

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>Bioscience</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Bioscience (Bioinformatics and Computational Biology)
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc

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?

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

This is only the second year that I have examined this course. Whilst some of the changes have been implemented the course could still evolve further. This is an essential part of any MSc in biosciences and should become a flagship component of the degree. There is also considerable scope for integration into other parts of the programme.

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 intended learning outcomes and standards are appropriate for the programme

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.*

This programme is of a similar and in some respects, higher standard compared to other programmes at other UK institutions

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.*

The assessment methods are appropriate, requiring the students to work both independently and as groups. They test the ILOs adequately.

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 students appeared to be of a good academic standard, comparing well and probably above average to those on comparable UK courses. Standards of international students appear particularly high.

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.

Module specifications have been modified to some extent following suggestions from last year. Improvement however is still possible, particularly in relation to a clearer outline of the learning objectives. It is not clear how well the assessment is mapped to these learning outcomes from the module specification description. No example work was available for inspection in many of the modules making it difficult to assess this area.

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.

This is excellent and a real strength. The taught material, right from the core modules to the research project, is very obviously research-led and delivered by staff who understand and are passionate about their own research work. The students comment on this and it is obviously as an organic characteristic of the course.

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.*

Copies of example work from many of the modules were not available on the day of the visit. This presented a problem when trying to reconcile the awarded marks with the feedback for each student. In future it will be important to ensure that examples are available.

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. But improvements to the module specifications are required.

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. Nature and level of questions was 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?

No. A number of modules had no accompanying example work. This made the task of assessment problematic. Scripts that I did see were clearly marked and annotated.

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

Yes. Assessment was appropriate.

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?

Yes, very.

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

Yes. Although in cases of mitigating circumstances it would help if the academic staff were to present their recommendation to the external examiners, rather than asking for an "on the hoof" judgement. As EEs are not party to detailed discussions over mitigating circumstances the academic staff are in a better position to make a firm recommendation, particularly in relation to the sale of any adjustments.

Other comments

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

This is a good course, but needs to evolve further. Student feedback suggested that the introductory module run by computer science was not sufficiently tailored to their needs. I note that this is already being addressed with a planned new bespoke module being developed for next year. This will perhaps allow some of the more basic material from the other bioinformatics modules to be handled separately, enabling the specialist bioinformatics modules to develop to a greater degree rather than having to cover so much introductory material. One major criticism is that at the moment there does not seem to be sufficient additional material in the 20 credit specialist modules compared to the 10-credit module (or is there too much in the 10 credit module? – hence some low marks?). Overall the paperwork and procedures for this course need to be tightened-up a little, but I am sure this will happen once the course has undergone the changes this coming year.

Faculty of Biological Sciences
Graduate School

University of Leeds
Garstang Building
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Our Ref:

21 November 2012

Dear

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2011/12:
MSc Bioscience (Infection and Immunity)
MSc Bioscience (Bioinformatics and Computational Biology)

Thank you for your report on our MSc Bioscience (Infection and Immunity) and MSc Bioscience (Bioinformatics and Computational Biology) programmes. We are pleased to hear that you found research-led teaching and learning in the curriculum a major strength of the programme and that you feel the programme has developed from strength to strength over your tenure as External Examiner.

Regarding the points that you raise in your report:

- **Overlap of modules shared with undergraduates.** Firstly, we are raising the awareness of the students that some modules will be shared at the induction meetings and explaining that expectations differ for them at postgraduate level so that the students know what to expect. Secondly, we have initiated changes to modules in which material is delivered to both postgraduate and undergraduate students. Students will be told that the lectures can be used as an optional resource for background material to assignments and small group tutorials will be held that review this material and discuss advanced material. We will also make available other options for learning the same material from e-learning resources and reading materials so that students can elect to utilise the undergraduate teaching vs other resources.
- **Future maintenance of high calibre of programme.** As this course continues in the changing economic times and pressures on resources, we will ensure that we maintain the high academic standards and implement only new materials and initiatives that enhance the student experience and keep the course engaging to students.
- **Bioinformatics and Computational Biology.** We agree that the computational module offered by the School of Computing was not sufficiently tailored to the needs of the Bioinformatics students. Consequently, for 2012-13 as you note; we have introduced a new module "Solving biological problems with computers" (BIOL5122) that is being taught within the Faculty of Biological Sciences. We are currently in the process of reviewing all our masters programmes and your comments regarding the integration of some bioinformatics material into the core modules and evolving other aspects will be considered carefully as part of these discussions. We will review our paperwork and procedures and ensure that the distinction between the different credit versions of the modules are clearer in terms of learning outcomes and how assessments map to these learning outcomes. We will also ensure that exemplars of assessed work are available for inspection at the next meeting.

Allow me to finish by thanking you for your time and devotion and insightful and productive comments while serving as External Examiner that have improved this taught MSc programme.

Yours sincerely,

Director of Taught Graduate Student Education