

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:	School of Earth and Environment
Subject(s):	Geology
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BSc Geological Sciences; BSc Geological Sciences (Industrial); MGeol Geological Sciences (International)
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BSc, MGeol

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 is 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?

Yes, these were provided upon arrival in Leeds.

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

- 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 programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the BSc and MGeol awards. The teaching and learning at SEE is generally of a very high standard, inspiring confidence that the students attain knowledge and skills that are broad and deep enough to be competitive in the jobs market and to succeed in postgraduate education. This is undoubtedly helped by the large amounts of laboratory- and field-based practical work, the wide range of topics covered and the valuable employability initiatives, such as Leeds for Life, SOEE2094 (Study Skills and Advanced Mapwork) and SOEE2095 (Research and Career Skills)

Following from recommendations made by the previous External Examiner, there is now more evidence in several modules on how differences in course work and examinations co-delivered to BSc and MGeol students match onto the differences in the learning outcomes. This should now be completed for all co-taught Level 3 and Level 5 modules, based on the suggestions made in last year's part 3 of the External Examiner's form.

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, the Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes are comparable with those at <>, and, as far as I am aware, with other UK universities.

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 generally well designed, varied, sufficiently challenging, and highly relevant. No major changes are necessary. The balance between classic assessment types (e.g., written examinations) and modern assessment types (e.g., using virtual learning) is very good, and feedback provision has clearly improved.

As a new External Examiner in Leeds I took a particular interest in the module handbooks. I downloaded and read the handbooks of c. 40 Geological Sciences modules. Most of these handbooks provide the students with sufficient information about content, learning outcomes, timetables, assessments and further reading. Yet, the handbooks for modules SOEE2145 (Palaeoecology & Evolution), SOEE2510 (Basin Evolution & Hydrocarbon Resources), SOEE2600 (Sedimentary Basins & Hydrocarbon Resources) and SOEE3603/5308M (Strategic Energy Issues) were short in comparison to other modules and lacked key information on, for example, reading lists and timetables. Examples of good practice include modules SOEE2094/2095, SOEE2500, SOEE2560, SOEE3281, SOEE3521 and SOEE3670. I recommend that each module handbook contains a link to the Learning Outcomes in the Module Catalogue and an overview of the types of feedback provision for all course work and examination, the latter in view of mediocre feedback scores within the School.

Teaching modules that stand out for me in terms of quality of teaching and assessment are SOEE2560 (Reservoir Simulation 1), which is one of the most popular modules amongst the students, SOEE3670 (Reservoir Simulation 2), which has an excellent handbook and is very well structured, and the Cyprus Fieldtrip, which covers highly interesting and relevant geological subjects and is well organised.

Module SOEE3073/3074/3078/5306M (Independent Field Projects) covers an impressive range of topics and locations. Independent work must be daunting for some students, but my impression is that all students are well prepared before they venture into the field without close supervision. I focussed my examination on potential award winners, highest and lowest marked projects, borderline cases and then made sure that I read across the full range of marks. The quality of the reports and maps is generally high, and the marking and moderation is fair and well organised. A couple of projects would have deserved a higher mark, and several other projects were somewhat generously marked. However, changing these marks would not have affected the final degree classification of these students, so no action was required.

Module marking was generally consistent and moderation works well for modules that I was provided Return of Moderation Marks forms with. Unfortunately, I did not have a complete set of these forms. This need to improve in 2015.

Most module evaluation forms were dominated by praise from the students, with weaknesses identified mainly on an individual basis. In three modules multiple students identified issues that should be addressed:

1. SOEE2062 (Sedimentary Processes): the workload for the Brent Core exercise was deemed excessive and the groups were deemed too large. I understand that the module organiser has now put in a request to discontinue this part of the module. I find the Brent Core exercise highly relevant and stimulating, so the module organiser should aim for a similar exercise of equal quality and importance.
2. SOEE2490 (Formation Evaluation): this module suffers from poor organisation and mistakes in practicals. Even though only 6 students (18%) completed the survey, their concerns were serious. These issues clearly need a solution for 2015.
3. SOEE3630 (Strategic Energy Issues): the students were positive about the module structure (blogs, online discussions, etc.), but more guidance and a more detailed introduction should be considered by the module organiser. Moreover, some students found the quality of the student seminars too varied, and the word 'dull' was used. Yet, only 15% of the student cohort completed the survey; the opinion of the remaining 85% is unknown.

The quality of teaching and learning, including assessment, featured prominently in External Examiners' interviews with SEE students. The three students who were available were extremely positive about their course and the academic staff. Not surprisingly, they highlighted the fieldwork components, but they also mentioned the great facilities (e.g., Visualisation Lab), the opportunity to teach A-level and GCSE students, and the Student-Staff forums. In addition to suggestions for improvement in the timing of feedback (see Section 6i), the students expressed the wish to have 24 hour access to the SEE computing facilities, because, in their view, computers in general clusters are too slow and the screens are too small. The External Examiners raised the issue of having only three students to talk to. The students suggested that the week after Easter Break is the best time to meet with a larger cohort of students. Personally, I would be willing to come to Leeds for interviews in the suggested period, or meet with the students via video link.

