

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): Neuroscience	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) B.Sc.

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 issues.

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?

Yes. I read the previous report and the responses provided by the school. The previous examiner's report was thorough and also critical of a number of aspects of the course. Specifically: limited exposure to lab work; level of support from supervisors etc. The responses from the school are detailed and clarify most of the issues raised by my predecessor. I raised some of these issues during my meeting in March with a group of students and members of staff. The students were very satisfied with all aspects of the course and I came to the conclusion that there were no major problems or other matters that need to be addressed.

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.

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 for the neuroscience programme and aims are stated clearly for each year of the BSc Neuroscience and final year of the BSc Neuroscience in Relation to Medicine course on Campusweb. The ILOs are entirely commensurate with each level and there is a clear progression from one year to the next.

I have no issues with standards. I perused a selection of scripts and project reports and the level of achievement is roughly what I would expect.

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.*

I have previous experience of teaching and co-ordinating neuroscience courses at the Universities of <<<>> and <<<>>. In my opinion the ILO expectations and aims are comparable to those courses.

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 range of assessment methods are used which test a variety of skills and knowledge. In final year, 40 credits are devoted to a research project which is a major component of the course and is assessed according to a research report and lab performance (for lab projects) or a grant proposal (for dry projects). Although library projects are often considered to be second best, I was enormously impressed by many of the reports I read and for some students, especially those who do not wish to have a career in science, this exercise provides an important generic skill. The lab projects I read were more variable. I was also able to peruse a selection of scripts across the mark range during both my visits. Even students at the lower end displayed an acceptable depth of knowledge.

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 classes of degree awarded are very much what I would expect; roughly 10% of students attained 1st class, 50% attained upper second class and there was only one third class student. This is very much in line with what I would expect and mirrors student performance at <<<>> and other institutions that I am aware of. I am always suspicious of courses where a large number of first class honours are awarded and I would consider that 10% is exactly the correct proportion of first class honours for a challenging subject like neuroscience.

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.

The Advanced Scientific Skills course offers students an excellent foundation for the final year of study. The students I spoke with were very positive about this course as it enabled them to approach the literature critically but also constructively. It helped in their understanding of experimental design and was a particularly useful introduction of how to approach project work.

The advanced topics courses provide a degree of flexibility and choice as they consist of core and additional topics. These courses are well designed and can be modified easily to cope with changes in teaching personnel. Students also commented on the Integrative Biomedical Science course. Many of the students who took this module felt that it formed an important component of their training as neuroscientists.

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.

It is clear that in final year, research specialities of staff members have a very positive (vital) influence on the curriculum. This is especially true for advanced topics units and the research project.

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 had free access to all marked material but I would have preferred to have had a hard copy of the results for the neuroscience degree, or alternatively, access to them via a computer designated to me individually. I was able to peruse the results but would have preferred to spend more time on this.

Specimen answers along with access to VLE were very helpful when assessing proposed exam papers.

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 all documentation.

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

I was asked to adjudicate on a 2:1/1st borderline candidate. I was able to peruse this candidate's scripts and research report, including examiners' comments; this enabled me to make a sound evaluation. I was also able to gauge this candidate's performance relative to the cohort of students.

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

Yes

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

There were no Neuroscience students with mitigating circumstances so cannot comment.

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.

Other Comments

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

This is my first year as Examiner for neuroscience so I'm still to some extent on a 'learning curve'. I am enormously impressed by the professionalism and dedication of the staff that organise and teach this course. It compares very favourably with neuroscience courses in other institutions that I have experience of and those responsible for it should be congratulated

External Examiner:

Programme Area: **BSc Neuroscience**

Academic Year: **2010/11**

Date of Response: **26 August 2011**

Dear

Thank you for your External Examiner's report on the Neuroscience degree programme. The programme team were very pleased with your positive report of the programme. It was also gratifying that you identified no major problems with programme in its present form, particularly as this year's programme is the culmination of several years of change to the structure and format of Neuroscience teaching at Leeds.

You identified only one problem in terms of your role as External Examiner:

I had free access to all marked material but I would have preferred to have had a hard copy of the results for the neuroscience degree, or alternatively, access to them via a computer designated to me individually. I was able to peruse the results but would have preferred to spend more time on this.

This is a problem that has been flagged up by previous External Examiners and is, unfortunately, out of our control. Banner is University software and only limited numbers of support staff are allowed access to it. I will raise your concern regarding access with the relevant Learning and Teaching committee. Previously, External Examiners have been provided with spreadsheets of student marks both in hardcopy and electronically. I am not sure why this was not provided to you this year. In future years I will make sure that these spreadsheets are made available.

Finally on behalf of the Neuroscience programme team, we would like to thank you for your hard work and constructive comments and look forward to working with you in the future.

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 Neuroscience

Firstly many thanks for agreeing to act in the role of External Examiner for the Neuroscience degree programme and for your effort throughout the year - we are very grateful for your input. It is great to see the hard work of staff reflected in the positive comments from students as well as those included in your report.

I am very pleased you commented positively on the range and quality of our final year research projects, the Advanced Scientific Skills module as well as the Advanced Topic modules. It is very encouraging when new modules are developed that are appreciated by students and enhance their experience- albeit with some teething problems which we will address for the coming session - staff will be very encouraged by your comments.

I note that explained the issue about access to the Banner software but we will do all we can to make sure that hard copy of spreadsheets will be available to you in future.

Thanks once again for your efforts during the year and I look forward to seeing you in April next year. If you have any queries, please let me know.

With best wishes,

Faculty Director of Undergraduate Student Education