

## 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:	Leeds Institute of Genetics, Health and Therapeutics
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc in Epidemiology and Biostatistics
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](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

**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 areas currently require urgent attention

**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*

I have been the external examiner since the beginning of the course and over the 4 years have seen the course develop and the course team implement changes to the course in response to feedback from students and their own realisation of where the strengths of the course lie and areas that could be improved. This has included widening the scope of the course to go beyond just statistical epidemiology and into Biostatistics with several different core pathways. The team are responsive to the needs of the market, both in terms of what students want and what employers need and this is reflected in the changes that they have made and I am sure that they will continue to make as and when they are needed. The course team have striven to provide a high quality student learning experience and have on occasion made changes to the teaching staff in order to do this. Their assessment procedures are clear and they have endeavoured to provide a variety of different assessment types in order to ensure that all types of learner can demonstrate their knowledge. The standards set by the team have been good and are consistent with other programmes of this type.

**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 programme aims and learning objectives are similar to those used elsewhere and are commensurate with the level of study. The aim of the programme is to train individuals to pursue careers in epidemiology, biostatistics and health services research and having examined the course for the past four years, including looking at each module and the work produced, I would say that the course has achieved its aim, and its learning objectives are entirely appropriate to this.

The academic standards set by staff on this programme are entirely appropriate to the award and are similar to comparable courses that I have had experience of both here at Sheffield and elsewhere. Staff have drawn on their subject knowledge to produce learning materials that are suitable for what would be expected of students on a Masters level 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.*

As far as I am aware, no subject benchmarks exists for Statistics/Epidemiology at PG level. However, the aims and outcomes do articulate with the benchmarks set for Maths, Stats and Operational Research at an UG level in the 2009 subject specific annex.

## 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 were appropriate for the course content and objectives and are comparable with other programmes in the UK. The course has used a variety of assessment methods in line with acknowledged good practice as this allows different types of learners to demonstrate their knowledge and learning. However, there were several critical appraisal assignments across a range of modules and it would be good to see coherence in assessments across modules so that all do not use the same type of assignment.

I saw clear marking schemes for the majority of modules. These provided students with a good understanding of what was expected of them. On the whole the marking was well documented on feedback sheets and many assignments were clearly annotated with feedback. The marking was consistent and I agree with the range of marks given and the level set. A range of marks were given indicating that the whole scale was being used and that the assessments were able to distinguish between students of different ability. Those students who had failed particular assignments had clearly failed and those who gained a distinction were clearly deserving of this. The marks awarded to students between these two extremes reflected the knowledge demonstrated. Overall I would say that the assessment process was thorough, the marking criteria applied consistently and the moderation worked well.

The student cohort was of mixed ability as was reflected by the range of marks. There was consistency across modules in the marks awarded to students, with the stronger students performing well across all modules and the weaker students generally scoring less well. The course team needs to be clear about what assessment in individual modules is geared towards. Is it about students demonstrating threshold knowledge or about testing knowledge across the range and thought should be given to ensuring that students are able to demonstrate knowledge across the learning outcomes.

## 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.*

As stated above the cohort was of mixed ability, but seemed stronger than in previous years with more students attaining higher classifications. As with previous years students generally did well in areas involving numeracy and less well in areas that involved pulling together and interpreting data and information. This is not entirely unexpected as interpretation is the area that students most often struggle with. Given the range of assessment methods students were given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Formative assessment was carried out throughout the course allowing students to further learn what was expected of them before the pressure of the final assessments.

## 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 team have changed the course title to better reflect the emphasis on biostatistics. There are several core pathways that students can take, though how sustainable this is in the long run should be examined carefully particular as some of the pathways are more popular than others and it is important to examine how few students are required before a theme becomes unviable.

**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.*

This is a research-led course where research is very strongly embedded within the curriculum. Students are expected to undertake several research-orientated tasks including the novel approach of encouraging them to produce an academic paper of publication quality for their final project assessment at the end of the course. In addition the professional spine encourages students to act and think professionally through a range of tasks that would face a professional statistician working within a research environment, such as a sample size calculation and article review.

**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.*

yes

**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.*

yes

**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 saw and was able to comment on draft examinations and assessments. The questions were appropriate for the level and there were suitable arrangements to consider my comments

**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?**

Yes. I saw a selection of all the assessed work for all modules across a range of marks.

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

The choice and range of subjects available for study for the dissertations was appropriate as were the methods and standards of assessment. Incorporating writing a paper of the results is an innovative approach and reflects the working environment and expectations that students face once they graduate.

**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?**

Arrangements were satisfactory; I was able to attend the Board and I was satisfied with the recommendations of the Board.

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

Yes they were

**Other comments**

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

The team have maintained their high quality of teaching this year in spite of being short-staffed and they are to be commended for this. They remain committed to providing an excellent student learning experience. The course is interesting and highly relevant in today's environment of evidence-based medicine and the new course structure and title that has been introduced for the coming academic year should further enhance this. The wide range of assessment methods used, including examination, presentations and report writing is commendable. For the majority of modules I saw examples of good quality feedback and I would continue to encourage the course team to ensure that the feedback across all modules is as good as the best on the course. Feedback is important to the learning experience and students gain much from receiving constructive feedback. I am pleased to see that the course team have acted on my recommendations from last year with regards to feedback and it has been consistently high across the modules that I have examined this year, unlike the previous year.

It was unclear what distinguishes the Research project from the module 'Project in Epidemiology and Biostatistics' and I would encourage the team to think about this latter module and what its core function is in order to provide some differentiation between the two.

**Leeds Institute of Medical Education  
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Faculty of Medicine and Health**

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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

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11 November 2013

Dear <>

### **External Examiner's report for Epidemiology and Biostatistics 2012-13**

As the School of Medicine's Director of Postgraduate Studies, I receive all the External Examiners' reports for the eighteen programmes offered in 2012-13. First, let me thank you for assembling the 2012-13 report for the programmes in Epidemiology and Biostatistics. This is your final report.

I note that there were no urgent matters for attention. You comment that the team deliver a high quality student learning experience.

#### **Programme Leader's response**

I have enclosed with this letter a response assembled by <>, Programme Leader. You will note that <> has addressed five issues which you have raised in the report. I am confident that the programme team will continue to be committed to providing an excellent student learning experience, with appropriate assessments.

Thank you so much for your service as External Examiner. Your contributions to the Epidemiology and Biostatistics programmes have been much valued.

Yours sincerely

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Enc: <> 31 October 2013

**Director of Postgraduate Studies**

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