



## EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	MARTIN POWELL		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report:	SOCIAL SCIENCES (SOCIAL POLICY)		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2014-2015	Date of Report:	05/08/15

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

As in previous years, I found the programme to be well structured, with considered core/ compulsory modules and a wide range of optional subjects. The individual modules clearly reflected recent scholarship in the area, including (which is always good to see) the work of the staff teaching the courses. There was a clear coherence to the programme and 'routes' were well considered. Although some progress has been made, I would still like to see a more common approach to two issues across modules. First, the degree of choice of both examination and coursework questions (choose x from y) varies significantly. Second, 'effort' in the form of a 'x word assignment' or a 'y hour examination' comprising a different percentage of contribution towards total marks varies.

### 2. Academic Standards

In my view, basic descriptive statistics (eg means/ medians/ standard deviations and coefficients of variation) that allow a comparison between modules should be available to the Examination Board.

My comments here are similar to last year. On the whole, I feel that standards compare well to leading Universities in the UK, although I still have some concerns over marking being perhaps a little over generous at the 'bottom end', especially for truncated/ note form examination answers, and some coursework material with high similarity scores (Turnitin) was perhaps marked too generously. Finally, I saw some really good dissertations, I feel that elements of the 'literature review' ('pure'

narrative; lacking structure) and 'qualitative analysis' (lack of discussion of coding: 'the following themes emerged.....') were disappointing (even from otherwise good students).

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

As usual, I found the assessment process was well carried out by internal markers. I remain impressed to see a variety of assessment methods, including a good balance between coursework and examinations. Internal markers clearly put a great deal of effort into the process, and the practice of having two markers for pieces of work is to be commended. However, the process of agreement/ moderation was a little variable. As External Examiner, I would IDEALLY like to see limited variation between internal markers. However, where there is a significant difference I would like to see a clear explanation of how the difference was resolved (ie not simply splitting the difference), While this was clear in some courses, in others I did not receive any 'moderation' material. In the case of one course, I appear to have been sent scripts that had not been moderated (ie difference between the scripts received by me, and sample with mark by marker and moderator). In my view, any penalties for over-length or lateness need to be clearly on reading lists (assessment section) and perhaps on the electronic system at the point of submission (perhaps 'I understand...') rather than only being buried away in the Handbook (which may not always be consulted for every assessment).

I still struggle to some extent with the new electronic marking system (although it is significantly easier than the system that we now have). The amount of 'within text' feedback varied between courses. I realise that this is very time consuming, but suggest that particular attention should be paid to 'fails' and to students with a high 2i (what do they need to do to push their future marks into a 1<sup>st</sup>?).

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

As last year. I am impressed by the 'Institutional Report' which shows that the University takes External Examiners' comments seriously, and deals with them in a transparent fashion (even when you do not agree with me or vice versa). However, although there has clearly been a genuine attempt to consider these issues, some of my comments this year are similar to last year (see below!)

With the move towards a more mechanical approach to marks and the reduction of discretion by Examination Boards, you may wish to consider if the formal 'full meeting' Board over two days remains a good use of people's time. You could perhaps consider a smaller Board; or use External Examiner's time more in discussion rather than simply noting a long list of marks that require no discussion/ action.

Finally, I am sorry that I feel I have to repeat my concerns over the current staffing levels for the social policy modules. The small team covers many courses, and appears to be very hard-pressed. While they have done an excellent job, I am not sure that such workload is sustainable for a leading research-intensive University.

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

NA

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

As above, I remain impressed to see a variety of assessment methods, including a good balance between coursework and examinations, and the practice of having two markers for pieces of work is to be commended. Moreover, I am impressed by the 'Institutional Report' which shows that the University takes External Examiners' comments seriously, and deals with them in a transparent fashion. This year I wish to highlight an innovative assignment for Sociology of Health of Illness' (which not all understood- but sure it was made clear)

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

NA

## 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?	Y		
8.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?			NA
<b>Draft Examination Question Papers</b>				
8.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?	Y		
8.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?	Y		
8.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	Y		
<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?	Y		
8.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	Y		
8.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?		Not alwa ys	
8.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	Y		
8.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?	Y		
<b>Coursework and Practical Assessments</b>				
8.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	Y		
8.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	Y		
8.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	Y		
8.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	Gene rally		
<b>Clinical Examinations (if applicable)</b>				
8.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			
<b>Sampling of Work</b>				
8.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
<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>Y</b>		
8.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	<b>Y</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>Y</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>N</b>	
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?	<b>Y</b>		
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			<b>NA</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