

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):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):		awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)	
Genetics		BSc	
Human Genetics		BSc	

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.

No

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.

This has been an interesting experience over the past four years. I have been impressed by the quality of the degrees delivered, by the research experience given to the students and by the responsiveness of staff to suggested improvements. I think the degree programmes have improved significantly over the past four years. The feedback to students is better. There is more consistency in the marking with model answers and better annotation of exam scripts. I support the different modes of assessment between coursework, written exams – with short answers, essays and MCQs however some modules have consistently lower mean marks and this needs further consideration. The identification of weaker students and ensuring that students are taking appropriate and sufficient modules to graduate has improved considerably.

I am disappointed that the Human Genetics course is not continuing. I find this a strange decision given the exciting developments in this area and I think reflects a withdrawal of senior support for the programme which over my time has led to a serious demoralisation in the staff who have retained their

professionalism in delivering excellent undergraduate education. The links with the Clinical Genetics Department in Leeds could have been strengthened.

I enjoyed meeting the students when the opportunity allowed. This gives the external examiner a real sense of the way the course is working and the practical issues that the students face.

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 programme aims and ILOs are commensurate with the level of the award. The Genetics and Human Genetics degrees at the University of Leeds are of high quality. I was especially impressed this year with the standard and with the quality of the research projects which should equip students for postgraduate study or a working life in the Life Sciences.

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 meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark and are consistent with the standards at comparable universities in the UK.

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.*

The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards were all appropriate.

I was particularly impressed by the standard of work from students in level 3 this academic year reflecting engagement with their studies and excellent teaching support.

The breadth of assessment methods incorporating coursework, research projects/literature reviews and examinations is good. It is important to note that there remains a marked difference between the mean marks for some modules compared to others. This was highlighted in my reports for both 2009 and 2010. I do not see significant progress in this regard. The large differences will potentially mean that students avoid certain modules if they feel disadvantaged by a lower mean mark. I do not believe that there should be a standardisation of testing across different modules but it is important to achieve a standardisation across module marking and further consideration needs to be given to this. This will become more important as students and employers refer to module marks rather than overall degree classifications.

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 students graduating in Genetics/Human Genetics were a considerably stronger cohort this year compared to previous years. This partially reflects the identification of weaker students at an earlier stage in the programme and either providing them with extra support or those students not continuing to year 3. It is also a credit to the teaching staff that such high quality work was delivered by this student group.

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

Not applicable

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.

There are no noticeable enhancements to the course over the past year that were apparent. However, the improvements made in previous years have been maintained. The research projects had a good breadth and were of particularly high quality.

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.

The lecture material and examinations cover significant recent advances in genetics and continue to reflect that lecturers are providing current relevant material for the students. The research projects were of excellent quality and stretched the students.

I was disappointed that there were no students on external industrial placement this year – this should be more actively encouraged as it often provides great research and working experience.

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. Adequate material was provided in the form of the handbook.

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

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

Yes

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

This was excellent. The administration of the process was well managed and the process ran smoothly.

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

Yes

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.

I am particularly impressed by the Genetics website – the information provided and the outward face of the Department – the person delivering this should be congratulated.

Providing core statistical support for students through their projects could be improved by drop in clinics or other means as practical issues emerge through the project.

I would recommend that project meeting forms are filled more rigorously – this is an important record for both the student and supervisor and could be put on line as at my University – no excuses not to do or that form missing.

I support the poster presentation of the research project but think that this could be supplemented with short spoken presentations.

External Examiner:

Programme Area: **BSc Genetics**
 BSc Genetics (Human Genetics)
 BSc Genetics in Relation to Medicine

Academic Year: **2010/11**

Date of Response: **20 September 2011**

Dear

Many thanks for your final report on our Genetics Degree Programmes, and once again, our heartfelt appreciation of the effort you have put in over the past four years.

This has been a period of change, most of it unwelcome, and your continued scrutiny of our teaching and assessment processes has been of considerable value for us in delivering an internationally competitive educational experience under difficult circumstances.

It is gratifying to learn that we have little to do to improve our programme, although we shall be striving to address the remaining outstanding areas requiring further improvement: particularly where undergraduate performance (as indicated by marks obtained) seems to be significantly different between modules. The causes of this are under active investigation.

Changes in the teaching personnel are still taking place, and it is consequently difficult to predict how this will impact on our ability to deliver some aspects of our current curriculum in the future. It is to be hoped that once the dust has settled following the Faculty restructure, that it will be possible for the University to take a more strategic view of future appointments, and to recognise the importance of Genetics as a discipline in the context of producing graduates equipped to meet the future needs of the Knowledge-based Bio-economy.

Sincerely,

Faculty of Biological Sciences

University of Leeds
Garstang Building
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

26 September 2011

Dear

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2010/11: BSc Genetics

Many thanks for all your efforts throughout your four year tenure as External Examiner for the Genetics degree programme - we are very grateful for your input and support. The changes implemented have greatly improved the programme and the student experience. It is great to see the hard work of staff reflected in the positive comments included in your report.

I am very pleased you commented on the positive impact that enhanced academic support has had on student performance and on the quality and breadth of the final year research projects. As points out in response to your report, we are investigating variance in module marks across the Faculty and in addition, working on enhancing the guidance to staff about marks assigned below 40%. I am also pleased you found our administrative and support processes of such a high standard during your tenure - staff will be very encouraged by your comments.

With best wishes,

Faculty Director of Undergraduate Student Education