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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Paul Newman		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Future plc		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	MA in Magazine Journalism		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2018/2019	Date of Report:	7 July 2019

Please complete all information in the spaces provided and submit within **six weeks** of the Examining Board.

Please note this form will be published online and should not make any reference to any individual students or members of staff in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (2018).

Please extend spaces where necessary.

1. Programme Structure (curriculum design, programme structure and level, methods of teaching and learning)

There have been no major changes to the programme since last year and this is to be expected given the constant refinement that has taken place over many years and the good balance of teaching and learning methods. I am nevertheless pleased to see the comments from my previous report regarding areas tangential to the professional magazine experience but of increasing importance being acted upon – video production, podcasting and ecommerce are all areas that have received a greater focus this year and I anticipate their importance continuing to grow in the coming years.

2. Academic Standards (comparability with other UK HEIs, achievement of students, any PSRB requirements)

Having now seen three years' worth of student coursework, I can say with some confidence that the 2018-2019 cohort has produced the strongest overall body of work during my tenure, with the largest sample of publishable work seen to date.

Accuracy was generally very good across the board and I know this is something the teaching staff have been hammering home to students following my previous observations on shortcomings in these areas.

The reliance on fellow students or teaching staff for case studies also appeared to have been successfully eliminated, while the course magazines produced – Project Esc and Canvas and Glass – were the most polished I have seen and featured a better balance of short and long-form content than their equivalents from previous years.

Disappointingly, however, the work placement reports were once again of a generally poor standard. Many covering letter and CV examples lacked focus and suffered from basic spelling and grammatical errors. I know the teaching staff have tried extremely hard to keep students focused once placements are completed and they are both puzzled and frustrated by this drop-off in performance. It may be that a different approach is required going forward.

3. The Assessment Process (enabling achievement of aims and learning outcomes; stretch of assessment; comparability of standards between modules of the same level)

There have been no year-on-year changes to the assessment process in the work that I examined and I am pleased to report that at all times the feedback tutors provide to students continues to be of an exceptional standard. What struck me in particular this year was that even the very highest standard of work – that scoring 80+ – comes with suggestions for how things could be further improved. The teaching staff really do take every opportunity to coach.

The tireless quest for perfection is self evident. As is the desire to act on feedback I have provided through this process and reports. So much so that my identification of a gap in ecommerce-related content last year was instantly met with an invitation for myself and a colleague to provide a guest lecture and workshop on the subject. The students showed a real aptitude for getting to grips with a new and quite technical area and anecdotal evidence from their placements highlights this is an area employers are increasingly focusing on.

4. **Examination of Master's Dissertations** (sample of dissertations received, appropriateness of marking schemes, standard of internal marking, classification of awards)

N/A

5. Year-on-Year Comments

[Previous External Examiner Reports are available from the Cardiff University Website [here](#).]

As the course is both maintaining and building on its excellent standards I have made a conscious effort this year to probe aspects of the set up that I haven't previously commented on in detail.

Facilities and equipment are essential to not only student productivity but also preparing students for the real world, so I have been delighted to tour the new building and see the facilities now at their disposal. My belief is that the investment made here is one that is both practical and promotes creativity. The structure of the building, with its many breakout areas, encourages collaborative working and better replicates the office experience of the modern media business. The multimedia studios promote the creation of rich audio-visual content and it is wonderful to see podcast content thriving and video becoming a natural addition to articles produced for digital consumption.

As the external examiner for industry I am very conscious of the pressures on modern publishers to comply with the highest ethical standards, follow the guidance produced by the industry regulator IPSO and achieve the appropriate accreditation from industry associations. I am delighted to confirm that the course ticks all of these boxes. I think it is also important that they continue to be built on – IPSO is currently very hot on financial conflicts of interest that can result from commercial pressures and I would like to see this factored into the teaching programme somehow.

We also live in an age of increasing cultural complexity and I would like the course to consider how guidelines for reporting and feature writing can be made to ensure content created by students is as inclusive and sensitive to an increasingly diverse audience as possible – without compromising on objectivity.

Finally, I looked at the way the course is externally promoting itself and, while this might be regarded as slightly outside of my remit, I feel that it could be presenting a more confident face. More effort could be put into bringing to life the course's connections to industry on the website – details of successful alumni, links to well-known media brands offering placements, testimonials from employers and so on.

