



## EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	John Driffill		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Birkbeck College, University of London		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report:	Economics <i>BSc in Economics / Business Economics / Economics with EU Language / Banking &amp; Finance / Economics &amp; Finance / Economics &amp; Management Studies (macroeconomics)</i>		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2013-4	Date of Report:	3rd July 2014

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

The board of examiners in which I participated covered degree programmes in Banking and Finance, Business Economics, Economics, Economics and Finance, and Economics and Management. It also considered joint degrees in Humanities (History, Philosophy, French, German, Spanish and Politics) and Economics. I reviewed modules in macroeconomics, finance, econometrics, and related subjects. In terms of their structure and content, all seemed to be coherent degree programmes. The material covered appeared to be current. The structure and content of the programmes were appropriate in relation to their stated aims, learning outcomes and programme specifications.

### 2. Academic Standards

The examination scripts that I have reviewed, the information on the distribution of marks on examinations and other pieces of assessed work for the various modules, and the overall results for the degree programmes, indicate that the candidates on these programmes are, on the whole, capable and well-prepared. There is every indication of effective teaching. The standards of work achieved are good. Broadly speaking, I feel that the programmes are maintaining appropriate threshold standards set for the relevant bachelor's degrees in accordance with the frameworks

for higher education qualifications and the relevant benchmark statements. The academic standards and achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher educational institutions, within my experience. I have a slight concern that the standard of work needed to obtain a first class or upper second class mark on a module or a degree programme overall may be slowly easing, but this seems to be a phenomenon that common to many higher educational institutions.

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

The modules I reviewed were all assessed predominantly by unseen written examination, with a small element of coursework, and this seems appropriate for the kind of material covered in the economics modules. In most cases the assessment is appropriately applied.

It is good that the full range of marks is used, and that excellent scripts are rewarded with high marks well into the range between 70 and 100 percent; equally that very poor scripts receive very low marks.

The data provided on the median and mean mark on individual modules were most informative. They show that most modules had median marks in the low 60s, but some had very high median marks, 70 or more in a few cases, while others had low median marks. Medians above 70 go along with half or more of the candidates getting first class marks, and this seems a large fraction. Consideration should be given as to why this occurs. It may be that some modules attract particularly able candidates. There would in any case be some sampling variation across modules, so a high median mark may occur by chance, particularly if a module has few students on it. But there is a case for looking into the causes of widely varying distributions of marks across modules.

The use of the full range of marks *per se* should not lead to high median marks. Examination papers should be set and marked in such a way that first class marks are only achieved by outstanding scripts, not merely sound and well-prepared answers. In modules that cover quantitative material where questions might have a correct answer, questions should be designed with sections of graduated difficulty so as to distinguish among the stronger candidates and result in only outstanding scripts achieving first class marks.

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

Last year I noted a very high proportion of 1st class degrees awarded on the BScEcon Economics degree. The examiners' board at Cardiff provided a detailed explanation drawing attention to the effect of having introduced an entry requirement of a maths A-level, and the effects this had on results across the various more and less quantitative modules. This was most helpful.

This year the proportion of firsts awarded on that degree has fallen close to its average of recent past years. It may be worth noting that the proportion of 1sts and 2.1s together was 90.2% in 2013 and is 81.2% in 2014, up from 76.7% in 2012. In almost all of the degree programmes the median degree was a 2.1.

To some extent this may result from high medians on some modules, and the awarding of module marks in the 80s and 90s, which raise a candidate's average mark strongly. In my view this reinforces the point made above under section 3 about the need for reflection on the design and marking of exam papers and pieces of assessed work.

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

Not applicable

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

The examinations process was conducted smoothly and efficiently. Problems that had arisen in connection with a small number of examinations and modules had been identified and dealt with effectively by the director of undergraduate degree programmes in economics.

The general standard of the students' work was good, indicating a preponderance of able, well-prepared candidates and a high standard of teaching.

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

Not applicable

## 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?			N/A
<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?			
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?	Y		
<b>Clinical Examinations (if applicable)</b>				
8.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
<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?	Y		
8.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	Y		
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?	Y		
<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?	Y		
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?	Y		
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?	Y		

Please return this Report, preferably in a Microsoft Word format, by email to:

[ExternalExaminers@cf.ac.uk](mailto:ExternalExaminers@cf.ac.uk)

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