



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:	Professor Graham Meikle		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Westminster		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report	MA Digital Media and Society		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2015/16	Date of Report:	8 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

I am pleased to see the MA in Digital Media and Society achieve a cohort of 15 students in only its second year. The degree makes exemplary use of research-driven teaching, with clear links between the course material and the research expertise of the teaching team. The range of topics and emphases across the core and the optional modules is impressive, and the provision of optional modules on very contemporary and/or emerging areas such as Big Data or social media politics is strong.

Questions of activism, and of civic and political participation, appear across the entire scope of the course, but less attention is given to other fundamental elements of contemporary digital media (entertainment, for example). It is clear that a lot of thought and effort has been put into avoiding duplication of material between modules whose closely related themes entail some inevitable overlap. However, I wonder whether this means that some students will miss out on what seem to be fundamental topics that are restricted to optional modules. So for example, the political economy of social media and its discourses of sharing, and questions of surveillance and its implication in the business models of the major social media firms, seem to me to be central to contemporary developments in digital media and society; but these are not addressed explicitly in the core modules. All of these themes are, in contrast, explicit topics in the optional module *Social Media and Politics*, which just under half of the students on this course opted to take. Indeed, reading the module handbooks, and considering the specific emphases of this degree, I wonder whether *Social Media and Politics* would work better as a core module and *Politics of Global Communication* work better as an option. That kind of structural question is beyond the remit of an external examiner, but I mention it here

because the course team may want to take the opportunity to reflect on how the balance of the course is working in practice now that they have had two years of the programme in operation.

2. Academic Standards

I was able to read substantial samples of assessed work from all five core modules and from a selection of optional modules. In all cases, the standard of written work is very high. The marking is thorough, detailed and robust, and there is appropriate evidence of second marking and moderation. I am happy to endorse all the marks that I saw.

The reading lists are up-to-date and well chosen. Required readings are clearly indicated; however, it is striking that the essays on some modules (including *Understanding Digital Media* and *Citizen Journalism and Digital Publics*) for the most part make next to no use of these reading lists. So I wonder how students are asked to engage with those readings, and to what extent there is room to make demonstrating engagement with actual course material into an assessment criterion. Put another way, if this is indeed *required reading*, then why is it required if the students are not expected to demonstrate having read it or to make use of it in their work? And if there is no requirement to use the required readings, what guidance are learners given as to what kinds of material markers expect to see used in their work? Of course, at MA level, students should be demonstrating some initiative in their reading, but this needs to be grounded in the core literature for the field as manifested in the reading lists. One solution might be to include two separate elements for reading and research within assignment rubrics, with one portion of marks allocated to evidence of engagement with the set course material, and a separate portion allocated to appropriate independent reading.

3. The Assessment Process

The assessment is clearly robust and thoughtful, and there is substantial evidence that the learners on the course are motivated and engaged with their subjects. The best work is at a very high standard indeed. I do think it's worth repeating my observation from last year, though, that the structure and nature of the assignment schemes are, for the most part, those of a pre-digital age, and that a Master's course in the area of *digital media and society* has a great deal of scope to bring digital media tools and platforms into the degree as learning and teaching spaces as well as objects of analysis (class blogs, to offer just one example). The short digital methods workshop component of *Putting Research Into Practice 2* does this very well, and I would again encourage the course team to reflect on whether there is scope to broaden the range of assignment types and to more closely articulate the themes of the course with its means of assessment.

I note also that the students appear to be required to submit both hard and electronic copies, which seems to me redundant. I recognise that the electronic copies are for plagiarism detection purposes, but I would encourage the course team to think of using them also for online marking and removing the requirement for hard copies altogether. (At my own institution, the students union ran a successful campaign several years ago for all marking to be done electronically, and this is increasingly common across the sector, in my experience).

4. Year-on-Year Comments

See point 3 above.

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

N/A.

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

The two research methods modules are, taken together, the best such modules I have seen. They offer breadth and depth of analysis, a wide range of expertise, and a challenging sequence of assessment tasks that should comprehensively equip the students for their dissertations. The sample of dissertation proposals and literature reviews shows a good range of research interests. The feedback on those proposals is particularly detailed and constructive.

7. Comments on the Examination of Master's Dissertations (External Examiners for postgraduate Master's Programmes only, see also 9.23-9.29 below)

For the academic year 2014/15, I received marked copies of five dissertations in November 2015, which was a sample of 100% for the year. All candidates gave the impression of a confident engagement with the literature and with their chosen research methods, and as a capstone project for the degree, their dissertations demonstrated a successful course. The overall standard was high, and I was happy to endorse all the grades.

One thing that the course team might consider for the 2016 dissertations is ensuring that candidates manifest a more consistent approach to ethical considerations in research. All of these 2014/15 dissertations involved human research subjects, but the attention to the ethical questions that this generates was uneven. Two of the dissertations did not address ethics at all, while two others briefly gestured towards this dimension but did not really explore it; only one dissertation, in my view, gave proper attention to the ethical dimensions of its project. To be clear, I am not suggesting that there were any ethical problems at all with any of these dissertations, and nor am I calling for the implementation of some burdensome new compliance procedure; rather, I am suggesting that it would be good to see all candidates who are conducting interviews or other research with human subjects demonstrate some awareness of the ethical aspects of this research, and offer some account of how ethical choices and decisions were negotiated during their projects.

8. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)

N/A.

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)
Programme/Course Information				
9.1	Did you receive sufficient information about the Programme and its contents, learning outcomes and assessments?	X		
9.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?		X	
Draft Examination Question Papers				
9.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?			X
9.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?			X
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			X
Marking 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?			X
9.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?			X
9.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?			X
9.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?			X
9.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?			X
Coursework and Practical Assessments				
9.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	X		
9.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	X		
9.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	X		
9.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	X		
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			X
Sampling of Work				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	X		
Examining Board Meeting				
9.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	X		
9.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	X		

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
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?	X		
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?			X
9.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			X
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			X
Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)				
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?	X		
9.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?	X		
9.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?	X		
9.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?		X	
9.27	If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?			X
9.28	Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?	X		
9.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?	X		

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:

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.