

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE: EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2012-2013 - MA in Journalism, Media & Communication

Dear Professor Conboy,

I am writing further to your External Examiner's report for the above programme(s). Your Report has been considered by the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies in accordance with our approved procedures. I am, therefore, now in a position to respond on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor to the main points you had raised.

Issues Highlighted

Your Report raised issue(s) which have been referred for consideration by the School.

1. **[3 and 4] your indication that "word-processing should be the norm for formative feedback and the pro-forma should be used on all module feedback without exception";**
2. **[4 and 6] your support for the need for marking "criteria to be published in the initial module guide" and for "full criteria-based feedback sheets to be completed" for a named aspect of the programme;**
3. **[6(ii)] your perception of "an urgent need to assess how language error by overseas students is assessed in relation to the overall quality of their work in relation to language error in home students' work" and related comments;**
4. **[6(iii)] the identified absence of a module handbook and second marker review on a named aspect of the programme.**

The following response has been provided by the Programme Director on behalf of the School.

"Thank you very much for your detailed and constructive report from July this year. It is a pleasure reading your positive and supportive comments as well as your critical observations which help a lot in developing and improving this programme further.

I was particularly happy to hear and read your comments about the overall programme theme and structure which provide a very helpful context and some necessary external perspective to the changes which our MA has undergone over the past years. You know that I am interested in strengthening and expanding the aspect of media and communication studies in this recently transformed MA course, and to make sure that we cover a broader set of theories and themes that go beyond journalism studies. Your comments remind us that journalism remains the core of the programme in terms of its reputation, staff expertise and modules offered, and that course redesigns and revisions should not compromise this existing strength. Accordingly, we have tried to revise the course content very moderately, and we will continue doing so. In the current academic year, there have been no major module changes. Rather, we have reviewed the existing modules in detail to make sure they cover the broader range of theories and themes that students of media and communication studies should be familiar with. We have tweaked and expanded module content where necessary, but there have been no changes (apart from minor adaptations and regular updates) to the journalism-related modules which you highlighted in your report as particularly successful.

The application and admission numbers have increased, although this has not yet led to a further increase in actual student numbers in this current year – partly because a few students decided to move to the more practice-oriented MA International Journalism. This raises questions about how to include and

accommodate practical aspects in what is essentially an academic programme. Despite this, we have a strong and diverse group again this year, with 18 students from Europe, the Middle East, the Caribbean, South East Asia, Korea and China. This is the same number as last year and a slight increase from 2011/12.

As you rightly point out, the consistency and standardisation of feedback and assessment, and the transparency of assessment criteria, are not yet at the level where they should be. This concerns, particularly (or perhaps exclusively), the optional modules which are offered across different MA programmes, each with different academic cultures and histories. However this issue has been recognised by all MA course directors, we have made some progress, and we are working towards standardising the module handbooks this year and making sure that they all include marking bands, criteria, etc.

As our programme attracts students from a range of different backgrounds, countries and languages, language difficulties are a persistent problem for many of our students. We require a high IELTS result from applicants, and students get significant support from the English Language Programme at Cardiff University throughout the year, yet we do encounter language issues in essays and dissertations. The exact degree to which these affect marking may not be entirely clear and consistent across the different modules, and I am grateful that you point this out. It is certainly something to clarify amongst tutors.

Thank you again for reminding us of the aspects that we need to improve and the issues we need to solve, but also for your very kind comments on the overall standard of the course and on the work by both tutors and students.”

Positive Comments

The School and University are pleased to note your positive comments on the School's provision including:

- a. **[1, 2 and 3] your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;**
- b. **[6] the range and nature of identified noteworthy practices across the programme and its organisation.**

I hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your service as External Examiner.

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 Registry web pages and will be available publically.

The University's provision of the formal Institutional Response is not intended to constrain direct communication between schools and their External Examiners. Schools are encouraged to discuss with their External Examiners any matters of detail raised in their Reports and, more widely, any issues impacting on the quality and standards of awards, including possible changes to programmes.

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

Mrs Jill Bedford
Director of Registry and Academic Services