



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Fiona Polack		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Keele University		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	UG programmes in the School of Computer Science and informatics		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2018-9	Date of Report:	27-6-2018

Please complete all information in the spaces provided and submit within **six weeks** of the Examining Board (the **taught 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 Data Protection Act (1998).

Please extend spaces where necessary.

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

Programme structures seem to be appropriate in structure and level. Overall, these are good programmes, that seem to be taught well.

The team-based approach to teaching on the software engineering degree continues to be particularly impressive.

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

The academic standards are generally very good.

Last year, we noted the tendency to examine technical ability (very well) but to avoid challenging students' knowledge of when and why to apply the technical skills (esp. at level 6). We proposed a simple solution, adding parts of questions that ask about the circumstances in which something is appropriate or might be varied, or similar.

Papers in general have followed this advice, and the massive disparity in marks between exams and areas such as the project where students had to think and apply what they know is much less obvious than last year. I think I returned one paper that had no reflective/qualitative elements, but all others were acceptable this year, and I have hopes that all will be good next year. The disparity between achievement in modules (very high) and achievement in reflective elements such as project and placement report (sometimes very low) was less apparent this year.

There were a number of projects scoring high 90s and one received 100%. In general, these were excellent projects and deserved the top-of-the-scale marks awarded (but see below on project marking). The top Maths/CS student, in particular, produced truly outstanding work.

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

The modules are of comparable standards, and assessments reflect (often explicitly) the learning outcomes.

We were consulted on a proposal to revise moderation, to include guidelines on challenge and proposals that would enable sharing of best practice. The proposals are excellent and would, in themselves, be best practice in the sector if enacted. I would encourage the staff to adopt these, not least because it would become clear to staff where their approach to assessment is out of line with other modules.

As last year, review of projects was hampered by the very minimal commentary that accompanies marks and resolutions. I have looked at this carefully since the visit, so this is not something I discussed with the staff in detail (though Prof. Holcombe did raise it). I had no significant concerns with the marks actually awarded to projects, but the process was very qualitative, with little evidence on which to conduct a quality audit. I can illustrate one issue from projects that I looked at. [REDACTED] scored 98 for his project: the markers reflect that the student did twice what he intended (this is clear in the proposal and report) and that the mark reflected that he achieved excellence in several projects' worth of work -- comments that I think are appropriate. [REDACTED] achieved 85 for her project, which was a systematic, thorough and very complete software development, written up very well; this was again reflected in the comments. However, [REDACTED] had minimal literature review, and had not looked at the many existing "scrabble solvers" (his topic) or, apparently, much of the literature on vision and AI related to the two parts of his project, whereas [REDACTED] did a careful review, considering many aspects of the problem, method and solution, with good citation. It is unclear to me why [REDACTED] got away with minimal review (most places would require this in a top project). Furthermore, comments show that [REDACTED] only got her mark over 80 because of a strong viva performance (something which cannot be verified in any way). Again, I am not querying the marking, but I do need more to go on when checking how and why the marks were awarded to the reports etc.

It is clear to me that the project marking process needs some clear guidelines, as is common at other institutions. These can be minimal, but need to identify what are the key requirements for all project reports, and what are the grade descriptors for each level. Projects cannot be marked on a simple scale (e.g. a "product" may be trivial or may be incredibly complicated; a "design" may be something already in existence or an entirely novel creation of the student), but aspects such as background/review, method, and evaluation are identifiable in all good reports. A top

project ought to meet each criterion in a way that is appropriate to the topic; thus, a project without an appropriate review should not get a top mark, whereas a thorough, systematic project that meets its (sufficiently challenging) goals should be eligible for a top mark.

This is not a new issue. Last year, I noted: "I looked at a range of other reports. In general, I found it extremely difficult to understand why the specific mark had been awarded. Markers (with one exception) seemed reluctant to indicate where marks had been "lost". In the worst case I saw, all three comments on a report with a 4-grade difference in marks gave no indication of how any of the marks had been arrived at."

The meeting was well run and appropriate. After last year's comments, we were assured that borderlines would be considered anonymously. I completely understand why this was not done: there are no decisions taken on the borderlines any more. However, working with named students, there needs to be extreme care that all students who have "alternative" calculations, ECs and repeat elements are treated equally, not just the ones that staff in the room recognise by name. I was alert to this during the meeting, and I believe that the meeting handled all students fairly, but this needs to be monitored and checked each time.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

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

The staff have taken most of our comments very seriously, and there is a clear intention to continue to improve procedures.

It is my fault that the project marking issue was not discussed properly during the visit: hopefully we can make progress on this over the next 12 months.

5. Preparation for the role of External Examiner (for new External Examiners only) (appropriateness of briefing provided, visits to School, programme handbooks and supporting information)

I had timely access to all the information I needed. (I lacked time to make good use of some of it, but that was my fault not the department's!).

Several things would make the visit more productive: these could be provided electronically e.g. in a shared / team google drive:

1. The completed moderation forms, summarising what was done in response to examiners', as well as moderators, comments.
2. the actual exam papers and coursework papers that the students sat, with sample/model answers where appropriate, so that scripts/solutions can be easily reviewed
3. the marking criteria for projects (see comments above) and a commentary on any special issues arising with projects (e.g. resolutions of marks, quality control across the cohort, etc.)
4. check that the examiners have access to all the relevant electronic materials... e.g. KLE access to courseworks.

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

As noted last year, the team work modules and projects of the software engineering programme, especially the excellent management of the teamworking elements, are best practice for the sector. Being able to provide students with a pedagogically rigorous but commercially realistic experience is fantastic.

Again, as last year, the placement year assessment, with its focus on self-reflection and cumulative learning (rather than the sometimes contentious “what I did on my placement”). I note that this is also included in most final project reports, and plays a similarly, important, role in promoting understanding of self-learning.

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

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?			na
Draft Examination Question Papers				
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?	improving		
8.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	y		
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?	y		
8.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	see above		
8.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	see above		
8.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	see above		

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		
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?			
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
8.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			na
Sampling of Work				
8.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	y		
Examining Board Meeting				
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?			na
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			na
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			na
Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)				
8.23	Did you receive a sufficient number of Dissertations to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?			na
8.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?			na
8.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?			na
8.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?			na
8.27	If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?			na
8.28	Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?			na

8.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?			na
8.30	Comments on the Examination of Master's Dissertations. <i>Please provide any comments you may wish to make on the issues raised above.</i>			

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