

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): BSc Medical Sciences	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) 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.

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 ILOs are entirely appropriate for this kind of degree. The structure and content of the modules are well mapped to the degree programme, and the standards applied are appropriate for the award of a BSC Honours 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.*

The structure and content of Medical Sciences degree programmes varies considerably between institutions. Nevertheless, this degree is comparable with similar and related programmes in other institutions, including my own, and easily achieves 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.*
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There is a healthy diversity of assessment methods, and marking is conducted in a rigorous and fair manner. Moderation of marks is clear and transparent.

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 marking range is of sufficient scope and linearity that the students have every opportunity to demonstrate their abilities (see also 6). The academic standard displayed by the students was excellent, as would be hoped and expected from a Russell Group University. Approximately 70% of students achieved 2(i) or better, with around 12% achieving firsts. The standard of work displayed by the top students was outstanding, and comparable with the best students on similar courses in other institutions.

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.

Notwithstanding the teething problems encountered (see "other comments"), I consider the introduction of Advanced Topics in Medical Sciences (and other subjects) to be an extremely positive development. The breadth of topics available, their structure and the way in which they are assessed provide the students with a medium in which they can demonstrate the full extent of their abilities. From discussions with the students, it is clear that they also consider this to be a welcome development.

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 Advanced Topics modules are an excellent example of research informed teaching, with student scripts providing numerous examples of outside reading of the scientific literature. The student performance in the

laboratory research projects continues to be excellent and is a clear indication of research led teaching; the very best projects are performed and written virtually to publication standard.

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.*

I was provided with all of the information needed to discharge my duties effectively. In addition, the roles, powers and responsibilities of external examiners were discussed both informally and during the exam board meetings.

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, I received everything that I needed.

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

Yes, I had access to all of the assessed work.

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

Yes, the administrative procedures were excellent.

Operation of the Board of Examiners was fair, effective and transparent. There was robust discussion of all students at the degree class borderlines and/or with mitigating circumstances. There was consistent treatment of students across all degree programmes.

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.

1. As mentioned under 6, the Advanced Topics are an excellent feature of the programme, and it is to be hoped that sufficient staff will continue to be available to maintain the breadth of coverage that is one of the major strengths of this feature. It is clear that there has been a serious issue with the teaching/examining of some of the Advanced Topics elements provided by BMB such that the mean marks were inappropriately and unacceptably low – far below the mean marks of the SBS Advanced Topics. The Medical Sciences

programme heads introduced a scaling factor which has the full support of the external examiners and the wider examination board, and that has prevented any detrimental effects to students in this cohort. Notwithstanding this remedy, it is clear that the structure, delivery and examination of the BMB advanced topics needs to be comprehensively reviewed, and it is reassuring to note that the programme leaders for Medical Sciences are already addressing this issue with colleagues in BMB.

2. The standard of the laboratory research projects remains impressive. Additionally, I would like to draw attention to the high standard of many of the literature projects. The better literature projects represent really excellent reviews of their respective fields.
3. The opportunity to meet the students and module leaders in April is extremely valuable. The meeting with students was well attended, with representatives from all years of study. The students were extremely positive and enthusiastic about the course and its development. They showed great appreciation of the help, support and interest that they receive from the academic staff.

External Examiner:

Programme Area: **BSc Medical Sciences**

Academic Year: **2010/11**

Date of Response: **10 August 2011**

Dear

Many thanks for your supervision of our examination process this year, and for your report, which has now been forwarded to me by our Teaching Quality and Support Office. I am pleased that you found our examination procedures good, provision of access to materials and students sufficient for your work, and that you regard the course as meeting the standards and expectations of the national benchmarks.

In regard to your specific comments:

I am glad that you feel the introduction of the "advanced topics" modules to our final year portfolio is a positive step. As you note, there have been some teething problems, which we are working hard to address. Clearly, it is important that we set a reasonably uniform standard of both teaching and assessment for these modules, to give all students a fair opportunity to show what they have learnt. However, like you, we feel that these modules provide a great opportunity for our students to see the topics at the edge of the research field, and to get a feel for how science advances.

Your comments about the final year projects are also very encouraging. In particular, we have modified the way we organise the literature-based research projects to ensure that students approach them in a hypothesis-driven way, and that they look forward to future questions in the field of study, rather than simply reviewing the literature. This does appear to have been reflected in a stronger performance in this area.

As a research-led university we see these projects as a key component of the course, and a lot of staff time and effort is committed to both running and marking them. I am glad that you found the notes provided by the markers useful: I will pass this comment on to all concerned.

Thank you for your comments concerning your visit in April. We share your view that this is a valuable opportunity for you to get a feel for how the students themselves view the course, which is very important to us. Feedback from them, via you, can be very useful in our module and course reviews. We are glad that you had the opportunity to talk with more students this year!

Finally, I would like to thank you again for your positive approach and support as our external examiner for our course: we greatly appreciate the time and effort that you have put into it.

Yours sincerely,

Programme Leader

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 Medical Sciences

Many thanks for your efforts during the year and your constructive report on the programme. It is great to see the hard work of staff reflected in the positive comments you have regarding the programme.

Whereas I also strongly support the introduction of Advanced Topics in final year, I share your concern about the equivalence of the individual component units but agree with you that appropriate moderation was carried out so that students were not disadvantaged. Thank you for your input into that process - much appreciated. As [redacted] notes in his response to your report, we are working hard to sort these issues for next session and are hopeful of success. I am also very pleased you find the range and quality of final year research projects to be impressive and reflect our research-based teaching staff will be very encouraged by your comments.

I look forward to seeing you in April next year and if you have any queries, please let me know.

With best wishes,

Faculty Director of Undergraduate Student Education