

The University of Leeds**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	Computing
<i>Subject(s):</i>	<i>IT</i>
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	Various
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	BSc Information Technology

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**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 Quality Assurance**
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

<> has just completed his term of appointment, and whilst I am not yet completing my own term of appointment, I would like to take the opportunity to comment on the high quality of his work and on his thoroughness and commitment. It has been a great pleasure and a privilege to work alongside him.

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 intended learning outcomes are appropriate for the programme, although I would like to see these made more explicit and generally available.

The standards are appropriate for 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.*

Yes.

Computer Science comes in many different forms at different institutions; at Leeds, there is a strong and appropriate focus on aspects of artificial intelligence and algorithm design.

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 department has made changes to introduce more coursework. When sent draft examination papers for comment, it's important for the external examiner to have a clear understanding of how they relate to coursework; it would be good if some thought could be given to how this might be addressed.

The department has given plenty of thought to what sort of student performance would justify exceptional marks (80%+ and 90%+). This has led staff to have more confidence to award occasional and appropriate exceptional marks, and the students are also gaining a better understanding that high marks are not awarded for simply working harder.

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.

The standards demonstrated are in line with those at comparable institutions.

There was some outstanding work again this year, with the final year project in particular giving students the opportunity to demonstrate depth of understanding, insight and significant skill.

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.

Within the department, staff have established clear and appropriate criteria across the mark range of 0 to 100% and are awarding marks that are commensurate with those awarded at other institutions of similar calibre. However, I understand that the university are still applying a final scaling factor that delivers marks on a scale of 20 to 90. I have received no satisfactory explanation of why such an obtuse approach is deemed necessary, and whilst it only seems to affect students at the extreme ends of the scale, it means that for the sort of outstanding students we might expect at Leeds, the marks that we agree as external examiners are not necessarily the final marks awarded. Of necessity, this means that, whilst I have every confidence in the department, my confidence in the marks as agreed by the university is dented.

It is good to see the department's detailed documentation for their Code of Practice on Assessment. Whilst it takes significant time to produce such documentation, it is clear that the process leads to clarity of thought and deeper understanding of the issues at stake.

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 course modules reflect the interests of the staff, so there is a direct link between research and the corresponding delivery in course modules. In one module this year, students complained about the research focus, another bizarre instance of our increasingly consumer-led culture. However, maybe staff could give thought to whether they could make clearer links between lab-based research and the needs of the real world. In this particular instance, the students presumably had no idea that artificial intelligence-based language analysis is a critical technology for companies like Google.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

N/A

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

No new examiners this year.

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. 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

11. 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.

It was good to receive very detailed documentation on assessment and the assessment process this year. The marking criteria have been examined and developed carefully and thoughtfully and are in good shape.

12. 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?

Yes, with one exception. As far as I could determine, COMP1345 somehow managed to proceed through its entire lifecycle, including marking and moderation, without a mark scheme ever being produced for part B of the paper. This has understandably caused significant embarrassment, and is being urgently addressed.

13. 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?

All work was made available, and I was able to have confidence in my evaluation of the standard of student work. I was happy with the annotation of the scripts.

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

Yes.

The occasions when internal markers disagree over the mark are few and far between. When they do, the department's moderation process works well, apart from a general agreement amongst the external examiners that the third marker usually has a tendency to err on the side of marking a little low. The effect is not sufficient to cause unease, but we would like to encourage third markers to consider that they could often be a little more generous. It's important to deliver a fair, rather than a midway mark in such circumstances.

15. 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 administrative arrangements were good.

I was able to attend the meeting.

I was satisfied with the recommendations of the board.

The board spend a lot of time making sure that every student is dealt with fairly, and I would encourage them to defend this focus whilst being under pressure to "be efficient".

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

Yes

Other comments

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

The department's programmes are healthy, and high standards are maintained. With this in mind, the following comments are made.

There are several indications that students here, as well as across the sector, increasingly expect to be "spoon-fed". It is most important to resist the outcome of this "customer-led" culture in HE and focus the students on independent thinking, challenge and debate. I would encourage the team to consider if there are specific ways in which they could help the students move on in their thinking, perhaps by unsettling them in their belief that high status text books and research papers are infallible, for example.

The department has moved significantly in its reliance on examinations, and I am acutely aware of the extent to which they have changed in response to my previous comments. It is interesting that the students themselves feel they learn most from practical projects in that they are forced to learn in order to apply their new knowledge to the problem in hand; and the problem scenario itself demonstrates whether their emerging learning is sound or defective. I would therefore encourage the department to consider whether there are more places where practical problem-solving tasks could be set for the students. This is especially important in the context where the department is rightly giving consideration as to whether the current heavy emphasis on the final year project is too great.

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Dear <>,

Thank you for completing the external examiner's report for the BSc IT programme for last session and the supportive comments you have made on our programmes and procedures. We have noted the comments you have made and I would like to take this opportunity to respond to some of these.

You mention in your report the importance of being able to see how examination papers relate to the coursework that students are set. I fully appreciate this and now that the majority of coursework set is summative, I agree you should also have the coursework available to you. This was clearly not the case last session. I suspect it is partly a hang over from when all modules had purely formative coursework and it was agreed not to send external examiners this coursework and we shall rectify this for the current session.

I have looked into the issues surrounding the module COMP1345 you refer to in your report. Following a discussion with the module leader I am satisfied that a markscheme did exist for this paper however, it was clearly not submitted along with other paperwork at the correct time and was therefore never sent out to you and I can only apologise for this.

Your comment on whether we can increase the use of practical problem solving exercises is very timely as we are working to increase both the variety of assessments we use and the practical content of all our programmes.

I look forward to seeing you in June.

Yours sincerely

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Director of Student Education