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 overall performance of the student group I looked at shows an expected spread that corresponds reasonably well with that at <>.

BSc Geological Sciences*	1 st : 9	2.i: 40	2.ii: 6	3 rd : 1	Fail: 1
BSc Geological Sciences (Industrial)	1 st : 0	2.i: 1	2.ii: 1	3 rd : 0	Fail: 0
MGeol Geological Sciences (International)	1 st : 6	2.i: 1	2.ii: 0	3 rd : 0	Fail: 0

*plus 3 delayed awards, pending possible resits, and 2 Ordinary Degrees, with possibility to attain higher classification.

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.

The previous External Examiner identified the following issues in 2012-13:

1. Online submission of digital course work, in particular plagiarism checks (Sections 3 & 6).
2. Online delivery of model course work examples, course material, course work marks and feedback.
3. Online, student-led collation of course work assessments, i.e. assessment portfolios (Section 6).
4. Distinguish differences in learning outcomes of modules that are co-delivered to BSc and MGeol students (Sections 1, 3 & 6).
5. Appreciation of spatial variation and 3D geometries in sedimentologically oriented field projects by means of correlation panels, paleontological data grouping and 3D block diagrams (SOEE3073/3074/3078/5306M) (Section 3).
6. Discrepancy between examination marks and course work marks (SOEE3135) (Sections 3 & 6).
7. High course work marks for SOEE2490 (Section 3).
8. Imbalance between the number of petroleum engineering and geological students on the fieldtrip for SOEE3560 (Section 3).
9. Low returns of module feedback online (Section 6).
10. More annotations on examination scripts for some modules (Section 12).

Issues 6, 7 and 8 have been fully addressed:

- a. The issues with SOEE3135 and SOEE2490 have been successfully dealt with.
- b. There are now satisfactory explanations for large discrepancies in marks for course work versus examinations in the modules that I examined.
- c. I do not regard the imbalance between the number of petroleum engineering and geological students on the fieldtrip for SOEE3560 as a major issue.

Issues 2, 4 and 10 have been partly addressed, but some concerns remain:

- d. More could be done to stimulate the use of VLE. Some modules stand out in the use of online methods, other do not seem to use these methods at all. I believe this should remain an individual choice, but fact is that more and more students expect a modern university to make full use of digital methods of teaching and learning, especially where the provision of course material and assessments is concerned.
- e. There is now more evidence on how differences in course work and examinations co-delivered to BSc and MGeol students match onto the differences in the learning outcomes, but this should be completed for all co-taught Level 3 and Level 5 modules. See earlier comments.
- f. Significant improvements have been made this year, but some modules still require more detailed annotations on examination scripts. See Section 13.

Issues 1, 5 and 9 need further action:

- g. I have not seen evidence that plagiarism checks are made more often. I do not share the concern that possible anomalous positive returns for plagiarism in TurnItIn are a major issue. The TurnItIn software is versatile and transparent enough to quickly identify such cases. The detection of the worst cases of map copying should be straightforward, and does not need TurnItIn-like methods.
- h. There are few correlation panels, paleontological data grouping and 3D block diagrams in this year's sedimentological field projects. Sedimentological staff and students need to be stimulated more to show appreciation of spatial variation and 3D geometries.
- i. Module feedback returns remain low. In addition, feedback scores for the School in the NSS survey and in the internal survey are lower than the Leeds University average and these scores have decreased since 2010-2011. This is a concern, despite the fact that there is evidence this year that feedback provision has improved. During the interviews, the students praised the quality of the feedback given and the helpfulness of the staff, but timing was an issue for them. The students appear to dislike uncertainty, so deadlines for feedback need to be clear as early as possible, and, if a deadline slips, the students want to know why and receive a clear new deadline date. The students we spoke with liked the idea of having deadlines for feedback in all module handbooks, plus an overview of types of feedback for each module component (course work and examination). I recommend that this is implemented. In my experience, students do not always know that feedback involves more than annotations on written work. Simply using the word 'feedback' every time oral, online, or written feedback is provided may help to remove this false perception. Other measures that have been successfully implemented elsewhere and should be looked into at SEE are: providing model answers when returning course work and examination scripts, and; organising feedback sessions for individual modules or on a programme-wide or school-wide basis. The use of online feedback forms is a problem, and I fully support a return to paper-based module evaluation forms. The sooner this is introduced, together with suitable measures that safeguard school-wide use of these forms, the better it is in my opinion. If it turns out not to be possible to return to a paper-based system, the online completion of the feedback forms should be stimulated by: using multiple e-mail reminders; making the forms as short as possible, and; focussing on written feedback (e.g., strengths and weaknesses) instead of tick boxes, as recommended by the geological student we spoke with.

In my view, the recommendation of an online system of assessment portfolios is difficult in practice and time-consuming to implement and maintain (Issue 3). I do believe, however, that a solution needs to be found for the poor state of many portfolios. The folder-based system in itself is very useful for the students, for SEE staff and for External Examiners, but only if the folders provide a complete record of course work. More guidance by, for example, personal tutors, might help.

