

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010– 2011

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION

Subject area and awards being examined:

School of:	Subject(s):
Programme(s) / Module(s):	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)
Pharmacology	BSc
Pharmacology (Industrial) + (International)	BSc
Pharmacology in Relation to Medicine	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?

Not applicable

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.

Not applicable

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 totally commensurate with the award of an Honours BSc in Pharmacology. The programme content is appropriate, offering a general coverage of Pharmacology at level 2 with a range of more specialist units at level 3. The Advanced Topics in Pharmacology Units offer the students the opportunity to study areas of contemporary activity in some depth. As expected, level 3 teaching strongly reflects the research strengths of the Institution. The research/dissertation topics offered at level 3 were appropriate and many students completed such work to a high standard.

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 offered in Leeds is comparable to that of other UK Institutions that I am familiar with, including the Universities of Newcastle upon Tyne, Edinburgh and Dundee that also offer named degrees in Pharmacology. Teaching at level 2 contains many of the elements recommended by the British Pharmacology Society (BPS) as being core to the discipline.

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.*

All of the assessment methods are appropriate. Examination scripts are double marked, which is good practice, and annotated, providing a good guide as to why a particular mark had been assigned. In my Report for 2009-2010, I requested that a more consistent level of commentary be provided regarding the marks assigned to laboratory projects / dissertations. I am pleased that this suggestion was acted upon in the current session.

Student performance in the 2010/2011 cohort was less impressive than last year. The majority of students were awarded upper second class honours degree, but less students than in 2009-2010 attained a first class award. However, as in the previous year, there was but a small 'tail' of students performing modestly, or badly. It is difficult to pin point a potential reason for the reduced number of students attaining a first class degree, but changes to the curriculum introduced in 2010-2011 may have had some impact. The overall outcome reflects well upon the efforts of all involved in the teaching and administration of the course.

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 format of the examinations is appropriate for the students to demonstrate the breadth of their factual knowledge and their level of understanding of the subject. The students in Leeds are performing at a standard similar, or slightly below based on the number of first class awards, to that of a comparable cohort at the University of Edinburgh, where I am also currently External Examiner. Students at Leeds are performing at a slightly higher standard than that of students at my own Institution. Overall, I feel that the level of performance at Leeds is very good.

I perceive no significant weaknesses in the student cohort, but note as above the smaller number of first class degrees awarded this year. Nonetheless, the performance of those students graduating with first class degrees is highly impressive and totally consistent with the prestige of such an award.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

Not applicable

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 Introduction of the Advanced Topics in Pharmacology Units appears to have been successful. It is commendable that the students are assigned to individual tutors who are able to provide teaching at the cutting

edge of the subject. Judging from the scripts that I examined, the students appear to have responded well to this more focussed teaching and method of delivery.

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 availability of level 3 units reflects the strengths in research at Leeds. The wide research base makes for provision of highly suitable of laboratory based projects that enhance the overall degree programme and the student experience. The research projects that I studied indicate that many students adapt well to laboratory research and would be capable of undertaking higher degrees. As in the my previous report, I acknowledge that the provision of laboratory research projects for large numbers of students can be challenging, but I would urge that this opportunity be extended to as many as possible of those students who are appropriately qualified and motivated.

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.*

Yes, the relevant material (e.g. The External Examiner Handbook) was more than adequate. The Course Leader <<<>> was available throughout my visit and was most helpful in responding to a small number of queries. I was totally clear concerning my role as External Examiner and was invited at the Board of Examiners to express an opinion upon the suitability, or otherwise, of borderline candidates for promotion to a higher degree classification. I felt that the Board gave appropriate consideration to the opinions of the External Examiners. I am absolutely satisfied concerning the fairness and impartiality with which the Board operated (see also response 11 below).

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, the documentation supplied was helpful.

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

Yes. A wide sample of such work was made available and to which I had free access.

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

The arrangements were exemplary. The Board of Examiners was meticulously convened by <<<>> and operated very efficiently indeed. Time was not wasted upon detailed discussion of candidates with clear degree classifications which allowed ample time to be reserved for detailed discussion of students on degree borderlines and/or those with mitigating circumstances. I applaud the system of considering students in several degree programmes at a single board of examiners which ensures parity of treatment.

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

Yes. A special circumstances committee considers such students and the recommendations of the committee are communicated, maintaining confidentiality, to the Board of Examiners at their final meeting. <<<>> briefed me of one such student prior to the meeting of the BoE which I found helpful. Appropriate discretion is available to the BoE.

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.

Not applicable.

Other Comments

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

There have been significant changes to the administration of the Pharmacology degree programme since 2009/2010. I am very pleased to note that the same high standards have been preserved.

It was helpful that I was afforded the opportunity to meet informally with representatives of the student cohort on a short visit to Leeds in late March. The meeting was both enjoyable and productive. The feedback that I received in response to my questions was very positive indeed. The students particularly expressed their appreciation of the pastoral support that they received.

I have no further comments to add apart other my thanks to colleagues at Leeds who made very efficient use of my time on both occasions that I visited this year.

External Examiner:

Programme Area: **BSc Pharmacology**

Academic Year: **2010/11**

Date of Response: **23/08/2011**

Dear

Thank you for your External Examiner's report and for all the positive comments you made on the content, delivery and assessment of our degree programme.

While you state that the level of performance in Pharmacology at Leeds is very good, I note your comment that the student performance in 2010/11 was less impressive than last year. We will endeavour to assess whether the reduction in the number of first class awards was the result of this year's cohort or whether it was due to the changes in the curriculum.

We will also continue to offer as many laboratory-based research projects as is feasible to those students who want them and who are appropriately motivated and qualified.

Thank for the time and effort you have put into the role of External Examiner. It was a pleasure to work with you and I look forward to working with you again next year.

Best wishes,

Pharmacology 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 Pharmacology

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. I am pleased that action implemented, secondary to your report from last year about enhancing project annotation, met with your approval.

I note your comment about the availability of laboratory based projects for students and also your assertion that we will do as much as we can in this regard. I am very pleased you commented positively on the recent introduction of 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 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