

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE: EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2012-2013 - MA in International Journalism

Dear Professor Brock,

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. [1.] your involvement in discussions regarding “the potential confusion for students between “academic” and “practice” dissertations” and related comments;**
- 2. [2.] your suggestion “that the teaching staff might give some renewed thought to the consistency with which they mark written English and whether the criteria for marking written English are clearly signalled enough” and related observations.**

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

“Thank you for your constructive and insightful external examiner comments for the MA International Journalism 2012/13.

In 1. you refer to your discussions with us regarding a perceived confusion, particularly towards the lower ability end, between the academic and vocational elements of our dissertations. We did share some of that concern.

All students produce a classic academic ‘wrapper’ for their dissertation by writing a literature review, methodology, conclusion and reflection based on their research question. However their research findings can be presented as either classic academic chapters or journalistic output in the form of a series of analytical features or short factual broadcast programme.

Achieving a successful combination of approaches is a challenge but we continue to believe it to be a very worthwhile one which the majority of our students opt for as part of their development into serious journalists aiming to cover global issues for an international audience. The academic elements provide a rigorous intellectual underpinning for the investigation that follows and the practice-based output demands that they present their findings in a form that would engage the public with some dynamic issue of international concern.

Students are provided with research skills teaching tailored to the particular demands of MAIJ dissertations and most develop the required blend of skills. To assist this process some format-specific workshops were provided last year in addition to the format-specific one-to-one supervisions which run from December to the end of July.

However, prompted by your concerns, we have specialised further this academic year with students being split by format for much of their methods teaching. We are working through classic methods such as interview and focus groups, but using our experienced print and broadcast practitioner staff to show how the academic theories can be applied in journalistic practice.

We had very few strugglers at proposal and literature review stage and expect our approach to pay particular dividends in the upcoming methodology stage. We will monitor the situation closely as the dissertations develop and could specialise still further in research skills delivery if required.

In 2. you mention some inconsistency in the attention paid in feedback to weaknesses/mistakes in written English. Most tutors do mark scripts rigorously and this may become easier as we make more use of electronic marking. It is important, as you indicate, for errors to be flagged up, particularly as students can go on to receive further guidance from our weekly English language support (ELS). All staff marking practice-based assignments have been reminded to do this.

Where markers feel a student is being seriously inhibited by poor expression in the medium of English, the course director is alerted to work with the identified students to ensure full advantage is taken of ELS and the weaknesses addressed. We will also be picking up any language concerns as students meet personal tutors during March to discuss their first semester performance.

Students are provided with the criteria for each assignment in the module guides at the start of each semester and talked through each brief before submission. The overall marking bands are made available in the student handbooks explaining the mix of expectation at each grade level.

The example of a student being awarded a distinction for an assignment despite significant language errors did appear to be at odds with those bands. In response, markers have been reminded of the requirements for each grade level and second markers will also be asked to be particularly alert to any such potential inconsistencies within and between modules.

As a result we would expect you to see improvements in these areas when you come to examine the work for 2013/14.”

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.**

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