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 influence of research on teaching and learning is most apparent in the 3rd and 4th year modules. The best examples are the independent field-based projects (SOEE3073/3074/3078/5306M) and the lab-based projects (SOEE5308M).

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

n/a

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 guidance for External Examiners was provided by means of a handbook well before arrival and a folder with key information upon arrival. This was sufficient. Having an experienced External Examiner as mentor was also useful.

- 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.

Yes, appropriate documentation was provided before arrival and during my stay in Leeds. Timely access was given to the Leeds VLE, where key information on individual modules was readily available. The School website is also a useful source of programme-related information.

- 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, I was provided with draft examination papers in good time before the examination period. The examination questions were generally well structured and pitched at a fair level. Minor revisions were needed in some examination papers.

- 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, a full set of examination scripts was made available for all SOEE3xxx modules and all SOEE2xxx modules, except SOEE2560 (Reservoir Simulation 1). The majority of the scripts was clearly marked, and sufficient feedback was given. However, the students taking modules SOEE2110 (Introductory Oceanography), SOEE2145 (Palaeoecology, Palaeobiology & Evolution), and SOEE3610 (Oceanography in the Earth System) would benefit from more detailed annotations on their examination scripts.

Assessed work was made available mostly through assessment portfolios, but these were often incomplete and poorly maintained. This hindered the comparative evaluation of the standard of student work. The present method of using assessment portfolios needs to be re-evaluated.

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

Yes, the independent field-based projects (SOEE3073/3074/3078/5306M) and lab-based projects (SOEE5308M) covered a wide range of subjects. The assessment and feedback was of particularly high quality.

- 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?**

I attended the Board of Examiners, which operated in an efficient, well-structured, objective manner. This was helped by awarding final degree classifications in a way that allows little room for discussion. The oral reports of the External Examiners were listened to carefully, and suggestions for improvement were taken seriously by the Board.

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

Mitigating circumstances were acknowledged on an individual basis, and modifications were made in final degree classifications, where appropriate.

Other comments

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

Summarising the above suggestions for improvement, the following actions should be taken:

1. Evidence on how differences in course work and examinations co-delivered to BSc and MGeol students match onto the differences in the learning outcomes should be completed for all co-taught Level 3 and Level 5 modules (Sections 1, 6e).
2. The handbooks for modules SOEE2145, SOEE2510, SOEE2600, and SOEE3603/5308M need an update (Section 3).

3. Module handbook should contain a link to the Learning Outcomes in the Module Catalogue (Section 3).
4. A complete set of Return of Moderation Marks forms needs to be provided (Section 3).
5. Issues identified on the evaluation forms of modules SOEE2062, SOEE2490 and SOEE3630 need attention (Section 3).
6. The interviewed students expressed the wish to have 24 hour access to the SEE computing facilities (Section 3).
7. A meeting between External Examiners and a larger group of students in the week after Easter Break, either in Leeds or by video link, should be explored (Section 3).
8. The students' impression of decreasing quality of feedback provision needs to be overturned (Sections 3 and 6i).
9. The present method of using assessment portfolios needs to be re-evaluated (Sections 6 and 13).
10. The use of VLE should be further stimulated (Section 6d).
11. Modules SOEE2110, SOEE2145, and SOEE3610 require more detailed annotations on examination scripts (Sections 6f, 13).
12. The School needs to start using TurnItIn plagiarism checking software (Section 6g).
13. Students need to show awareness of spatial variation and 3D geometries in sedimentological field projects through the use of correlation panels, paleontological data grouping and 3D block diagrams (Section 6h).
14. Adding feedback information to module handbooks should be considered (Section 6i).
15. A return to paper-based module evaluation forms should be targeted for 2015 (Section 6i).
16. Care should be taken to make available the examination scripts of all teaching modules (Section 13).

School of Earth and Environment

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

03 November 2014

Dear

RE: Response to External Examiner's Report (Geological Sciences Programmes (BSc/MGeol), 2013/14

I would like to kindly thank the examiners, _____, and _____ for their measured and thoughtful comments. It is pleasing to see that they have highlighted areas of good practice within the programme. However, as always, there is room for improvement and I am grateful for their input into how we may move forward. I will address, in turn, the specific recommendations below:

Part B – Matters for Urgent Attention

- _____ **writes:** *As a matter of high priority the School should consider the learning outcomes and assessment of several co-delivered BSc and MGeol modules.*
- **In Section 1 of the Report,** _____ **elaborates:** *In 2012-13 we received an assurance that the School was actively addressing this issue, however, it is not obvious that anything has changed. Whilst an additional assessment is typically offered for the MGeol cohort in several modules no additional learning outcomes are associated with this assessment for these students and nor any greater expectation associated with the common ILOs.*
- **In Section 1 of the Report,** _____ **writes:** *Following from recommendations made by the previous External Examiner, there is now more evidence in several modules on how differences in course work and examinations co-delivered to BSc and MGeol students match onto the differences in the learning outcomes. This should now be completed for all co-taught Level 3 and Level 5 modules, based on the suggestions made in last year's part 3 of the External Examiner's report.*

We acknowledge that there are discrepancies with the L3 BSc and L5 MGeol co-delivered modules for both the ILOs and the assessment and, whilst we have started to reconcile this in some modules, we recognise there is a need for more systematic work in this area. We are making the resolution of this problem a priority and aim to resolve the matter this academic session, not only in Geological Sciences, but across our suite of undergraduate programmes. In order to achieve this, the new incumbent as co-Programme Leader (_____) will produce new guidance and ensure that it is applied to all of the modules affected and is codified for the production of new co-delivered modules.

