



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Gary James Merrill		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Gloucestershire		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report:	MA International Journalism		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2014/15	Date of Report:	July 31 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

This MA International Journalism (MAIJ) programme incorporates a range of practical, contextual and academic modules. All students are taught information gathering techniques, research methods and foreign news reporting, and in semester one, students choose a specialist platform (broadcast, documentary, newspaper or magazine) and hone their practical skills over the course of the year.

In semester two, students have numerous options (business, insurgency, international relations, etc.) and have considerable freedom to pursue their own interests in the final stage of the programme, with the choice of an academic dissertation, a written journalistic project or a TV/radio equivalent.

This programme has gained an excellent reputation since it was established some fifteen years ago, and this year's cohort - 82 students - confirms that it remains a popular choice and Cardiff is still recognised as the pre-eminent UK journalism school. Over that time, however, the news industry and journalism have undergone massive changes, and hence it is vital that the programme continues to furnish students with relevant skills, knowledge and understanding.

In many countries, print and broadcast no longer exist in distinct silos, nor will graduates necessarily spend their whole working lives in one medium, and so it is important that the course structure reflects the realities of the modern and future job market. While the practical modules currently include some digital elements, there is perhaps a case for embedding them more while also exposing all students to

broadcast, print and digital media in the first semester and then allowing them to specialise in the second.

The module guides, assessment briefs and student submissions demonstrate the centrality of the mandatory contextual elements of the course (Information Gathering and Foreign News Reporting) and the optional modules allow students to follow their professional and intellectual preferences. If the practical elements were modified and perhaps reduced, however, the programme architects might want to consider boosting the contextual and academic contributions.

For example, there may be a case for an academic module that takes a critical look at journalistic cultures by comparing, for example, the *modus operandi* of practitioners and news organisations in the UK, Europe, China, India, etc. Cardiff media academics currently give one-off guest lectures in the Information Gathering module, and a dedicated module would greatly enhance students' understanding of the normative expectations of journalism; the processes that create 'the news'; the characteristics of journalistic output; the effect of news on audiences; and some of the recent successes and failures of journalism. JOMEC is renowned for its research and including an academic module of this nature would be a powerful differentiator and help cement Cardiff's reputation as the top UK journalism school.

2. Academic Standards

I reviewed samples of work from all of the core modules, including the newspaper, magazine and broadcast pathways of International News Production, and four optional modules. It was evident from the sample that the school attracts very good students and their submissions are testament to their industriousness, application and intellect. There was also plenty of evidence of background reading and thinking, and really strong engagement across all modules. Overall, the quality of work was very high and there is no doubt that the teaching, feedback and marking adhere to the highest academic standards.

Credit must go to the teaching staff who put considerable thought, passion and effort into their lectures. It was also gratifying to see staff and students focussing on the 'big' issues of the world - such as the economy, human rights, geo-politics, etc. - rather than sport, music, lifestyle, etc. This emphasis places Cardiff above 'competitor' universities which tend to concentrate on the lighter end of the spectrum. Indeed, some student submissions were of sufficient quality that they could easily slip into the pages of the *New York Times*, or onto the schedule of the BBC World Service.

Overall, on the basis of what I saw, it is clear the course is in very good shape, the students are producing top class work and the marks are a fair reflection of the standard of work. One could argue that some marking is a little high at times – in IGA II journalistic modes, for example, over 40% of the class received distinctions – but it would be misguided to reduce marks just to achieve a certain distribution across the cohort. High marks are usually the product of good students and excellent teaching, rather than generosity on the part of the marker. Hence, the observation about *some* high marks in *some* assignments should be taken in the context of the quality of the learning experience and the calibre of the students.

3. The Assessment Process

In all cases, the module guides and the assignment briefs were comprehensive and unambiguous, and students knew what to expect from the module, and what was expected of them in the assignments. Similarly, the marking criteria were explicit, and on the very few occasions that someone scored less than 50%, it was generally because they didn't follow the brief.

The marking was consistent within – and between - the modules: the distinctions were definitely distinctions, and the fails were definitely fails, and overall, the moderation procedure is extremely robust. Inevitably, the quantity and detail of feedback varied somewhat between markers and modules, but without exception, students received fair and constructive comments on their work, and on this basis they have little reason to dispute their marks.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

N/A

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

N/A

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

There were numerous examples of impressive creativity, and whenever an assessment required students to generate an idea, they responded well. Notable examples were evident in the magazine pathway, dissertation proposals and in the optional module, *In the Editor's Chair*. There were some very high marks (80% plus) in Foreign News Reporting and these were awarded to work of publishable quality. In this module, students really engaged with their topics, did good interviews and the standard of writing was very high, especially from non-native speakers.

Apart from the suggestions outlined in section 1 (above) I am struggling to find anything that could arguably be improved with the programme and there are certainly no major concerns. I did, however, notice some issues with spelling, typos, grammar etc. In some cases, these were highlighted by the marker but, even with the best will in the world, comprehensive subediting is difficult when staff have so many submissions to assess in such little time.

The programme has large, international cohorts, and the majority are non-native speakers, which, at busy times of year, puts a strain on English language support and indeed tutorial time with teaching staff. There is no easy answer to this conundrum but it is extremely important to stress to students that poor written accuracy is not conducive to forging careers in journalism. Errors on job applications and CVs will invariably lead to rejection at the early stages of the recruitment process.

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				
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?		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?	Y		
8.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	Y		
8.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	Y		
8.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	Y		
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:

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