



## 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:	Vanessa May		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Manchester		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report	Sociology/School of Social Sciences <i>Social Sciences and Sociology modules on undergraduate programmes</i>		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2015-16	Date of Report:	30 July 2016

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 structure of the programme is appropriate, with the core modules covering theory and method, and an impressive range of optional modules. Learning outcomes for all modules are helpfully documented in the Undergraduate Module Catalogues that are published for each level of study. The content of the programme reflects the latest developments in the field.

### 2. Academic Standards

The programme maintains relevant subject benchmark standards. The quality of paperwork was overall good, particularly the Undergraduate Module Catalogues and the Assessment Handbook for staff and students. The quality of student work on the modules that I examined was overall high. As in previous years, I was particularly impressed by the fact that all of the modules required students to apply sociological thinking to 'real world' issues of their own choice. The quality of student work is comparable with other institutions that I have worked in.

This is my fourth year as external examiner for Cardiff University, and once again I can note that module convenors put a lot of work into keeping their modules fresh, and that new modules are offered that reflect the cutting edge of sociology. In discussions with staff it was clear that members of staff are continuously striving to improve their modules so as to ensure that pedagogical and academic aims and

objectives are met. This is a sign of active engagement with teaching. All modules also engaged with current social developments, most notably developments in ICT and social media.

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

Two of the four the modules that I examined were assessed on the basis of coursework, but each module contained a different mix of types of coursework. In both modules, the assessments were designed to step-by-step build up to the final small project. The remaining two modules were assessed using a combination of coursework and exam. In one of the modules, coursework was in the form of group work. This is all testament to the creative ways in which staff at Cardiff University approach assessment.

The quality of marking was overall very good, with students being given a clear sense of why they received the mark they did. In some cases however, I would urge caution in terms of wording used in feedback, i.e. not to say 'this is a good essay' for essays both in the 2:2 and 2:1 categories. I am happy to note that most of the modules used a wide range of marks, most of them up to the lower 80s.

I did not receive paperwork regarding the moderation process until I arrived in Cardiff (though I understood during the exam board that other examiners had received this), and one of the forms was for the wrong module. Given that the role of external examiners is to audit whether processes and procedures are being followed correctly, it is important that external examiners receive these moderation forms as standard. I also only received tables with mean marks given for each module – it would be very helpful to receive these automatically for each module we examine well ahead of time.

Overall, the quantity of feedback provided on coursework is good across all four modules. The style of feedback differs between modules. Some markers provided comments in relation to marking criteria, others did not. There is also uneven use of 'feed forward' comments that tell the student how they could in the future improve on their work.

I would like to repeat my suggestion from last year that the School consider adopting the use of the 'rubric' function on Grademark, whereby each piece of coursework is numerically graded in relation to key learning outcomes. This would serve two functions. First, it would be a quick and easy way for staff to give feedback related to the marking criteria, without having to write this in their general comments, thus giving them more time to give specific comments on each essay. Second, this would be an easy way for students to gain an overview of which marking criteria they did well on and which they need to still work on.

In my report three years ago I noted how good the old essay feedback sheet was, providing a section on things to commend and things to improve in future work, as well as an indication of how well the student did on the key assessment criteria. Some markers have kept up this good practice even after the transfer to online marking, but I fear that it is at risk of being lost. I would therefore reiterate my suggestion from the past two years that the teaching and learning committee consider ways in which aspects of the old feedback form could be incorporated within Grademark (e.g. by utilizing the rubric function as suggested above) and an agreement that all staff include in their general essay comments sections highlighting things to commend and things to improve ('feed forward') would also be helpful.

Regarding exam marking, I wonder if the School might be willing to consider a policy whereby markers write, at the end of each script, a sentence or two to summarise reasons behind the mark given (or, if such a policy already exists, to enforce it). Such comments would make it easier for moderators and external examiners to judge how marking decisions have been reached.

I also noted that some dissertations were rather strictly marked – I would usually err on the side of generosity when it comes to dissertations.

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

Most of the issues I have raised over the past four years have been responded to and taken on board. For example, a wider range of marks is generally being used, and the module handbooks are becoming more streamlined, containing most of the necessary information (though one module still requires students to download two separate documents). There is only one major outstanding issue, namely ensuring that all external examiners receive all the necessary paperwork related to the moderation process.

