



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	James Wakefield		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of Exeter		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	BSc in Molecular Biology / Genetics / Biotechnology / Biochemistry		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2016/17	Date of Report:	4th July 2016

Please complete all information in the spaces provided and submit within **six weeks** of the Examining Board (the **taught 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 Data Protection Act (1998).

Please extend spaces where necessary.

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

The new structure and content of the programmes are well aligned with their aims and seem to be settling down. The course materials and Handbook are clear.

The material and taught techniques are appropriate at the different levels - 1st year Programme structure is compulsory and provides your students with the core material required for their degrees, while the 3rd year courses generally provide a good level of choice, with an emphasis on small group teaching and critical analysis.

The optional Professional Placement Year (PTY) provides students with an opportunity to secure a year in a research environment that will be beneficial for their future careers and should be encouraged.

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

Based on the available evidence (exam scripts, project reports, other assessments) I am confident that the academic standards at Cardiff are high.

3. The Assessment Process (enabling achievement of aims and learning outcomes; stretch of assessment; comparability of standards between modules of the same level)
Generally, the level of feedback on coursework, final year projects and examinations that I assessed this year was very good. The marking criteria for the different levels are excellent - clear and helpful, with a good distinction of assessed qualities between Levels. However, there were some examples of variability of practice that need looking at. In one final year module, where short-answer examination questions were used (totalling a third of the paper's marks), some assessors wrote the allocated marks on the front sheet without converting to a percentage. These were converted prior to generating the spreadsheet so there is no question that, in this case, overall grades were calculated correctly - however, it opens the possibility of errors creeping in to spreadsheets, especially with the complicated calculations required to convert individual marks within sub-sections. In addition, one question was marked without any justification of how the marks were arrived.

As ever, the vast majority of academics provide excellent, helpful and thorough feedback to students though, again there were instances where this slipped and where the comments did not match the marking criteria. It would be good to reinforce to staff the importance of matching feedback to criteria.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

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

During my 4 year term as External Examiner, the single thing I have consistently brought up at every available opportunity is the work that External Examiners are required to do to fully assure the quality of the marking, modules and programmes. The data analysis that is carried out on your modules and, consequently, what we're provided with as External Examiners remains less than ideal. Things have progressed - we are provided with mean module marks and standard deviation aligned against historical data - sometimes going as far back as 2008. However, I personally think visual representations such as the range of marks in a module, as a box-whisker plot and a scatterplot of the final marks for students on a module compared to their overall average performance on the degree would make it far easier for all concerned to assess quality and consistency throughout the degree. This year, an added frustration was the difficulty of accessing and targeting individual Final Year Projects. I applaud the use of GradeMark, the on-line assessment and the marking sheet, all of which makes it easy to see how marks were arrived at. However, files on GradeMark only possessed the student name - they were not split by programme, nor did they have titles. It therefore took a substantial amount of time to identify projects from specific fields, across a range of marks, before the quality assurance checking could be undertaken.

5. Preparation for the role of External Examiner (for new External Examiners only) (appropriateness of briefing provided, visits to School, programme handbooks and supporting information)

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

There is no doubt that Cardiff has maintained the high quality of the Programmes I have monitored over the last 4 years. The feedback on written assessments is generally excellent, the levels of the Examination questions appropriate, and you really do have an excellent process for justifying and providing good feedback for your Final Year Projects. The Biosciences Student Office and Education Staff remain committed, conscientious individuals who have the student's interests at heart.

Aside from my comments about data analysis above, the one related enhancement I would like to see is a much more robust internal procedure for monitoring modules that show consistent discrepancy over time in terms of grades. If a module is identified as having a mean mark or variance significantly above or below the average, for two or more years consecutively, it should be subject to additional scrutiny by the Board of Studies and either fully justified or measures put in place to bring it into line with the others. Continued discrepancies should then be raised and evaluated at higher University levels. My understanding is that the historic measures that were in place within the Department to ensure this type of monitoring are perhaps not currently being consistently and methodically applied.

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

I have thoroughly enjoyed my 4 years as External Examiner. The Department places a strong emphasis on the quality of their undergraduate courses and both the academics and administrative staff involved in running the programmes are very involved with making them the best they can. I very much hope that the Department can find the time and support required to more fully analyse the data relating to their modules as I firmly believe that this lies at the heart of effective and efficient quality assurance.

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	Y		

	its contents, learning outcomes and assessments?			
8.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?			N/A
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?			N/A
Sampling of Work				
8.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
Examining Board Meeting				
8.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	N		
8.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?			N/A
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/A

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
Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)				
8.23	Did you receive a sufficient number of Dissertations to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?			N/A
8.24	Was the sample in accordance with the University's sampling guidelines (guidelines provided below)?			N/A
8.25	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the Internal Examiners?			N/A
8.26	Were you able to attend the Master's Degree (Dissertation) Stage Examining Board?			N/A
8.27	If so, was the Examining Board conducted properly and in accordance with established procedures?			N/A
8.28	Were the schemes for marking and classification correctly applied?			N/A
8.29	Were the standards of the awards recommended appropriate?			N/A
8.30	Comments on the Examination of Master's Dissertations. <i>Please provide any comments you may wish to make on the issues raised above.</i>			
	N/A			

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:

External Examiners, Registry, Cardiff University, McKenzie House, 30-36 Newport Road, Cardiff, CF24 0DE