



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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

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|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| | For completion by External Examiner: | | |
| Name of External Examiner: | Mary Ann Steane | | |
| Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner: | University of Cambridge | | |
| Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report including any dissertation stage reports | MArch Dissertations | | |
| Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report: | 2015/16 | Date of Report: | 12 April 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.**

1. Programme Structure

The external examiners were agreed that broadly speaking, the programme introduction, timetable, and guidance offer students a useful framework within which to develop their thinking. There emerged again however a general feeling that many students pursuing topics in the history/theory area would benefit from being offered an alternative thesis model to the one currently outlined, which seems most suited to social science topics. We also felt that the school might consider how to amend the structure of the programme to encourage more dialogue amongst the students concerning their ambitions, scope, focus, methodology at a middle point in the process. This should allow some reflection/debate on such issues as say whether a new methodology or a specific choice of case studies would improve the originality of the study. It was suggested that this might be way of scheduling an event at which the students make brief powerpoint presentations to one another and to one or two staff members?

2. Academic Standards

I can confirm that the work I saw was generally of a satisfactory standard for an MArch level programme (although there were a couple of fails this year, the range of levels of achievement was comparable to previous years and to cohorts elsewhere), with the strongest dissertations both a pleasure to look at and to read, addressing salient questions in an appropriate level of depth and detail.

Overall I had the sense that this year did not produce as much work across the upper middle range as the first year I examined, i.e. there seemed to be more of a gap between the best, most enjoyable and rigorous studies and the safer less accomplished but still capable work of the upper middle students.

3. The Assessment Process

The Cardiff MArch dissertation examining process is thorough as regards double marking and mark moderation. In response to my key criticism last year, all examiners seemed to have been sent a range of the dissertations to read, i.e a mixture of top, middle and bottom ranked work, which greatly aided the external examination process. It allowed us to concentrate on such issues as whether any further moderation of marks was required following the viva interviews, any critical issues are emerging concerning the programme, and perhaps most importantly, to assess more easily that overall standards are being maintained.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

- The guidance offered to students on the significance of dissertation illustrations *and their captions* deserves updating in my view. I raised this point last year but I did not see (or in any case was not shown) any related change in the guidance provided by the course handbook. While thesis writing clearly develops the writing and research skills of design students, it also has the capacity to build a greater confidence in what designers bring to research, the extent to which the kind of sophisticated drawings/graphs/diagrams of which they are already capable have the capacity to distil knowledge and to clarify or extend arguments.
- This year, prior to the start of the two viva examination days, we were encouraged to give greater attention to student performance in the interviews, when reviewing the marks awarded by the internal examiners. This led to useful discussion about the merits of each study, what progress had been achieved, what opportunities had been identified or ignored, the originality - or not - of different aspects of the work, its significance to a particular field. One or two students performed particularly well and were able to give an enthusiastic yet measured justification for the range of work they had undertaken, and no students did themselves a serious misservice in the viva.
- I note again that only a very few of the theses were in the area of building science/sustainability this year, and as last year, I did not review any offering quantitative evaluation of environmental design issues. Apart from this the choice of topics was varied, with many taking on pressing issues in sensible ways, and generally students chose appropriate methodologies to develop their understanding, even if the weaker students sometimes failed to grasp how to develop an argument by exploring rather than downplaying the paradoxes they had uncovered. One student does not prove a rule, but a failure by one candidate to take advice from a supervisor regarding the necessity to obtain guidance in the use of a complex analytical tool suggests that this issue deserves further emphasis in the course handbook, alongside the importance of fully explaining the assumptions and any critical first steps necessary when employing such models.

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

N/A.

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

- As already noted in section 1 the guidance on research methods and thesis writing /production is clear and comprehensive, but best suited to social science topics, and I remain convinced that it would be useful to formulate an alternative model for those students who are keen to explore other issues and develop other kinds of argument, alongside further written/verbal guidance on the different questions and approaches to which different models are suited.
- One or two of the students who made reference to the relation between their design and thesis projects performed particularly strongly in the thesis this year. We discussed whether this related to the strength of conversation it is possible to build within a studio and whether it might be useful to underline again to students the potential synergies that such cross-over studies can generate.
- I remain convinced that it could be helpful for the school to think harder about how students can 1) identify the focus of their research and its critical design questions and 2) adopt, adapt *or even invent* the most appropriate methodology for exploring and illuminating the issues in play. We agreed that full engagement with a question needs to be encouraged amongst middle-range students more explicitly, the sense in which such engagement is developed and communicated through the process of writing and editing first and second drafts, and thinking critically about key illustrations and their capacity to illuminate the argument – see year-on-year comments above.

7. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)

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) |
|--|---|------------|-----------|--------------|
| Programme/Course Information | | Y | | |
| 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? | | N | |
| Draft Examination Question Papers | | | | |
| 8.3 | Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award? | N/A | | |
| 8.4 | Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate? | N/A | | |
| 8.5 | Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments? | N/A | | |
| 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? | N/A | | |
| 8.7 | Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate? | N/A | | |
| 8.8 | Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks? | N/A | | |
| 8.9 | Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners? | N/A | | |
| 8.10 | 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 | | | | |
| 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 | | |
| Clinical Examinations (if applicable) | | | | |
| 8.15 | Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments? | N/A | | |
| Sampling of Work | | | | |
| 8.16 | Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work? | Y | | |
| Examining Board Meeting | | | | |

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

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