



Academic & Student Support Services
Gwasanaethau Academaidd a Chefnogi Myfyrwyr
Registry
Y Gofrestrfa
Academic Registrar Cofrestrydd Academaidd
Simon Wright LLB(Hons)

Cardiff University

McKenzie House
30-36 Newport Road
Cardiff CF24 0DE
Wales UK

Tel please see below
Fax +44(0)29 2087 4130

www.cardiff.ac.uk

Prifysgol Caerdydd

Tŷ McKenzie
30-36 Heol Casnewydd
Caerdydd CF24 0DE
Cymru Y Deyrnas Unedig

Ffôn gweler isod
Ffacs +44(0)29 2087 4130

www.caerdydd.ac.uk

Sent by email to stephen.serjeant@open.ac.uk

15 April 2020

Dear Professor Serjeant,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2018/19

I am writing further to the receipt of your report for MSc Data Intensive Astrophysics and MSc Data Intensive Physics.

Your report has been considered by colleagues in the School and is the basis of this Institutional Response on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor. The School will also use its contents to help inform their [Annual Review and Enhancement](#) process and where appropriate, [Periodic Review](#).

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. Your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process.
2. The programme now has a more comprehensive treatment of machine learning.
3. The exam marking was exemplary, carefully double-marked. The exam questions are of a high standard and comparable with the best in the sector.
4. the excellent support from the School in arranging access to examination materials and dissertations, helping with logistics, and arranging for opportunities for external examiners to meet the students separately from the academics.
5. The students praised the excellent and clear teaching of cosmology.
6. The workload in the Autumn term has been looked at carefully, and the students are already no longer describing this aspect of the workload as their leading concern.
7. The MSc programmes are a great success story with a very healthy and growing recruitment.



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8. The impressive innovative teaching methods through the grant application activity and student activity of assessment of a previous student's work.
9. The widespread practice of recording lectures in Cardiff is also very good practice.
10. The implementation of the recommendation of an Informal Tutor who is outside the line management chain.
11. The continued impressiveness of the open-door policy maintained by the programme convenors, which is greatly valued by the students and contributes enormously to the academic success of the programme and to its growth in recruitment.
12. The appointment of one of the programme convenors as a National Teaching Fellow.

Issues highlighted in your report and response provided by the School:

1. ***Academic Standards:*** *Permit students to take a wider range of modules; Advise students of the option to take other modules using recordings of lectures at induction.*

Consideration of widening the diet for MSc DIP, DIA will be considered at the next PGT Board of Studies. Processes are already in place to allow ad hoc additions to the diet where these align with the programme-level learning outcomes.

2. ***Year-on-Year Comments:*** *Provide students with a 'spider-diagram' of module inter-dependencies.*

A prerequisite course spider diagram is a good idea and will be considered during the course of the upcoming 5 year MSc review.

Prerequisite knowledge and skills are not part of the requirements for SIMS module descriptions, but this could be incorporated as part of the prerequisite spider diagram, if adopted.

3. ***Year-on-Year Comments:*** *Consider providing students with access to module notes and recordings from previous years.*

Students have access to all current materials for their elective modules on day one and it is down to the judgement of individual module leaders whether to make previous years' materials available (this is done on PXT101/201 and PXT102/202, for instance). Consideration of a baseline policy on such releases can be considered at the next PGT Board of Studies.

4. ***Year-on-Year Comments:*** *Lack of clarity over the set textbook for Magnetism and Superconductivity.*

This will be clarified for 2020/21.

5. ***Year-on-Year Comments:*** *Physical space available to the MSc programmes.*

The School Manager has visited the MSc Teaching and Learning Facilities and is aware of the issues. The discussions are on hold due to prioritising other activities due to the coronavirus pandemic, but this will be taken up again during the summer.

6. ***Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement:*** *Increase in teaching workload due to increased recruitment; There must be an excellent business case for an additional 100%-teaching academic staff member to support this growing cohort of MSc students, even if it's only a fixed-term appointment.*

Teaching workload has been raised at School Board and will be raised again at individual academics' PDRs. The discussions are on hold due to prioritising other activities due to the coronavirus pandemic, but this will be taken up again during the summer.

We hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your continued support of the programme.

In order to meet the expectations of the [QAA Quality Code](#), both the External Examiner Annual Report and this Institutional Response will be published on the University's [Public Information website](#) and will be available to all students and staff.

We are most grateful for your comments and for your support in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Simon Wright
Academic Registrar