

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

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

Faculty / School of:

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Human Physiology

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

BSc

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**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 Quality Assurance

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

I examined the Human Physiology degree programme for 4 years. This has been a very positive experience, which I have enjoyed. I have been impressed by the high standard of teaching and the commitment of the staff (both academic and administrative) at Leeds to the whole student experience. When I took up the appointment of External Examiner, the programme was facing a particular challenge due to the recent loss of a significant proportion of staff who had previously contributed to the teaching. The solution adopted was to re-organise the course in an imaginative way and despite the reduced staff resources, the re-organised course has proved to be very successful. Of particular note, the new Advanced Topics in Physiology modules in Year 3 offer students a wide range of research based topics from which to choose, that reflect the research strengths of the staff. Core research based lecture material is provided and from this base, students conduct independent enquiry supported by supervision and mentoring, which challenges and stimulates them.

Along with most universities in the UK offering similar programmes, Leeds has found it impossible to offer all students a traditional laboratory based research project in their final year. As a consequence projects may now be library or laboratory based, with the scope of the former widened to include pedagogical research relevant to the programme as well as topics related physiology in Society. This provides students with a very wide choice, which presents potential problems in standardising marking. This has been addressed in the form of specific marking guidelines and by double marking to ensure consistency. The course is continually being reviewed and developed attention is paid to student feedback, which can be channelled through the external examiner. In 2013 the latest imaginative module: Physiology in Extreme for year 1 was rolled

out and has already proved very popular and captured the imagination of students for their discipline.

As external examiner I had the opportunity each year to meet with students from all years of the course to discuss with them their impressions and to take forward any criticisms. The staff take this feedback very seriously and have responded and acted promptly to iron out 'niggles'; indeed in some instances these had already been identified by the staff themselves and measures were being put in place. Consequently there is a high level of student satisfaction with the course.

The high standards achieved by students at Leeds are comparable to the best I have experienced elsewhere in the UK. The staff are highly committed and continually review and strive to improve their programme and are supported by a dedicated and efficient Admin. Team. The marking and assessment procedures are transparent.

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 structure and content of the programme and the level of attainment required by the students are entirely appropriate for the degree of BSc Human Physiology

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 equal to the best I have experienced at other institutions 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.*

There is a range of assessment methods, computer marked MCQ, data handling, traditional essay and short answers as well as a substantial dissertation, all of which are entirely appropriate. Many scripts are double marked, as well as dissertations. The assessment process is transparent and all marks are made available to the External Examiner. Particular attention is paid to candidates with marks that place them on the borderline between grades, to ensure that an appropriate classification is made.

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 best students produce excellent work comparable to that I have seen elsewhere. There is scope, particularly in the advanced Topics modules and in the dissertation for bright and motivated students to achieve an extremely high level. Students have the opportunity to develop intellectually and take ownership of their programme of work study. There are few tail enders on this programme, suggesting that the admission process is realistic and that the course engages the students. Whilst students are required to answer examination questions on only two topics, the best students are not limited and have the option of choosing to study a wide range of material delivered by research active 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.

The staff review the course content, constantly as well as the delivery of teaching and the students' progression. The specialist Advanced Topics modules, which were relatively new to the course when I commenced my term as examiner, are now bedded in and offer a very wide range of research based subjects. This is good practice. In the last year a new module for first year students has been introduced, which focuses on physiological adaptations to extreme environments. With an imaginative approach that includes personal accounts from individuals about their experiences, this module is stimulating students and encourages them to relate to the importance of physiology to survival.

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.

Year 3 is heavily research based and delivered by research active members of staff who are eminent in their field. Students carrying out laboratory based research projects are exposed directly to the research environment whilst those choosing library based projects have ample opportunity to engage with the research community via their supervisors. The Advanced Topics module in the final year is another excellent example of research led teaching. The core teaching for this module provides a platform for students to study in further depth, the topics that engage them the most in order to hone their intellectual skills to make a critical evaluation of the field and importantly, for the most able students to demonstrate the extent of their abilities.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

n/a

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

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

I acted as mentor to a new examiner during the final year of my appointment. We interacted in an informal basis, in person or by e-mail, greatly facilitated by the fact that we were both in the same institution.

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. 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.

