

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:	Computing
Subject(s):	<i>Computer Science</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MEng/BSc Artificial Intelligence MSc Artificial Intelligence MSc Advanced Computer Science
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MEng, MSc, BSc

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

Overall this has been a very satisfactory experience. The staff in the department are diligent and evidently care for both their subjects and the students, and the processes in place for managing the substantial number of students, degree programmes and modules for the most part run smoothly, The examination process is well conducted and I am confident that the results they produce are valid and will bear comparison with good practice elsewhere.

In my first year I commented that the processes involved in writing marks on the scripts, moderating the marking, checking the addition of marks, transferral to the database etc were not sufficiently transparent and fail-safe. I am happy to say that there has been a marked improvement in this respect during my time as external, although best practice is still not being adhered to by all markers.

I also recommended the use of scatter plots to show how well students' performance in each module correlates with their overall performance for the year, which is a good way of bringing to light any problems with the assessment in a module. I am pleased that this suggestion was taken up, and the plots have proved helpful at the exam boards.

Over this period there have been a number of changes to modules, with new ones introduced and old ones discontinued or repackaged, and summative coursework has started to be used at all levels. All the changes I am aware of were well-motivated and implemented sensibly.

I would like to thank all the staff involved for helping to make my visits to Leeds productive and enjoyable.

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.*

There is a good range of modules providing a broad coverage of the subject areas, and the assessments and examination papers are at an appropriate level.

- 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, the programmes provide a good match with the national benchmarks.

- 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 coursework and exam question papers that I examined provided a good coverage of the syllabus, and contained an appropriate level of routine and more challenging questions, making for an effective instrument for discriminating between students of different abilities and levels of achievement.

- 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 was a wide range of performance in the student cohort. The top ranking students performed excellently, and there were some impressive projects.

- 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.

Following comments by myself and the other externals last year, there seems to be a greater willingness now to award high marks (80+) to outstanding projects, and this is to be welcomed.

- 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.

Many of the third-year and masters-level modules relate directly to staff research interests, and this is also true of many of the projects which I looked at.

- 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**

N/A

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, I was provided with all the information I needed.

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.

Yes – in fact the information about assessment conventions seemed to be much more comprehensive and systematically presented than previously, which was very helpful.

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, I looked at draft exam papers for all modules coming under my remit; as far as I could tell, all my comments were appropriately acted upon.

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?

I had access to all the scripts for all the modules I was responsible for, and was able to verify that appropriate procedures were being followed and the assessments were fair. One or two markers are still not following best practice in regard to annotation of scripts, however: I would reiterate my previous recommendation that subtotals for parts of questions should be clearly shown, in fractional form (e.g. 3/5). I would also prefer to see it noted on each script that the arithmetic had been checked by a second party.

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

I examined a number of dissertations and was impressed by the range of topics covered. As I remarked at the exam board, because students are allowed to do different styles of project (e.g., theoretical, experimental, or software development projects) it is important to ensure that there is sufficient clarity on how the marking criteria apply to these different styles so that they can be fairly compared.

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?

Yes, everything went very smoothly, with dedicated staff ensuring that all the necessary information was available to ensure that the outcomes were fair. There was some discussion concerning how students whose marks place them in one of the discretionary bands should be handled, and in a couple of cases the decision was determined by majority vote. There is something to be said for making the procedures as algorithmic as possible in order to avoid the necessity for this, though again that is also an area where there is room for discussion.

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

I feel I have to question the rationale for the bizarre system the University uses for defining mark thresholds and discretionary bands for the different degree classes. Why are they different in every case? It is very confusing that the discretionary bands are 68.0-68.5 for first, 58.5-59.0 for 2.1, 49.0-49.5 for 2.2 and 39.5-40 for third. I also find the method of calculating marks confusing, i.e., the processes of getting from the marks on the scripts to the marks on the marksheets. It does not help that different components of an assessment can have both different ranges and different weights – it would make more sense to insist that all individual assessments are marked out of 100, and then scale according to the weight.

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Dear <>,

Thank you for completing the external examiner's reports for last session and the supportive comments you have made on our programmes and procedures. You raised a few points in your reports that I would like to take the opportunity to respond to.

In response to your comment on best practice of annotation of scripts and checking of arithmetic, we have now reminded all staff about the use of subtotals in marking scripts. The arithmetic of every script is now checked by a third party in addition to the module leader and assessor. We have also introduced the practice of the assessor checking the marks entered into the examination system.

You raised a point on the need for us to ensure there is sufficient clarity on how to apply our marking criteria for different types of projects. This concern was shared by a number of staff and students and as a result we have introduced a number of different types of project in the current session, (Theoretical Study, Exploratory Software, Software Product and Empirical Study) to ensure the marking criteria better reflect the type of project.

With respect to the use of discretionary bands we have now revised the text in our code of practice on assessment to ensure it is clear the rules are algorithmic.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for your input to our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes over your period as external examiner to the school. We are very grateful for your support and hope you feel we have acted to address all the points you have raised.

Yours sincerely

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Director of Student Education