

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:	Civil Engineering
Subject(s):	<i>Civil Engineering</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Civil & Environmental Engineering * Civil & Environmental Engineering (International) * Civil & Structural Engineering * Civil & Structural Engineering (Europe) * Civil & Structural Engineering (International) * Civil Engineering with Construction Management * Civil Engineering with Construction Management (International)
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BEng, MEng

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?

Not applicable

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

The standards achieved have remained high with the students producing some very impressive work. Similarly, the marking, assessment and QA procedures have continued to be carried out to a very high standard. Nonetheless, the programme has evolved significantly over the four years during which I have been external examiner; in particular, there is now a clear and developing thread of integrated design work over the four years of the programme. This is a major improvement on what was already a very good offering. I continue to be impressed with how student-centred the School remains, despite a very high student:staff ratio (this is evident from recent league tables) and a correspondingly exceptionally high load in terms of project supervision. The University should not underestimate or undervalue the commitment of the staff in civil engineering, who as a body work very hard and do an exceptional job.

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 of the programmes and their constituent modules are appropriate. They are consistent with other universities of which I have direct experience, and with the requirements of the professional institutions as evidenced by the JBM accreditation. The structure and content of the programmes are likewise coherent and consistent with best practice across the sector. The standards applied and upheld are appropriate and similarly consistent with sector-wide norms both on a module-by-module (or task-by task) basis and for the programmes as a whole.

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, as alluded to in my response above the Aims and ILO's meet and are fully consistent with those at comparator universities, and with the requirements of national subject benchmarks and the professional accrediting bodies constituting the Joint Board of Moderators (i.e. the Institutions of Civil Engineers, Structural Engineers, and Highways and Transportation).

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 have been considered carefully in relation to the ILO's, and for the programme as a whole represent a combination of coursework assignments, individual and group research and design projects, and formal examinations. In each case, the method of assessment is appropriate to the ILO being assessed. The arrangements for the marking of modules are clear and fair. These include a marking scheme for examinations, which from the scripts I inspected seems to have been fairly and rigorously applied. I was especially impressed with the new method of marking major projects, which takes the assessor through a series of descriptors for various aspects of the assignment and then assigns a mark on the basis of this. This seemed to work very well, producing a consistency in the outcome across a wide range of projects and assessors that is often difficult to achieve. I would be interested in adapting a version of this for use at my own institution! The degree classification scheme is similar to that at my own and other comparable universities. It was available in hard copy to all at the examination board, and was fairly and rigorously applied. The quality of the teaching, learning and assessment is high: it is able accurately to assess and discriminate between different levels of student performance. I have every confidence that the assessment methods and their application are fair and robust, and produce reliable results.

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, the students were given the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities through the range of activities that were assessed. I am satisfied that the overall assessments were fair and reflected the performance of individual students, which covered a similar range to that I have seen at other comparable institutions. No particular weaknesses were apparent: strengths include the dedication and loyalty the students have gained to the School, the subject and the University; and the very strong threads of sustainability, interdisciplinarity and societal importance seen in the individual projects in both the third and the fourth years of the programmes.

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 applicable

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.

As already mentioned, I am impressed by the gradual strengthening of the design thread (and the integrated and conceptual nature of it) that has taken place over the past four years; the breadth, interdisciplinarity and societal relevance of the project topics offered to and chosen by students; and the unified marking scheme introduced by the School which I think has gone a long way to eliminate the inconsistencies that often creep into the assessment of major pieces of coursework of this nature.

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.

I have in previous years found there to be a good awareness amongst students I spoke to of the research carried out in the School. I did not specifically explore this with the students I met this year, but I believe that the nature of the third and fourth year projects that I have commented on favourably above reflects the research strengths of the school in sustainable materials, sanitation, water and urban development. So the influence of research on learning and teaching, in the more advanced elements of the curriculum especially, is very strong.

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

Not applicable

The Examination/Assessment Process

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.*

Yes. This has been my fourth year as an external examiner. Throughout this period, I have been provided with all the materials and information needed, whether initially or following a request by me for further details.

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 (see above).

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. The School has a good, efficient and effective system for me to make comments and then for the School to act on them as appropriate. That has all worked very well.

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?

Yes. Scripts are clearly marked with evidence of auditing as well as first marking.

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

Yes. I have already commented extensively on both of these points in my answers to earlier questions

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, absolutely. Again, I have already expanded on this answer in my responses to earlier questions.

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

Yes. They are similar to those used at my own institution and other UK universities (as it happens, all Russell Group institutions) of which I have recent direct experience.

Other comments

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

I would just like to emphasize that the staff of this School do a fantastic job for their students, with what is for the subject area a very high student:staff ratio. I hope that the University recognises their commitment and value, and will support them appropriately in the future. They are a huge asset to the University which has a well deserved big reputation in civil engineering.

9 July 2012

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Dear <>

Thank you for all your hard work and professionalism in your role as External Examiner to the School over the past four years. Your contribution and comments have been very appreciated and welcomed.

I am grateful for your recognition of the effort put in by staff into our students' education, and we intend to drive our staff/student ratio below 1/20 for the next academic year. As you are aware we are striving to introduce greater design and sustainability threads into our programmes as requested by the JBM whilst, simultaneously, introducing threads such as societal awareness, in line with university guidelines; so your recognition of the changes during your time as examiner, and how they have improved our programmes, is most welcome.

Regarding your comments on assessment, we thank you for your positive comments on the electronic marking system used for final year dissertations. As this has proved successful we plan to extend it to level 3 and the MSc dissertations next year. The statement that the "unified marking scheme... has gone a long way to eliminate the inconsistencies that often creep into the assessment of major pieces of coursework of this nature" supports our internal views and gives us confidence in the approach.

Your enthusiasm for research-led teaching is matched in the School. There is now a university wide drive to ensure that all programmes show clear evidence of research-led teaching and your comments show that we are making good progress.

Finally, thank you once again for your time, effort and helpful comments over the past four years.

Yours sincerely

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