

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012– 2013

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

Faculty / School of:	Engineering / Civil Engineering
Subject(s):	Environmental Engineering & Project Management
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Advanced Water Engineering; Environment & Health Management; Integrated Water Resources Management; Natural Wastewater Treatment & Reuse; The Management of Projects; Wastewater & Organic Waste Management; Research Project
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc

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?

Yes (I was author of previous Report)

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 ILOs were entirely appropriate for this specialised Master's course, which was logically organised for delivery in Semesters. However, the 4 x 15 Credit modules in Semester 2 might be better delivered as 2 x 30 Credit modules, to complement Semester 1 delivery (repeat of last year's comment). I was pleased to see the two Semester 1 modules delivered in sequential 4-week blocks, as

I think this allows deeper learning and increased flexibility of delivery and I would encourage the team to adopt this practice for Semester 2, if staff availability allows.

Standards of achievement were entirely consistent with a taught Master's course (QAA Level 7).

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.*

I am not aware of a national subject benchmark for this MSc subject area.

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 use of coursework and an exam for each module is commended, as it allows students with strengths in either area to demonstrate their abilities. However, except in the Research Project (Dissertation) module where the new VLE-based system ensures that Supervisor and Second marker marks are in close agreement, I did not see evidence of moderation or second (double) marking in the samples of work that I had time to view.

It would be useful to have each piece of coursework marked as a %, with the weighting given on the marks summary sheet in a row near the top. This additional piece of information would be of particular use where assessment elements had different weightings. It would also be useful to record the individual exam question marks on all the module summary sheets, not just some of them. Therefore, I would strongly recommend that all the module marks summary sheets are amended in this way to assist clarity.

As for moderation or second (double) marking, which is recommended by QAA, I suggest that this is done for any student at or near a borderline for the module, where a small change in mark might make a big difference in outcome. Therefore, this should not be too onerous a task, as relatively few students normally end up in this position, but it would ensure the fairest outcome for such students and help to ensure that the current high standards are maintained.

This cohort of students clearly included mostly strong candidates, with the five Distinctions, seven Merits, two Pass and no Fail. Whilst indicative of recruiting strong candidates from a healthy number of applicants, it is also indicative of strong teaching, deep learning, and robust assessment.

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.*

Given the wide range of assessments across the modules, the use of formal exams to help assess each module, and the possibilities to demonstrate their higher-level abilities provided by the 60 Credit Research Project, all students were given adequate opportunity to demonstrate individual achievement of the Aims and ILQs.

The majority of the students demonstrated a strong performance across the breadth of this challenging course. Only two students had marginal fails (> 40%) in one module. I therefore consider that the students were a strong cohort and benefitted from this industrially-relevant course that prepares them for employment in the water industry.

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.

I am not aware of any enhancements to the programme or modules since last year, although combining the four Semester 1 modules into two, to match the Semester 2 delivery, was mentioned as an objective last year.

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.

Each module showed evidence of content informed by the research of staff delivering them. For example, deep knowledge of the practical aspects of wastewater treatment were evident in the Wastewater and Organic Wastes module. The Research Project module, as anticipated, is especially strong in this area.

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

N/A

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.*

I was provided with a printed copy of the External Examiner Handbook 2012-2013 well in advance of my visit, which provided the necessary information for me to carry out my duties. I also find the HEA Handbook for External Examining a useful supplement to the EEH, and I notice that there is a link to this on the EE website.

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.*

I received a copy of the School's booklet on Postgraduate Master's Course last year, which included two pages of detail on this course. This year, I received a copy of the "Mini-Handbook" for MSc. Copies of the programme specification or module handbooks requested in last year's Report were provided as summaries of the syllabus and assessments for each module. However, a copy of the marking criteria (e.g. marking scale and relevant descriptors) requested last year was not available. The links to internal and external documentation on the EE website are a useful resource for understanding the University policies, e.g. on disability.

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?

I only have a record of seeing 2/4 Semester 1 draft exam papers, although I saw 2/2 for Semester 2.

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?