Report Section 2

- _____ **notes:** *In comparison with other Universities there is little evidence of the use of plagiarism software for student assessments. Given the background levels of plagiarism that are picked up at other Universities it might be prudent to introduce more systematic checks.*

The School is making a concerted effort to encourage staff to set assessments to be submitted electronically wherever possible and we will encourage all GS teaching staff to do so. We have a new Academic Integrity Officer who has been charged with enhancing our use of modules on good academic practice as well as increased use of Turnitin etc. Currently the mapping dissertations are not checked, but we may consider moving to e-submission for these as well as hard copy.

Report Section 3

- **notes that there are certain module handbooks which lack key info, namely modules SOEE2145 (Palaeoecology & Evolution), SOEE2510 (Basin Evolution & Hydrocarbon Resources), SOEE2600 (Sedimentary Basins & Hydrocarbon Resources) and SOEE3603/5308M (Strategic Energy Issues), and would like handbooks to contain links to the ILOs in the module catalogues online, as well as detail style of feedback expected.**

The School has created a new template for module handbooks and has asked staff to adopt this template to create their handbooks this session. The template is thorough and contains links to the module and programme catalogue, as well as information about feedback. We will encourage the GS teaching team to use the template.

With respect to modules SOEE 2510 and SOEE 2600 – module leader/lecturer

notes: handbooks do provide enough information and do offer a reading list, and are thorough in their 20 pages. All students on these modules are given a printed version of this and it is also available on the VLE. The confusion has arisen because the handbook is provided in two parts as separate files on the VLE and the external has perhaps only accessed Part One, called “course outline”, which is just the initial 2 pages of summary information. I will bundle it as one file from next year for ease and to avoid confusion for students.

- **notes that module moderation and marks forms were not always complete and states this must improve for 2015.**

We acknowledge that there is variation in the quality of forms returned and will work together with the Student Education Service Manager to encourage all staff to be thorough and complete.

- **notes that there are issues needing to be addressed for 3 modules:**
 - **SOEE 2620 – Sedimentary Processes. The Brent Core Exercise was deemed to be excessive in terms of workload, but relevant and stimulating; recommended to find a similar exercise with less workload.**

module leader, notes that the workload for the exercise has been halved in recent years and this has still not made any difference to the receipt of negative module feedback regarding workload, while an equal number of students report it as a highlight. has agreed to make an attempt to modify the exercise, or replace it, in order to alleviate the perceived heavy workload.

- **SOEE 2490 – Formation Evaluation. This module was deemed to suffer from poor organisation and mistakes in practicals; module feedback reflected this. The examiners have suggested improvements (and we will work with the module leaders to ensure that these are implemented).**
- **SOEE 3630 – Strategic Energy Issues. More guidance and a more detailed introduction should be considered by the module organiser.**

We have communicated the concerns to the module leaders and will work with them to improve practice. SOEE 3630 is a module that may not continue to run as an option for Geological Sciences beyond 2015 (it is core for Petroleum Engineers, who are based in another School).

- **Both examiners noted that it was a shame that there were only 3 finalists who were present to talk to at the time of their visits. Both make a request for more students to be present for the meeting, but also note that timing is an issue. has suggested the possibility of a video link-up meeting.**

We note that the timing of the externals' meeting has always been an issue for attracting finalists to attend – it is well past the last date for exams and many students are not in Leeds. We do want to encourage more finalists to attend and will also explore the possibility for either: i) a video conference call to be arranged with both externals and students, for example shortly after Easter; or ii) a short visit by the externals at around this time to meet with students.

- **raises a general concern over the consistency of approach to grading, moderation and provision of feedback, noting that the approach seems to be far too individualistic.**

We agree that consistency is important when it comes to these activities, but also observe that it would be impossible to completely standardise staff approach. In order to help make sure there is adequate consistency (for provision of feedback, especially), we will reiterate expectations to staff and share good practice (e.g. through the forthcoming Teaching Away Day). Feedback is an area of concern, highlighted by current cores in the 50-65 range for the NSS, and we have identified this as a priority area for improvement.

- **has several concerns relating to the marking process for the Dissertation Mapping projects, chiefly:**
 - ***Inconsistency in the marking schemes for different projects***
 - ***Large variability of grades awarded for an individual item of work/component of the assessment between 1st and second markers***
 - ***Marking process may possibly disadvantage/unfairly advantage students***

We acknowledge concerns and agree with aspects of these; however, we observe that had no major issue with the marking process for the projects and indeed comments: *The quality of the reports and maps is generally high, and the marking and moderation is fair and well organised. A couple of projects would have deserved a higher mark, and several other projects were somewhat generously marked. However, changing these marks would not have affected the final degree classification of these students, so no action was required*

There is variety in the style of projects offered at Leeds, and we believe this is a benefit for our students; however, it does pose a problem when it comes to creating consistency in the marking process, as a universal “one-size-fits-all” scheme cannot readily be created. We have classic mapping areas (example: Skye, Raasay) where there is an emphasis of the fieldslips, but also offer others that focus more on highly detailed sedimentological data gathered in notebooks (logging, sketching), and hence have less focus on the fieldslips.

