

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

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION*Subject area and awards being examined:*School of: **Geography**

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)

MSc/PgD Catchment Dynamics and Management
MSc/PgD GIS for Catchment Dynamics and Management
MRes Catchment Dynamics

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

Alternatively you can post your report to:

Head of Academic Quality and Standards,
Academic Quality and Standards Team,
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building,
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

PART B: COMMENTS FOR THE INSTITUTION ON THE EXAMINATION PROCESS AND STANDARDS***Matters for Urgent Attention***

None – but the web entry needs a quick audit and tidy up because I saw some typos (e.g. complimentary, Environmental Agency etc)

Only applicable in first year of appointment

Yes the previous EE report and response was supplied

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.*

It is not easy to find the ILOs for individual modules. The Course Handbooks (2010/11) do not identify or describe the ILOs in a consistent manner (the majority of modules have only 'objectives' and 'syllabus'). I was told the Handbooks may be withdrawn for next year but web information needs checking.

Standards are appropriate for the awards under consideration. It is pleasing to see students obtaining primary data for their theses. Data are generated from original fieldwork. Some dissertations are produced alongside major research projects showing a strong link between research and teaching. There is good use of quantitative skills throughout the programme.

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 programme really stretches students. The links to business are evident throughout the programme and produce highly-skilled graduates who can move seamlessly into the water industry and related careers.

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.*

Assessment methods are appropriate. For the dissertation, students have to write a concise research paper in a journal format. This type of assessment is original, refreshing and challenging. I would argue very strongly for this form of assessment to continue and it is an excellent example of 'good practice' that could be shared across the university. There was plentiful evidence that MSc theses were being translated directly into academic papers.

4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and ILOs?

- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

Yes and the mark profiles reflected this.

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

Not applicable

6. 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.

Difficult to judge because this is my first year as External Examiner. Note the comment under (3) for an example of 'good practice'.

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.

This is probably one of the strongest features of the programmes at Leeds. Staff who are engaged in global research bring this experience into their teaching and dissertation supervision. There is no doubt that MSc students are taught by leaders in their field who have an incredibly strong partnership with the water industry, catchment managers and water end-users. Leeds is a Centre of Excellence for water-related research and it encouraging to observe that all water-based research staff get involved in delivery of the Masters programmes.

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 all material was supplied and well-organised.

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 all very clear.

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

All papers were made available to me. I was sent eight dissertations in advance of my visit. I had a whole morning to read material and talk to the course leader and staff.

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

Yes, although other research commitments meant the Exam Board had few attendees.

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

Yes, as evidenced at the Exam Board for one particular case.

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.

Not applicable

Other Comments

I wish to express my thanks to <<<>>> and <<<>>> for preparing all the necessary paperwork and managing the whole examination process so efficiently.

As reported at the Exam Board, there are four issues I would ask the School to consider:

1. *Simplifying and rationalising the Moderator System. The Module Moderation Form can be up to seven sides long and involve a host of checks and form filling. Sometimes it looks like it takes longer to complete the work for the Moderator Form than it does being the first marker of the assignments. I applaud the thoroughness of the whole process but question whether there is a simpler and more efficient way of moderating your peers without sacrificing quality control.*
2. *Undertake an audit of all course programme material on the web (SoG and module catalogue on banner) and in hard copy to ensure accuracy and consistency.*
3. *Debate whether the dissertation weighting of 70:30 (critical review paper:literature review) is appropriate. 18 credits are earned by a 1 x 3000 word literature review. The literature review is then updated and edited and forms part of the critical review paper. There is opportunity for double-counting here. Also, the literature review is not double-marked (or moderated).*
4. *Reviewing the number of assessment points for some modules. For example, GEOG5400M (15 credits) has four assessment points (40, 30, 20 and 10% each). It may be more efficient to reduce the number of assessment points.*

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11 November 2011

Dear

**Response to external examiner's comments
(MSc CDM / GIS-CDM /MRes CDM Programmes)**

Thank you for your external examiner's report for 2010/11 on the above programmes. On behalf of the Msc and MRes teaching staff, the Director of Taught Postgraduates, and the Taught Postgraduate Examinations Officer I would like thank you for your careful and thorough examination of our courses and very much appreciate your advice and time.

Your insightful and constructive comments on the programmes have been warmly welcomed.

It is very pleasing to us that you recognise the professionalism of the staff involved, the organization and high (knowledge and skills) standard of the programme, the industry links, the influence of research on the curriculum, the methods for assessment and the feedback provided to students. We appreciate your confirmation that ILOs and Standards are appropriate for the awards.

We note your detection of typos in the University's online web-catalogue of module descriptions for 2010-11 session, problems of identifying learning objectives for some modules, inconsistencies with descriptions in paper handbook copies. We appreciate the paramount importance of ensuring that formatting and content of these is completely accurate. Dr Jonathan Carrivick, the Director of Taught Postgraduates, will lead an 'audit' of these.

We certainly want to move away from issuing paper-based copies of module descriptions to students (in handbook format). We are very keen to work with a single definitive set of descriptions in one place. Thank you for bringing this issue to our attention.

We have continued to assess masters students in a manner similar to their future workplaces, i.e. through continuous assessments and deadlines, rather than by closed-book exam. We have also continued to update modules with content reflecting that desired by industry, and continue to engage in an informal manner with industry at all levels. As suggested, the School's Taught Student Education Committee will consider rationalising the number of assessments (e.g. GEOG5400 Issues and Skills for Catchment Dynamics and Management) for the benefit of both students and staff as part of the annual process of programme review.

Cont.....

A re-weighting of the dissertation module component literature review will be implemented with immediate effect.

The moderation system is indeed thorough and has arisen and developed to be robust, defensible and objective as well as transparent and equal across all modules. It can appear onerous and this is something we will consider across all TPG programmes.

Once again, on behalf of the School of Geography, may I thank you for your enthusiastic scrutiny and considerate work.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gill Valentine', written over a light blue grid background.

Professor Gill Valentine
Head of School

Professor Gill Valentine
Professor of Human Geography
Head of School
Director, LIVEDIFFERENCE Research Programme