

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): | <i>Pharmacology</i> |
| Programme(s) / Module(s): | Pharmacology Pharmacology in Relation to Medicine Pharmacology (Industrial) |
| 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?

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

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, providing 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 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 delivered in Leeds is comparable to that of other UK Institutions that I am familiar with as External, or Internal, Examiner, including the <<>>, <<>>, <<>> and <<>> 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 and provides a solid foundation for more advanced study at level 3.

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 and was pleased to report that this had been acted upon in 2010-2011. Unfortunately, there was one instance of a borderline student in the current cohort who had been awarded a first class mark by the second marker, but unfortunately insufficient justification was provided for this. I accept that this may be an isolated instance.

Student performance in the 2011/2012 cohort was overall very good. The majority of students were awarded upper second class honours degree, with relatively small numbers attaining first, or lower second, classifications. It is difficult to pin point a potential reason for the small numbers of students attaining a first class degree in Pharmacology, compared to, for example, Neuroscience. One contributory factor may have been that there were no intercalated medical students in Pharmacology in the current cohort.

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 to, or slightly below, that of a comparable cohort at the <<>>, 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 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. 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 in Pharmacology Units continue to be 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 respond well to this focussed teaching and method of delivery.

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 range of level 3 units offered reflects the strengths in research at Leeds. All units are at a suitably advanced level. The wide research base makes for provision of highly suitable of laboratory based projects that enhance the overall degree programme and the student experience and employability. 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 reports, I recognise 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.

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

Not applicable.

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.*

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 and informing me of students with mitigating circumstance (along with <<>>). I was totally clear concerning my role as External Examiner. At the Board of Examiners I was invited 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 due 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).

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, the documentation supplied was helpful.

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. All papers were sent to me for approval in a timely manner. The questions set were entirely appropriate to the level of study undertaken. I made no major comments upon the draft papers this year.

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. A wide sample of such work was made available to which I had free access. In the vast majority of cases, the level and quality of annotation was most helpful.

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

Yes.

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 arrangements were exemplary. The Board of Examiners, which I attended, was meticulously convened by <<>> and operated very efficiently indeed. Time was not wasted upon detailed discuss 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 was totally satisfied with the recommendation of the Board. I applaud the system of considering students in several degree programmes at a single board of examiners which ensures parity of treatment.

15. 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 two such students prior to the meeting of the BoE which I found very helpful. Appropriate discretion is available to the BoE.

Other comments

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

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 very 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 other than to register my thanks to colleagues at Leeds who made very efficient use of my time on both occasions that I visited this year.



3 October 2012

Dear

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2011/12: BSc Pharmacology

Many thanks for your efforts during the year and your comprehensive report on the programme. Thank you for also commenting positively on the assessment strategies employed, the continued success of the level 3 Advanced Topic Module and that at the final year projects enhance the student experience and student employability. I am also pleased that you commented that our administrative arrangements were exemplary and that you were totally satisfied with the examination board process which offered parity of treatment for all students in the programme area. In addition your comments about the improvement in quality and extent of examination script annotation are pleasing as this is an initiative we have been progressing across the Faculty over the last session.

Although, there were very few First class degrees awarded to this cohort, as you state, this may well reflect the absence of intercalated students on the programme this year. However, it was encouraging to read your comments that our best students were performing at a similar level to those at the University of Cambridge. The programme has received much praise via the NSS this year which likely reflects the commitment and quality of the teaching provision given by staff contributing to the programme.

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

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External Examiner:

Programme Area: **BSc Pharmacology**

Academic Year: **2011/12**

Date of Response: **17th July 2012**

Dear

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

I note your comment on the small number of 1st class students this year (2) in comparison to Neuroscience (12). One reason for this discrepancy is that this particular Neuroscience cohort has been particularly strong throughout the three years at Leeds – 8 of these students obtained a 1st class degree. In addition, as you pointed out, Pharmacology had no intercalating medical students this year (Neuroscience obtained 4 additional 1st class students via this route). However, the Pharmacology programme team will discuss this issue and take whatever action is deemed appropriate.

As before, we will 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 you once again for all the effort you have put into the role of External Examiner during the academic year. I look forward to working with you again next year.

Best wishes,

Pharmacology Programme Leader