



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Mary Ann Steane		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Cambridge		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report:	MArch Dissertations		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2014-2015	Date of Report:	May 14 2015

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

All the external examiners were agreed that broadly speaking, the programme introduction, timetable, and guidance together offer students a strong clear detailed framework within which to develop their thinking. There remained again however a general feeling that those students pursuing topics in the history/theory area might benefit from being offered an alternative thesis model to the one currently outlined, which seems more suited to topics in building science or social science.

2. Academic Standards

I can confirm that the work I saw was generally of a satisfactory standard (there was only one fail) for an MArch level programme, with the strongest dissertations both a pleasure to look at and read, addressing relevant topics in an engaging and thoughtful way.

3. The Assessment Process

The Cardiff MArch dissertation examining process is thorough as regards double marking and mark moderation, but it was agreed that there is room for improvement. The key point to emerge from this year's examining process is that the school needs to ensure each dissertation examiner is sent a range of the dissertations to read, i.e. some stronger, some mid-range and some weaker work, as indicated by the marks already given as a result of the internal examining process. While this may affect the timetable in that the dissertations will need to have been marked before they are

sent out, it will enable all examiners to fulfil better a specific aspect of their duties – being able to advise on the maintenance of overall standards if all the external examiners are sent a range of the work produced as regards quality.

I struggled to read the dissertations I was sent as they were all so tightly bound. For the same reason they also had to be couriered back rather than brought with me. In this regard, I would be happier to be sent digital copies in the future.

Finally, I was asked to give a viva to one student who could not be available on the examination days for health reasons, via Skype, having already discussed his work with the other external examiners at our moderation meeting. This was conducted several weeks later, but following exactly the same arrangements, i.e with the internal examiner and an internal chair, and for the same length of time. In the circumstances, this seemed a satisfactory procedure to ensure all students were treated fairly.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

- As already noted in section 1 the guidance on research methods and thesis writing /production is clear and comprehensive, the current model outlined is more obviously applicable to theses in the areas of technology and social science. I remain convinced that it would be useful to formulate an alternative model, alongside guidance on the different questions and approaches to which different models are suited.
- It again seemed surprising, given the Environmental Design expertise at the Welsh School, that not more of the theses were in the area of building science/sustainability. It was a shame that I did not see any dissertations offering quantitative evaluation of environmental design issues this year. The two or three I read last year were of a particularly high standard.

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

N/A.

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

- The guidance offered to students on the significance of dissertation illustrations and their captions deserves to be updated in my view. A couple of the stronger pieces of work I looked at had a particularly elegant set of images, considerable care having been devoted to the message they communicated in backing up or making more graphic the key points of the text. A number of the other dissertations were however particularly lacking in this regard. Design students have no real excuse here in that they are being taught to produce and rework images as a core aspect of their training and I wonder whether the course handbook might be adjusted to give this point more emphasis.
- Having read more of the weaker dissertations this year, it also became evident that more thought needs to be given to helping students 1) identify the focus of their research and its critical design questions, 2) adopt, adapt or even invent the most appropriate methodology for exploring and illuminating these issues,

including revisiting the reciprocity between focus and methodology as research material is gathered. While the written guidance the students currently receive is very full, the particular model of dissertation it sets out would seem a hindrance to some middle range or weaker students without such discussion. Thus for example, many of those I read chose to appraise two or three case studies as a methodological approach, when in some cases they might have more fruitfully taken one project but reviewed it in light of specific cultural or historical themes (there was one more successful example of this), while in others they would have been better to discuss many more projects in less depth in order to construct another kind of argument.

- It was not clear how many of the students had run pilot study questionnaires in order to get feedback on their comprehensibility/capacity to illuminate the critical questions of the thesis.

7. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)

N/A.

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)
Programme/Course Information				
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	
Draft Examination Question Papers				
8.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?			N/A
8.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?			N/A
8.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			N/A
Marking Examination Scripts				
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?			N/A
8.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?			N/A
8.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?			N/A
8.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?			N/A
8.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?			N/A
Coursework and Practical Assessments				
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		
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
8.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
Sampling of Work				
8.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
Examining Board Meeting				

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
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		
Joint Examining Board Meeting (if applicable)				
8.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			N/A

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:

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