



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

The completion of this Report is supported by *Annual Report Form – Guidance to External Examiners*. The Guidance and this Form are available at: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/regis/ifs/exex/rep/index.html>. Fee information and claim forms are available at: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/regis/ifs/exex/fees/index.html>.

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Dr Nick Holmes		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Cambridge University		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report:	School of Medicine Intercalated BSc Cellular and Molecular Pathology route		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2014-15	Date of Report:	22 June 2015

For completion by External Examiner in the spaces provided. Please extend spaces where necessary. **Please note this Form will be published online.**

1. Programme Structure

The Cellular and Molecular Pathology Intercalated programme offers selected pre-clinical medical students a valuable opportunity to develop their critical skills and knowledge in immunology, microbiology, genetics and cancer biology. The range of topics covered is both attractive and appropriate. The most distinctive and valuable component is the research project, which gives students a unique opportunity to experience first-hand genuine laboratory research. The course design is well suited to its objectives and to achieving the desired learning outcomes.

I conducted with exit interviews with 5 students (of a total of 8) who took this route in 2014-15. As in previous years, the students expressed a high level of satisfaction in their course. All had enjoyed the project experience especially. The tremendous value of the project is something I have commented on before and it was clear again this year that students do appreciate the large amount of time and effort which goes in to giving them this opportunity. I commented on this at the Molecular Pathology Board.

2. Academic Standards

The standards of the teaching and research programmes are comparable with similar courses at cognate higher education institutions with which I am familiar. While each year group is of relatively small size (5 – 8 in the four years I have been

external) I am quite satisfied that the students' performance is generally comparable to those for students on similar courses at comparable UK HEIs. The University should have a high level of confidence in the results and in the quality of education offered by this course.

3. The Assessment Process

The range of assessment methods used is appropriate to the course. The marking scheme is comparable to similar courses and appropriate. In general, the whole process was conducted in a fair and rigorous manner. As is the case at other institutions with which I am familiar, Cardiff's academic staff put a very considerable amount of work into the assessment procedure.

This year, at the exit interviews we particularly asked students about the balance of assessment modes and teaching methods. There was general agreement that there were a good variety of both teaching and assessment modes used. There were differences in individual preference surrounding the balance between in-course assessment modes and unseen exams, with some expressing a desire for more coursework and others less. This is in line with other years I have examined in Cardiff and with other courses and different HEIs that I have experience of.

I have commented in previous years on the rule on the classification of borderline candidates, whereby candidates within 2 marks of a borderline are automatically awarded the higher class if 50% of their credits are awarded marks above the relevant borderline. If I have understood it correctly, the aim of this procedure is to increase the percentage of candidates in the higher classes, especially First class. I am sympathetic to this objective; particularly in essay-based subjects my experience suggests it is common for examiners to mark over too narrow a range. Taken together with the statistical effects of combining marks from several different modules, which inevitably tends to produce some regression to the mean, it can indeed be the case that class distributions are squashed, though it could be emphasised that this happens at both ends of the distribution.

However, I will reiterate that I find the automatic application of such a 'rule' to be at variance with the practice at other similar HEIs in the UK.

It continues to be my view that the exam boards' proper procedure should be to take a holistic view of the work of any borderline candidates, ensuring that outlier results do not unduly depress the outcome and applying any judgement fairly and equally to all. Looking back over the past years in which I have been involved, there have certainly been occasions when I felt that the outcome of this rule has been unfortunate, in that candidates with very similar performance ended up with different degree classifications due to the inflexibility of the process. I do think the University should look again at this, particularly bearing in mind the 40 credits for the project and the consequences of a mark of 69 versus 70 for borderline candidates.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

5. Preparation / Induction Activity (for new External Examiners only)

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

The preparation of framework answers to the examination papers was carefully done and a good example of how this practice can enhance the transparency and consistency of marking.

The marking of research project reports is an especially tricky task at all HEIs. The procedure adopted by the programme of having two independent markers and where these disagree substantially of referring it to a third person is a good practice. Together with the weighting of the supervisor's mark (usually the one with most variance), this generally produces a fair result.

I am also impressed by the effort put in to providing feedback to the students on both their course work and their exam answers on the Autumn semester modules. I have seen examples of the individual feedback provided on a proforma. I am aware of the effort needed to provide this even with a small class. Certainly the University could do more to support the efforts of the teaching staff in providing feedback, perhaps by providing some online tools.

7. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)

The molecular pathology route to the intercalated BSc is one of a number of 'routes' which have both shared and reserved course components. The intake to this course is exclusively intermitting medical students and there has been, as I understand it, a significant degree of selection – both self-selection on the part of the students and some academic criteria applied by the School. The result of this is that the course has a small but highly motivated and able cohort of students. Certainly the median standard of students on the course as I have encountered it in the past four years was high. This is clearly reflected in the results they achieved in their assessments and in the quality of the project write-ups, of which I have read most but not quite all of those submitted in the past 4 years. The exit interviews have also been most instructive and every year there have been a few outstanding students who have impressed me with their enthusiasm, knowledge and understanding. This consistency and frequency is noticeable in such a small group (typically around 8 in each year).

In my view, the enthusiasm of the students and the high standard of their project reports and essays reflects the effort and quality of the educational opportunities that the Intercalated Molecular Pathology route offers to its students. I have also had a chance to meet many of the staff teaching on the course and discuss the course with them. It is clear to me that the enthusiasm of the students is matched if not driven, at least in part, by the enthusiasm of the staff and the quality of teaching and supervision provided. It should also be said that the effort and rigour with which the staff go about assessing the students work is equally laudable.

This is my fourth and final year as external examiner and I should particularly like to record my thanks to [REDACTED] and the rest of the Cardiff team for the efficient and professional way they have helped me audit their work

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?	√		
8.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?			√
Draft Examination Question Papers				
8.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?	√		
8.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?	√		
8.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	√		
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?	√		
8.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	√		
8.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	√		
8.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	√		
8.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?	√		
Coursework and Practical Assessments				
8.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	√		
8.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	√		
8.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	√		
8.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	√		
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
8.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			√
Sampling of Work				
8.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	√		
Examining Board Meeting				

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
8.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	√		
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?	√		
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?		√	
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			√
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			√

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:

Clive Brown, Registry Officer, Registry & Academic Services, Cardiff University,
McKenzie House, 30-36 Newport Road, Cardiff, CF24 0DE