

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	Engineering
Subject(s):	All Aeronautical and Aerospace Programmes, plus the relevant, related modules.
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Aeronautical and Aerospace Programmes
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BEng / MEng

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner

Title and Name of Examiner:	
Institution:	
Address for communication:	
Email:	
Telephone:	

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

It has been a pleasure working with the Colleagues in Mechanical Engineering. The standard of the teaching and the work done by students is high, and the students I have managed to speak to are generally very satisfied with the course.

Over my years as external examiner, there was a notable decline in facilities for aerospace engineering, and labs for students in general, which was possibly driven by investing in and creating space for successful research activities which in view of REF is very understandable. It was very refreshing to see during the last visit the extensive investment Mechanical Engineering has made over the last year to substantially renovate and improve the student lab spaces. These facilities are now excellent and will serve the staff and the students very well over the next few years.

When starting my term as external examiner, Mechanical Engineering had an excellent internal computer based administrative tool for marks and degree classifications. Due to University decisions this tool was given up in exchange for a university wide system. This was a very noticeable step backwards in administrative terms from what was visible at the specific exam board I attended. One extremely worrying side effect of this was the fact that it was not possible anymore for us as a team of external examiners to fully trace and audit marks from students' work to entries into the central system and the resulting degree classifications. It also seems to be the case that marks are handled in various online systems, with (potentially manual?) transfer (and scaling?) of marks in between. This is not robust and error prone. And indeed in the last exam board during our limited checks we did find one or two occasions where marks between the script, the cover sheet and the mark in the central system differed. Upon checking a valid explanation was given and the mark recorded in the central system was correct. However, this raises doubts on the overall robustness of the system and processes, and extrapolating over all recorded marks using an "error rate" we found in the limited checks we did one would anticipate that some other marks might also be incorrect. Therefore, this system and associated processes need immediate attention to make sure that in the future it would be possible to trace marks all the way through and as a consequence external examiners would be able to fully verify accuracy of the marks recorded.

Down to uniformity across the University Mechanical Engineering marks from 0% to 100% but these are then scaled into a range of 2 to 9. This is not standard and one could argue that it will put graduates from Mechanical Engineering from Leeds into a disadvantageous position when compared with their peers. I would urge the University to reconsider this scaling, and if it cannot be implemented across the University, the University might want to consider granting an exemption to Mechanical Engineering (and other Engineering Schools if they wish), to have a system for these graduates in place which is following more common practice for engineering graduates elsewhere.

Every year of my time as external examiner there was insufficient or no evidence that checking of the marking was done. In previous years, there were gaps in the checking. This year, there was no evidence in the scripts that mark checking had been done at all. Therefore there is no guarantee that everything has been marked and marking has been checked fully. Upon checking, it seems that University guidelines state that mark checkers do not need to "tick" or make visible their mark checking. This system is not auditable and therefore the University is advised to revisit this to bring this in line with practice elsewhere where mark checking is clearly visible on exam scripts.

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 learning outcomes are as expected for a programme of this type, and the standards are commensurate with the level of the award.

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 is of good quality and in line with similar courses offered at comparable institutions.

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.*

Inspection of the exam scripts highlighted some shortcomings in the checking of the marks. It was not clear of the exam scripts examined whether the marker and/or the checker had actually checked the scripts or not. This shortcoming might lead to oversight and errors in marking and must be addressed.

This is a repeat comment from the last three years now.

Again, a repeat comment from last year: More careful consideration needs to be given to Year 3 students progressing into the 4th year of their respective programmes. Weaker students around the 50 to 55% mark or below have been allowed to progress into the 4th year. However, some of these students seem to be struggling achieving the required higher standard in the 4th Year. This was evident from the results looked at.

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 performance of the students is very much in line with the marks awarded. The standards for the work and the projects are high and in line with their peers at other institutions.

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 lab facilities have improved substantially, which I am sure will improve the students' learning experience.

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.

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

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?

The nature of the questions was appropriate. However, the marks achieved by the students are clustered around the higher end of the scale. No standard deviation results for modules were not presented. Therefore no judgement could be made on whether exams were set at appropriate levels, stretching less able students, but also challenging the top end students.

The BDes had 15 out of 19 graduates with a 1st or 2:1. This needs to be monitored to see whether this very high rate of good results was a one off or whether this trend continues.

In one module in Blackboard the Turnitin report came back with a 99% (!) similarity, yet there was no trace on how this was dealt with, and how a pass mark was obtained by this student in this module. I presume a “supplementary” exercise was set for this student and it was remarked, but it was not possible to trace this. In another case there was a submission of work after a dead line, yet the student passed, and it was not possible to follow through the system how this decision was arrived at.

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?

Sufficient work was made available.

The marking was done well, but the checking could not be verified since it was not visible.

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

The choice of subjects was appropriate.

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?

The arrangements for the Board were not fully satisfactory with respect to the information / paperwork available. I believe this is due the change of the internal system, when the very useful electronic internal system was changed for the University wide system. But this year it was an improvement over last year, indicating that the system new to Mechanical Engineering is on its way of bedding in.

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

Due care and attention was given to these.

Due to very limited number of students available for interviews (one?) no student interview was conducted since the view of a single student might lead to misleading conclusions from me. It would be helpful or even essential to organise a better student attendance at the external exam board in the future.

School of Mechanical Engineering

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

4 February 2015

Dear

RE: School Response to External Examiner's Report 2013/14

Thank you very much for your External Examiner's Report for our Aeronautical and Aerospace Engineering undergraduate programme last session.

We note your very positive comments and will look to address any deficiencies you may have raised. In particular we will aim to clarify that the marking of all examination scripts is arithmetically checked by requesting the checker to annotate the front cover of each script.

I regret that for the time being, we are unable to update the current system for collating and viewing individual student marks due to software development limitations. We will however, endeavour to improve the transparency of the process, and aim to make module mark standard deviations available as well as the mean marks.

We will aim to have more students available for meetings with the external examiners in the future.

As this was your last year as an external examiner on our undergraduate programme, I would like to thank you very much for all your efforts over the last few years and wish you the very best for the future.

Kind Regards

Head of School

cc

Head of School

Professor of Solid Mechanics