**External Examiner Annual Report 2020/21**

External Examiner reports should be made available to students on the programme. Please ensure that any names (staff or students) and/or any information that may identify a student (for example a dissertation title) are redacted prior to making the report available to students.

You can also access this form through [External Examiner Annual Reports 2020-21](https://datastudio.google.com/reporting/7a8d1be8-1c3a-49e0-9bbd-9e301df41b0a), in a format which allows you to search and examine all of your department’s reports at the same time.

| **External Examiner Details** | | | | |
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| **Name** | Dr Lisa Evans | **York Department** | Psychology | |
| **Email address** | EvansLH@cardiff.ac.uk | **Level of Study** | UG | |
| **Home Institution** | Cardiff University | **Degree Programme/**  **Modules Examined** | BSc (Hons) Psychology and MSci (Hons) Psychology | |
| **How many years have you been an external examiner for York?** | This is my first year. |
| **(i) How effective were the procedures for induction and preparation for your role? (optional)** | Very good. I attended the University induction and found all the documentation to be very useful. In addition, I was given a very good introduction to the programme by the Chair of the Board of Examiners. | | | |
| **(i) Please provide an overview of quality and standards covering the duration of your term of appointment. (optional)** |  | | | |

| **Attendance** | | |
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| **Did you participate in any virtual Boards of Examiners meetings?** | Yes | **Please use the space below if you have any comment about opportunities to participate in these virtual meetings.** |

| **Standards**  Please comment on the following: |
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| **a) the appropriateness of the course structure and content to the level of qualification and to the relevant benchmark statement**  The course structure and content of the BSc/MSci in Psychology are entirely appropriate for the level of qualification and meet the subject benchmarks in psychology. The programme is accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS).   In the first two years of the programme students take set modules, to fulfill BPS requirements. There is a clear and coherent structure to these years, with second year modules explicitly building upon the knowledge and skills gained in the first year. In the third/fourth year students can choose which advanced modules to take. There is an excellent variety of topics for students to select from which are spread across the breadth of psychology. The MSci programme, with the various pathways, is well conceived and integrates well with the BSc programme. |
| **b) the appropriateness of the marking scheme/grading criteria and the extent to which the grading criteria have been rigorously and consistently applied**  The marking criteria for each assessment are appropriate and clear. Based upon the sample of work that I considered the marks allocated are consistent and mapped closely on to the marking criteria.  I understand that advanced module marking reports, which give a snapshot of how the module went and the marking and moderation process, have recently been introduced. I found them to be very useful.  A minor point concerning the literature survey is that it would be helpful if the second marks could be recorded on the spreadsheet, so that the process is transparent. It would also be helpful for both the literature survey and the research project if members of staff could write a short explanation to justify the agreed mark if there is a discrepancy between markers. This happens sometimes but not always.  Due to COVID-19 restrictions the format of the assessment for advanced modules was changed to open-book with 24 hours for students to complete it. The data seems to show a slight increase in marks in some modules from previous years. It is possible that this is due to the open-book nature of the exam. Furthermore, in some modules there were less students, than might be expected, demonstrating the higher-level skills, and so getting first-class marks. The open-book nature of the exam means that it is easy for students to do a “lecture dump” and demonstrate knowledge and potentially understanding but not much more. It seems like this format of exam might continue so it is worth the team thinking about what refinements can be made to address these challenges. This might be in terms of the questions asked, which might require more integration of material across lectures and/or sessions with students to educate them about this particular exam format. It is important to note that the changes to the exam format are in keeping with other institutions and the issues that I raise are those that the sector are dealing with. |
| **c) threshold standards: the standard of students' performances in terms of their knowledge, skills and understanding in reflecting the level of the qualification.**  The students demonstrate a high level of competence. They have knowledge and understanding across the breadth of psychology and are also able to undertake independent research. The standard of students’ performance is commensurate with the level of qualification. |
| **d) comparability of standards: the standard of particular degree classifications/ distinctions/ passes awarded in comparison with those students on similar programmes of study in other UK degree-awarding bodies with which you are familiar**  The standards and the spread of degree classifications for the programme are similar to those that I have observed in other UK Higher Education Institutes in this subject area. |

| **Assessment**  Please comment on the following: |
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| **(e) the appropriateness of the assessment methods (for the subject, level of study and learning outcomes)**  Over the course of the programme there are a good variety of assessment methods. Students need to complete practical reports, essays, and research methods/statistics assignments; and these are appropriate for tapping knowledge, skills and understanding in this subject area.   One issue that was very salient on this programme is the extensive use of MCQs. This assessment method is an extremely effective and efficient tool in indexing the breadth of knowledge and understanding that students need to obtain. On this programme in the first two years of the degree all exams are MCQs, whereas in the final years of the programme all advanced modules are assessed by essay-based exams. It is the modules in the later years which are heavily weighted in the final degree classification. Something for the team to consider is whether the second year of the degree needs to be more of a transition year in terms of exam assessment format. For example, by having a mixture of MCQ and essay-based assessments to help prepare students better for the format of the exams in the later years. I understand that students do coursework essays and have the opportunity to complete practice essays, so while they have practiced the general skill of writing essays it can be a somewhat different (additional?) skill to do this under time-limited exam conditions.   The second issue is all the MCQ exams in the first and second year were rescaled, with the majority of module marks being adjusted downwards and some going up. The process of rescaling has been completed in a fair and principled manner. However, moving forward it might be useful for the team to think about how the amount of rescaling can be reduced. Here are some ideas that the team might want to consider.  1. Perhaps it would be useful to work out the conditions under which rescaling will occur i.e. how much deviation is needed before module marks are rescaled? It might be the case that some modules do not require rescaling.   2. The profile of responses to each MCQ could be examined to determine which questions are able to differentiate students and which might need replacing. This could be an iterative process through the years.   3. It would be worth considering the questions you ask and what skills they tap according to the marking criteria. So very broadly you might want around half of them tapping knowledge and understanding and the other half the higher-level skills of synthesis, application, and critical analysis. These higher-level skills can be measured with MCQs. This would also mean that you would be marking to criteria rather than to a certain distribution. It would also allow students to demonstrate these higher-level skills if they have them and so help differentiate between students. This point might be more applicable in the second year.  The final issue connected with MCQs, when they are run remotely, is minimising the chances of students colluding. One way in which this issue can be reduced is by randomising the order of questions and answers. This requires certain software. If it seems likely that exams will continue being delivered remotely it might be worth the University purchasing this software to help guard against academic misconduct. |
| **(f) the conduct of, and the procedures followed by, the Board of Examiners (specifically whether the University rules relating to assessment, progression and award and procedures governing exceptional circumstances affecting assessment and academic misconduct have been fairly and equitably applied);**  The Board of Examiners meeting was conducted efficiently and effectively. The University rules relating to assessment, progression and awards were equitably applied. As far as I could tell the procedures related to exceptional circumstances were fairly applied. The meeting was conducted on Zoom and ran very smoothly.  Of particular note at the Board of Examiners was the detailed consideration of module marks and their relation to previous years and other modules. The visualisation of these data was excellent, comprehensive and accessible, which allowed members to easily see trends. |
| **(g) the effectiveness of the external examining administrative arrangements (for example the time available for reviewing scripts, availability of documentation needed to carry out the external examiner role);**  I was extremely well supported in my role by the Chair of the Board of Examiners and the administrative staff. All my questions were addressed, and I was given access to all the documentation that I needed. I was very grateful that everything was ready for me in a very timely manner. The wiki pages which give information about the course were very comprehensive and useful. The remote access to student work functioned well. |

| **Quality of Teaching and Learning** |
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| **(h) in so far as you are able, please comment on the quality of teaching and learning (including the quality of feedback to students), as revealed in exam scripts/other assessments, and by the level of student performance.**  The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. It is great to see the world-leading research of staff being disseminated to students in the advanced modules and students’ enthusiasm and high-level of capability in applying this cutting-edge knowledge.  Overall students receive excellent feedback on their work. The form for providing feedback includes a specific part for markers to outline points for improvement, which I am sure students must find helpful.  I was particularly impressed by the quality of the research projects. Some of these were not too far off publishable standard. This year has been particularly challenging because of the need to move research online and it seemed like students (and supervisors) had coped admirably with this. |

| **Previous Issues** | | |
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| **(j) if particular issues were raised in your report last year, have they been considered and (where appropriate), addressed?** | Not Applicable | **(j) Please comment on your response as required.** |

| **Additional Comments** |
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| **(k) Please use this space for any other remarks not covered by the above, such as examples of good/innovative practice identified, opportunities to enhance the quality of learning opportunities based on your experience, any issues to be drawn to the attention of the Board of Examiners or the University, or other thoughts.**  Through the process of External Examining it is clear that the staff involved in delivering and supporting teaching (academics and administrative staff) are committed and motivated. This has been particularly important this academic year, with the various challenges we have faced. Considerable efforts have been made to ensure that students have been impacted as little as possible and they have been helped through this difficult time. Furthermore, a stimulating learning experience has been provided where high standards have been maintained. I commend staff for the excellent job they have done. |

| **Form Feedback** |
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| **(m) this form is reviewed annually and any feedback on this form is welcome and will be considered as part of the annual review**  None |

| **Statements** | **Yes/No** |
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| **a) the standards set for this/these award(s) are appropriate for qualifications at this level, in this subject** | Yes |
| **b) the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK degree-awarding bodies with which you are familiar** | Yes |
| **c) the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and fairly conducted in line with the University’s regulations and procedures** | Yes |