



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Dr P. P. Liddel		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Manchester		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report:	BA Ancient History, BA Ancient History joint degrees		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2013/14	Date of Report:	28/06/14

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

The programme that is offered to Ancient History students (single and joint honours) at Cardiff is impressive, and offers an excellent grounding in Greek and Roman history, while offering students the possibility to take specialist modules which correspond to the expertise of colleagues in the department. There's an emphasis on engagement with the ancient sources at every point in the programme, and this is a real point of excellence. Cardiff students show real strength in combining material and literary evidence, and this is a tribute to the excellence of the courses on offer at Cardiff.

The BA Ancient History programme succeeds in its stated aim of (at <http://coursefinder.cf.ac.uk/undergraduate/course/detail/V110.html>) of offering a balance between modules on historical periods and thematic social and cultural aspects. Overall, the courses on offer allow the students the opportunity to engage with both mainstream and specialist areas of ancient history. There's a good balance of Greek and Roman, social, political, cultural, military, Hellenistic and Late Antique. The existence of 10-credit units allows students a wide range of choice and a close view of a specialist topic, and clearly (as was demonstrated on the feedback forms I saw) contributes greatly to student satisfaction. It is clear that students benefit from the wide area of specialisms that exist within the department.

The combined degree programmes (BA Ancient History and Archaeology/Mediaeval History/History/Religious Studies/Philosophy) offer students the opportunity to

develop expertise in both ancient history and another subject, and the programme structures appear to me to be well-designed and coherent.

I am satisfied that students demonstrate achievement of the QAA benchmark statement

(<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Classics.pdf>). Students clearly demonstrate engagement with a wide range of methodological problems, in particular those concerning the interpretation of material evidence: students engage with field-work in both core and optional units and they are trained in the interpretation of literary evidence. The modules offered cover a wide range of political, military, social and cultural approaches. On some modules students get the opportunity to think about theoretical approaches. Other courses offer the students excellent opportunities for fieldwork expeditions and workshop-type activities. Students on independent study modules are given excellent support and their progress is monitored and supported at every point. Cardiff students often show their strength when combining and comparing literary and material evidence, and they are given ample opportunities to do this at all levels.

2. Academic Standards

In terms of the degree classification, I am sure that the overall balance of rewards demonstrates the high academic standards being maintained at Cardiff. I was particularly impressed by the performance in the final-year dissertation, where a number of students produced pieces of work that achieved Excellence and demonstrated very good potential for moving on to postgraduate work, and were appropriately rewarded with marks in the 80s. An average of 67.9% achieved in the Dissertation by the final-year cohort is extremely impressive. It is clear that the cohort was able to achieve such a high level because of the excellent training with which they have been provided the course of their degree-programme. Course-documentation for these units was excellent and gave the students extremely clear guidance: this was particularly clear in the 2nd-year Independent Study, where there was a marked improvement in scholarly engagement particularly among those students who embarked upon more imaginative projects. On independent study modules, the best students ask ambitious questions, show originality, independence of mind, and even, in some cases, creativity, which is excellent.

3. The Assessment Process

Assessment and moderation seemed very fair. Double blind-marking of the final year dissertation is an excellent practice. Moderation was undertaken fairly, with changes being made to marks only where fair: the department seems to have made the best possible use of the new regulations on moderation, for instance in adjusting some marks to ensure fairness across the board. The department provided me with an extremely clear rationale for the selection of scripts to be moderated at every level. On occasions where there was disagreement about the classification of pieces of work, discussions between internal markers were mostly well-documented. One thing that struck me as odd was that the moderated sample was selected by element of assessment: it strikes me as more sensible to follow the practice of selecting candidates whose overall performance is either first-class or borderline.

The department makes use of a good range of forms of assessment. There was a very good range of assessment methods: class tests, coursework essays, literary

commentaries/criticisms, exams, which encourage students to combine in-depth factual knowledge of events and phenomena while developing skills of sifting, analysis of ancient material, and forming arguments. Students learn a great deal from the excellent and detailed feedback that they receive on formatively- and summatively-assessed coursework.

