

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010-11

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION

Subject area and awards being examined:

School of: Biological Sciences Programme(s) / Module(s): MSc Biosciences (Infection and Immunity) MSc Biosciences (Bioinformatics and Computational Biology)	Subject(s): MSc
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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?

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.*

ILOs were commensurate with the level of the award (see attached full report below for further details)

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.*

N/A

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.*

Assessment methods were appropriate. See attached report for minor comments for consideration

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.*

Yes, see full report

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.

See attached report

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.

This continues to be a particular strength of the programme. See attached report for further details.

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.*

This material was sufficient

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

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

Yes

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?**

Yes

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

This is my third year as External Examiner. The overall impression is that this course maintains the high standards of previous years, providing students with an excellent range of modules which are delivered professionally, offering a wide range of choice. The “research-led” agenda of the learning and teaching continues to be exemplary along with the participation of research-orientated staff which underpins the Programme. I have no fundamental criticism of the Programme, which I continue to rate a very high standard.

The responses to my report from last year have largely been adopted and minor modifications incorporated as suggested.

The opportunity to meet students on a separate day to look at posters and discuss the course in detail with them was particularly welcome. The feed-back from the students was overwhelmingly positive. A few expressed the wish that they could have had longer on their research projects, but I took this as a positive reflection of the

extent to which students had enjoyed the research aspects of the programme.

Bioinformatics and Computational Biology – general remarks:

This is the first year I have assessed this part of the programme. I have no major criticism of this part of the programme which contains essential skills for bioinformatics students. Indeed, other students from the Masters in Biosciences programme would benefit considerably from some elements of the course, especially BIOL5165M which contains of essential 'omics technologies such as transcriptomics, proteomics, GWAS etc.

Minor module-specific comments

There are a few more specific comments that the Board of Studies may wish to take account of when reviewing the Programme.

Core Skills

BIOL5206M

Excellent formative feedback for students. Assessed work is generally annotated in detail in a constructive and clear way.

BIOL5100M

Self/per assessment markers are generally very generous. Why include self assessment? Might it be less problematic to include just peer assessment in the marks?

BIOL5292M

No issues – good feedback

BIOL5294

No issues

BIOL 5205M

Lots of individual assessments with quite a bit of detail and skill required (eg section on mass spectrometry and proteins). To be commended – very thorough.

Infection and Immunity modules

BIOL 5248M

For the oral presentation the amount of written feedback given was quite variable. If written feedback is not given in detail it would be good to be reassured that this is given on a one-to-one basis.

BIOL 5249M

Good feedback given throughout

BIOL 5246M

An apparent inconsistency of feedback for assignments was raised formally by one member of staff as a potential issue. I spent some time looking at the assignments in question, but given the normal variation expected between the styles of assessors I did not think that a major problem exists here. Generally feedback was clear, helpful and constructive.

BIOL 5253M

Essay – essays which achieve distinction level marks appear to be based largely on factual knowledge. Although these essays are generally well presented, there seems to be little discussion in the work or evidence of critical thinking. If the purpose of these essays is simply to recite knowledge then they are doing their job; however, the students at this level ought to be encouraged to be able to write more critically in their essays.

Bioinformatics and Computational Biology modules

BIOL5165M

This appears to be a really excellent module – but should be done by more students!

BIOL5025

Another excellent module, but the module descriptors (aims) are not as clear as they could be because of the overly long list of specific aims. The module aims could easily be condensed from 35 aims (!) to a more reasonable number with many being combined under one heading.

BIOL5255M

Fine, but modify module descriptors as above

BIOL5256

I like the problem assessments. How is feedback given?

Research projects (both Programme streams)

These continue to be excellent. Assessors should not be afraid to state the actual marks they obtained independently on the forms, as well as the final agreed mark; even if they are at variance from the other assessor.

Once again, it was a pleasure to act as External Examiner for this programme and I look forward to working with this Programme Directors, the Board of Examiners and the Board of Studies next year.

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

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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Our Ref: DTGSE/AD/CME

28 November 2011

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2010/11:
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 welcomed the opportunity to attend the poster session and that the feedback from the students was overwhelmingly positive.

Regarding the points that you raise in your report:

BIOL5100M – you suggest that in the peer/self assessment of the oral presentation it may be less problematic to include just peer assessment and withdraw the self-assessment component. We will review the forms to see whether the removal of self assessment could present a more accurate assessment of individual contribution to group work.

BIOL5248M - during the oral presentation sessions for BIOL 5248M, students are provided with individual verbal feedback on their presentations. However, as written feedback on the marking sheets is variable, we will ask assessors to provide a little more written feedback where currently there is no to low comments.

BIOL5253M - for the 2011-12 academic year, we have reviewed the number and types of assessments that students complete across our programmes. Following on from this review, we have reduced the overall number of summative assessments students complete and incorporated additional opportunities for students to receive formative feedback on their work. As part of this process, the essay component of this module has been withdrawn but the existing case studies have been retained. The latter provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and critically evaluate data which is as you note; skills that Masters level students should be developing/demonstrating. There continue to be opportunities for students within the core and specialist modules to develop their critical writing ability (e.g. for example; through literature reviews, research paper critiques, proposals and dissertation).

Bioinformatics and Computational Biology modules – we will ask the module manager to review the module aims for modules BIOL5025M and BIOL5255M and reduce from the current 35 that are listed. Module BIOL5256M is a variant of the BIOL5025M and BIOL5255M modules (but of a different credit size). We provide feedback on the problems associated with these modules through the VLE and verbally. We note your very positive comment regarding the BIOL5165M module and as part of the continual review of our programmes; will look at opportunities for making the teaching or at least aspects of it more widely available.

Research projects – to ensure that both assessors state the actual marks they obtained independently on the marking forms, as well as the final agreed mark; we will strengthen our instructions to assessors for 2011-12.

We look forward to your visit again and we thank you for your continuing help in developing the programmes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "A. Divan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Aysha Divan
Director of Taught Graduate Student Education