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

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

There are some examples of good practice that I would like to particularly commend:

Cultural Sociology: Excellent use of Blackboard, containing lecture notes and several readings in PDF form per lecture. The main assessment, which consisted of a small research project, also worked very well and produced some interesting essays that allowed students to apply sociological theories to their everyday experiences. The essay writing guidance was detailed and gave students step-by-step and exhaustive advice on how to go about conducting and writing up their research project. The lectures were centred around particular 'real life' questions that the theories were aimed to answer. In lectures, students are also asked to apply these theories to their everyday lives – this is good both in terms of getting students to apply their sociological imagination, but also in preparation for the assessment. Thus the

lectures are able to demonstrate the relevance of sociology to students' everyday lives, and I appreciate how much work has gone into designing the lectures in this way.

**Digital Sociology:** The logic of the module works well, starting out with theories of information/digital society, followed by digital methods of research. The module handout was well structured and gave students all the key information in one place. Each lecture was structured around a key question, sparking students' interest in the topic. The assessments were well structured, with the second piece of coursework building on the first. The seminars were geared towards the assessment, and it was very clear from the module handout and from the convenors feedback on students' coursework, that she was making herself very available for the students to offer them guidance on the coursework. The module taught students important research skills, and I noted that in their coursework, students had made use of a wide range of analytical software, including Ncapture and NVivo. It is great that students can play to their strengths by choosing the topic of their project. This really shows though in the level of engagement that is present in some of the essays. The feedback provided on coursework was very good, patient and detailed.

**New Frontiers (Autumn):** The module handout is excellent, containing well written lecture blurbs that read like a detective novel and detailed advice on the assessment. It was very clear what students had to do in order to gain a high mark in the coursework. Learning Central was well organized and contained, for each lecture, slides and a list of required of readings. The lecture slides were fantastic: they told a story in engaging language. I was impressed with how clearly moral philosophy was explained. The feedback provided on coursework was exemplary: detailed, tailor-made feedback was given for each essay. Students were also given general feedback in the form of slides uploaded to Learning Central. Even the somewhat weaker students in the 2:2 range have written quite good essays. In other words, I am impressed by what students have learnt during this module.

### **Science, risk and resistance**

Excellent module outline with very clear and detailed learning outcomes, comprehensive reading lists and detailed guidance on assessment. The seminars were clearly tied to the assessment in the autumn. Very patient and in-depth feedback was provided on coursework, where the marker was trying to figure out unclear points and provide ways in which these could have been improved or further developed.

## **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)**

I have enjoyed immensely my experience of external examining at Cardiff University. The quality of teaching and of student work is consistently high. Much thought goes into teaching: content of modules, learning outcomes, lectures, seminars and

assessment, including feedback. Every year, I have tried out some aspect of good practice that I have come across at Cardiff in my own teaching.

I have noted over the years that the curriculum is constantly being refreshed to reflect changes in teaching staff, but also developments in society. I have been particularly impressed by the fact that many of the modules require students to apply sociological thinking to 'real world' issues of their own choice, which, in my mind, is translated into high levels of student engagement. Students are also taught how to argue a point clearly, and I have been impressed with the quality of writing among students at Cardiff.

I have also enjoyed the fact that external examining is taken seriously by the School of Social Sciences. Staff have ample opportunity to voice any concerns and regulations are clearly explained. Any discussions that have been required, for example regarding decisions surrounding policy and procedure, have been allowed sufficient time and consideration. I have valued the opportunity to meet module convenors to discuss their modules. These conversations have felt meaningful, and have offered an opportunity for dialogue about good teaching practice.

Looking back, I remember my first year as being a bit bumpy in terms of learning the ropes, and I felt like I was frequently pestering [REDACTED] with practical questions relating to when I would expect to receive coursework/exam scripts, when these would have to be read by, and whether any feedback was expected from me before the exam boards. Given the restructuring of the administrative office of the School, it would be worth considering whether some kind of template could be prepared for external examiners that sets out what the role entails, and which tasks are expected to be done when. (I understand from our discussion during the exam board this June that something like this had already been prepared for next year.)

And finally, external examiners are looked after extremely well by the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. The hotel we have usually been put up in is very comfortable and within easy access of the university, and the hospitality shown towards external examiners by the School is exemplary. My yearly visits to Cardiff have become the high point of my June, and I will miss 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)
<b>Programme/Course Information</b>				
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?			N/A
<b>Draft Examination Question Papers</b>				
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?			N/A
<b>Marking Examination Scripts</b>				
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?		N	
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		
<b>Coursework and Practical Assessments</b>				
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		
<b>Clinical Examinations (if applicable)</b>				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			
<b>Sampling of Work</b>				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
<b>Examining Board Meeting</b>				

		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		
<b>Joint Examining Board Meeting (if applicable)</b>				
9.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?	Y		
9.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?	Y		
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?	Y		
<b>Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)</b>				
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)?			
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](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, 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.