

**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 Science
Subject(s):	<i>Bioscience, Biotechnology, Plant Science &amp; Biotechnology / Bioinformatics &amp; Genomics</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Plant Science & Biotechnology
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	M.Sc.

**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](mailto: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*

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?*

Yes

**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.*

This is a high-quality course that provides training in important areas. The course goes well beyond undergraduate-level teaching and provides students with a genuinely impressive training in both the subject areas and laboratory skills.

**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 course compares very favourably with similar courses elsewhere, partly due to the emphasis on laboratory work.

**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 varied, with a range of different methods employed. The assessment is in general effective and usually dictated by the type of module. I found the marking to be fair, having been present at poster assessments and having gone through exam scripts and project marking. My one concern is that written feedback was sometimes too brief, especially for projects. In many cases the feedback amounted to only a short paragraph with little hard information.

**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 were on the whole very enthusiastic indeed and were very happy with the course and the teaching staff. They showed an in-depth understanding of their subject areas.

**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 applicab;e

**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.*

This was my first year as external examiner

**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 has a strong influence on the curriculum and has clearly influenced the design and range of modules on offer. They are, however, varied and topical and the different MSc programmes offer a broad choice to potential applicants. The research has a particularly strong influence on the range of projects available to the students.

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

Not applicable

## 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**

One of the other MSc examiners acted as mentor and the arrangements were satisfactory. No problems were encountered.

## 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.*

The course content material provided was very comprehensive. I was able to carry out the examiner role effectively.

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.*

It would help to have some of the material, particularly the overall provisional marks sheet, a little earlier.

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?**

Yes to all questions

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?**

Yes to both questions, apart from a comment (made above) relating to the lack of written feedback on some of the research project dissertations.

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

The students undertook a very wide range of dissertations and the marking was effective and appropriate.

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?**

Yes, everything went according to plan. I did attend the meeting and I was satisfied with the recommendations of the board.

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

Yes

## Other comments

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

I was struck by the enthusiasm of the staff involved in teaching and organisation of the course. There was an excellent rapport between the students and staff.

I was also impressed with the level of practical work involved in the course – this is expensive and too often tends to be replaced by 'dry' topics

Faculty of Biological Sciences  
Student Education Service



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

17 December 2014

Dear

**RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2013/14**  
***MSc Plant Science and Biotechnology***

Thank you for your report on this course. We are very pleased to receive your very positive comments on this programme and to know that you do not consider that there are any issues requiring urgent action. You raised a couple of issues in your report for consideration and I outline our response below:

1. *The assessment methods are varied, with a range of different methods employed. The assessment is in general effective and usually dictated by the type of module. I found the marking to be fair, having been present at poster assessments and having gone through exam scripts and project marking. My one concern is that written feedback was sometimes too brief, especially for projects. In many cases the feedback amounted to only a short paragraph with little hard information.*

As you know the projects are marked according to a proforma for consistency, and brief general comments can be recorded on the proforma. We do encourage assessors to annotate and add comments to the report as appropriate and will remind them of the importance of doing so for the upcoming year.

2. *It would help to have some of the material, particularly the overall provisional marks sheet, a little earlier.*

The timeline for turning around the marking of the projects is particularly tight however it should be possible to make provisional mark sheets available to you shortly after the internal exam board and we will endeavour to do so for the upcoming session. Please do contact the office if there is any information you would like that has not been provided.

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