

The University of Leeds**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012– 2013

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

Faculty / School of:	Biological Sciences
Subject(s):	<i>Physiology</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Human Physiology
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

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

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 programme aims to provide a solid grounding in physiological sciences and to develop a rigorous and critical approach to the subject. The programme is very well organised, students have plenty of choice and scope to extend themselves. The standard reached is entirely appropriate for an honours degree course.

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 programme is entirely comparable with similar programmes offered at other universities at which I have examined.

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.*

There is a mix of course work and formal examinations, which range from multiple choice papers in the early part of the course to essays at a later stage. A substantial research project, which forms a significant element in the final year, gives students an opportunity to demonstrate their strengths and some attain a very high level. Marking is fair and marks are moderated, particularly for final year students. All project work is double marked.

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.*

Yes. The course is designed to give the most able students the opportunity to attain a very high level of scholarship. The best compare favourably with the best at other institutions at which I have examined.

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.

Then staff constantly review the course content, the delivery of teaching and the students' progress. The specialist Advanced Topics modules, which are relatively new to the course, research based, and offer a very wide range of subjects, are still bedding in and it can be expected that the modules will be adjusted and developed each year, according to student experience and staff availability as has happened over the past year. This is good practice.

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 course is research lead, especially in the final year. The students are therefore exposed to teaching from experts in the field. For laboratory based research project students are integrated into active research groups. The course therefore evolves to reflect latest advances in the field.

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

n/a

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.*

The organisation of the course is exemplary. I visit the University twice a year. Each time I have access to all examinations scripts, to mark spreadsheets, and I meet with course organisers and module leads. I am also given the opportunity to interview students alone in an informal environment to encourage them to comment on their experience of the course and to voice any grievances. I am then able to transmit the information to the programme lead without breaking confidentiality.

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.*

All relevant 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 draft of all papers in good time to comment. The nature and level of the questions was entirely appropriate. The minor queries that I raised were dealt with efficiently.

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?

All scripts and dissertations were available to me. The marking was transparent.

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

There is an excellent choice of subjects for dissertations. Given the large cohort of students and the limited staff resource, it has become necessary to offer library based project as well as "wet" laboratory projects. However, care has been taken to ensure that there is parity between the two types of project. The pressure of staff to design projects has resulted in a broadening of the range to include topics peripheral to physiology, such as Science and Society or Education i.e pedagogical research. Whilst these appear to offer a rigorous research experience, they would not equip a student for a vocational career in Physiology. Students may need to be mentored to this effect.

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. The staff in the undergraduate office who administer the course should be congratulated.

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

The staff at Leeds make every effort to take into account mitigating circumstances in a rigorous yet fair manner.

Other comments

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

Overall, the course is running very well and the staff should be congratulated in providing a high quality student experience.

External Examiner:

Programme Area: **BSc Human Physiology**

Academic Year: **2012/13**

Date of Response: **17.07.2013**

Dear

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2012/13: BSc Human Physiology

Firstly, as Programme Leader I would like to thank you for your continued input throughout the 2012-13 academic year and for the end-of-year programme report. We appreciate your kind comments on the efficiency of the examination process and the professional and efficient support that you get from our UG administration team, especially during your visits to Leeds. Your report was presented at our recent programme team meeting and due consideration was given to the points you raised - these are discussed in more detail below. We were pleased to note that no areas of serious concern for urgent action were identified and that, in your opinion the programme "provides a solid grounding in physiological sciences" with students being given every opportunity to "develop a rigorous and critical approach to their subject" with "plenty of choice and scope to extend themselves" and that our programme is "well organised and the standard reached is entirely appropriate for an honours degree course". You state that "the programme is entirely comparable with similar programmes offered at other universities" and it is good to receive this endorsement although you will understand if I say that our ambition is to provide an experience that goes beyond what many other institutions can offer especially as the number of established Physiology programmes continues to decline nationally. We take particular pride in being able to offer our undergraduates exposure to everything from integrative and systems Physiology through to cellular and molecular topics as they relate to both normal Physiology and human diseases.

Your positive comments in relation to the strong research-led elements of the degree programme are noted – it is important that our students are aware of and learn about Physiology from those who are experts in their respective disciplines and we are pleased that this is recognized as a strength. As you have noted in your report, examples of this at Level 3 include the Advanced Topics and the research-based dissertations. With regard to the latter, you raised a concern about the "broadening of the range to include topics peripheral to physiology, such as Science and Society or Education" which would "not equip a student for a vocational career in Physiology". You suggest that students should be properly mentored to consider their choices against their future career aspirations. At our recent team meeting, indicated that this already happens to some extent but further actions may be appropriate. As you note, we have taken care to ensure that all the projects offer a rigorous research experience and we believe that there is equivalence of experience regardless of the type of project pursued. Also, we feel that it is extremely important to offer a breadth of projects and topics that reflect the interests and aspirations of the students, many of whom will pursue careers beyond Physiology. We are also fortunate to have experts in pedagogic research and our students benefit from their contribution to the course. We shared your disappointment that so few undergraduates took advantage of the opportunity to have a face-to-face meeting with you as part of the course review process. In the past these sessions have been well attended. I know that you value this contact as a means to get direct feedback from our student cohorts on their experiences and for them to comment on the quality of teaching and resources associated with the various modules they will have studied during the year. For the coming academic year and for future, we will ensure that there is proper representation across Levels 1-3 at these meetings and intend to involve the student reps in helping us to achieve this. Our new module 'Extreme Human Physiology' module with a linked open-access learning resources was very successful and the feedback was excellent. We are now aiming to embed this as a permanent element of our programme as it provided our students with a solid introduction to some key concepts in Physiology at an early stage in their studies.

Despite the many challenges facing the Higher Education sector, our BSc in Human Physiology continues to be a popular programme attracting excellent quality students with strong A-level grades. Our aim is to deliver a world class research-led programme that fully reflects the breadth and depth of modern Physiology. At the same time, we are very cognizant of the need to equip our students with the many transferable and employability skills that will ensure resilience and success in future careers whatever route they choose to follow. Your continued input in the coming years will ensure that we deliver on both these fronts. On behalf of all the staff connected with the Human Physiology programme I would like to thank you for your efforts as our External Examiner and we look forward to working with you again next year.

Yours sincerely,

Programme Leader