We acknowledge that supervisors have been allowed too much freedom to alter the amount allocated to each individual component (report, fieldslips, notebooks, cross sections, fair copy map), and often have provided little or no justification for the variability. We also note that the format of the mark schemes used by staff varies hugely, as well as the methods used to calculate each component (some mark each component as a %, then convert to a fraction based

on the total marks for the component, whereas others only give a limited range of marks as fractions – this has obvious effects related to granularity, and should be avoided).

While students are informed about the differences in the projects, as well as informed about the differences in the mark schemes, this is perhaps not clear enough and needs to be advertised well in advance of the projects fair and selection process. It is essential that the students know well in advance of selection, how the mark schemes differ, and why.

In order to improve the process for the coming year and create a more standardized and better-justified scheme, we plan to:

- Create a standardised mark scheme document for supervisors to use –this marks scheme may be altered only in the percentages for notebooks vs fieldslips, and may only vary as much as: 20-25% for notebooks; 25-30% for fieldslips.
- Supervisors will be asked to provide a written statement justifying their amendments (within the limited range above) to the standard mark scheme, with reference to the aims of the project.
- Simplify the mark components such that the Report mark has the Fair Copy Map mark included within, and the Fieldslips mark has the Cross Section mark included within.
- Insist that staff mark components as a %, using the whole 0-100 scale, and convert this % to a fraction for the component –this should alleviate possible advantage/disadvantage resulting from coarse granularity effects when only fractions are employed.
- Provide clear guidance to staff new to marking projects.

With regards to the marking process, whilst we acknowledge suggestion that one member of staff second marks all projects would ensure consistency, we deem it to be impractical for workload reasons. We will try a new approach to second marking this year, whereby second markers will be given groups of projects to mark that each include a similar mark range based on first marking (upper 2nd, for example), but not be informed of this range. This ensures that a wider range of projects are marked by a wider range of staff, and should help to moderate instances of marker bias (easy/hard marking), as well as help to “calibrate” inexperienced markers. We will highlight the need to pay particular attention to these points during module moderation.

also suggests that the weighting of field component vs written/presentational components be split 60:40, rather than the current 50:50. The module manager is sympathetic to this suggestion and plans to open a discussion at the next Geological Sciences Teaching Meeting on the matter.

- **notes that SOEE 3135 - Engineering Geology, employs aspects of negative marking, and asks this to be removed –marking should reward understanding not penalising what is absent.**

We have asked the module manager to consider changing the assessment.

Report Section 4

- **notes that some of the cohort showed a lack of honours level field skills, and asks that staff marking dissertation projects should be using the whole 0-100 grading scale and awarding lower marks were appropriate.**

The School has not long changed from the 20-90 scale, and some staff may still not be applying full use of the 0-100 scale. We will remind staff to do so and encourage appropriate marking.

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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:	Earth and Environment
Subject(s):	<i>Geological Sciences</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Geological Sciences
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BSc, MGeol

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

As a matter of high priority the School should consider the learning outcomes and assessment of several co-delivered BSc and MGeol modules (see detail below).

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

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.*

Overall the structure of the BSc degree is excellent with a good range of core and optional modules, ILOs are commensurate with the BSc award, but should be more challenging for the MGeol degree.

The School offers several co-delivered BSc and MGeol modules with identical learning outcomes. In 2012-13 we received an assurance that the School was actively addressing this issue, however, it is not obvious that anything has changed. Whilst an additional assessment is typically offered for the MGeol cohort in several modules no additional learning outcomes are associated with this assessment for these students and nor any greater expectation associated with the common ILOs.

As a consequence it seems like the MGeol students are being graded on the same criteria as the BSc students. A MGeol degree should not be just an "excellent" BSc degree, learning outcomes should be more advanced and consequently expectations when grading work should be higher. In several co-delivered modules there remains no evidence for this progression.

..

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 Geoscience programmes at Leeds compare well with those at other institutions.

In comparison with other Universities there is little evidence of the use of plagiarism software for student assessments. Given the background levels of plagiarism that are picked up at other Universities it might be prudent to introduce more systematic checks.

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.*

In general the design and structure of the assessments is very good and a commendable range of assessment types is employed. Assessments methods are appropriate for the ILOs, however it would be useful if the model answers were more tightly linked to learning outcomes. With regards to the grading process, there are some examples of excellent practice but not much evidence that this good practise is being disseminated. There are too many examples of an individual approach being taken to grading, moderation, feedback by individual staff members. A lack of consistency appears to characterise the approach to marking.

