

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):

BSc Medical Sciences

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?

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

My experience of the Medical Sciences programme over the 4 years of my appointment has been an extremely positive one. The academic and support staff, both past and present, have been both helpful and supportive in their efforts to facilitate the external examining process. It has been a pleasure to observe the development of the course over the last four years; it has maintained its strengths and has seen numerous innovations such as the introduction of the advanced topics modules.

During my period as examiner there have also been some fairly major changes in staffing and organization within both the School and the Faculty. It is to the enormous credit of the academic staff that this has not been allowed to impact negatively on the delivery of the programme. Medical Sciences is a high quality and popular degree programme that attracts well qualified entrants and ensures that they have every opportunity to maximise their academic potential, as evidenced by the continued high proportions of upper degree classes achieved by successive student cohorts. A significant element of this success relies upon the high levels of dedication and professionalism of the staff who deliver the programme. The quality of teaching and student support is also reflected in the positive feedback that I as an external examiner receive from the students that I meet each year, External examiners in general have less and less direct interaction with students, and I view the opportunity that I have been given to do this as extremely important, and I hope that this practice continues.

The marking and assessment processes have been fair and robust throughout. The examiners board meeting is exemplary and would serve as a good model for any institution. It provides an excellent forum for discussion between internal and external examiners, and ensures that the marks of every student, particularly those at the degree class borderlines, are considered in an even handed way across the various programmes within the school.

One of the major strengths of the Medical Sciences programme is its breadth. Not just of subject material, but also the breadth of approach, embracing both integrative whole organism perspectives – crucial in the post-genomic era- as well as cellular and molecular studies. I believe that it is vital to maintain this breadth of approach and hope that this need is fully taken into account when considering staffing issues going forward.

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 varied structure and content of the modules are well suited to this broad based degree programme, and their ILOs are entirely appropriate.

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.*

Medical Sciences degrees in the UK form a heterogeneous group (and in some cases are awarded as BMedSci). Notwithstanding this caveat, the overall programme at Leeds is comparable with similar and related programmes across the UK with which I am familiar, and it 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.*

A wide variety of appropriate assessment methods is employed, which is a positive feature of the programme. The assessment methods could be broader still if it were practicable to hold viva voce examinations. The marking is rigorous and fair, and in my opinion the classification borderlines are properly set. Mechanisms for double marking and moderating are transparent and fairly applied.

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.*

Examiners use the full range of marks available to them, thus providing every opportunity for students to properly demonstrate their academic potential. The research project in particular offers a vehicle for students to fully demonstrate their abilities, and there are many examples of excellent achievement. The quality of the research projects is at least as good as those that I have seen from comparable courses. This particular student cohort demonstrated excellent academic abilities. Around 30% of the students achieved a first class award with a further 54% achieving class 2(i).

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 advanced topics modules continue to provide a wide range of subject material. Consistent marking standards across school boundaries are clearly being achieved. Planned changes to the assessment of the advanced topics modules may provide further opportunities for the students to demonstrate the full extent of their abilities.

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 research project, accounting for 40 credits in level 3, is a very clear example of research led teaching and evidence of its success can be seen in both the laboratory and literature based projects. The advanced topics in medical sciences also clearly demonstrate research informed teaching, which is evident from student examination answers. Taken as a whole, a substantial proportion of the level 3 curriculum is strongly influenced by research within the faculty.

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.*

I was provided with everything that I needed. The roles and powers of external examiners are clearly defined in the handbook for external examiners and were also widely discussed on numerous occasions during my visit.

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.*

Everything necessary 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?

Yes, I was provided with these in a timely manner, and had the opportunity for input into them. Their content, level and scope were appropriate.

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, all assessed work was available, and I had already had the opportunity to examine the semester 1 material during my visit in March 2013. The medical sciences curriculum is extremely broad so that annotation of the scripts is particularly helpful for examiners who are inevitably non-experts in some very specific areas. The scripts were clearly marked, and in the main, extensively annotated. Annotations were on occasion very brief so it would be useful to encourage all internal examiners to make these as comprehensive as possible. The marking/comment matrix for the research projects is particularly useful.

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

An impressive range of dissertation subjects was available to the students. The dissertations that I examined had been assessed fairly to an appropriate standard and all had been double marked.

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 procedures were of the usual high standard that I have come to expect. I attended the board of examiners, which was operated fairly and effectively, and was also attended by most module organisers. Both the internal and external examiners had every opportunity to engage with all aspects of the process, which was completely transparent. The performance of every student from the various degree programmes was reviewed. The performance of all students with mitigating circumstances and/or borderline degree classes was discussed in great detail. Treatment of these cases was consistent across all degree programmes covered by the BoE. I was fully satisfied with the board's operation and recommendations.

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

Yes, see 14 above.

Other comments

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

The internal examiners drew our attention to an issue with a level 2 module of chemotherapy delivered by microbiologists. The examination results for this module were significantly lower than comparable modules taken by the same student cohorts. Although relatively few (5) medical sciences students had taken this module, they too had performed badly. The module examination result and the marking of the examination answers were discussed extensively at the Board of Examiners. A recommendation to increase (scale) the marks for this module was made, with which all external examiners were in complete agreement. The changes to final marks are small and did not affect any degree classification or move anyone into areas of discretion. I believe that the way this issue was handled is a good example of the effective and robust operation of the Board of Examiners. Nevertheless, a plan will need to be adopted to avoid a recurrence of this specific issue in the future.

External Examiner:

Programme Area: **BSc Medical Sciences**

Academic Year: **2012/13**

Date of Response: **30 August 2013**

Dea

Thank you for your report as external examiner, which has now been passed to me. I am grateful for the many positive comments you make about the programme. In particular, I will pass on your commendations of the quality and commitment of the teaching and administrative staff, without whom it would be impossible to run the programme.

I am glad that you find the programme broad and integrative, and that you feel it fulfils the national benchmarks. We do our best to provide an attractive curriculum, based around the research areas within the faculty, so that we can provide a research-led experience for the students. I note your comments about the importance of seeking to maintain this diversity in the face of staff turnover, and will do my best to ensure that the faculty is aware of this requirement whenever new appointments are made. Of course, there is always a degree of tension between the desire to develop strong research groups and the need to cover a broad curriculum, but we will do our best.

I note your comments about the wide range of examination methods we use, and the observation that including *viva voce* examinations would broaden it further if that were possible. We will give the matter some thought, but on the whole we prefer not to use them, because it is difficult to ensure uniformity of assessment across the whole cohort, and there is some concern about how much weight should be placed on a single, brief, discussion. We are looking at introducing interview practice into our level 2 skills modules, which we hope will address some of the skills training aspects that vivas provide.

I am glad that you feel the approach taken to the minor issues seen in the chemotherapy module was appropriate, and we will be discussing how to avoid such problems in the future with the staff managing that module.

Finally, I would like to thank you for hard, conscientious, and always cheerful work on our behalf over the last four years. I have found your advice extremely valuable during some difficult periods for the programme. It is much appreciated, and I believe it has contributed significantly to the quality of the programme.

Yours sincerely,

Programme Leader, Medical Sciences