

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S ANNUAL REPORT  
ON POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES OF STUDY  
2019-20**

Name of external examiner	Dr Natasha de Vere
Institution	Aberystwyth University
Programme(s) being examined (e.g. MA Drama)	MSc in Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation
Examination board(s) attended (e.g. PG Drama SEB, 19/10/18)	SEB 24/6/20 Oct Exam Board 2/10/20 (also attended student MSc presentations)

Your completed report should be submitted by e-mail to Alice de Havillan, Academic Quality and Standards Officer, at [a.l.dehavillan@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:a.l.dehavillan@qmul.ac.uk) within 30 days of the main examination board meeting.

If you prefer, you may post your report in hard copy. If completing this by hand, you may need to enlarge the text boxes before printing. Please send any hard copy reports to:

Academic Secretariat (External Examiners)  
ARCS, Queens E10  
Queen Mary University of London  
Mile End Road, London, E1 4NS

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Your report is intended for internal use only and will contribute towards aspects of Queen Mary's annual reporting procedures. Your report will be read widely, and will be made available to students; **please do not include personal information (such as your home address) or identify individual students.**

If you would like to raise any issues of a sensitive nature directly with the Principal, please feel free to do so. The address is Principal, Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS. Please do NOT use this form for this purpose.

This template is updated annually; the most recent version is available at:  
<http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/>

## 1. Programme structure

*Please comment upon:*

- *any particular strengths and weaknesses of the programme;*
- *the balance and content of the degree programme(s) followed by students;*
- *the coherence of programmes, and the appropriateness of the core/compulsory modules in relation to the aims and intended learning outcomes;*
- *the suitability of methods and the adequacy of teaching as reflected by the standards achieved by the candidates.*

I am extremely impressed with the course structure of the MSc in Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation. There is a really interesting and appropriate mix of taught modules that are organised in a cohesive and engaging way. There is a good balance of lectures, practicals and fieldwork. The assessments provided are innovative and equip students with the skills required for a researcher and/or practitioner in the fields of plant and fungal taxonomy and conservation. Within module BIO741P I really like the mini monograph assessment, where students are provided with a taxonomist to assist them. In module BIO745P the assessment to create a Red List Assessment is particularly effective. The Field Course to Madagascar is an excellent opportunity, that is well received by the students, they particularly appreciate the opportunity to learn from local experts.

Looking at the feedback from the students, they are particularly impressed with the diversity of teaching staff involved with the MSc. They are also very happy with the chance of being able to access the scientific facilities at Kew.

The students are provided with an excellent range of research projects and the taught modules prepare them for their projects well. I like the way that the students give presentations on their projects during their research, rather than at the end. This is a good way for the students to assess where their projects are heading and get useful feedback at this point. I found it really useful to attend these talks, as the external examiner, as it put the projects in context before reviewing them prior to the final exam board.

## 2. Curriculum design

*One aspect of the Queen Mary strategy is a specific objective on 'ensuring a high quality learning experience for all students through the design of the curriculum and its assessments'. For this objective, one of the measurements is through the external examiners' comments and there is a target related to your grading. Please will you indicate below how well you believe the programme curriculum and assessments are designed.*

**GOOD**

## 3. Standard of student performance

3.1 *In your view, are the standards of student performance comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK higher education institutions with which you are familiar?*

*YES (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)*

I am very impressed with the standards the students are achieving, which are higher than those from other institutions I am familiar with.

3.2 *Are there any other points on student performance that you wish to raise?*

It has been a hard year for this cohort of students, with the coronavirus pandemic impacting on their research projects. I am really impressed with how the students and staff have dealt with these challenging circumstances. In particular, how the research projects have been modified to produce excellent results – even where the original project has had to change.

### 3. Assessment Process

4.1 *In your view, are the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards sound and fairly conducted?*

*YES (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)*

4.2 *Please also comment for Queen Mary on:*

- *strengths and weaknesses in the assessment process;*
- *the appropriateness of the assessment methods (i.e. examinations, essays, dissertations etc.) to the learning outcomes for the programme, and the balance between them;*
- *the marking scheme, and the scheme for the award of honours (including weighting in final assessment between years of the programme and in relation to the number of modules completed);*
- *the quality and achievements of the candidates.*

The assessment process is fair and robust; with assessment methods that are appropriate to the learning outcomes of the programme. The marking schemes are all suitable and clearly defined.

