

Guidance notes are available to support the completion of this Report via the Cardiff University Intranet [here](#) and from ExternalExaminers@cardiff.ac.uk.

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Paola Pedarzani		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University College London (UCL)		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	Biomedical Sciences (Neuroscience; Physiology)		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2018-19	Date of Report:	23/06/2019

Please complete all information in the spaces provided and submit within **six weeks** of the Examining Board (the dissertation stage Examining Board in the case of postgraduate Master's programmes).

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)

The curriculum design of the Biomedical Sciences degree courses (specifically Physiology and Neuroscience), level setting and application of a variety of teaching and learning methods are overall fine. While the second year works in providing an adequate foundation, **the availability of subject-specific modules in Neuroscience in the final year is limited in the new curriculum (only 2 modules)**. While I understand that this facilitates teaching and workload distribution for the lecturers, I am slightly concerned for the lack of choice and variety for the students in research-led, specialised modules in the final year compared with Neuroscience degree courses (BSc and MSci Neuroscience) in other Russell Group Universities (see e.g. UCL, Manchester, Nottingham).

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

Academic standards, expectations and achievement of students were definitely high, comparable to those of other top UK Universities. In the BSc Neuroscience, slightly more than 20% of students achieved a 1st class degree mark. This is a relatively high percentage of the cohort. **This will need to be monitored in the coming years,**

especially in view of the new breakdown of marks in the modules (60% final exam and 40% coursework) in order to prevent mark inflation.

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

Both modules that I have scrutinised (BI3451 and BI3452) had a solid and proper structure, enabling the students to achieve the learning objectives and perform at good levels overall.

Structure and stretch of the assessment were comparable between these modules. For the exam papers, I found standards very comparable and consistent between them. Both modules provided exam scripts with very good and clear annotations, these were particularly good and clear for BI3452.

Overall, markers made a good use of the full range of marks, with examples of outstanding exam papers marked in the 80% range.

Final year projects were of high standard, both in terms of the breadth and depth of topics covered, quality of the write-ups and robustness of the assessment process.

One point that needs consideration is the case of students who could not perform the experiments described (or part of them) because of extenuating circumstances or other issues: the students should clearly specify what was done by them and what was contributed by others in a dedicated paragraph in their final thesis.

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

[Where possible please complete this section following the dissertation examining board determining the final award.]

The MSci dissertations that I have reviewed were of high standard and appropriately marked.

5. Year-on-Year Comments

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

As external examiner, my focus was on ensuring that the work assessed within the School had been fairly marked and processes had been appropriate and coherently followed. The outcome of my scrutiny was satisfactory, and the evidence presented shows robust, thorough and fair assessment of the students' work at all levels.

Points needing consideration for next year:

- 1- As in the last two years, this year we were given a long spreadsheet with all of the marks that contribute to the final degree class of every student, plotted as individual profiles. This is very inconvenient to scrutinise and does not provide a prompt overview of the class and various modules taken across the years. It would be useful to have instead a summary spreadsheet collating all of the marks that contribute to the final degree class of every student for a single degree course (i.e. Biomedical Sciences (Neuroscience), Biomedical Sciences (Physiology), etc). This would be helpful to determine, for example, how a module that received particularly low marks would influence a degree outcome if the marks were higher. We have put forward this request in our reports for the last two years, but it has seemingly been ignored. It would be very helpful if Registry could please address it.
- 2- One day is tight to scrutinise samples of exam scripts as well as final year projects for the BSc and MSci. It would be very useful if external examiners could be given access to the project dissertations and their assessment a couple of weeks before the Exam Board Meeting. This would give us sufficient time to look at larger samples of projects in more depth.
- 3- It would be very useful for the external examiners to have bar diagrams with grade distributions for each module's exam (contributing 60%), coursework assessment (contributing 40%) and final module marks. This would reveal whether marks have normal or bimodal distribution and highlight potential skewing factors, particularly in view of the high contribution of coursework, which normally receives higher marks.
- 4- Considering the limited time that external examiners have to review exam scripts, it would be very useful if 'samples' of scripts for every module (plus a summary spreadsheet with all marks and stats) could be pre-selected for them, rather than having to go through spreadsheets and the whole pile of scripts for each module. Samples should include all Fails; mid-class examples for each class (mid-forties, mid-fifties, mid-sixties, Firsts/Distinctions); and examples of all upper borderlines (39, 49, 59, 69). Should the external examiners feel that they need to widen the sample, they should have access to the rest of the scripts upon request on the day of the scrutiny. I think this would make the scrutiny process more efficient.

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)

In most modules, I found annotations on the exam scripts very useful to understand how marks were allocated and justified, resulting in a fair and robust marking process.

Very good practice in marking final year projects, with a well balanced set of components and thorough comments and reports by supervisors and second markers.

Excellent advance planning of dates, comprehensive briefing and provision of relevant information on the Programmes of study and the changes implemented in the last year. Outstanding support by the Deputy School Manager, the Director of Undergraduate Education and his staff throughout the process.

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/A
Commenting on draft examination question papers				
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
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		
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	Y		

	established procedures and to your satisfaction?			
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)				N/A
9.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?			
9.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			

Please return this Report, **in a Microsoft Word format**, by email to:
externalexaminers@cardiff.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