Each Module Box contained all exam scripts. However, I had to ask about the notation used, e.g. to indicate that marking had occurred (line in red ink down side). A summary sheet detailing these standard notations would be useful.

As for annotations, I found that only a few module teams made comments on scripts. In terms of assessing the fairness of marking, it would be useful if all internal examiners made comments on the script, with a brief summary at the end justifying the mark. I am aware that some HE institutions have a list of descriptors to guide staff, so that comments match the mark. The exception to this was the project (Dissertation (see 13.)).

It would also be useful if each Module Box contained the Exam Paper and Marking Scheme. Although I had seen most of these previously, I was unable to remember the detail!

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

Topics for the Project (Dissertation) Module provided a wide choice to the students and allowed them to work in areas of current interest to environmental engineering in developed and developing countries.

The new VLE system for assessing the Project Reports had clear evidence of double-marking and showed where the first and second markers differed in their opinions. Although I was sceptical about the fairness and ease of use of this system, I was assured by several members of the teaching team that it was easy to use and helped to ensure fairness for the students. Tightening the degree of agreement between examiners, from 10% to 5%, is clearly in the student's benefit.

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?

The administrative arrangements were exemplary and the individual concerned is congratulated on her professionalism, attention to detail, clear understanding of the Regulations, and for her cheerful disposition!

I was able to attend the Exam Board.

I was entirely satisfied with the recommendations of the Board and felt that the two students who failed one module and others who were near borderlines were dealt with adequately and fairly.

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

I was not aware that any student had mitigating circumstances or medical evidence this year but I know from last year's Exam Board that such students are dealt with fairly and in confidence.

Other comments

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

As mentioned last year, I would like to be sent the Abstract for each project before I visit next year, preferably with the module summary sheet showing Supervisor and 2nd Marker marks, so that I have sufficient time to do them justice and can identify any issues for discussion prior to my visit.

I would also like the opportunity with the next cohort to visit whilst the students are still around, as none was available this year for questioning about their experiences.

Feedback on internal examiners' response to my comments on the exam papers would be useful, to close the quality control loop.

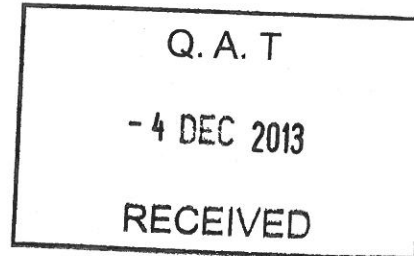
A marks breakdown for CIVE 5034M would be useful next year, to allow comparison with the other Modules, which did provide this information.

Either all pieces of Coursework or samples from each mark class (Fail, Pass, Merit and Distinction) would be useful in each Module Box, to assess equity of marking.

The classification of awards was clearly explained, both verbally and in writing, but it was confusing to again see undergraduate classifications on the module summary sheets. Given the number of Master's courses offered by the University, I would have thought it worthwhile to have a separate system for indicating Master's level grades. Nonetheless, the appropriate Master's grades were used on the Exam Board paperwork.



2 December 2013



Dear

Thank you for the time and effort you have taken in fulfilling your role as External Examiner on our MSc(Eng) Environmental Engineering and Project Management taught course. We are grateful for the detailed and constructive comments you have provided on the course for the 2012 – 2013 academic year and pleased to note the positive aspects that you have highlighted. In particular we have noted your views on the very practical nature of this course and the alignment of our ILOs to deliver this. Additionally, it is pleasing to see that you view our modes of assessment as highly appropriate for permitting the students to demonstrate their capabilities in a practical way.

At the same time you have provided us with a number of suggestions for improvements and we are currently working towards implementing these suggestions. Whereas some of these are straightforward, for instance we have brought forward the date of the external examiner's meeting to June in order to ensure that you can interview a representative cohort of this year's students, others are more difficult and will require a meeting of all the academic staff on the course to agree a way forward. This meeting has been arranged and the Minutes and decisions will be forwarded to you in advance of the next examiner's meeting.

We look forward to meeting you again in June and we are confident that by this time many of the suggestions you have made will have been accepted and put into operation.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely