to use the Turnitin reports and look for blocks of text and high similarity, and similarly project supervisors /assessors have to report on the Turnitin similarity percentage and note any concerns.

The External examiner provided us with two examples of projects which he felt had unacceptable levels of plagiarism. One had an overall similarity of only 19%, which is not high, and we would normally only closely examine reports which are flagged amber, at 20% or above. The project coordinator will now look at all reports at 15% or above, as that particular project did in fact have a couple of blocks of text from sources, which

added up to 2%. This should have been spotted by the supervisor. The other project had 9% similarity with a single source, but this had been identified and discussed by the project supervisor, assessor and project coordinator. It was felt to be acceptable as the project led on from this previous report, and there were no whole sentences or paragraphs reproduced, only phrases which would be very difficult to express in any other way. We will ask project assessors to note this type of decision in their reports, in future.

Additionally one module's coursework had not been properly assessed for plagiarism. That module organiser (who was new) will receive training and all module organiser will be reminded of the plagiarism procedure, in this year's briefing for teaching staff.

We hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your continued support of the programme.

In order to meet the expectations of the [QAA Quality Code](#), both the External Examiner Annual Report and this Institutional Response will be published on the University's [Public Information website](#) and will be available to all students and staff.

We are most grateful for your comments and for your support in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Simon Wright  
Academic Registrar