

**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> Psychology <b>Programme(s) / Module(s):</b>	<b>Subject(s):</b> UG degree programmes  <b>awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)</b> BSc
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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**

**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.*

***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 able to discuss these issues with the outgoing external examiner during my visit

***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.*

All the modules I saw had ILOs in line with what I would expect at similar institutions. The course design and content were as I would expect for a BPS accredited psychology degree.

**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, as above.

**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.*

There was a good range of assessment tools being used. I was initially sceptical about the relatively widespread use of group dissertation projects as without due care free-riding is a serious possibility. However in the examples I saw students were able to produce noticeably different reports and the better students were able to write better reports than others in the same group. This is a good thing to be able to do as it means that the sample sizes for the projects are more respectable and allow the students to make more of the findings. It also has the benefit of encouraging students to take the data collection process seriously since the students will be keen to monitor the quality of each others' work.

**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.*

Leeds attracts good students and the degree has been designed to allow the students to be stretched and perform well. The strong students were producing very good quality work indeed.

**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 I can only go on what the staff and the other external examiner say but the feeling is that the recently revised UG programme has raised the level of student performances and certainly what I saw was generally very good.

**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.*

The projects I saw reflected the research interests of the Leeds staff as I would expect. It was also interesting to read work from the final year options which was clearly linked closely to staff interests and was genuinely interesting from an outside perspective.

## **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, I was provided with a lot of useful information and any additional material I wanted was produced very quickly.

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, I received all these documents.

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?**

These were excellent, very efficient and conscientiously carried out.

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

Yes.

### ***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.*

### **Other Comments**

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

This year there were a lot of 1<sup>st</sup> class awards made (54, 34.6%) which is a high rate and a major increase from previous years according to the figures we were shown. The course team identified a number of potential explanations for this and I think it would be worth the University considering these in the review that I understand is currently being conducted.

The team pointed to the fact that this was the first cohort to go through a radically revised version of the course which had been redesigned to improve the quality of the learning experience and I had no reason to do anything other than agree that the standard of work I saw was generally very good. I had no quibbles with the marking of the work and the adherence to the published marking scheme. The improvements seem to have had the desired effect. However, other factors seem to be at play too.

The marking criteria had been re-designed in response to previous examiners' requests for markers to use the full range of marks (this seems to be a standard request across the sector) and the markers had duly begun to use the higher end of the range to distinguish between different levels of first class performance. As Leeds attracts good students with strong A level profiles the impact of the revised marking scheme has been largely to increase the number of high end marks as there are not many students producing 2:2 or lower level work. This in itself is not a problem but the rules about dealing with borderline students have not been revised to keep up with this change.

First, if the marking scheme is now deemed better and more accurate then there seems little reason to keep the first class borderline at 6.85 (68.5%). If first class work is being given first class marks (74% being the lowest possible grade to give a first class piece of work) then having a borderline that is in the 2:1 range seems out of step with this. I assume that the 68.5% borderline was in put in place in the days when markers rarely gave marks beyond 72% and thus it was there to help borderline students whose averages rarely came out clearly above 70%. The University might consider moving the threshold to 70% or perhaps 69.5% in line with other HEIs.

Another factor influencing the high number of firsts is the existence of the two schemes for weighting marks – 1:1 and 1:2 L2 vs. L3. The 1:2 system is common in the universities that I am familiar with and it is a recognised way of recording 'exit velocity'. This makes sense in terms of employer expectations as most employers assume that a first class student has been performing at a first class level recently rather than that they were first class two years ago but haven't done anything first class recently. I looked at the work and profiles of all the borderline students and the two weakest students who were unambiguously in the first class category under the current rules. Somewhat unfortunately the two clear first class students had displayed negative exit velocity having produced no, or only one module's worth of first class work in their final year – they both benefitted from a couple of exceptionally high marks in their second years. This was emphasised by the fact that several of the borderline cases who ultimately (and appropriately given their pattern of L2 marks) did not get firsts had much stronger final year performances. The 1:1 route seems particularly generous and is probably unnecessary now that the marking schemes have been revised and are being used.

Having said all this, based on the marking I saw and the University's current regulations and procedures the process was conducted appropriately and the students seem to have been awarded the correct degrees.

Institute of Psychological Sciences

University of Leeds  
Leeds LS2 9JT



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

25 July 2011

Dear

**External Examiner Report 2010/11**

Many thanks for your positive and thorough report and for the feedback you have provided throughout the year in relation to our assessments and marking standards.

The focus of your comments was the high number of first class awards this year. Your discussions with us and the observations in your report have been extremely useful in exploring explanations for this. Many of us share your concern about the low classification thresholds at Leeds so your comments about bringing these in line with other HEIs are welcome and we will feed this into the University's review of the degree classification scheme. We will also feed in your view, shared by others here, that the 1:1 average is a particularly generous option and worth reviewing.

It has been a pleasure working with you this year.

Yours sincerely

cc: Academic Quality and Standards Team