

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010 – 2011

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION

Subject area and awards being examined:

School of: Biological Sciences	Subject(s): Biosciences
Programme(s) / Module(s): Bioscience (Human Disease and Therapy)	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) MSc

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.

N/A

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.*

The aims and intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are entirely commensurate with the level of the award, in a difficult year the staff should be congratulated on their professionalism (specific comments below).

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.*

Yes (see separate sheet)

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.*

There are some issues in my "other comments" below

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 also comments below)

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 comments

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.

I am happy that this is a research-led course

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.*

No problems

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, it was excellent

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?**

The administrative arrangements were more than adequate and I, and my fellow examiners, really benefited from an overview from the course team from the outset in the first instance. This gave us an opportunity to get an overview of the extent to which our suggested changes from last year had been implemented.

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.

N/A

Other Comments

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

In general terms, I like to use this box more extensively than the "proforma" approach above. Herewith therefore are the bulk of my comments.

I am pleased to note that many of the systems recommended by myself and the other external examiners have been implemented or are in process. The arrangements for the examiners were excellent as always and the information provided was of the highest quality.

Clearly this has been a difficult year for the course team and the institutionally imposed review has obviously affected morale. This has, apparently, also filtered through to the students. For the first time since I've been an examiner here the students expressed dissatisfaction at their overall experience. While some of their grievances were clearly unreasonable, around half the group gave an overall impression of malcontent. It is my understanding

that the Human Disease and Therapy arm of the MSc is the one that has undergone the most changes, both in terms of content and teaching staff. I am aware that many staff feel (with some justification) that they have been badly treated by University management. It comes as no surprise therefore that this is the course that seems to be having the most problems in terms of student satisfaction. As I understand it, the institutional review is now largely complete and I hope that, in this coming year, the changes will begin to bed in to the satisfaction of both staff and students. If they do not, then questions may begin to be asked about whether the course is fit for purpose.

One disturbing aspect of the course is a seeming unwillingness to collaborate with colleagues and projects in the Faculty of Medicine. As I understand it the financial structure of the faculties actively discourages collaboration. As an examiner however it seems ludicrous to have an MSc in Human Disease and Therapy right next to a Faculty of Medicine but no collaboration between the two. In future I would encourage the institution to find means by which the two faculties can collaborate more fully e.g. by offering projects for each other's students, sharing resources and expertise etc.

I still think that the procedures for double marking projects need a little work. The process is going in the right direction but it is also clear that some markers are not entering into the spirit of independent marking and they are colluding beforehand. I don't think it is a good idea to have a box that says that assessors "returned a single joint mark" – this is not in the spirit independent double marking. I have suggested some changes to the proforma, which I will pass to the course team. The box in which the tutor and 2nd marker are asked to say how they arrived at the mark is often left blank or the words "agreed mark" is put. I think the form should be clearer and I have made some suggestions. The viva mark is clearly arrived at by discussion between the two at the time so there seems little point in maintaining a pretence of independent marking. A single "agreed mark" box will suffice here.

It is refreshing to see some evidence of use of model answers for the essay questions but still some way to go. For this, it is not necessary for the tutor to write a whole model essay, just prepare some indicative content at the time that the question is set (half a page or so). Those tutors that have done this clearly find the marking process much easier thereafter. I feel that we are moving in the right direction with this however. As I understand it, there is also now some system of moderation of marks, which is a good thing and I encourage it to continue.

The mark sheet for essay questions is now much better and clearer and it is refreshing to see it being used. Many markers (e.g. BIOL5250M, BIOL5254M, BIOL5202M, BIOL5243M, BIOL5223M) still however are not highlighting the relevant points on that sheet that pertain to the question being marked. I would encourage everyone to do this. Also there are a couple of instances where out of date marking schemes are being used.

BIOL5025M computational biology of genes and proteins and BIOL5165M computational biology of genomic systems– there was no indication in module box about how marks were arrived at. However I spoke to the tutor involved in this and I am satisfied that a full double marking scheme is in operation with both written and verbal feedback is given. I would however encourage the module leaders to write down the rationale for their marking schemes and include examples of the feedback in the module boxes next year.

Overall therefore, I think that the course and the team look like they are coming out of a difficult time and the course is still recruiting well. I would hope that the dip in student satisfaction is a blip. There are clearly many things that are outstanding with the course and it was refreshing to have more time to meet with the students in September. The projects were of a very high quality indeed and this is testament to all staff involved in the MSc, both teaching in the modules and supervising the students individually.

Faculty of Biological Sciences
Graduate School

University of Leeds
Garstang Building
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

3 February 2012

Dear

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2010/11: MSc Bioscience (Human Disease and Therapy)

Thank you for your report on the Bioscience (Human Disease and Therapy) MSc programme. We are pleased to hear that you consider the projects to be of a very high quality and that there are many things that are outstanding about the course.

In response to the specific issues you raise in your report:

- **Changes to the Human Disease and Therapy arm of the MSc and student satisfaction:** as you say the Human Disease & Therapy MSc has undergone the most changes in the last year. It replaced our previous Human Genetics MSc and hence ran in its current format for the first time during 2010-11. There has been substantial reorganisation of the Human Disease and Therapy programme for 2011-12. This includes the introduction of new specialist teaching (e.g. novel therapies) and we have engaged different staff in the delivery and management of the programme. In addition, one of our key external speakers will now teach a smaller component than previously. We anticipate this will improve the teaching and organisation and management of this programme and hence improve the student experience and overall satisfaction, both which we are monitoring closely.
- **Procedures for double marking projects:** we have implemented the suggestions you made to our research project proforma and we will remind assessors to provide more detail so that it is clearer how the agreed project mark is arrived at.
- **Use of model answers and use of marking criteria:** we have begun to collate model (indicative content) answers for essay-style questions from tutors and for other pieces of work (such as data analysis) and will continue to build on this. In addition, we have reminded staff to highlight the relevant points on our level 5 essay-style criteria sheet that pertain to the question being marked. Student feedback this year has been that they are finding the highlighting useful which is encouraging. One of the reasons for the lack of highlighting on some of the modules that you mention could be because the criteria of the level 5 essay-style marking sheet is too difficult to apply to non-essay type questions. We are therefore devising tailored marking schemes for the different types of assessments we have (e.g. research planning type exercises) to provide assessment specific criteria for assessors and feedback to students. We are unsure as to which out of date marking schemes you refer to – but we have deleted all older versions so that these are not sent out mistakenly.

- **BIOL5025M computational biology of genes and proteins and BIOL 5165M computational biology of genomic systems:** we have asked the module leaders to write down the rationale for their marking schemes and we will include examples of the feedback in the module boxes for you to look through during your visit in September.

As you point out, it has been a difficult year, but we are now looking forward and continuing to build on the quality of training we provide to our Masters students. We thank you for your continued help and support with this and we look forward to your visit in September.

Yours sincerely,

Director of Taught Graduate Student Education