

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:	Mathematics and Physical Sciences/School of Chemistry
Subject(s):	<i>Colour and polymer chemistry</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc in Polymer Surface Coatings Science and Technology
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?

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

During my period as external examiner I have been very impressed by the high standard of the course, in terms of the nature of educational experience given to the students, the quality of the teaching and variety of assessment methods, together with the thoroughness of the marking of student work. Over the years it has only been necessary to introduce minor changes, because this is a mature, well developed and structured course, which provides ample opportunity for students to achieve their full potential. The quality of the course is evidenced by the high standards achieved by many of the students. It is unfortunate that the course has not attracted a larger number of students and I understand that the course structure will be modified for future cohorts in order to improve both its efficiency of delivery and attractiveness to potential recruits. I wish the staff well with it.

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.*

As mentioned in previous reports, the programme aims and ILOs are entirely commensurate with those of a Masters level course. In particular the project component provides the opportunity for students to apply the knowledge they have acquired through the taught components and to focus on a particular research issue.

The standards are very much those I would expect of Masters level awards. I would add that the quality of many of the project dissertations has been most impressive, indicating very high standards of achievement.

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.*

There are no equivalent courses that I am aware of in the UK on which a reasonable comparison can be made. The course content is unique, but certainly of the standard I would expect of an applied chemistry based course at Masters level.

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.*

As noted above a variety of assessment methods is employed. Some modules are assessed solely by written examination, some by a combination of written examination and coursework. Even the nature of the coursework is varied, some involving literature searching, some involving practical work and some involving data analysis. A variety of assessments methods is also involved during the course, including formal written examination (a component of all modules), written essays and laboratory reports. The Project component is assessed by a combination of the students' project dissertation, poster presentation, and oral presentation. Marking of the report is carried out by two staff and the marking of the oral and poster presentations is carried out by four staff.

The fact that this year's cohort of students all performed consistently well shows that the quality of the teaching and of the assessments methods is sound. I am strongly of the opinion that the average student who qualifies to enter the course has every chance of being successful and stands to gain considerably from the educational experience provided by the staff.

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.*

There were only six students in the cohort so it is difficult to make statistically robust analyses. However, I saw all of the assessed work produced by the students and found the standards to be very high. Two students had a performance that was classed as 'Distinction' and two passed with 'Merit'. The remaining two students passed, with average marks in the mid-50's. The performance of the students in the project component was excellent, with the average mark for the cohort being 68.4%. There were some excellent dissertations and the marks accurately reflected the student performances.

Because there are no other directly comparable courses, I cannot comment on the performance of the students in relation to students of other courses. It does appear however that this was an academically strong and enthusiastic cohort of students.

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.

No changes have been made to the course since the previous 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.

The main influence of research lies in the subjects selected for the project, which is a major component of the course. The topics investigated are very much topics of current industrial relevance and academic interest and also reflect the research interests of the academic staff. Some of the projects are supported by companies. The module curricula contain topics that provide the students with the underpinning knowledge, such as instrumental analytical methods, to conduct research projects. Some of the coursework requires students to undertake literature surveys using different searching vehicles, and to carry out the analysis of experimental data, both of which are important for developing a research culture in the course.

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

The Examination/Assessment Process

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

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

I am satisfied that I had all the information I needed to carry out my duties properly.

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 all the documentation I needed about the programmes, including information given to students, handbooks and marking criteria.

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 was provided with draft examination papers and invited to comment on them, though as usual, this tended to be in a rush, just before the examinations were due to be sat by the students. Again, the comments I made were only of a minor nature, and this time I did receive feedback to say whether the staff were in agreement with them and whether or not appropriate changes had been made.

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?

I was given all of the assessments to peruse, including the examination scripts, essays, project dissertations and marking sheets for the oral and poster presentations. I therefore had a complete view of all the assessed work by the students. The marking was very thorough indeed, with helpful comments annotated where appropriate. It was easy to see where marks had been awarded and where (together with reasons) the answers were unsatisfactory. In all cases I found the marking to be fair.

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

There were six students who carried out projects on different topics, though two were on the topic of hydrogels. All of the topics were relevant to the programme. Two staff members read and assessed a project report; if they disagreed by more than 5% they met to discuss their differences and if no agreement could be reached on a joint mark a third marker would be invited to assess the report. No third marker was required this year. The standard of assessment was as I would expect and was consistent with that of previous years.

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?

I attended the Examination Board meeting. The meeting was professionally conducted and the results of each student given careful consideration. In this cohort there was only one difficult case (see 15 below) to resolve, which was discussed in detail. The final Board recommendations were entirely appropriate.

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

One student attended the course with a medical condition and I am entirely satisfied that the staff made every effort to accommodate that student's condition. The student was dealt with fairly and in accordance with the University's regulations. I am confident that the award of 'Pass' was an accurate reflection of the student's ability, given the particular condition being experienced.

Other comments

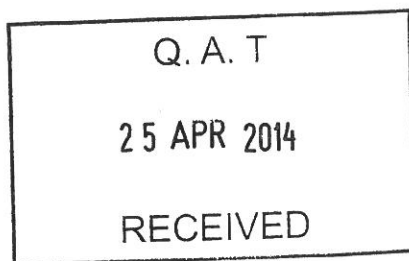
Please use this box if you wish to make any further comments not covered elsewhere on the form

A minor comment that I raised within the Examination Board meeting was in relation to a component of a module which involved the student to select a topic on which to research and write an essay. The written examination paper may then contain a question on the same topic and my feeling is that students who choose that topic for their essay will have an advantage over the others. The staff agreed to consider this matter in future years.

Finally I would add that it has been a pleasure to be the external examiner for this course and to work with such dedicated and professional staff.

School of Chemistry

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

15 April 2014

Dear

Re: MSc Polymer and Surface Coatings Science and Technology

I am writing on behalf of the School of Chemistry to provide a formal response to your Examiner's report for 2012-13. I would like to thank you for your contributions over the past years and I hope that you have enjoyed working with us; we have certainly valued your input greatly. We also appreciate your willingness to act as a mentor for the new external examiner for the MSc Polymers, Colorants and Fine Chemicals programme.

We welcome your positive comments about the programme, in particular those about the high standard of the course, in terms of the nature of the educational experience given to the students, the quality of the teaching and variety of assessment methods, together with the thoroughness of the marking of student work.

With regard to your comment about a component of a module which involved students selecting a topic on which to research and write an essay, with the possibility that the written examination paper may then contain a question on the same topic, we will check and make appropriate changes, if required, in future years.

On a final note, as your tenure as External Examiner has ended, I would like to take this opportunity once more to extend my thanks for your considered contributions and to wish you well for the future.

With best wishes,

Head of School

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