The grading of the independent projects is particularly inconsistent both in terms of marking schemes and the marking itself. The School has previously argued that individual projects are sufficiently different that individual marking schemes must be applied. In my view this argument can not be sustained and individual students are being advantaged and disadvantaged as a consequence. It has been left to individual supervisors to set different marking schemes despite the similarity of the projects themselves. In exceptional circumstances one could envisage a different marking scheme being applied to a particular project but this should be the exception not the rule.

Grades awarded are also extremely variable (e.g. 17/20 to 11/20 for an individual item of work) and whilst there is a moderation scheme in place to pick up on overall grade disagreements between 1st and 2nd markers, the background variability of grades for individual components is a concern. This variability does not yield confidence in the overall dissertation grades and should be addressed as a high priority.

I suggest the following:

- a) A single marking scheme with a fixed % breakdown for the different project components should be applied and communicated to the students.
- b) An agreed simple marking/feedback sheet should be used (given to the students in advance).
- c) A scheme should be introduced to "calibrate" inexperienced markers.
- d) Whilst variability in grading of these dissertations persists, all projects should be 1st marked by the supervisor and 2nd marked by a single experienced staff member. Clearly this is a big task for the individual concerned with workload implications.
- e) In the marking scheme, I would also recommend a higher weighting towards the field-based components (60/40 in favour of the field components vs presentational aspects). This emphasis is a crucial message to get across to students.

The negative marking scheme based system used for assessments in 3135 should be brought into line with other modules. Rewarding understanding, not penalising what is absent.

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 excellent range of assessment styles provides students with ample opportunity to demonstrate their achievement. In most respects the cohort is dominated by strengths in key areas of geoscience.

In general the level of field skills demonstrated by students is a little disappointing, in this regards a few of the weaker examples do not appear to be of an honours standard and staff may need reminding that the full grading scale needs to be used where appropriate.

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.

The introduction of the Geology style presentation of the MGeol projects does appear to have been beneficial, bringing a greater level of consistency to this aspect.

There are many examples of good practise by individuals but more limited evidence of wider dissemination in the School (e.g. The excellent approach of one staff member who provides feedback and grading of dissertation work by simply highlighting components directly from the marking guidelines sheet and supplements this with a few written comments. This contrasts with some staff who attempt to justify a 40 credit dissertation grade with a couple of sentences, whilst others provide perhaps an excessive 5 or more pages of documentation). Some excellent evidence of moderation process (e.g. 2010, 2590).

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 final year modules for both BSc and MGeol programmes incorporate many aspects of current research.

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

Arrangements were satisfactory.

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.

Yes this material is adequate.

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.

Yes. Online access to materials is provided by the School in advance of our visit.

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, draft exam papers are provided with an opportunity to comment.

A problem with the examination of 3490 was identified. The School chose not to address this in the 2013-14 exam diet, but have promised to "look into the issue" for the coming year.

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?

As mentioned previously the presentation of student work in the form of Portfolios makes it difficult for external examiners to monitor the performance of individual courses. Please could these be split on a module by module basis prior to the examiners visit. In addition much of the work from individual students is not present in their Portfolios and consequently it is not practical or possible for external examiners to fully evaluate some modules.

There remains a lack of consistent internal critical reflection on the performance of the assessments. I reiterate the request to scrutinize more thoroughly the results internally prior to the arrival of external examiners and document this reflection.

1. For each module: plot the student grade for the module against their overall grade for the year (This allows an assessment of module performance vs overall performance) and

2. Where modules have more than one assessment plot student performance in one assessment against their performance in the other assessment (This allows the performance of each assessment to be compared).

These procedures should be done as a matter of routine and helps the school understand how modules and assessments are performing. This should not be left to individual module leaders to do but should be done by programme leaders or exams officer, i.e. someone responsible for overview of programme performance. It is helpful to accompany the plots with a brief written comment from the module leader.

Greater levels of internal scrutiny would also be helpful in consideration of the unusual number of modules that yield unusually high mean grades. Perhaps this reflection does occur within the School, but there is no evidence provided to external examiners. Maybe the School could distribute copies of the minutes of annual teaching review meetings to the external examiners.

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

A good range of areas are available for students to undertake independent mapping dissertations. One of these, in Bulgaria, remains unsuitable as a test of mapping skills.

See comments above about the grading of dissertations.

Overall the mapping dissertations do appear to be graded a little generously. In particular field maps consistently lack detailed justification for boundary placement. I saw no evidence of use of structure contours, rarely evidence of annotation (vegetation change, break in slope etc) and overall a lack of subtlety in placement that would be expected from 1st class performance.

In the research project dissertations by MGeol students, grading is perhaps too focussed on the written submission and the School might consider introducing a grading sheet that captures a supervisors report with an element of the student engagement with the project.

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. Excellent organisation throughout.

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

Yes. Leeds has an excellent system in place for dealing with special circumstances. However, two examples of feedback sheets containing reference to matters that should only be dealt with by the mitigating circumstances board were found. Staff should be reminded that this is not appropriate.

Other comments

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

Student evaluation of module performance is a crucial part of the quality assurance process, and external examiners are provided with data on each module. It is obvious from the extremely poor levels of completion of the on-line surveys that the current system is not fit for purpose. I would urge the School to adopt a simpler system, paper based if necessary, that can yield higher levels of student feedback, to address a simple question...is the module performing well. If there is a problem identified by this process then explore it with a more detailed survey.

