

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

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

Faculty / School of:	Biological Sciences
Subject(s):	<i>Human Disease and Therapy; Biotechnology</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Bioscience
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**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 Quality Assurance**
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

No urgent action required

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?

n/a

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

N/A

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.*

Like last year, the Aims and Learning Outcomes of the programme and individual modules are clearly presented, and they are appropriate for the overall programme and for the individual modules.
The standards are entirely appropriate.

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 continues to compare favourably with similar programmes, and easily meets national standards.

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 is continuous, relying on in-course assessment using a variety of different assessment formats. This allows the ILOs to be comprehensively assessed.

The marking arrangements are clear, stringent and appear very fair. Having reviewed the projects and a number of pieces of coursework, I did not find a single instance of a mark that I felt was not appropriate. The clear marking criteria are likely to be a major factor in this.

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.*

It is clear that the students generally performed to a high standard, and that the course design allows the progression in their acquisition of skills and knowledge.

As was the case last year, the students appear to be a motivated and committed group, who seem very happy with the course. This is particularly evident in the student feedback meeting on the day of the poster session. The students are very loyal to the course and were extremely reluctant to appear negative in the feedback discussion. However, as no course is ever going to be perfect, I did manage to extract suggestions for some improvements which were fed back to the programme organisers. One of the perennial issues is the timeliness and quality of the feedback from assessments. This was also very clear from the student survey that was provided to us. Feedback is a problem for most courses in most institutions where academics have a variety of pressures and priorities to juggle. Ways of addressing this problem might be explored, including managing the student's expectations of what is reasonable.

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.

Last year, I was extremely positive about the programme and had very little to suggest for improvement. I am pleased to see that Bioimaging appears to have a bit more prominence, and that a number of projects had microscopy components. From various discussions between staff and the examiners, it is clear that the programme organisers are receptive and responsive to suggestions for change.

I would, again, like to emphasise the use of the mini project and the research proposal part of the project as ways of preparing the students for practical laboratory work, and for research planning. I feel that this is a key feature of the programme which contributes significantly to the quality of the research projects.

Inviting external examiners to attend the poster session and to meet with groups of students continues to be an effective way for staff, students, and examiners to interact. It allows examiners to have a flavour of the students' projects, and re-familiarise themselves with the staff and the course modules, making the exam board day much smoother and more efficient.

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 research in the Faculty continues to have a strong, positive influence of the content of the programme, as would be expected of an institution of Leeds' standing.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

N/A

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

I acted as a mentor for <> in <> first year as an examiner. To be honest, the efficiency of the academic staff and administrators in providing programme information and support is such that my duties were minimal.

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. 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.

As with last year, the material that was made available and the briefings with the staff provided more than sufficient information to allow me to get to carry out what my duties.

11. 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.

All the information was provided in a timely manner, and the policies and procedure were clear and appropriate.

12. 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?

N/A No exams in this programme, as it is continuously assessed.

13. 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?

The amount of assessed work made available was more than sufficient. I was able to examine all projects, and a significant proportion of the coursework. In my view, the assessments were carried out in a stringent but fair manner. The quality of the submitted work was generally strong, but any weaker pieces that I examined were assessed fairly and appropriately. Of the work that I assessed, I did not feel that any mark given was not appropriate.

At the discussions with staff at the poster day, the examiners asked for material in advance. Arrangements for us to access the VLE and the S: drive were made, but these proved to be problematic. This could be looked into for next year.

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

I refer to my comments from last year:

With any programme of this type, the dissertation topics generally reflect the research interests and backgrounds of the academic staff. This is appropriate, and the range of projects suggests that students are able to undertake a topic allied to their interests. The project assessment was, as with other assessments, stringently and fairly assessed. The different component parts of the project assessment and the instructions to markers are clear.

15. 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 administration of the assessment process is clear, scrupulously fair and efficient.
I did attend the exam board meeting. It was conducted fairly, a few small clarifications were discussed, but the process was smooth and the results were agreed by all attendees.

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

Mitigating circumstances were applied fairly.

Other comments

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

The programme continues to impress. The strong set of results achieved this year is a testament to the quality of the teaching and the students' efforts.

**Faculty of Biological Sciences
Student Education Service**

Student Education Office
Irene Manton Building
University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT, UK



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

27 November 2014

Dear

**RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2013/14:
MSc Human Disease and Therapy
MSc Biotechnology**

Thank you for your report and for the generally very positive comments on our programmes. Your report highlighted a few issues for consideration, and I outline our responses below:

1. *One of the perennial issues is the timeliness and quality of the feedback from assessments. This was also very clear from the student survey that was provided to us. Feedback is a problem for most courses in most institutions where academics have a variety of pressures and priorities to juggle. Ways of addressing this problem might be explored, including managing the student's expectations of what is reasonable.*

Currently the Faculty operates a three-week turnaround time for returning marked work to the students and in the vast majority of cases, this time-scale was met. We are continuing to monitor this to ensure that work is returned in a timely manner. Through discussions with students, we are aware that they perceived a lack of clarity of what was expected in assignments relating to a single module (BIOL5271M). We have discussed this with the module manager concerned and reminded all staff involved in Masters module management to ensure that students know how the work will be assessed, provide some comments on written work and return marked work in a timely manner.

2. *At the discussions with staff at the poster day, the Examiners asked for material in advance. Arrangements for us to access the VLE and the S: drive were made, but these proved to be problematic. This could be looked into for next year.*

We acknowledge this was a problem this year and will ensure that the office provides easy access prior to the exams board visit.

We appreciate that acting as External Examiner is an additional call on your time and we are grateful for your input. We look forward to welcoming you as External Examiner in 2015.

Yours sincerely,

Faculty Director of Student Education