



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:	Prof Katie Lloyd Thomas		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Newcastle University		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	AR5002 MArch Dissertation		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2017-18	Date of Report:	06.04.2018

Please complete all information in the spaces provided and submit within **six weeks** of the Examining Board.

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).

Section 1: Annual Report Checklist

If you respond 'No' to any of the questions below, please can you provide more detailed comments in Section 2 below.

	Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
Programme/Course Information			
Did you receive sufficient information about the Programme and its contents, learning outcomes and assessments?	Y		
Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?		N	
Draft Examination Question Papers			
Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?			N/A
Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?			N/A
Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			N/A
Marking Examination Scripts			
Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?			N/A

Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?			N/A
Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?			N/A
Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?			N/A
In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?			N/A
Coursework and Practical Assessments			
Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?			N/A
Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?			N/A
Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?			N/A
Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?			N/A
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)			
Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
Sampling of Work			
Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?			N/A
Examining Board Meeting			
Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	N		
Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?			N/A
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?			N/A
Joint Examining Board Meeting (if applicable)			
Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?		N	
If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			N/A
Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)			
Did you receive a sufficient number of Dissertations to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?	Y		
Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?	Y		
Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?	Y		
Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?	Y		
If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance	Y		

with established procedures?			
Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?	Y		
Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?	Y		

Section 2: Detailed comments on the programme/modules

Please extend spaces where necessary.

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

Module preparation is very well structured to allow students to identify and develop topics of interest in good time and to complete the preliminary tasks of proposal drafting and literature through short taught courses while they are working in practice. By the time they return to full time study in the autumn they should have completed the bulk of their primary research and have a four-month period more fully supervised before submission. Whilst this very linear research structure is a useful starting framework, it can leave little room for the iterations of good research – for example students rarely revised their methodological approaches in the light of their research findings, or turned to new literatures to better explain them.

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

The module meets QAA and benchmark standards, and demonstrates parity in terms of word length, expectations and marking with other similar modules in the UK that I have come into contact with. I saw the full range of marks this year including a failing piece of work and was fully satisfied that levels are appropriate at the passing, middle and highest levels. It is commendable that where there is outstanding achievement the team are using the high range of marks into the 80s and even a 90.

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

In response to previous comments the dissertations team have reconfigured the assessment process this year. All dissertations are now first marked by the supervisor, and by an internal second marker. A new dissertation moderation committee is responsible for third reading and final grading decisions wherever there are significant disparities between the two markers. External examiners were presented with a final set of marks, and were only involved in grading the viva itself at 10% of the final mark. This new system is already working very well indeed.

We noted that whilst external examiners each read a quarter of the cohort's dissertations (13-14) thereby gaining a comparative overview of achievement, the internal markers each read no more than a handful. A useful refinement could be that the moderating committee establish their own internal process to enable a similar internal overview of module achievement and ranking.

Comments on the Examination of Master's Dissertations (sample received, the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners, how the schemes for marking and classification were applied).

The dissertations I reviewed covered the full spectrum of marks and a good range of topics and methods. It was excellent to be able to see feedback sheets from first and second markers this year, and these were comprehensive although not all markers were explicit about the relation of their comments to the criteria. Criteria are well suited to a more social sciences or science-based research process, than to history/theory research or some of the more creative methodologies architecture students make use of.

Year-on-Year Comments

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

The viva provides an excellent opportunity to appreciate the level of students' engagement with their dissertation research. Even where students have produced middle of the range documents it can become apparent that this has been a very important exercise and is already informing the kind of architectural practice they aspire to after their degree - and at the high end students are producing outstanding research with value to communities beyond the school. Conversely, as previous examiners' reports have noted, the very structured framework students are provided with (literature review, method, application of method to 1-3 case studies) allows even rather disengaged students to perform quite well. There are many alternative models at MArch level in architecture that could be explored – options, group-based research, tutors leading topics based in their own projects and disciplinary backgrounds, design-based research, relating dissertations to studio projects, etc. – which could make the module educationally valuable and meaningful to all students.

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

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

The dissertation module leader and team are to be commended for implementing the new assessment process, and for providing such comprehensive feedback and records of the new system. The external examination process is transparent and open, providing an excellent forum for discussing the module's strengths and areas for improvement.

This change has also clarified the nature of the viva, giving the students the remarkable opportunity (unique in the UK to my knowledge) to discuss their research in depth, in a situation that is now less pressured, since the marks have already been finalised. Some students with weaker grades impressed by being self-reflective and aware of the flaws in their work, whilst some strong students already had plans to develop their research further. Most students were well prepared, engaging and confident, and number of students remarked how much they had enjoyed the viva.

Students demonstrate a good grasp of the basic principles of research and academic writing, provided through lectures and the very thorough and helpful handbook. I saw few examples of students using visual methods in their research, and would suggest this is added to the stable of methods. The team might also consider introducing more opportunities for peer learning (eg. group tutorials, presentation sessions) in addition to the strong lecture programme and one-to-one supervision already provided.

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

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