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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Martin Stabe		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Financial Times		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	MSc Computational & Data Journalism		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2019-2020	Date of Report:	26 July 2020

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 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)

The MSc in Computational & Data Journalism does something that is quite difficult in a single academic year: teaching the wide (and growing) range of journalism and technical skills expected of people working in the data journalism roles that now exist in many news organisations. The programme remains one of only a handful of journalism courses in the UK that is teaching this material at a high level.

The degree programme's two core modules require students to complete a range of tasks similar to those they would need to complete as data journalists in a professional setting: The Data Journalism module covers the basics of data-acquisition, -handling and -analysis tasks in spreadsheets, as well as visualisation and writing about data. The group project in the Digital Investigation is one of the programme's major strengths, as it accurately simulates the challenges of working within the sort of cross-disciplinary team that would need to be assembled in a professional newsroom to complete a longer-term, complex interactive development project.

Both these already strong modules have been substantially improved this year by apparent changes to the material that is taught and how it is assessed. Student work in writing and

visualisation appeared to be of a higher standard than in previous years, and the group appeared to incorporate a commitment to focusing on the essential “softer” skills of project management and team-building, the absence of which appeared to inhibit effective collaboration on group projects in previous years.

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

Teaching the enormous, cross-disciplinary range of technical, analytical and presentation skills now used by data journalists in a single year is extremely challenging, but the course does this very effectively.

As in previous years, the strongest students produce work that indicates they could work very effectively within professional data journalism teams immediately.

This year, it was my impression that the more typical work was of a higher standard than in the past, particularly in the core skills of writing based on data analysis and production of data visualisations.

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

The assessment criteria appeared to be clearly set out the course materials and applied fairly.

I was pleased to see improved assessment criteria in some areas that I had considered problematic in the past, particularly with regard to writing, visualisation and collaborative working.

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

N/A

5. Year-on-Year Comments

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

In previous years, I expressed concern about the quality of the work students produced in three areas, as well as the degree to which this was addressed through feedback and the assessment criteria: (1) data visualisation (2) writing about data (3) awareness of legal issues in data journalism, and (4) failure of group projects due to unresolved interpersonal conflicts among the students.

There appeared to be a marked improvement in all these areas this year, with clearer assessment criteria and assignment structures that allowed for specific skills to be checked and errors corrected where necessary.

Comments on student work regularly focused on **how to use data to write compelling stories**, as opposed to simply describing the data. There was a recurring stress on the importance of using data to identify the newsworthy rather than writing about the data itself. Several students' work was clearly marked down for not being factually or legally "safe", and the reasons were explained in the feedback.

Students' **production of graphics** appeared to be assessed more systematically, and basic data visualisation errors were routinely corrected in feedback. The use of various off-the-shelf visualisation tools allowed students to focus on the substantive content of their graphics rather than only the technical aspects of their production.

The Data Journalism module structure was improved in that there is now a clear sequence of assignments of increasing complexity that reflected the range of tasks a working data journalist might be asked to complete: from data sourcing, handling and analysis through visualisation and writing. This allowed for more assessment of the various skills that they might be required to have, and for greater coaching of students' writing through feedback.

There was also great improvement over previous years in the "Digital Investigation" group project module. Over the first two years of my appointment, I had become increasingly alarmed about the reflective pieces produced by students for this module. These had been exclusively subjective and based on personal opinions and impressions. Students could obtain high marks without citing evidence or describing efforts to apply good practice in collaborative working, which is an essential soft skill for data journalists. It seemed to be acceptable to focus on interpersonal conflicts in the group and assign blame to other team members for discord.

This had already improved somewhat last year, but this year's work was markedly improved. Students had clearly been exposed to processes and tools for coordinating complex team-based work, and focused on how well or not they applied these in their work. They discussed the use of industry-standard project management tools like Trello and Git, and how these affected their ability to work collaboratively. They showed awareness of relevant concepts like "continuous deployment" and "Agile" and critically engaged with whether these were appropriate to adopt for their journalistic project. Students described researching processes used by professional teams undertaking similar work, and described the incorporation of user testing in their product-development timeline. I cannot recall examples of any of this in previous years.

Because data journalism work is almost always undertaken in cross-disciplinary teams, ability to coordinate work effectively in a team is a vital soft skill for data journalists. The improvements to the module have clearly made graduates of the course substantially more employable by giving them the ability to work effectively as part of a team.

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)

I was given all the necessary materials in ample time to attend the exam board, which was conducted online because of Covid-19 restrictions.

I was not able to see all of the output of one of the Digital Investigation group projects because there was no public-facing working version of the final project and I did not have access to all of the relevant Github repository.

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

As I mentioned in previous years’ reports, graduates of the MSc in Computational and Data Journalism are extremely employable as entry-level generalists within newsroom data teams and equivalents in other industries.

One area where data teams’ demand for skills still exceeds supply of well-trained journalists is in the area of statistical analysis and data science. It’s not clear that journalism graduates — even from this outstanding course — are the best-equipped potential recruits in this regard. The strongest candidates tend to come from other academic disciplines which place greater emphasis on the theory and practice of statistics and quantitative research methods.

Another area for growth is product development — thinking about journalistic outputs as ongoing products rather than one-off stories or “content” for such products. Many journalists find this quite difficult, but it is an increasingly important frame of reference to instill. Some “Digital Investigation” project and students’ dissertation projects are already examples of this.

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

As noted above, I have been impressed by the degree to which recommendations have been implemented and standards have been improved over the course of my appointment.

I would encourage the programme leaders to continue their efforts to incorporate more training in formal statistical methods and digital product development into the programme, insofar as this is possible given the limited time available in a single academic year. These remain consistent areas of weakness among entry-level journalists coming from most traditional journalism training programmes that this course is in a unique position to help address because it already attracts students predisposed to applying numeracy and interactive digital formats to journalism.

9. 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				
9.1	Did you receive sufficient information about the Programme and its contents, learning outcomes and assessments?	✓		

9.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?		✓	
Commenting on draft examination question papers				
9.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?		✓	
9.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?			✓
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			✓
Examination scripts				
9.6	Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?	✓		
9.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	✓		
9.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	✓		
9.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?	✓		
9.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?	✓		
Coursework and practical assessments				
9.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	✓		
9.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	✓		
9.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	✓		
9.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	✓		
Clinical examinations (if applicable)				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			✓
Sampling of work				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	✓		
Examining board meeting				
9.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	✓		
9.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	✓		
9.19	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?	✓		
Joint examining board meeting (if applicable)				

9.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?			✓
9.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			✓
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			✓

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

Your fee and expenses claim form and receipts, should be sent electronically to the above email address or in hard copy to:

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