

## The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

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

Faculty / School of:	Biological Sciences
Subject(s):	Neuroscience
Programme(s) / Module(s):	
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	B.Sc

**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](mailto: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?*

**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*

**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 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.

The standards are entirely appropriate for a course of this type.

**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 experience of similar courses at the universities of <<>> and <<>>. The standards are equivalent and easily meet 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 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).

The quality of teaching is very high; this is reflected in the excellent results obtained this year. Assessment is rigorous and fair.

**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.*

This year the standard achieved was exceptional; approximately 30% of students were awarded first class honours and very few obtained less than lower second class honours. Whilst the number of students obtaining first class degrees is higher than usual and also higher than of equivalent institutions, my overall assessment was that this was an outstanding cohort of students.

**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.*

As I commented last year, the Advanced Scientific Skills course offers students an excellent foundation for the final year of study. The students I spoke to were highly appreciative of this course. Also the advanced topics courses are an excellent idea which provide a degree of flexibility as they consist of core and additional topics. Most students also felt that this was good practice; however a view was expressed by one student that the neuroscience course was not distinctive and there was too much overlap with other subject areas.

I had the privilege of attending a second year laboratory class where students were recording intracellularly from snail neurons. I was enormously impressed by this; very few institutions have the capacity to provide this type of training to an entire class of second year students.

First and second year students were very positive about the course.

**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.*

Leeds is an excellent research university and this is reflected in the course which is taught by experts with national and international reputations for their research work. As a consequence staff are able to offer challenging, state of the art projects and teach contemporary areas of neuroscience with authority.

**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 full documentation for all courses and had free access to all marked material. I was able to peruse individual marks the day before the final board of examiners meeting.

**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.*

Yes

**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 able to comment on the examination papers which were fair and 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. I perused a selection of dissertations and marked scripts. In most cases, they were well annotated and comments were very helpful in understanding why specific marks were awarded.

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

There was a good range of choices. The method of assessment was good; both supervisor and an independent examiner awarded marks for the project report and the supervisor also awarded marks for lab performance where a lab project was undertaken.

**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. I was able to attend the meeting and was entirely satisfied with the process and decisions made.

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

Yes. I had one student in this category. I was provided with full information about the mitigating circumstances and was able to peruse all this student's scripts and research reports. I was also provided with <> grades for all three years. I felt that I was able to make an informed judgement based on the evidence at my disposal.

**Other comments**

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

The staff should be commended for providing an excellent course that enables students to achieve their maximum potential.



3 October 2012

Dear

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2011/12: BSc Neuroscience**

Many thanks for your constructive report and the positive comments you make on the challenging content of the programme, state of the art research projects and the quality of the staff community that contribute to the programme, which has received much praise in the 2012 NSS. The outcome this year, with ~30% first class degrees awarded was exceptional as you note, but I also am sure it reflects the quality and commitment of this student cohort.

Thank you for also commenting positively on the wide range of assessment strategies employed, that assessment is rigorous and fair, the examination board process satisfactory, administrative arrangements excellent but also very importantly from my point of view, is your acknowledgement of the quality of teaching on the programme. It is very important that staff whom provide an exceptional student experience receive such feedback, not only from within Faculty but also from outside.

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

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*External Examiner:*

*Programme Area:* **BSc Neuroscience**

*Academic Year:* **2011/12**

*Date of Response:* **18<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

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Dear

Thank you for your external examiner's report on the neuroscience degree programme. The programme team were very pleased with your extremely positive report and praise of the programme. It was also gratifying that you identified no major problems with programme in its present form.

You mentioned that one student felt that the advanced topics modules provided too much overlap with other programmes in the BMS area, although no other students felt that this was a problem. The advanced topics are based on the research areas of academic staff and therefore we have a limited number of subject areas that we can provide. Nevertheless neuroscience students have 8 neuroscience specific topics of a total of 17 available to them and the remaining topic areas have neuroscience components embedded within them or have direct relevance to current and future challenges in neuroscience.

It was very satisfying to know that you consider our intracellular recording laboratory classes to be a unique and important contribution to the teaching of Neuroscience at Leeds. We have worked hard to develop and retain this practical class over the years and consider it to be a vital teaching session for our neuroscience students.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Neuroscience programme team, we would like to thank you for your commitment to assessing our degree programme and your insightful, constructive comments. We look forward to working with you next year.

Yours sincerely,

Programme Leader