



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

Guidance notes are available to support the completion of this Report and are available at <http://learning.cf.ac.uk/quality/review/external-examiners/reports/>.

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Prof Malcolm Coe		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Southampton		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report	MSc (Astrophysics)		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2015-16	Date of Report:	16 Sep 2016

For completion by External Examiner in the spaces provided. Please extend spaces where necessary. **Please note this Form will be published online and should not make any reference to any individual students or members of staff.**

NB I have taken the liberty of using my own formatting of this report as I felt it better reflected my views and thoughts.

External Examiners Report on MSc(Astrophysics) 2015-16 by Prof Malcolm Coe

Reviewing the material and meeting students

I met with the three students on 29 July 2016 who are currently working on their projects, plus the one student who failed to progress to the report stage. It was very clear from all of them that they greatly appreciated the support they had received specifically from [REDACTED] but also from [REDACTED]. It is clear that there had been several crisis points in this first year of the programme (see below) and the two staff members had worked extremely hard to get the students through these issues. Hopefully these “teething” problems can be resolved before the course runs again next year.

I also spent some time reviewing the exam papers and looking at the performance of the students on all the courses they had taken. Combining their marks with their comments it is clear that the demands placed upon these students were much greater than is reasonable on several occasions and it is a credit to the motivation of the students that they have succeeded in getting where they are now.

I subsequently read their project reports and was generally impressed and had no doubt that they were of a suitable standard for the award of MSc.

Recommendations/comments

My specific comments and recommendations are:

1. Workloading – it is clear that the combination of courses taken by the students led to extremely high workload points, particularly leading up to Xmas. It is possible that the individual course coordinators were unaware of the impact of all the continuous assessment work being set by other courses, and this may be because the MSc students take an unusual mix of 3rd and 4th year courses. I recommend that this is looked at, and if, as I understand it, these courses are double encoded (as UG and MSc courses) that the MSc versions have a different method of assessment applied. One suggestion appropriate for MSc students would be to make the assessment 100% examination – but the department may not wish to go that far.
2. Prerequisites – the students felt very strongly that they had little idea what prior knowledge was expected of them for each course. Since most of the courses they took are part of the normal UG programme this issue does not arise for those students – lecturers know what courses those students have already taken and can assume that knowledge in their delivery. But MSc students “parachuting” in from outside maybe missing large chunks of some materials. So the knowledge expectations must be clearly laid out to incoming MSc students, preferably well in advance of the start of the course, so that they can try and fill those gaps in their knowledge before starting. The current students said they would have willingly spent a month or two before the course started doing this. Of course, these issues should also play a key role in the recruitment process.
3. Glitches in the system - there clearly were some significant timetabling issues that arose this year which I fully expect are already being resolved. Two such examples were the data analysis/programming courses that did, but should never have run simultaneously; and the fact that the students were unable to access course materials on Blackboard for 4 weeks due to the double-encoding of the courses.
4. Academic content - the students also expressed the view that the amount of material presented in Astronomy Instrumentation courses was overwhelming. But they also noted that some of the options available were very much easier to score highly upon than other courses. This needs to be reviewed to provide consistency across the programme.

In summary, despite all the unintentional challenges thrown at the students, they feel the course is very worthwhile. They believe that the material presented has set them up extremely well for the next stages of their careers, several on PhD programmes, and after some adjustments they would strongly recommend it to others.

Examiners Meeting

I would recommend that the department investigate the possibility of conducting this meeting using only anonymous identities for the students. Though it may seem rather contrived this year, but if there are going to be 20+ students next year then this approach will seem more appropriate. In my opinion avoiding unconscious bias is crucial in such important meetings. Needless to say I am not suggesting anything incorrect occurred in yesterday's meeting, 15 Sep 2016.

9. Annual Report Checklist

Please include appropriate comments within Sections 1-8 above for any answer of 'No'.

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
Programme/Course Information				
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?	Y		
Draft Examination Question Papers				
9.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?			N/A
9.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?	Y		
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	Y		
Marking Examination Scripts				
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		
Coursework and Practical Assessments				
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		
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
Sampling of Work				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
Examining Board Meeting				

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
9.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	Y		
9.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	Y		
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		
Joint Examining Board Meeting (if applicable)				
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
Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)				
9.23	Did you receive a sufficient number of Dissertations to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?	Y		
9.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?	Y		
9.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?	Y		
9.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?	Y		
9.27	If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?	Y		
9.28	Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?	Y		
9.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?	Y		

Please return this Report, preferably in a Microsoft Word format, by email to:

ExternalExaminers@cf.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

SAMPLING OF TAUGHT MASTER'S DISSERTATIONS BY EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

External Examiners shall be expected to see prescribed numbers and ranges of Dissertations, but not to mark them, on the following basis:

At least 10% of Dissertations for a postgraduate taught Master's Programme, or a minimum of 10 (whichever is the higher figure) must be seen by the External Examiner(s). Where the total number is less than 10, all Dissertations must be seen by the External Examiner(s) #.

Dissertations seen by External Examiners should include examples from across the whole range of achievement (i.e. Pass with Distinction, Pass, Fail).

External Examiners will retain the right to see other Dissertations at random.

Where more than one External Examiner is appointed on a Programme, at least 10% of Dissertations, or a minimum of 10 (whichever is the higher figure), should be seen collectively by the External Examiners.