



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:	Adam Benham		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Durham University		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	Biosciences (Biomolecular modules; BSc in Biochemistry, BSc in Genetics, BSc in Molecular Biology and the BSc in Biotechnology)		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2016-17	Date of Report:	25/07/17

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)

The curriculum design, programme structure, programme level, and methods of teaching and learning are appropriate and meet the needs of a modern biosciences course at a Russell Group University. The course materials are clear, comprehensive and student friendly. In preparation for the external examiner activities, materials are provided in a timely fashion by the departmental academic support team. The transition to 4-year degree programmes accompanied by a streamlining of themes to Biology, Biomedical Sciences, Biochemistry and Neurosciences appears to have progressed well. Some thought may be required to consider whether a 2-week bioinformatics followed by 2-week laboratory project is appropriate at 3rd year for all the 4-year degree programme students that take this option.

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

The Biosciences degree programmes deliver to a high academic standard, and provide a rich and stimulating framework for student learning, in keeping with the demands of QAA. The academic standards achieved by the students reading Biosciences at Cardiff are high, in my opinion, and comparable with those at competitor institutions.

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

The School continues to ensure that the assessment process is rigorous and fair. Mechanisms are in place to enable students to achieve the aims and learning outcomes of the course(s). I found many examples of detailed and thoughtful feedback by staff on student examination scripts (and other course assignments) that will help students to improve their learning outcomes as they progress through the degree programme. Award classifications are appropriate; in my opinion, this year the spread of first and upper second-class degrees in Biosciences routes reflected the standard of student work. The stretch of activities and assessments is apparent, particularly in practical and project work, where students are able to develop and test an experimental hypothesis and develop their scientific independence. Standards between modules of the same level are largely comparable, although this year module BI3316 was an outlier with a relatively low mean module mark. Issues associated with this module were discussed amongst the external examiners and are likely to be addressed in more detail in the Biomedical examiners report.

I was asked to comment on the exam papers and model answers in advance of the examinations. The provision of this material was piecemeal again this year, and this remains one area where the School could improve. However, I was pleased to see that the School took my comments on the examination papers into consideration when finalising the exam questions. The breadth of topics covered by the examinations appropriately reflected the course content. I paid particular attention to modules BI3212 (Genetic Engineering in Biotechnology), BI3211 (Eukaryotic Gene Expression), BI3216 (Genetic Models of Disease), and BI3218 (Protein Structure, Function and Folding). In each of these modules, there was evidence of scrutiny and evidence that the full marking range was being used, in line with the marking criteria. Although the marking schemes and descriptors provided are comprehensive, I did find some examples where descriptors did not match the mark awarded at the lower end of the marking scheme.

One area that I would like the School to consider is transparency in documenting how disagreements in first and second marking/scrutineering are resolved. I saw one, albeit isolated, example where an uplift in the mark occurred on an examination script for module BI3216, but no annotation was provided to explain why this done. If this procedure had been applied to downgrade a mark, it could potentially disadvantage a student.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

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

This is my second year as an external examiner for the School of Biosciences. Last year I commented on the positive aspects of the programme structure, academic standards, and assessment procedures, as well as the value of the Induction day and the opportunity to meet the students. The Registry and School noted these positive comments and also provided a reply to some points of concern. Overall, I am satisfied that the University has taken my comments from last year on board and has made steps to address issues where necessary. The School put in place a review of statistics teaching to address some student concerns about the use/relevance of R. The perception that not all students have the opportunity to do laboratory projects in the final year was clarified, and will largely be addressed by the 4-year Masters degree programme coming on line. Issues with library space and lecture theatres appear to have been addressed by refurbishment and library reorganisation. It will be interesting to speak to students next year to hear their thoughts on these new arrangements. The School noted my comments that exam marking at the upper end of the scale was rather tough in 2016, and this does not seem to have been an issue this year. An important point that remains, however, is that the SIMS system is not fully fit for purpose and prevents the School staff from providing external examiners with excel spread sheets. This limits the ability of external examiners to fully explore the student performance datasets, and consumes time that could be spent drilling down into second year scripts and second year student performance. The School raised concerns over the rounding procedure for marks with the Registry, with support from the external examiners. It remains to be seen how these software-driven issues will be resolved.

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)

Not applicable

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

As in 2016, I was impressed with the level of annotation and feedback provided by the School academics on final year exam scripts, particularly given the short turn-around time for marking. The marking and annotation criteria are very clear and help standardise achievement across modules. There is also very clear instruction and provision with respect to student disability. One area that would help external examiners is if examples of project reports could be provided in advance as pdfs, across the degree classification categories and degree streams. Although the access that external examiners are given to student work online is appreciated, it can be difficult to find representative subject-specific projects at each degree classification in a timely fashion.

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

Not applicable

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?		N	
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?	Y		
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?	Y		
8.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	Y		
8.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	Y		
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?	Y		
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
8.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
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?			N/A
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			N/A
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?			N/A
8.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?			N/A
8.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?			N/A
8.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?			N/A
8.27	If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?			N/A
8.28	Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?			N/A
8.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?			N/A
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>			
	N/A			

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