

## Cardiff University

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## Prifysgol Caerdydd

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Guidance notes are available to support the completion of this Report via the Cardiff University Intranet [here](#) and from [ExternalExaminers@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ExternalExaminers@cardiff.ac.uk).

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Dr Jen Birks		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Nottingham		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	MA Journalism, Media and Communication		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2019/20	Date of Report:	20/07/20 (interim)

Please complete all information in the spaces provided and submit within **six weeks** of the Examining Board (the dissertation stage Examining Board in the case of postgraduate Master's programmes).

Please return this Report, **in a Microsoft Word format**, by email to: [externalexaminers@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@cardiff.ac.uk).

**Please note this form will be published online and should not make any reference to any individual students or members of staff in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (2018).**

Please extend spaces where necessary.

### 1. Programme Structure (curriculum design, programme structure and level, methods of teaching and learning)

*Please include consideration of the following:*

- confirmation that the actions taken as a result of the variation of assessments in relation to industrial action and Covid-19 have been appropriate to protect the academic standards of the programme and have allowed students to achieve their programme level learning outcomes*

This is a well-rounded and stimulating course, which is a pleasure to examine. It manages that delicate balance between introducing students to a new field whilst challenging them sufficiently for the level of study.

The adjustments made across the university have been appropriate, consistent with practice at other institutions I am familiar with and were clearly communicated to me. All staff are to be congratulated for the admirable way in which they responded to the lockdown in adapting their teaching at short notice for online delivery.

## **2. Academic Standards** (comparability with other UK HEIs, achievement of students, any PSRB requirements)

*Please include consideration of the following:*

- *module marks are an accurate reflection of the standards they achieved, and the award classification reflects their academic attainment on their degree programme.*
- *if scaling has been recommended by the pre-Examining Board, there is appropriate justification for the recommendation based on the scaling guidance and the proposed scaling methodology to be applied to the marks is appropriate*
- *the application of the Safety Net Policy to ensure that students' award classification reflects their academic attainment on the degree programme, and that the degree classification is not affected by any potential dip in their academic performance in assessments undertaken during a period of disruption.*
- *Highlighting where the Safety Net Policy could not be applied/or only in part due to specific PSRB requirements and the outcomes of the discussion and decisions made.*
- *the academic standards of degrees meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications' framework.*
- *the degrees awarded by the University are valid and reliable and are of an equivalent standard to degrees awarded in previous years.*
- *confirmation that the degree outcomes of each programme under consideration are in line with the sector and meet any professional, statutory, regulatory body requirements.*
- *where issues have been identified, the main Examining Board have been clear in their deliberations and actions to safeguard the academic standards.*

Standards have been maintained, even at the cost of failing some students who cannot meet them, and most markers are using the full range of marks into the high 70s and low 80s at the top end to properly recognise superlative work.

The safety net policy appeared to have been applied appropriately, and where students have done poorly that has generally been a consistent pattern across the whole year. At the same time, there has been some very impressive work produced by the most able students, despite the challenges.

I did note a range of responses to evidence of plagiarism and poor academic practice in coursework submissions. Students were reprimanded in feedback for a range of poor practice (perhaps through misunderstanding UK conventions, for instance) and suspected intentional deception, but it's not clear how consistent penalties are imposed across that spectrum. It would be worth considering a consistent policy across the school to apply a specific penalty (such as a written warning, a percentage decrease, a mark of zero for the plagiarised material, or a mark of zero for the whole component) depending of the severity of the infraction and whether a prior offence has occurred. It is also increasingly common practice to afford the student a hearing to allow them a right to reply and give mitigating explanations.

**3. The Assessment Process** (enabling achievement of aims and learning outcomes; stretch of assessment; comparability of standards between modules of the same level)

*Please include consideration of the following:*

- *assessment variations used are appropriate, and where possible continue to test the module learning outcomes*
- *students continued to be provided with the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the programme learning outcomes as a result of the variations*
- *assessments continued to be conducted with care and due diligence to ensure that students were not academically disadvantaged as a result of the variations.*

The teaching staff demonstrate real dedication in their feedback, the vast majority of which is fulsome, detailed and constructive.

The assessments are appropriate to the learning outcomes and stretch the more able students appropriately. Marking criteria are very clear and prominently presented in module handbooks.

As assessment is via essay-based or textual analysis report-based coursework, few adjustments to assessment were necessary. One minor exception was the spring research methods module, where students were enabled to shift their pilot studies online, which allowed them to meet the intended learning outcomes.

**4. Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)** (sample of dissertations received, appropriateness of marking schemes, standard of internal marking, classification of awards)

*Where possible please complete this section following the dissertation examining board determining the final award.*

[To follow in due course]

**5. Year-on-Year Comments**

[Previous External Examiner Reports are available from the Cardiff University Website [here](#).]

*Please note that due to the unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, Schools may have had limited time to enact changes.*

Following my suggestion, some markers did signpost explicitly to language support services in their feedback. Others suggested a proof-reader but improving their written English skills would be preferable to paying someone to tidy their work up.

On two modules there was a very useful outline of the sample moderated, the moderator's comments, and the overall spread of marks. I imagine this may have been more widely adopted without the pandemic placing marking schedules under pressure, but it would be good to see that best practice extended next year.

**6. Preparation for the role of External Examiner (for new External Examiners only)** (appropriateness of briefing provided by the programme team and supporting information, visits to School, ability to meet with students, arrangements for accessing work to review)

N/A

**7. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement** (good and innovative practice in learning, teaching and assessment; opportunities for enhancement of learning opportunities)

*Due to the need to for continued adaptations during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, we would be grateful if you could please include consideration of the following:*

- *advice and guidance on where adaptations can be made to support a blend of high-quality on-campus and online learning for 2020/21 to support Schools with curriculum developments to address ongoing requirements to socially distance due to Covid-19.*

Covid-19 adaptation for 20/21: Whilst understandably, under pressure in Spring 19/20 and in common with other universities, there has been a reliance on full-length lecture capture, research suggests that students respond better to shorter sections of online video, perhaps with small tasks interspersed between lecture 'chunks'.

I didn't seem to have access to seminar-type activities, which may have been undertaken synchronously through video-conferencing platforms, but a range of other tools can also enhance learning and facilitate collaboration asynchronously, such as discussion forums, collaborative Padlets, or shared annotation of PDFs on MS Teams.

**8. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)** (significant changes in standards, programme/discipline developments, implementation of recommendations, further areas of work)

N/A

## **9. Issues for Response**

To assist with a timely and detailed response to your report, we would be grateful if you could briefly summarise any issues referred to above that you would like to be specifically addressed in our institutional response.

1. Consistent policy on plagiarism penalties and student hearings
2. Extending use of moderator reports confirming the sample viewed and feedback on marking
3. Consolidating good practice on pointing students with poor command of written English to language support services