- 6. Preparation for the role of External Examiner (for new External Examiners only)** (appropriateness of briefing provided by the programme team and supporting information, visits to School, ability to meet with students, arrangements for accessing work to review)

N/A

- 7. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement** (good and innovative practice in learning, teaching and assessment; opportunities for enhancement of learning opportunities)

As with previous years, the course maintains extremely impressive links to industry and this can be seen in the programme of guest speakers and the range and quality of placements students are able to secure. It was deeply satisfying to hear reports of students being offered jobs during their placements and this underlines both the quality of the cohort and how well the course prepares graduates for industry.

This year I was able to review the student marking that is applied to the course magazine projects for the first time and it was a fascinating read. Not only did this underline the course's focus on critical reflection as a key learning method, but it helps to equip students with analytical skills that will help them in their future careers and mirrors the team working culture that awaits upon graduation.

- 8. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)** (significant changes in standards, programme/discipline developments, implementation of recommendations, further areas of work)

N/A

9. 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				
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	
Commenting on draft examination question papers				
9.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?			N/A
9.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?			N/A
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			N/A
Examination scripts				
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?	Y		
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		
Coursework and practical assessments				
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	Updated June 2018	

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		
Clinical examinations (if applicable)				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
Sampling of work				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
Examining board meeting				
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		
Joint examining board meeting (if applicable)				
9.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?		N	
9.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			N/A

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Updated June 2018

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2. **Academic Standards** (comparability with other UK HEIs, achievement of students, any PSRB requirements)

N/A

3. **The Assessment Process** (enabling achievement of aims and learning outcomes; stretch of assessment; comparability of standards between modules of the same level)

N/A

4. **Examination of Master's Dissertations** (sample of dissertations received, appropriateness of marking schemes, standard of internal marking, classification of awards)

As with previous years, it is highly satisfying to see the culmination of the learning and development journey students have undertaken manifest, in the great majority of cases, in the highest standard of work they have produced to date.

Much of the work reviewed was well written and researched, and clearly fit for professional publication, with only the standard adjustments an editor of a magazine, newspaper or website would make. The Features Project dissertations were particularly strong, with passion for the subject matters tackled clearly evident and a diverse range of sources employed. The very best writing was either highly informative or entertaining and sometimes both.

Unfortunately the Enterprise Project dissertations reviewed were of a generally poorer standard than equivalent work from previous years. While weak writing and a disappointing level of accuracy were key contributing factors, some of the commercial thinking on show was more troubling and perhaps hints at something that needs to be addressed from a teaching perspective.

A fundamental measurement of the course's success must be preparing students for successful careers. Careers where they can support themselves financially, pay down student debt quickly and, hopefully, create jobs for other journalists. Both Enterprise Project samples contained business plans that were incapable of sustaining the authors financially and seemed more of an exercise in creating content on the lowest possible cost base than an ambitious launch an investor might be prepared to support.

Starting a business is a high-risk proposition and it is understandable to exercise caution over outgoings at the start, but the business plan must at the very least support a decent salary for the author or it is a hobby and not a business. Writing a business plan for an Enterprise Project is a hypothetical exercise, so there should really be no obstacle to achieving this. As the external examiner for industry I would more than happy to run a workshop on creating a viable business plan complete with illustrations of likely revenues and costs.

With regard to the marking and classification of awards, the consistently excellent standards of the course tutors were maintained in the vast majority of the dissertations examined. However, it did feel like some of the weaker pieces received higher marks than perhaps they warranted. This is the first time this has been noticeable in three years of reviewing work and following detailed consultation with the course tutors over specific examples we concluded it was because the marking scheme did not penalise poor and inaccurate writing as heavily as it probably should. I am satisfied that the classification of awards would not be affected by this finding, but it is something that warrants further consideration as work produced at this stage should be as clean and error-free as practicably possible.

This report has had something of a critical bias so it is only right to end on a positive note. As ever, it is a real pleasure to see how strong the connections is between the students and the teaching staff. Not only did acknowledgements frequently make reference to the vital support provided by the tutors, but the marking and commentary also often showed a deep understanding of the characteristics of the individual student's work that could only be the product of a close and supportive relationship.

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