



Academic & Student Support Services
Gwasanaethau Academaidd a Chefnogi Myfyrwyr
Registry
Y Gofrestrfa
Academic Registrar Cofrestrdydd 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 Mr Martin Stabe

23 June 2020

Dear Mr Stabe,

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

I am writing further to the receipt of your report for MSc Computational and Data Journalism .

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. Students to complete tasks similar to those they would need to complete in a professional setting, while appearing to give them ample freedom to specialise in aspects of data journalism practice that most interest them.
3. The group project in the Digital Investigation module is particularly useful, as it simulates the challenges of project management in cross-disciplinary teams that are common in professional data journalism practice.
4. Teaching the enormous, cross-disciplinary range of technical, analytical and presentation skills now used by data journalists in a single year is extremely challenging, but the course does this very effectively.
5. There has been some clear improvement in visualisation work this year, with a minority of students producing very strong, even professionally publishable, work. I was also pleased to see some students using off-the-shelf tools like Flourish for their graphics.
6. Constructive student collaboration in group projects as part of the Digital Investigation module was much improved this year.



Registered Charity, no. 1136855
Elusen Gofrestredig, rhif 1136855

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

1. **Academic Standards:** *The general standard of visual and written work was considerably weaker, indicating that perhaps more emphasis could be placed on the more traditional journalism skills that the students would also need to work in newsrooms.*

Extra classes were run this year on journalism foundations and journalistic writing as well as a day-long workshop the day after the UK elections. The views of the external examiner for the present cohort will certainly be integrated into the preparation of the modules for 2020-21.

2. **Academic Standards:** *On the data journalism module (MCT559), the feedback could be blunter and the marking more stringent, as this early module is where expectations about core skills like data visualisation and writing about data should be set.*

This is a useful observation since MCT559 is a module that takes place in the MSc's foundational first semester. This year's module aimed to instil these principles and its degree of success will be evaluated by the external examiner's review in July 2020.

3. **Academic Standards:** *Some recurring problems in the students' writing about data. Many stories were written with intros that suggested that the data itself — its production by some official agency, or its scheduled public release — is what is newsworthy.*

We recognise this problem as an inherent danger for the discipline and have sought this year to emphasize the importance of the newswire in all the assignments, particularly in the foundational MCT 559 module. The External Examiner's review of 2019-20 will undoubtedly help to judge to what extent this has been achieved or more work is needed.

4. **Assessment Process:** *For graphics, it is unclear what the criterion "demonstrates impact" means in assessing the use of graphics within students' stories. What constitutes strong achievement in the visual presentation of data would be clearer to students if marking were framed around specific criteria of theoretical and technical mastery.*

It is planned that assessment of graphics in the data journalism module will henceforth be done in terms of a framework of best practice. As the external examiner notes, basic errors of graphics creation are not being eliminated completely.

5. **Master's Dissertations:** *Consider asking students to declare in advance what aspects of their skills they expect to attempt in their dissertation, allowing for feedback about how appropriate this is, much as members of a professional data journalism team might need to pitch a proposed course*

of action to an editor before committing resources and proceeding beyond a point of no return.

For this year's dissertation projects a technical brief is being requested where appropriate to ensure the student identifies at the beginning of the project what skills will be needed and to make sure the student doesn't arrive at a point where s/he is under-skilled in terms of what needs to be done to complete the project.

6. ***Master's Dissertations:*** *One area of assessment that could be strengthened is "legal issues"; It would be good if a discussion of the legal and ethical issues arising from the project were a requirement, even if it merely forces the student to assert that there are none or to show an understanding of the possible legal risks or potential ethical objections to their approach.*

The ethics review that all students complete ahead of their project dissertations now includes an assessment of any planned web scraping. The first semester MCT 559 now includes classes on: law & ethics for scraping and GDPR & DPA. This year we have underlined to students that no images can be used without indicating the source in order to prevent illegal use of copyrighted images.

7. ***Master's Dissertations:*** *The role of site design in the assessment was unclear. One student had comments on "poor design" which I could not find in the assessment criteria.*

This will be borne in mind in reviewing assessment criteria and the precise expectations around site design will be clarified.

8. ***Year-on-Year Comments:*** *For group work on the Digital Investigation module, it would be useful if the assessment criteria for the reflective pieces could be used to reward students who make an effort to create processes to allow for smoother consensus-building within their groups.*

The marking system for the Digital Investigation module will be reviewed completely for the class of 2020/21. Eight criteria (most weighted differently) to evaluate this assessment is probably both overly complicated and not an efficient means to evaluate individual contributions to the smooth-running of the projects. Group assessment techniques used in the School of Computer Science will be examined to see if a more effective system can be envisaged.

9. ***Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement:*** *Consider developing additional optional modules (perhaps provided by other departments of the university) that allow students to go into greater depth in to areas such as project management, UI/UX design and statistical analysis and methodology.*

This is an excellent suggestion although the range of material already on offer to the students may limit our ambitions in this regard.

The optional modules on Human Centric Computing and Data Visualisation (Computer Science) respond in part to the UI/UX needs, and the introduction of Emerging Journalism (Jomec) this year means there is an optional module based around collaborative project management in a professional context.

Statistical competence however remains a crucial skill that it may be possible to further through optional modules, perhaps in collaboration with other schools. This will be investigated for the class of 2020/21 (Covid-19 restrictions permitting).

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.

We are most grateful for your comments and for your support in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Simon Wright
Academic Registrar