



Academic & Student Support Services
Gwasanaethau Academaidd a Chefnogi Myfyrwyr
Registry
Y Gofrestrfa
Academic Registrar Cofrestrydd Academaidd
Simon Wright LLB(Hons)

Cardiff University
McKenzie House
30-36 Newport Road
Cardiff CF24 0DE
Wales UK
Tel please see below
Fax +44(0)29 2087 4130
www.cardiff.ac.uk

Prifysgol Caerdydd
Tŷ McKenzie
30-36 Heol Casnewydd
Caerdydd CF24 0DE
Cymru Y Deyrnas Unedig
Ffôn gweler isod
Ffacs +44(0)29 2087 4130
www.caerdydd.ac.uk

Sent by email to Dr Adam Benham

08 November 2019

Dear Dr Benham,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2018/19

I am writing further to the receipt of your report for BSc in Biochemistry, BSc in Genetics, BSc in Molecular Biology and the BSc in Biotechnology.

Your report has been considered by colleagues in the School and is the basis of this Institutional Response on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor. The School will also use its contents to help inform their [Annual Review and Enhancement](#) process and where appropriate, [Periodic Review](#).

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. Your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process.
2. The successful implementation of the BIOSI 2020 curriculum, with evidence so far showing they have been beneficial both to student learning opportunities and to degree outcomes
3. The achievements of Cardiff Biosciences students, taken together as a cohort, are excellent this year.
4. The supporting coursework (for example, materials available on the Cardiff Learning Central portal) are impressive and help to facilitate the stated learning outcomes.
5. The mid-course progress evaluation for Masters dissertations is a good idea.
6. The consistency of marking, annotation, scrutineering and feedback on exam scripts is excellent.
7. Some of the assessments on the new modules are inventive, particularly “adopt a gene” on the Genes to Genomes module.



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Issues highlighted in your report and response provided by the School:

1. ***Year-on-Year Comments:*** *Late response to previous report.*

We apologise for the late response to your previous report. This was due to an oversight, which meant that required information for the response was not provided in a timely way. We have amended our processes for this academic year to ensure this does not reoccur.

2. ***Year-on-Year Comments:*** *Timely provision of exam scripts.*

We have revised our procedures and mapped out a timeline for the year, so that this task is properly timetabled working backwards from the Registry submission deadline, which will include sufficient time to send the papers to External Examiners for review and comment in a timely fashion.

3. ***Year-on-Year Comments:*** *The opportunity to meet with students; consider arrangement of event to showcase student work and achievements.*

This opportunity is something we have typically offered to External Examiners in previous years, inviting them to meet students in a bespoke visit around February time. Our typical approach has been to invite External Examiners to visit the school to meet students on alternate years, so that each External in a subject area visits every other year. However, this was not arranged this year due to a focus on managing the introduction of the new Final Year curriculum. We will be planning this meeting opportunity for the 2019/20 academic year as soon as possible.

Dr Benham's suggestion of a 'Celebration of Science' event is an excellent idea, and we are grateful for his outline of the event.

4. ***Appointment overview:*** *Stabilisation of degree outcomes in future years.*

We are confident that the degree outcomes have already stabilised. We mapped student outcomes for 2017/18 without the additional impact of the 'D' Extenuating Circumstances code applied as a remedy for the UCU Industrial Action. This was broadly similar to the 2016/17 outcomes, and was matched by the 2018/19 outcomes. The number of 1st Class degree outcomes has risen slightly over the past 10 years to a level which is commensurate with equivalent institutions in the Russell Group. We attribute this to an increased use of the full range of marks in exam marking. We will continue to monitor this over the upcoming years.

5. ***Appointment overview: Opportunity to fully overview second year work.***

Year 2 scripts are available to overview if requested, but are not provided to External Examiners as standard due to the large volume of scripts involved (approximately 2400 scripts in addition to the same number of Year 3 exams). The Year 2 scripts from 2017/18 were available for review if requested. The Year 2 scripts from 2018/19 would not have been available, as the marking of these had not yet been completed when External Examiners visited the School.

In future years we will: (a) Invite External Examiners to nominate any Year 2 Modules that they would like to review from the previous academic year, in advance of their arrival to Cardiff, so that these can be obtained from the archive. (b) Provide External Examiners with access to all Year 2 modules for the previous and current academic year on the VLE (Learning Central) so that they can audit any coursework materials if they wish to do so. (c) Provide External Examiners with details of Year 2 module outcomes and Year 1/Year 2 progression rate statistics for all Year 2 modules from the previous academic year, and as far back as possible prior to this (though it should be noted that the current Year 2 curriculum was only introduced in 2017/18).

Issues highlighted in your report and response provided by Registry:

6. ***Appointment overview: Data provided to external examiners***

Schools continue to have access to a standard set of reports that the University provides. The reports are set to meet the needs of all Schools and provide an appropriate baseline to allow examining Boards to function comparably and consistently across the University. We appreciate that Schools will want the information presented to them in a number of different ways including information that falls outside of the scope of the standard business object reports. We continue to work with Schools to enhance the available reports to meet their needs, however we regret that there is limited capacity to make bespoke reports with unique specifications for each of the University's 24 Schools.

Where Schools wish to create their own reports to represent the data in a format of their choosing, then any resource implications will need to be considered and appropriately managed by the Head of School. Schools can seek advice and guidance on how best to utilise and manage institutional data from their College Data Analyst.

We hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your continued support of the programme.

In order to meet the expectations of the [QAA Quality Code](#), both the External Examiner Annual Report and this Institutional Response will be published on the University's [Public Information website](#) and will be available to all students and staff.

As this is your final year as External Examiner, we would like to thank you for your service and we are most grateful for your valuable input into this process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Wright', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mr Simon Wright
Academic Registrar