The marking for both the taught modules and research projects was excellent overall. There is good evidence of double-marking and where required a third marker if the difference between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> marker is over 10%.

The feedback provided is generally very detailed and constructive for both the taught modules and the research project. For the research project there is a strong emphasis on the thesis being of publishable quality and this is reflected in the feedback comments.

The students complete module evaluations and it is really useful to review these. The proportion of students responding is often rather low ranging from 25 – 41% for the taught modules. I realise that there are logistical issues with getting the students to complete the evaluations but I would really like to see if these could be overcome to provide a greater response rate. *Within the October exam board a new plan for student evaluations was described to try and improve the response rate and also provide more immediate feedback for the module leaders. I am very happy to hear of these new plans and look forward to evaluating their effectiveness.*

### 5. Other Issues of Quality

*Please delete as appropriate. If the answer is 'no' for any of these questions, please give details in the comment box at the end of section 5.*

Examination Papers		
5.1	Were you satisfied with the arrangements for consulting you on the structure and content of the examination paper(s)?	N/A
5.2	Were your comments on the examination paper(s) properly taken into account?	N/A
Marking and Moderation		
5.3	Were you satisfied with the arrangements for your moderation of assignments?	Yes
5.4	Did you have sufficient information on the marking scheme(s)?	Yes
5.5	Did you feel that you could fairly assess the quality and consistency of the marking?	Yes
5.6	Was the quality of the marking satisfactory?	Yes

5.7	Were you satisfied that all scripts were double-marked internally (where required)?	Yes
5.8	Were you satisfied with the arrangements to review any practical work?	Yes
5.9	Were you happy with the arrangements for conducting oral examinations/ presentations (where used as part of the assessment for a module)?	Yes
Examination Board		
5.10	Were you satisfied with the arrangements for, and conduct of, the examination board meeting?	Yes
5.11	Were you satisfied with the decisions and recommendations of the examination board meeting?	Yes
Assessment		
5.12	Was the standard of assessment consistent with that of the national university system, so far as you could tell?	Yes
5.13	Were you satisfied with the assessment arrangements for associate students (if applicable)?	NA
<p><i>Please detail below any concerns regarding 5.1 – 5.13.</i></p> <p>The information provided by the PG admin team (Natalie Holland) was excellent and I appreciated the use of Dropbox to provide all of the materials required.</p>		

## 6. Issues of Procedure

*If applicable, how did procedures/arrangements compare this year with previous years? Were suggestions that you made last year acted upon? (if not applicable, please go to question 7).*

It is my first year as external examiner of this scheme.

## 7. General Comments

7.1 *In your view, are the standards set for the awards appropriate for qualifications at this level in this subject?*

**YES** (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)

Yes, definitely

7.2 *Are there any other points that you wish to raise? In particular, Queen Mary would welcome your comments on any aspects of exemplary practice in the subject area for which you act as external examiner.*

This is the first time I have examined the MSc in Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation and I am really impressed with this MSc scheme. A particular strength, noted by the students and myself, are the wide range of staff from Kew who come together to provide teaching, marking and supervision. With such a range of staff involved there might be the potential for inconsistency in approach and marking and this does not happen at all. Clear guidance and training has obviously been provided to the Kew staff.

7.3 *If appropriate, please provide a short statement or bullet points of any particular strengths or distinctive or innovative features in relation to standards and assessment processes.*

This is an excellent MSc course with interesting and innovative assessment and research projects. It is a challenging course

and a lot is expected from the students. The students respond well, given the excellent set of results obtained.

The students are provided with a fabulous opportunity to engage with the staff and facilities at Kew. This MSc is a flagship within plant and fungal conservation postgraduate training.

**Signed:        Natasha de Vere**

**Date: 2/10/20**

Thank you for completing this report and for your contribution to assuring standards and quality at Queen Mary University of London. Please return your report to the address/e-mail address given on the front page of this pro-forma. You will receive acknowledgement of the receipt of your report from the Academic Secretariat.