

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

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	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 programmes)		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2018-19	Date of Report:	14-07-19

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, programme structure and methods of teaching and learning are appropriate and robust at the School of Biosciences. The structure of the programme has changed considerably over the past few years with the implementation of the BIOSI 2020 curriculum - the new degree course offers the students enhanced opportunities to study a streamlined range of modules in more depth at a time of increasing competitiveness in the postgraduate employment market.

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

The academic standards are high and comparable with other UK HEIs, in my opinion. The achievements of Cardiff Biosciences students, taken together as a cohort, are excellent this year. The student achievement is reflected in the high percentage of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2.1 standard degrees awarded.

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

The assessment process is reliable and is based around written examinations (both seen and unseen) and a variety of summative assessed coursework, including written assignments, practical studies, oral presentations and posters. The range of assessment types tests the breadth of students' skills. I had the opportunity to review final year exam papers on "Genes to Genomes" (a large module), "Advanced Cell Biology" (a smaller module) and the "Omics" module (a module with a new open book exam format). In general, marking is fair, there is comparability of standards between modules at the same level, and there is no evidence to suggest that a student would be favoured or disfavoured by taking different combinations of modules. For new modules, sample papers were provided to the students prior to examinations. The supporting coursework (for example, materials available on the Cardiff Learning Central portal) are impressive and help to facilitate the stated learning outcomes. Panopto voice recordings, summary sheets and appropriate background information from the scientific literature supplement traditional lectures.

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

I did not review a postgraduate Masters programme, but I did have the opportunity to sample dissertations from the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the integrated undergraduate "M" courses. The standard of internal marking is high and consistent with the marking criteria. The mid-course progress evaluation is a good idea. The classification of awards is appropriate. Some of the dissertations at the top end were outstanding - students graduating with an integrated Masters in Biosciences from Cardiff are competitive for research PhD positions at other Russell group Universities.

**5. Year-on-Year Comments**

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

This year was my fourth and final year as external examiner. In previous years, the Registry have noted my comments and responded appropriately in writing. This year, however, I did not receive a written response to my report until June 2019, which was disappointing. The Biosciences staff continues to be dedicated and diligent, and have worked hard through a period of change to produce a challenging degree programme to meet the needs of modern bioscientists. Evidence from the first cohorts on the new degree programmes suggest that the programme changes are producing graduates with excellent degree outcomes.

An ongoing issue that was not resolved this year is the advance provision of exam scripts, which was piecemeal and has been at short notice for the past couple of years – the School could do more to engage the external examiners in the examination process. Another issue that I raised last year that was not resolved was the opportunity for externals to meet students, particularly 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students on the Masters courses. This would reassure the external examiners that the new degree routes are meeting student expectations. I urge the School to give the externals the opportunity to meet with students next year. At my home institution, we have a "celebration of science" event at which selected students give talks about their research projects, placements, etc. A similar event could be considered by the

School to showcase the achievements of their undergraduates- this need not take up too much staff/examiner time if organised efficiently.

**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)

The consistency of marking, annotation, scrutineering and feedback on exam scripts is excellent. The School should be commended for maintaining these high standards over the period that I have been external examiner. There are excellent opportunities for enhancement of learning opportunities at Cardiff for Bioscience undergraduates, including extended laboratory projects and placements. Some of the assessments on the new modules are inventive – I particularly liked the opportunity to “adopt a gene” on the Genes to Genomes module and to use the adopted gene to understand its various molecular properties as the module progressed.

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

In my external examiner period, the School has implemented a new Masters undergraduate degree programme across four subject areas (MBiol, MBiochem, MBiomed and MNeuro). The School has also introduced a new streamlined BIOSI 2020 curriculum. The evidence so far is that these changes have been a success and are beneficial both to student learning opportunities and to degree outcomes. The support and teaching staff has clearly worked hard to bring about these changes (last year against the backdrop of industrial action in the sector) and should be congratulated on their achievements.

Cardiff Biosciences students are deservedly achieving a high proportion of first and upper second class degrees – however going forward, care is required to ensure that degree outcomes have now stabilised, especially as the marking split between coursework and exams is now 40%:60% at Level 3; and for the Masters students there is a 20:30:50% split across years 2, 3 and 4, placing a strong emphasis on coursework in year 4. Following the changes to the degree programmes, I expect that the School will allow these changes to bed in and that the next few years will see a period of stability and minor readjustments to the degree course structure. Areas of work still required include the ongoing lack of flexibility of the University database system to provide some of the key performance measures to external examiners; and the lack of opportunity to fully overview second year work.

Overall, I have enjoyed my time as external examiner. I thank the academic and support staff for their efforts in assisting the external examiners and wish the School and its students all the best for the future.

## 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)
<b>Programme/Course information</b>				
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	
<b>Commenting on draft examination question papers</b>				
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?	Y		
<b>Examination scripts</b>				
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		
<b>Coursework and practical assessments</b>				
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		
<b>Clinical examinations (if applicable)</b>				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
<b>Sampling of work</b>				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
<b>Examining board meeting</b>				
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		
<b>Joint examining board meeting (if applicable)</b>				
9.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
9.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			N/A

Please return this Report, **in a Microsoft Word format**, by email to:  
[externalexaminers@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto: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