

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

**PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION**

*Subject area and awards being examined:*

<b>School of:</b> Earth and Environment	<b>Subject(s):</b>
<b>Programme(s) / Module(s):</b> <a href="#">BSc Geophysical Sciences</a> <a href="#">MGeophys Geophysical Sciences - (Int)</a> <a href="#">BSc Geophysical Sciences - (Ind)</a>	<b>awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)</b> BSc MGeophys BSc

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than 6 weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to [exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk](mailto: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**

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**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?*

I was provided with the report and the School's development policy

***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.*

## 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 course content was diverse and challenging and met the intended learning outcomes. The expected levels of attainment were appropriate for the awards.

### 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 programme compared well with those at <<<>> and is highly regarded.

### 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 school offers a range of assessments that are appropriate to the modules normally split between coursework and examination. In general the assessment procedures are very good and match the classification of awards. I felt 4 modules (2 each in the BSc and MGeophys course) could do with appraisal to ensure ILO's, credits and classifications are balanced.

Module codes: 3221 and 5180M: failed to provide sufficient discrimination (std dev was small excluding failed candidates). The module assessment is all done through coursework – 10 short (1 page) reports and a written project proposal. The students felt this was a too higher workload for the 10 credits awarded also I found the presented assessment material tended to be superficial resulting in a rather bland marking scheme. My recommendation would be to keep the module but change the ILO to that of improving writing and communication skills. This would also address concern of previous external examiner about the quality of the writing in the final year project reports which I also endorse. I suggest reducing the number of 1-page reports to 8 and then ask each report to be written in a different style (e.g. review article for a science magazine (Nature); a micro-science paper (GRL); for the popular press; internal report for management; 4-slide presentation). Similarly I would enforce strict style constraints on the research proposal assessment, eg NERC rules for grant proposals.

Module codes: 3200 and 5510M: this is a new(?) module that provides a 1 week field-camp on geophysical data acquisition. The marks were both very high (mean >70%) and little discrimination (std dev between 1.5 and 3.25%). Assessment procedure needs to be revised to bring the mean down to an more appropriate level and increase the range of marks.

In talking with the MGeophys students there was confusion on how the marks from the International Placement were transferred to a mark at Leeds for their 3<sup>rd</sup> year. This need to be made as transparent as possible. Also there was the perception that there was a bias to give the 'top' placements to the highest performing students based on their second year. To the point where some students did not bother selecting the 'top' places as they were not confident that their request would be considered. The Orwell sentiment "everyone is equal but some are more equal than others" comes to mind. I am sure Leeds have chosen their International Placement with great care and either perception of 'top' places needs to be squashed or the allocation needs to be seen to be fair.

### 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 material provided gave me an excellent demonstration of the capabilities of the students and it compared well with that produced by students at <<<>>. I would especially note the performance of the Mgeophys students. I was fortunate to meet with some of their number and found them highly motivated and articulate. They appreciated the course at Leeds as being both demanding and rewarding, they will be excellent ambassadors for the School.

### 5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

N/A

### 6. The nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year

*It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.*

As this is my first year this is difficult to judge but I would note the issue on writing skills highlighted by the previous external examiner still needs work (see above).

#### **7. The influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching**

*This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.*

There is a clear link between research and the teaching and learning especially though the final year project reports. Comments from the students reflected this but also the request to increase support on career choice from industry – it was suggested that the industry led seminars used in the MSc programme should be more widely advertised to both the BSc and Mgeophys cohorts.

## **The Examination Process**

8. **The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?**

- *Whether external examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.*

Yes, though I will probably optimise my strategy over the coming years as 2 working days is short given the range of topics and assessed material to cover. The school did point me to specific candidates that required special attention.

9. **Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks?**

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

Yes, though it may have been useful to receive the background material (course outline, module descriptions and moderator comments) ahead of time to help inform which modules may need attention

10. **Was sufficient assessed/examination work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?**

Yes

11. **Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners?**

Yes, but I felt the rules may be too rigorous thus discouraging academic input and comment from the examiners.

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

Yes, these were revealed at the examiners meeting

### **For Examiners involved in Mentoring Arrangements**

*If you have acted as a mentor to a new external examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements.*

As this was my first year I was assigned a mentor – who was also on the first year too so we were both a little in the dark. However, I had taken the opportunity to visit last year and meet the outgoing examiner which actually proved more useful and I would recommend this more personal hand-over.

### **Other Comments**

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

I was disappointed by the allocation of awards. The School needs to reappraise the award criteria or introduce an additional award for Geophysics. This year the two top financial awards went to the same person in a different programme who was NOT the top student, who happened to be in the Mgeophys programme. I recommend a review and, if at all possible, a special award to this MGeopyhs student



## UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Head of School of Earth and Environment  
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8<sup>th</sup> September 2011

Dear

Thank you for examining our Earth Sciences undergraduate degree programmes for the last academic session. Your views are an essential part of our quality assurance mechanism and we welcome your input into our teaching processes.

We were pleased to receive your generally positive comments and we agree with the areas for improvement you identified and in some cases have already taken steps to resolve the issues.

The module manager of the Research Seminars modules (SOEE3221/5180M) has also raised the larger number of small assessments as an issue, both in terms of workload and the learning experience. We will look to incorporate your suggestions into any changes we make to that module. However, it is important that the primary focus of the module, which is to have the students actively engage in a wide range of current research, not be damaged. This goal has guided the strategy of a relatively large number of short reports that are then used as a spur to group discussion. Ideally the module would help to improve the writing skills of our students. We have attempted a number of small changes within the programme to raise the writing standards over the past several years, but the cumulative impact seems to remain small and a disappointing number of dissertations suffer from poor write-ups. We will be changing the project proposal that the students produce early in the dissertation to be a more substantial piece of work with more formal feedback to the students on both writing style and project plan.

The 2-week, final-year, field trip modules SOEE3200/5510M are not new, but they had been taken over by a new member of staff resulting in a change in both the location of the trip and the methods of assessment. We agree that the high mean and low standard deviation were an issue, and had already changed the assessment in response. In particular we added an individually assessed pre-trip report in which the students research the geology and geophysics of the island and make initial plans on the surveys to be performed. The Lanzarote version of the trip ran for the second time in June 2011 and the final marks have now been collated; the changes resulted in a lower average and a greater spread (66.5 +/- 4.7%). For the next trip we plan to change the current, group assessed data disk to a pass/fail component (i.e. a satisfactory data disk must be produced before the group members will be credited with passing the module, but it will

not count directly towards the final mark), a change that should further increase the spread of marks.

The formulae used to translate marks from the year abroad to a Leeds equivalent are made available to the students; however, more could be done to explain how they have been developed and continuously checked for fairness. Similarly, the procedures for assigning places are explained from the outset and we certainly do not intend suggest that any of the partner universities are "top choices" as all destinations will provide the students with an outstanding experience. A new version of the year abroad handbook is in the process of being produced and additional information on the reasoning behind our procedures will be included based on your comments.

The weekly industry visits to the MSc programme are advertised to all final year BSc and MGeophys students, but more will be done to actively encourage them to attend.

We have attempted in the recent past to obtain external sponsorship of a geophysics specific prize for the graduating class. However, we have not successfully secured any such funding. A review of school policy on prizes (across all programmes) has been raised as an action point for the upcoming year.

Thank you for your useful and constructive comments.

Yours sincerely,