I was provided with a comprehensive handbook for External Examiners.

11. 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

12. 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 drafts of all examination papers. The course used a number of assessment methods with entirely suitable questions. My queries on the small minority of questions, which I felt could be improved (usually for the sake of clarity) were dealt with appropriately. The very small number of questions for which I had minor queries on

13. 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?

I had access to all scripts and mark sheets. Scripts were annotated and in many cases had been double marked.

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

Because of the increasing numbers of students on the programme, there are no longer sufficient staff resources to offer traditional laboratory based projects to all students. The solution has been to broaden the scope of the laboratory based projects to include pedagogical research and "Science in Society" themes and in addition to offer in depth library based projects A rigorous scheme of assessment has been developed which can be applied to all types of project in order to ensure comparability of marking across a very wide range of topics.

15. 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 for the examination process were extremely efficient throughout the entire 4 years. Draft examination papers were sent in plenty of time or if, a quick turn round was required I was forewarned. I attended the Board of Examiners and was entirely satisfied with the rigour of the examination methods, the transparency of the process and the recommendations of the Board. The team at Leeds are to be congratulated.

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

Yes

Other comments

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

The Human Physiology course is commendable and running well and there is a high level of student satisfaction.

Faculty of Biological Sciences
Student Education Service

Student Education Office
Irene Manton Building
University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT, UK



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

30 September 2014

Dear

RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2013/14

BSc Human Physiology
BSc Human Physiology (Industrial)
BSc Human Physiology (International)
BSc Human Physiology in Relation to Medicine
MBiol, BSc Human Physiology (Integrated Masters)

Firstly, as Programme Leader I would like to thank you for your hard work and input throughout the 2013-14 academic year. Your comprehensive end-of-year programme report has been read with interest. We were pleased that no areas of serious concern for urgent action were identified and that you were “impressed by the high standard of teaching and the commitment of the staff (both academic and administrative)”. The range of assessment methods utilised e.g. computer marked MCQ, data handling, traditional essay and short answers as well as a substantial dissertation, were all deemed by you as “entirely appropriate” and that “students had adequate opportunity to demonstrate their learning achievements”. We pride ourselves 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. Despite pressures in terms of delivering on all of these fronts due to diminution of local expertise across all areas of Human Physiology, we draw upon a diversity of pedagogical resources to ensure that our graduates continue to learn across the full breadth and depth of Physiology. We appreciate that this is recognised in your observation that “the high standards achieved by students at Leeds are comparable to the best I have experienced elsewhere in the UK” although we will continue to strive to provide the *best* in the UK.

We continue to emphasise research-led elements throughout the degree programme and we are pleased that this is recognised by you as “a strength”. Your endorsement of the effectiveness of the Level 3 Advanced Topics module which challenges and stimulates our students and encourages self-directed learning speaks to positive feedback that this module receives, notwithstanding some points raised regarding the assessment uniquely through essay writing and the potential value of building in a coursework element. As regards the latter, this is under constant review within our school. Our relatively new module on the topic of ‘Extreme Human Physiology’ is very successful and the feedback is excellent. We are now aiming to embed this as a permanent element of our programme and to weave the topic through to Levels 2 and 3 in the coming years. To this end, for 2013-14 a new topic on the theme of human endurance, to be delivered by _____ should be in place. We were pleased that after last year’s disappointing turnout by our undergraduates for their face-to-face meeting with you, this year it was well attended and so provided meaningful student input to the course review process. The fact that you reported, through this mechanism,

“a high level of student satisfaction with the course” is positive although we are aware that issues such as quality of feedback and consistency in the student experience e.g. within tutorials require attention. We continually try to innovate within the programme in order to ensure that the programme is ‘fit-for-purpose’ in the modern era. For example, we are strengthening and emphasising ‘employability skills’ e.g. by use of practise C-V writing and the ‘mock interviews’ sessions which were new for 2013-14 and which received very positive feedback from the students. We are alert to the need to equip our students with scientific knowledge combined with transferable and employability skills that will support their future success whatever they may do.

Finally since this is your final year as our External Examiner, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of all of the staff connected with the Human Physiology programme to thank you for your valuable input to our degree which has helped us to develop and improve our provision.

Yours sincerely,