



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Dr Einar Thorsen		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Bournemouth University		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report:	MA Journalism, Media and Communication		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2014/2015	Date of Report:	27/07/2015

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 was my first year as external examiner for MA Journalism, Media and Communications, and I have been really impressed by the overall quality of the degree. The programme provides a robust and rigorous approach to the study of journalism and broader media contexts, suitably reflecting the outstanding research expertise of staff teaching on the degree.

It seems evident in assignments I have read that students are both inspired and enthused by the environment fostered by the team. Indeed one of the core strengths of the programme is the systematic approach to research throughout, which evidently equips students with the requisite skills for their dissertation and research work beyond their degree.

The programme core is provided through five 20 credit modules, with additional flexibility for students to explore a range of contemporary topics through 10 credit specialist option modules. This provides students with a great variety of subjects and ability to opportunity to define their own pathway within the degree.

Student work also covered a fascinating range of topics - from a comparison of BBC and Newsround coverage of ISIS, to neoliberalism in 'Come Dine With Me', all within the same module! Students are evidently exposed to some of the best contemporary scholarly thinking and learn how to apply this to their own case studies.

In terms of themes covered, there were no module reflecting on Welsh media, either from a national or local perspective - or even the role of non-English language news media in a global context. Similarly, there was no discussion about Welsh contexts in the sample of assignments I read (apart from one focus group assignment). The team may want to consider how this could be integrated, even in a small way, since the opportunities associated with this would have global resonance even for international students.

2. Academic Standards

Quality of student work is for the most part very impressive, and it is possible to discern a clear progression in work from the first to second semester. The standard of work is comparable to that of other institutions, but the breadth of research expertise demonstrated is outstanding.

Module handbooks were detailed and provided students with a good overview of what to expect. My only suggestion here would be to consider standardising the presentation of information, so student experience of the material is consistent.

Reading lists were all fairly up to date, but students did not always draw on the latest material in their assignments. Some encouragement is required to ensure they too draw on the very latest research to support their own analysis.

One small error in handbook: degree title is incorrect in 3.2 on page 21.

3. The Assessment Process

I was provided with an appropriate range of sample work for consideration.

Assignments were marked consistently and in accordance with marking criteria. The grading applied is commensurate with external benchmarks and similar courses at other institutions.

Feedback provided to students was overall exemplary, and in many cases more detailed than I would ordinarily expect. Particularly impressed by the level of markup on assignments that did not do so well - there is ample advice here for students about how to improve in future work, from conceptual points to minor corrections to grammar and spelling.

There were, however, some examples where the feedback was very brief - just 2-3 sentences - so this should be addressed for parity across the programme. An assignment that scores in the 70s still has 25-30% they could have improved upon, so feedback should reflect this.

I was surprised to see the presence of second marker comments on one or two of the feedback sheets. Students might use this to work out which sample has been second marked, and thus make representation to have theirs second marked if it has not been. This is a minor point, but it might be worth considering ways in which synthesised comments can be presented to students.

It was good to see that marks are awarded for content and depth of analysis, even where the written English lacked felicity. Particularly important when the cohort contains a number of international students.

It is not clear how “participation” is assessed in MCT493 (Introduction to Journalism Studies) and MCT503 (Mediatized Conflict: The Politics of Conflict Reporting), where it accounts for 10% in both instances. Is this a pass / fail component, and if not then how is it calculated with partial attendance? Why is it considered worthy of grade allocation in these two units and not in other (core) units? Whilst it is important to ensure attendance at taught sessions, I am not convinced by the merits of using summative marks to impose this.

There were some inconsistencies in assignment weighting, for example:
Introduction to Journalism Studies: 3k = 50%, 2k = 40%, participation 10%
Mediatized Conflict: 2.5k - 3k = 45%, 2.5k - 3k = 45%, participation 10%
Politics of Global Communication: 2.5k - 3k = 40%, 2.5k - 3k = 60%

Thus a 3,000 word essay counts for 45%, 50% or 60% depending on the module, which inconsistently rewards the same type of coursework across different modules.

The leeway in word count is also different across the modules. This is not a problem in itself if the reasoning is communicated clearly to students, but it does open the possibility of modules being over-assessed if students write to the maximum permissible word length in all assignments.

In terms of assignment submission, the need to students to submit both paper and electronic copies seems superfluous - and the programme team may want to consider options for online marking and feedback.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

N/A – first year as external examiner for this degree.

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

Provided with all necessary information via handbook and regulation documents.

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

Students are exposed to a range of research methods and given opportunities to apply these through mini pilot studies. Whilst these are very compact, students nevertheless manage to conduct some interesting research within the parameters given. This shows great promise leading up to their dissertation work.

It was great to see students experimenting with digital research methods, using tools like Twitonomy, Topsy, Bluenod, Mentionmapp. If possible, it would have been great to see students push this even further by adding their own parameters of analysis (qualitative or quantitative) - for example by extracting tweets and performing different types of analysis on the output.

There were some excellent discourse analysis too, and some outstanding essays in the Mediatized Conflict module deservedly scoring in the high 70s and even one in the 80s.

I was also fascinated to hear about the research proposal retreat in rural Wales and look forward to reading the dissertations in due course.

The suggestions outlined in the above sections are all relatively minor issues, and overall the teaching and administrative staff should be congratulated for a truly impressive postgraduate degree programme.

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?	Y		
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?	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?	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 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	
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

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