

## 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](mailto:ExternalExaminers@cardiff.ac.uk).

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Simon Leather		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Harper Adams University		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	BSc Biological Sciences (Ecology, Zoology) <i>BSc Biology, BSc Ecology, BSc Zoology</i>		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2016-17	Date of Report:	Received 16 June 2017

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 programme structure is very similar to many other universities with a common first year followed by optional modules. The assessment is varied and allows students to develop skills in essay writing, report writing and oral presentation. I am somewhat surprised at the large number of students registered on some of the final year modules, for example 94 students on the Conservation Biology BI3114 module. In my opinion, best practice would suggest that a final year module should have, at the very most, 40 students, preferably 30. At final year students should be interacting with both staff and peers in class discussions that involve ALL students. I do not see how this can be possible once student numbers exceed 40. I know that there is pressure on universities to streamline courses by reducing the number of modules available to reduce teaching loads and expense but I do worry that the student experience is being negatively affected.

I am also not convinced that a literature review final year project is the equivalent of a practical/experimental research project. Ideally all students on an honours science

degree should be doing a 'hands-on' project. If literature based projects are unavoidable then I suggest that they are done as a formal meta-analysis.

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

Looking at the exam papers, project report and assignments I believe that the academic standards are comparable with similar degrees across the UK. The presentation of the final year research projects was excellent, only a handful of students submitted projects containing 'Excel' graphs that had not been edited to conform to scientific conventions.

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

Assessment methods are varied and as far as I can see are fair and rigorously applied. There is evidence of plenty of student feedback. Exam papers are copiously annotated and the marks given are justified and in the main follow the written rubric. There were a few occasions where students were given the same mark but the written comments were very different; 65% "Poor level of detail", 65% "Substantial answer accurate coverage", 65% "Largely based on course material, major points covered and evidence of secondary reading." These are however, the exception rather than the rule.

I met a group of final year students in February and whilst they were in the main very complimentary about the course, the Department and the staff, they did voice concerns about the lack of contact hours in their final year modules. There was also some disquiet about the varying levels of supervision that they received during their research projects.

Although in general the questions on the examination papers attracted roughly equal numbers of answers, there was on module, BI3136 Global Climate Change Ecology, where one question was noticeably unpopular. I was unable to see any reason why this question was avoided but perhaps the School might consider looking into the matter.

**4. Year-on-Year Comments**

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

I note that previous examiners have commented on the university's draconian policy of penalising late submissions with a zero mark. I to feel that this is unnecessarily harsh. I have certainly never come across it at other institutions.

I also, as an examiner would like to be able to see module marks presented in mark order and alphabetical order. It would also be useful to see the final class list also presented in this way. It would enable me to judge the proportion of students in each class and to judge the borderline cases more easily.

It would make our job much easier if we were provided with a list of the final year project titles.

**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)

I was unable to attend the formal induction event but received enough documentation to enable me to understand what was required of me.

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

I was very pleased to be able to meet students earlier in the year. I was also very impressed with the detailed comments given in student feedback and also on exam scripts. The assignment in the Biological Conservation module BI3114 is an excellent and challenging means of assessment.

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

N/A

## 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)
<b>Programme/Course Information</b>				
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/A
<b>Draft Examination Question Papers</b>				
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		
<b>Marking Examination Scripts</b>				
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		
<b>Coursework and Practical Assessments</b>				
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		
<b>Clinical Examinations (if applicable)</b>				
8.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
<b>Sampling of Work</b>				
8.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
<b>Examining Board Meeting</b>				

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?			
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		
<b>Joint Examining Board Meeting (if applicable)</b>				
8.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?	Y		
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?	Y		
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			
<b>Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)</b>				
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	<b>Comments on the Examination of Master's Dissertations.</b> <i>Please provide any comments you may wish to make on the issues raised above.</i>			

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