Meeting a cohort of students is also a valuable means of monitoring the Geology programmes. Whilst the group of students that we met were incredibly enthusiastic about the programme and were clearly satisfied with the provision from the School, it was a disappointingly small group. Perhaps arranging this meeting at a different time of year would address this problem.

School of Earth and Environment

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

03 November 2014

Dear

RE: Response to External Examiner's Report (Geological Sciences Programmes (BSc/MGeol), 2013/14

I would like to kindly thank the examiners, _____, and _____ for their measured and thoughtful comments. It is pleasing to see that they have highlighted areas of good practice within the programme. However, as always, there is room for improvement and I am grateful for their input into how we may move forward. I will address, in turn, the specific recommendations below:

Part B – Matters for Urgent Attention

- _____ **writes:** *As a matter of high priority the School should consider the learning outcomes and assessment of several co-delivered BSc and MGeol modules.*
- **In Section 1 of the Report,** _____ **elaborates:** *In 2012-13 we received an assurance that the School was actively addressing this issue, however, it is not obvious that anything has changed. Whilst an additional assessment is typically offered for the MGeol cohort in several modules no additional learning outcomes are associated with this assessment for these students and nor any greater expectation associated with the common ILOs.*
- **In Section 1 of the Report,** _____ **writes:** *Following from recommendations made by the previous External Examiner, there is now more evidence in several modules on how differences in course work and examinations co-delivered to BSc and MGeol students match onto the differences in the learning outcomes. This should now be completed for all co-taught Level 3 and Level 5 modules, based on the suggestions made in last year's part 3 of the External Examiner's report.*

We acknowledge that there are discrepancies with the L3 BSc and L5 MGeol co-delivered modules for both the ILOs and the assessment and, whilst we have started to reconcile this in some modules, we recognise there is a need for more systematic work in this area. We are making the resolution of this problem a priority and aim to resolve the matter this academic session, not only in Geological Sciences, but across our suite of undergraduate programmes. In order to achieve this, the new incumbent as co-Programme Leader (_____) will produce new guidance and ensure that it is applied to all of the modules affected and is codified for the production of new co-delivered modules.

Report Section 2

- _____ **notes:** *In comparison with other Universities there is little evidence of the use of plagiarism software for student assessments. Given the background levels of plagiarism that are picked up at other Universities it might be prudent to introduce more systematic checks.*

The School is making a concerted effort to encourage staff to set assessments to be submitted electronically wherever possible and we will encourage all GS teaching staff to do so. We have a new Academic Integrity Officer who has been charged with enhancing our use of modules on good academic practice as well as increased use of Turnitin etc. Currently the mapping dissertations are not checked, but we may consider moving to e-submission for these as well as hard copy.

Report Section 3

- **notes that there are certain module handbooks which lack key info, namely modules SOEE2145 (Palaeoecology & Evolution), SOEE2510 (Basin Evolution & Hydrocarbon Resources), SOEE2600 (Sedimentary Basins & Hydrocarbon Resources) and SOEE3603/5308M (Strategic Energy Issues), and would like handbooks to contain links to the ILOs in the module catalogues online, as well as detail style of feedback expected.**

The School has created a new template for module handbooks and has asked staff to adopt this template to create their handbooks this session. The template is thorough and contains links to the module and programme catalogue, as well as information about feedback. We will encourage the GS teaching team to use the template.

With respect to modules SOEE 2510 and SOEE 2600 – module leader/lecturer

notes: handbooks do provide enough information and do offer a reading list, and are thorough in their 20 pages. All students on these modules are given a printed version of this and it is also available on the VLE. The confusion has arisen because the handbook is provided in two parts as separate files on the VLE and the external has perhaps only accessed Part One, called “course outline”, which is just the initial 2 pages of summary information. I will bundle it as one file from next year for ease and to avoid confusion for students.

- **notes that module moderation and marks forms were not always complete and states this must improve for 2015.**

We acknowledge that there is variation in the quality of forms returned and will work together with the Student Education Service Manager to encourage all staff to be thorough and complete.

- **notes that there are issues needing to be addressed for 3 modules:**
 - **SOEE 2620 – Sedimentary Processes. The Brent Core Exercise was deemed to be excessive in terms of workload, but relevant and stimulating; recommended to find a similar exercise with less workload.**

module leader, notes that the workload for the exercise has been halved in recent years and this has still not made any difference to the receipt of negative module feedback regarding workload, while an equal number of students report it as a highlight. has agreed to make an attempt to modify the exercise, or replace it, in order to alleviate the perceived heavy workload.

- **SOEE 2490 – Formation Evaluation. This module was deemed to suffer from poor organisation and mistakes in practicals; module feedback reflected this. The examiners have suggested improvements (and we will work with the module leaders to ensure that these are implemented).**
- **SOEE 3630 – Strategic Energy Issues. More guidance and a more detailed introduction should be considered by the module organiser.**

We have communicated the concerns to the module leaders and will work with them to improve practice. SOEE 3630 is a module that may not continue to run as an option for Geological Sciences beyond 2015 (it is core for Petroleum Engineers, who are based in another School).

