



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.

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Fiona Polack		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Keele University		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	UG programmes in the School of Computer Science and informatics		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2017-8	Date of Report:	12-7-2018

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)

Programme structures seem to be appropriate in structure and level. Overall, these are good programmes, taught well.

The team-based approach to teaching on the software engineering degree is particularly impressive.

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

The academic standards are generally very good.

There is a tendency to examine technical ability (very well) but to avoid challenging students' knowledge of when and why to apply the technical skills (esp. at level 7). This would be easy to rectify (e.g. parts of most questions need to ask about the circumstances in which something is appropriate or might be varied, or similar.). We

(the examiners) should have picked this up when we reviewed assessments, but as we each see a subset and not all at the same time, it only became obvious when looking at the outcomes.

Another inflationary factor is the practice of adding on the absolute mark for the project proposal (out of 5) to the report mark. Most students' proposals get high marks (i.e. 2:1 upwards) for their proposals, and many students are lifted over the module's borderlines by their proposal mark. There were several cases where the markers had stated that a report was mid-grade but the overall mark was in the grade above. It was clear that these markers saw the report mark as being out of 100, rather than out of 95. The project mark calculation needs adjusting: either the project report is marked out of 95 (and grade boundary "qualities" adjusted accordingly), or the relative contributions of report and proposal need adjusting so that the overall grade reflects the level achieved in the final report.

I had an initial concern that a similar inflation was happening in placement-year reports. However, those I looked at (including some from otherwise weak students) were reflective and insightful. The placement year assessment is cleverly set and the students merit the high marks awarded this year.

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

The modules are of comparable standards, and assessments reflect (often explicitly) the learning outcomes.

This is my first year, and I looked particularly at student project reports. The best are excellent, and, in general the marks awarded seemed to be comparable to other Russell Group institutions that I know.

At the finer level, the precise marks were often harder to understand. I looked at the three very high marked projects. Of these, the the lower two looked like exceptional reports on very challenging work, but the highest seemed to be a more "ordinary" first-class report, and possibly a less-challenging project (or a project in which the student set themselves lower hurdles): it was certainly unclear why these reports differed by 7 percentage points, and the markers' comments did not help me.

I looked at a range of other reports. In general, I found it extremely difficult to understand why the specific mark had been awarded. Markers (with one exception) seemed reluctant to indicate where marks had been "lost". In the worst case I saw, all three comments on a report with a 4-grade difference in marks gave no indication of how any of the marks had been arrived at.

I accept that it is hard to be definitive in marking guidance for projects, but it is possible to arrive at some guidance on how to comment on marking; it is also useful to be clear on the specific reasons why a poor mark is awarded. I would like markers' comments to be clear enough that a moderator or external examiner can see why the student received a mark that is not much higher and not much lower.

A comment that is often made by external examiners, especially where degrees are BCS accredited, is that the ethics coverage could be better. On the reports I considered, those using human subjects all had appropriate ethical permissions. However, I would have expected reports on e.g. security areas such as hacking and

threats to include appropriate discussion of ethical concerns as a matter of course, particularly as it is sometimes necessary for a researcher to justify otherwise-unethical behaviour!

Despite the industrial action in the Spring, the papers were sent for checking in a timely way. After some problems with the required formats, I was able to read moderation forms and submit comments which were dealt with efficiently by the setters.

The meeting was well run and appropriate. Unfortunately the aircon in the room meant that communication was difficult: it was a teaching room so this may be a message to take back to the University! Procedurally, both examiners are accustomed to borderlines being considered anonymously, but the variation from this standard practice did not introduce any obvious biases. The remaining latitude to promote strong students over borderlines is refreshing and was appropriately applied.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

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

I have read the previous reports; I did not note any additional issues from these.

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 had timely access to all the information I needed.

If I were to suggest one additional piece of information, it would have saved me considerable effort if I had been sent the summary “module structure” of each of the degrees, so I could see at a glance which module assessments I was checking and how the modules fitted.

The preparation for the examiners’ visit and meeting was very efficient but it was not easy to get answers to supplementary questions about the visit (e.g. when I had to change my travel plans).

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

The team work modules and projects of the software engineering programme, especially the excellent management of the teamworking elements.

The placement year assessment, with its focus on self-reflection and cumulative learning (rather than the sometimes contentious “what I did on my placement”).

All the exams team were available on the days of the visit, helping with navigating the programme, and understanding much of the rationale for the degrees and modules. We had some very useful discussion of best practice. The review room was a good room to be shut in for a day, with excellent “refreshments”: this is not always the case!

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'.

None of these questions deserves a “no”, but I would like to draw attention to the comments in the body of the report. FACP.

		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?	y		
8.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?			na
Draft Examination Question Papers				
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?	see above		
8.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	y		
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?	y		
8.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	see above		
8.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	see above		
8.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	see above		
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		
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	y		

	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?			na
Sampling of Work				
8.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	y		
Examining Board Meeting				
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?	see above		
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?			na
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			na
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			na
Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)				
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?			na
8.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?			na
8.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?			na
8.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?			na
8.27	If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?			na
8.28	Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?			na
8.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?			na
8.30	Comments on the Examination of Master's Dissertations. <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

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