

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	Biological Sciences
Subject(s):	Genetics, Human Genetics
Programme(s) / Module(s):	
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BSc

Completed report

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six 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?

I was provided with a copy of the previous external examiners' report and the Schools response. Based on this report there were no significant issues that needed addressing.

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

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 current programs aims and ILOs are fully commensurate with that achieved. The Genetics and Human Genetics programs are of a high quality, with clear evidence of the students gaining a good level of understanding and achievement from a broad and balanced range of modules.

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.*

The aims and ILOs clearly meet the benchmark standards and are comparable with research lead universities within the UK. On reading a large number of the essay questions and all the project reports I was happy the academic standards are set at an appropriate level.

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.*

Across the three year program a wide range of assessment methods are applied, ranging from MCQ and short answer questions to essay based examinations and extensive reports. Additionally there are opportunities for data analysis, verbal and poster presentations and practical exercises. As is common, course work tends to produce higher average marks and variation in the proportion and type of coursework associated with different modules can disguise some significant variations in examination performance. For example in Evolution and Population Genetics the practical component had a class average of 76% while the written exam produced an average of 55% - additionally there was relatively limited spread of marks for the practical component. It would be a useful exercise for the program director and module coordinators to review these components to ensure that they are not merely a means of raising the module average but do actually discriminate between students. However, such exercises also represent an important formative exercises and not primarily summative. The variation in course work content for modules is not in itself problematic but it would be appropriate for the staff to consider if there should be any rationalisation both in terms of workload, the contribution to the final mark and consideration of quality assurance. It should also be noted that, as the external examiner, it was not possible for me to assess the suitability or level of these components.

The former external was concerned about variation between modules with respect to mean mark. There are a few which show a >5% variation from expected but none are dramatically out of line. This is an area for vigilance but no dramatic action seems necessary.

Project marks include a 20% mark for performance, which is certainly relevant to the 40 credit experimental based projects. However, there are no clear marking criteria. It may be useful to draw up some key points to be considered in awarding this mark. As in other institutions, there is always a concern that it is only possible for the supervisor to award this mark. For this reason clear guidance may be valuable. I must stress that personally I would not want to see this component reduced, as it aims to assess a key component of the project and is what distinguishes this valuable component from other parts of the course.

I was a little surprised by the 2nd marking/moderation procedure, as the first marker not only annotates the scripts and writes a summary but also puts their suggested mark. The danger of this is that the second maker will not assess the script in anyway independently. I would personally prefer the scripts to be annotated but the mark kept undisclosed until the two assessors meet.

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.*

There were only nine final year students this year. In part this is because some of this intake are currently having their year in industry or abroad and none from the previous year were returning. From this group there was a good spread of ability and achievement displayed in the assessments - including one 1st and one 3rd class award. There were no students with either mitigating circumstances or with borderline marks requiring careful consideration. I was particularly impressed with the quality of writing in the project reports, and the range of science the students had undertaken was impressive, particularly considering the very high load being required of the staff.

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. Please comment on 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.

N/A

7. Please comment on 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.

The content and quality of teaching displayed clearly reflects the strong research environment in the Biological Sciences Leeds. It is important that this is maintained and I have concerns both regarding the amount of teaching required from staff (in particular the probability of having relatively large numbers of project students compared to equivalent institutions) and the future prospects of maintaining the breadth of teaching. In particular the Human/Clinical aspects of Genetics, which are usually preferred options for undergraduates, seem to be threatened in the short term. I feel strongly that these aspects must be present in a modern Genetics degree. It also seems surprising that in a University with strength in this area, though no longer within the Faculty of Biological Sciences, should have difficulty in maintaining the excellent courses in this area. The problems seem to relate to internal financial models, which should not impact on teaching excellence in a well run University.

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

8. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

I have been provided with a mentor (<<>>, <<>>) whom I have met and who has been very helpful in advising me. This arrangement is ideal.

The Examination/Assessment Process

9. 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, adequate material was available and staff were very helpful in obtaining any specific information I requested if not originally supplied

10. 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, marking criteria?

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

Yes, this information was provided.

11. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

I was provided with all the examination papers in a timely manner. These included model answers and suggested changes were appropriately adopted.

12. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes, I had access to all the examination scripts and project reports. All of which were well annotated, with appropriate comments included.

13. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

Within the Genetics program the students undertake a research project which in part includes extensive literature survey and is equivalent to the dissertation. The variety and quality was high and these were appropriately assessed. I have commented on the assessment in section 3 above.

14. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

The administrative arrangements were excellent. I was not able to attend to Board of Examiners meeting, but I was informed that of the students I was associated with none were on borderline or needed special consideration relating to mitigating circumstances.

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

N/A

Other comments

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

It was good to have the opportunity to meet students earlier in the year. However, I only managed to see three second year and one first year student reading Genetics. Although I did manage to speak to some 3rd year students it would be nice to meet the Geneticists to get their view of the course in future years.

Course feedback from students: There was not much data on course/module feedback and I was told that relatively few of the students completed this. I feel that this is important to obtain. At <<>> we require students complete a web based course questionnaire as part of their tutorial/skills module. It may be appropriate to consider a similar approach.



External Examiner:

Programme Area: **BSc Genetics**

Academic Year: **2011/12**

Date of Response: **30 AUGUST 2012**

Dear

First, very many thanks for acting as our Genetics programme External Examiner this year. We rely on our external examiners to ensure that we do not become complacent in our practices, and that we can continue to offer our students the best possible educational experience.

I was particularly pleased that you were happy both with the generalities of the programme, and the achievements of our students.

You raised some specific issues for us to consider in our continual review of the programme and its content, and we are endeavouring to address these.

One of our principal areas of concern, in the last few years, has been the erosion of our ability to ensure the continued provision of a strong Human/Medical Genetics component in our teaching. I'm happy to report that there is now some progress in this area, due to cross-faculty discussions that we have been having with colleagues in the Leeds Institute for Molecular Medicine, based in St. James' Hospital.

Staff in LIMM are being encouraged to participate more fully in teaching (there is a strong financial incentive for them to do so!), and are contemplating developing a degree programme with a molecular medical genetics component that reflects their research activities. We are now holding discussions with them about the possibility of running either jointly administered (Faculty of Biological Sciences/Faculty of Medicine) modules or a jointly administered degree programme. So far, the attitude of both Faculties has been very positive, and there is no doubt that this would represent an excellent solution to the problems that we have faced in recent years.

The suggestion that we might provide a few key indicators for the project performance mark is very constructive. I suspect that a number of us have done this in an informal way in the past, but it would be a good idea to formalise this within the module handbook, and in the guidance given to students at the outset of their research. I've passed this on to the module manager, and will make sure that at least the Genetics students will get a clear set of guidelines, this year.

With regard to the marking and moderation of the project report mark, I think you're probably labouring under a misapprehension. So far as I'm aware, the second marker does not get to see the marks awarded by the first marker, and the marks are independently awarded (in fact it is a requirement that if the marks awarded by the two assessors differ by more than 10%, then they should meet to agree on an appropriate mark). – As external, you get to see both sets of mark sheets, but the two assessors only see their own.

Once again, many thanks for your efforts, and I look forward to your continuing input to our programme.

Best regards,

Programme Leader

Faculty of Biological Sciences

University of Leeds
Garstang Building
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Our Ref:

3 October 2012

Dear

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2011/12: BSc Genetics

Many thanks for agreeing to act as external examiner for this programme and for your constructive report on the programme. I am pleased that you feel the programme meets the intended learning outcomes, that the academic standards are set at an appropriate level and that the range of assessments utilised is appropriate.

An important issue you raise is the loss of human /clinical genetics content over the past few years and as noted in your response we are in the process of considering a number of ways forward to address this deficiency. I believe with input from our clinical colleagues from adjunct faculties, we could develop an exceptional programme in genetics for our students.

I am pleased you found our administrative and support processes of such a high standard during your visits and I'm glad that having [redacted] as a mentor was helpful.

With best wishes,

[redacted]
Faculty Director of Undergraduate Student Education

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