- **Both examiners noted that it was a shame that there were only 3 finalists who were present to talk to at the time of their visits. Both make a request for more students to be present for the meeting, but also note that timing is an issue. has suggested the possibility of a video link-up meeting.**

We note that the timing of the externals' meeting has always been an issue for attracting finalists to attend – it is well past the last date for exams and many students are not in Leeds. We do want to encourage more finalists to attend and will also explore the possibility for either: i) a video conference call to be arranged with both externals and students, for example shortly after Easter; or ii) a short visit by the externals at around this time to meet with students.

- **raises a general concern over the consistency of approach to grading, moderation and provision of feedback, noting that the approach seems to be far too individualistic.**

We agree that consistency is important when it comes to these activities, but also observe that it would be impossible to completely standardise staff approach. In order to help make sure there is adequate consistency (for provision of feedback, especially), we will reiterate expectations to staff and share good practice (e.g. through the forthcoming Teaching Away Day). Feedback is an area of concern, highlighted by current cores in the 50-65 range for the NSS, and we have identified this as a priority area for improvement.

- **has several concerns relating to the marking process for the Dissertation Mapping projects, chiefly:**
 - ***Inconsistency in the marking schemes for different projects***
 - ***Large variability of grades awarded for an individual item of work/component of the assessment between 1st and second markers***
 - ***Marking process may possibly disadvantage/unfairly advantage students***

We acknowledge concerns and agree with aspects of these; however, we observe that had no major issue with the marking process for the projects and indeed comments: *The quality of the reports and maps is generally high, and the marking and moderation is fair and well organised. A couple of projects would have deserved a higher mark, and several other projects were somewhat generously marked. However, changing these marks would not have affected the final degree classification of these students, so no action was required*

There is variety in the style of projects offered at Leeds, and we believe this is a benefit for our students; however, it does pose a problem when it comes to creating consistency in the marking process, as a universal “one-size-fits-all” scheme cannot readily be created. We have classic mapping areas (example: Skye, Raasay) where there is an emphasis of the fieldslips, but also offer others that focus more on highly detailed sedimentological data gathered in notebooks (logging, sketching), and hence have less focus on the fieldslips.

We acknowledge that supervisors have been allowed too much freedom to alter the amount allocated to each individual component (report, fieldslips, notebooks, cross sections, fair copy map), and often have provided little or no justification for the variability. We also note that the format of the mark schemes used by staff varies hugely, as well as the methods used to calculate each component (some mark each component as a %, then convert to a fraction based

on the total marks for the component, whereas others only give a limited range of marks as fractions – this has obvious effects related to granularity, and should be avoided).

While students are informed about the differences in the projects, as well as informed about the differences in the mark schemes, this is perhaps not clear enough and needs to be advertised well in advance of the projects fair and selection process. It is essential that the students know well in advance of selection, how the mark schemes differ, and why.

In order to improve the process for the coming year and create a more standardized and better-justified scheme, we plan to:

- Create a standardised mark scheme document for supervisors to use –this marks scheme may be altered only in the percentages for notebooks vs fieldslips, and may only vary as much as: 20-25% for notebooks; 25-30% for fieldslips.
- Supervisors will be asked to provide a written statement justifying their amendments (within the limited range above) to the standard mark scheme, with reference to the aims of the project.
- Simplify the mark components such that the Report mark has the Fair Copy Map mark included within, and the Fieldslips mark has the Cross Section mark included within.
- Insist that staff mark components as a %, using the whole 0-100 scale, and convert this % to a fraction for the component –this should alleviate possible advantage/disadvantage resulting from coarse granularity effects when only fractions are employed.
- Provide clear guidance to staff new to marking projects.

With regards to the marking process, whilst we acknowledge suggestion that one member of staff second marks all projects would ensure consistency, we deem it to be impractical for workload reasons. We will try a new approach to second marking this year, whereby second markers will be given groups of projects to mark that each include a similar mark range based on first marking (upper 2nd, for example), but not be informed of this range. This ensures that a wider range of projects are marked by a wider range of staff, and should help to moderate instances of marker bias (easy/hard marking), as well as help to “calibrate” inexperienced markers. We will highlight the need to pay particular attention to these points during module moderation.

also suggests that the weighting of field component vs written/presentational components be split 60:40, rather than the current 50:50. The module manager is sympathetic to this suggestion and plans to open a discussion at the next Geological Sciences Teaching Meeting on the matter.

- **notes that SOEE 3135 - Engineering Geology, employs aspects of negative marking, and asks this to be removed –marking should reward understanding not penalising what is absent.**

We have asked the module manager to consider changing the assessment.

Report Section 4

- **notes that some of the cohort showed a lack of honours level field skills, and asks that staff marking dissertation projects should be using the whole 0-100 grading scale and awarding lower marks were appropriate.**

The School has not long changed from the 20-90 scale, and some staff may still not be applying full use of the 0-100 scale. We will remind staff to do so and encourage appropriate marking.

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