

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010– 2011

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION*Subject area and awards being examined:*

School of: Biological Sciences	Subject(s): Biological Sciences
Programme(s) / Module(s):	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) BSc
Modules; BIOC3900, BMSC3146, MICR3080, MICR3120, MICR3212 and DAHS3007	

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than 6 weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to:

Head of Academic Quality and Standards,
Academic Quality and Standards Team,
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building,
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

PART B: COMMENTS FOR THE INSTITUTION ON THE EXAMINATION PROCESS AND STANDARDS***Matters for Urgent Attention***

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box.

None.

Only applicable in first year of appointment

Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?

N/A

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School.

N/A

Standards

1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme aims and intended learning outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award?

- *The appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

The aims and intended learning outcomes of each module - provided to all students - are clearly stated, comprehensive, and are completely fulfilled by the module teaching content. They provide an integrated approach to cover all of the most important scientific aspects addressed by the module. Academic standards are, indeed, commensurate with a first degree.

2. Did the aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

Yes: the aims and ILOs are consistent with similar degree programmes run at other universities with which I have experience. All of the modules I looked at compared very favourably with national benchmarks.

3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs?

- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

Performance in modules is assessed using a range of methods: continual assessment of course work, MCQs, short-answer and essay-format questions in examinations. The methods of continual assessment involve a range of presentation / transferable skills. Such methods are entirely appropriate: a high standard is expected and attained. With the exception of the single point I raise below, I think the highest of standards are adopted, and followed, in the assessment of student performance and the classification of degree awards.

One issue arose which all three externals picked-up on - and had the same view: second-marking of scripts. We observed that that at Liverpool, Leicester and St. Andrews all final year work is double-marked, but at Leeds only a proportion of scripts were double-marked. The practice at St Andrews is that the first marker awards a grade, then the second marker assesses the work - 'blind'. Marks are then compared and discussion takes place between the markers where discrepancies occur: the agreed mark is then submitted. We all felt that the criteria used to decide **which** scripts were to be second-marked was not made clear.

4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and ILOs?

- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

The examination process I have seen at Leeds gives students every opportunity to demonstrate their ability to fulfil the aims and ILOs of each module. Overall, students showed a high level of achievement in comparison with students taking similar modules in other universities.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

N/A

6. The nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year

It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.

Considerable reorganisation of the overall range of modules, plus their composition, has taken place over the past year. This large task has been accomplished remarkably well. New modules always take some time to 'bed-in' and the content refined. I noticed some degree of overlap between aspects of cancer between the cancer biology and virology modules, but this will be addressed for the next academic year. The high standards established in both module content and teaching delivery established in previous years has been maintained throughout the new structure.

7. The influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching

This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.

A good balance has been struck between a broad curriculum and one that reflects the areas of research interest of the academic staff. Importantly, final year modules showed good evidence of the inclusion of up-to-date research findings. As is the case with all comparable universities, Leeds has struck the necessary balance (resource / time allocation) between allowing students to perform either a laboratory-based or literature-based research project. Both types of project sharply focussed upon current research topics.

The Examination Process

8. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?

- *Whether external examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.*

Yes: The information provided is comprehensive and enabled me to make comparisons both between modules and between methods of assessment within specific modules (exam questions / continual assessment etc.). I have always been granted complete and rapid access to any further material I have requested to see.

9. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks?

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

Yes, although I think it would be helpful if module booklets could be supplied in an electronic format: I assume such information is made available to students in such a format in any case (e-mail PDF files of module booklets?). I feel that the policies and procedures put in place certainly enable me to perform the explicit roles requested of me.

10. Was sufficient assessed/examination work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?

Yes (plus see answer to q8).

11. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners?

Yes. The meeting of the Board of Examiners was held in a very efficient manner: ample time was devoted to issues requiring discussion, whilst those not requiring any discussion were expedited quickly. A thorough, but efficient, process in which all issues were addressed. I am completely satisfied with the whole process and commend all the staff involved in their competence and efficiency.

12. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?

Yes: I got the very strong impression that care, diligence and sensitivity had been taken in assessing the potential effects upon any student's performance by the particular mitigating circumstance that had arisen – and across the wide range of circumstances presented to us.

For Examiners involved in Mentoring Arrangements

If you have acted as a mentor to a new external examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements.

N/A.

Other Comments

Please use this box if you wish to make any further comments not covered elsewhere on the form.

None.



RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
Faculty of Biological Sciences | Undergraduate School

External Examiner:

Programme Area: **BSc Biological Sciences**

Academic Year: **2010/11**

Date of Response: **October 13, 2011**

Dear

Thank you very much for your continued hard work and detailed interest in the Biological Sciences programme.

Thank you also for your report on academic year 2010-11 and the many positive points that you made about the Biological Sciences programme.

There were two matters of concern to you, the first relating to second marking of examination scripts and the other was about possible overlap in teaching between virology and cancer biology. You also wished to have more extensive access to all module booklets in electronic format.

Concerning second marking of examination scripts, we adhere closely to the University of Leeds guidelines. I also understand that in academic year 2011-12, all borderline scripts will be second marked. You commented that the Examiners in the Biochemistry and Microbiology programmes were also concerned about criteria for selection of scripts for second marking. Given that, as from 2011-12, most of these final year programmes, as well as Biological Sciences, will be based on Advanced Topic Units (many of which will be shared between programmes), we will need to develop a common set of procedures for second marking in the Biochemistry, Microbiology and Biological Sciences programmes and we will be working on this during the coming academic year. I will, of course, seek your advice about our procedures before the examinations next May.

Regarding possible overlap between virology and cancer biology teaching, as mentioned above, we are now moving to a largely Advanced Topic – based Final year which will be different from the year on which you reported. However the BIOC3900 module (Cancer Biology) will continue, principally for Genetics, Biology and Medical Sciences students although certain Biological Science students may opt to take this module. BIOC3900 will also be available as two Advanced Topic Units (Molecular Oncology and Cancer Therapy) which will cover most of the material in the BIOC3900 module. Obviously there is complete overlap between these Advanced Topics and BIOC3900 as they are delivered in parallel but, obviously, we do not allow students to enrol on all. I will investigate possible overlap between these and other Advanced Topic Units that might be considered to be part of the Microbiology programme and eliminate any overlap as necessary. Thank you for pointing this out.

Finally, you requested access to module booklets in electronic format. This information is made available to students via the Blackboard VLE. You have access to the entire VLE, although I understand that there may have been problems with External Examiner access in the last academic year. [redacted] in the Undergraduate School Teaching Office will provide you with VLE access and you can browse through all the module information at your leisure. [redacted] can also provide you with the University Guidelines on second marking.

May I thank you again for all your hard work and excellent advice concerning the Biological Sciences programme.

Programme Leader

Faculty of Biological Sciences

University of Leeds
Garstang Building
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

7 November 2011

Dear

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2010/11: BSc Biological Sciences

Many thanks for your efforts during the year and your constructive report on the programme.

Regarding your comments on double marking of examination scripts, especially regarding how these are selected, we have recently updated our procedures in several areas of assessment which will go some way to addressing your concerns. Whereas blind double marking of all examination scripts would be difficult (from a workload perspective) to roll out across the entire Faculty, we are going to moderate/double mark at least 20% of all scripts including all failed scripts and a random selection across the marking range, in line with University of Leeds policy. We are also working on giving staff more guidance in assigning marks in the range below 40%. I am glad that you found our approach to final year research projects appropriate and that the literature-based projects we offered were as equally focussed on current research topics as laboratory-based projects.

I am very pleased you commented positively on the reorganised structure of the Biological Sciences programme and that the high standards of content and delivery have been maintained. This has involved a huge amount of work from dedicated staff who will be very encouraged by your comments.

I look forward to seeing you next year but in the meantime if you have any queries, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Faculty Director of Undergraduate Student Education