In courses where there was a different form of coursework, colleagues provided helpful guidance which is clearly very valuable for the students: one example of this is in the Tyrants module, which uses short answer responses, where Janett Morgan provided excellent guidance which was clearly taken very seriously by the students. The marking schemes for the Greek courses also were impressively clear, and they managed, on the whole, to avoid problems associated with excessively high marks.

Perhaps, at points, I thought the department might make more use of the grade descriptors in the student handbook, especially in the course of moderation process, or the discussion of cases where two internal markers differ significantly. My understanding is that moves are underway to revise and make more specific the University's grade descriptors, which is something that is highly desirable.

The introduction of submission of essays via Turnitin certainly has advantages, for instance in identifying excessively derivative work relatively easily. In Semester 1, there were some problems with allowing moderators to access Turnitin anonymously. It would also have been better if Turnitin presented students' essays exclusively by reference to student numbers, as this would have made it easier for me to co-ordinate between exam scripts and pieces of coursework for individual students. However, I was provided with paper documentation by the administrator which made it possible to overcome this problem.

The exam-setting and scrutiny process was carried out in a very detailed and effective way. The department's scrutiny meetings seem very effective and should be maintained. I suggest that in future summatively –assessed tests be sent to scrutiny meetings too. The department might also consider setting resits at the same time as first-sits, and considering these papers at scrutiny too.

I was sent all exam scripts and independent studies pertaining to the final degree by post. I received them in good time and they were carefully organised. In my opinion, while sending out the papers incurs significant expenses, it is a worthwhile practice. I was able to access electronically-submitted coursework via Turnitin, though, as I stated above, I should have liked to have seen coursework consistently labelled by student number.

My comments on the work I was sent and its assessment were taken seriously, and they were circulated by the Exams Officer to the whole department and considered at the meeting. The examination boards were well-organised and efficient.

The External Examination board went very smoothly; it is clear that SIMS had generated some administrative problems, but that the hard work of the department in the run-up to today's exam board meant that everything was clear and worked-out in advance.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

On the introduction of Turnitin, see above, section 3.

I felt there were clear improvements on last year, including consistency in the treatment of plagiarised and derivative work (of which there was – happily -- little) and also consistency in the treatment of over-length work.

It was excellent that the department is now making appropriate use of Good First Class (75-80%) and Excellent First Class (80+) marks in the independent study modules. The department should continue to do this especially at year 3, where the reduction in relative weighting has had a negative impact on final classification of at least one student (see next paragraph).

The change in weighting of year 2 and year 3 work had a negative impact on the final classification of 3rd-year students: it meant that the exit velocity displayed by many students was not properly rewarded. As a result, at least one student who would have got a 1st-class degree under the old regulations (and indeed would have got a 1st at Manchester and some other universities) was left with a 2.1. The impact of this change should be monitored closely in coming years, and I would encourage discussion of its effect, at the highest level in the School.

Finally, it might be worth considering the possibility of introducing a 2nd external examiner in Ancient History next year. There are two reasons for this: one is the sheer volume of material which I was expected to look at. If there were two examiners, the burden would be shared and the externals would be able to do a more thorough job. Intellectually, it might make sense to have one external with expertise in Roman imperial/late imperial history and another in Greek history.

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

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

The department deserves congratulations on another set of excellent results and the careful and effective organisation of the processes of scrutiny, assessment and classification. I am very pleased to hear that Ancient History will be able to make a new appointment over the summer, and anticipate that this is only the starting point for further expansion of a very efficient department.

I was able to see student feedback forms during my visit, and was very pleased to see that students offered extremely positive feedback on the teaching that they had received on all of their course units.

7. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)

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?	Y		
Draft Examination Question Papers				
8.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?	Y		
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?			
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?	Y		
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?	Y		
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?	Y		

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