

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:	Physics and Astronomy
Subject(s):	<i>Physics</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Physics, Physics with Astrophysics, Physics with Nanotechnology, Theoretical Physics. Medical Physics
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BSc, MPhys

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?

Yes.

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

N/A

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 various degree schemes cover a broad range of undergraduate physics. The Aims and ILOs are appropriate and commensurate with the awarded BSc and MPhys degrees.

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 Aims and ILOs are comparable with those at <> where I have been teaching for 25 years. The difficulty of examination papers and student performance are broadly similar to those at <>. The courses are accredited by the Institute of Physics.

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 are appropriate in terms of balance between course work and examination and in terms of examination paper structure with sections A and B to probe breadth and depth. Marking procedures were appropriate and the classification of awards was fine. Student performance was in line with my expectations based on experience at my home university.

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 examination papers were appropriate and fairly effective at probing the students' understanding and ILOs. The section A and B structure is a helpful one in this regard. Final year projects in both BSc and MPhys covered a wide range of topics: some of the reports were of an extremely high standard.

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.

I am not aware of the exact changes made – unable to comment in an informed manner during my first year as external examiner.

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.

I observe connections between research strengths and some of the taught modules. In my area of expertise relating to nanotechnology and biophysics, there is a strong synergy between teaching and research, which is to be applauded.

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

<> has been helpful in making <> available for consultation throughout the year. Due to practical constraints, we were both at Leeds at different times which was unfortunate, but unavoidable, in us not meeting.

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, the guidance was fine.

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. <> and colleagues were very helpful in providing information efficiently on request. Graphical representation of the distribution of marks for each module would be 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 was provided with draft examination papers. The level of questions was appropriate in nearly all papers, very few requiring any adjustment.

A small minority of papers displayed a slightly higher level of typographical errors and minor issues of formatting than I am familiar with at <>.

It would be helpful to be able to see clearly during visits whether suggested changes had been implemented. There is no need for these to be supplied during term-time as exam are being prepared. However, these comments and responses should be available for each module with the papers and student scripts during visits related to exam boards in June.

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?

Yes, all papers were made available. I had the time to check a fair number of papers during my visit. Everything seemed to be done well and in an orderly manner.

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

There was an impressively wide range of final year projects/dissertations. Assessment was generally appropriate.

One question I have raised with the School is the supervisor's contribution to the final project mark for years 3 and 4: a relative weighting of 45%, for a module that contributes a large proportion of a student's mark for the year, seems to me to be rather high. The school might consider allocating 20% of the project mark for the viva and 20-25% for the supervisor's assessment rather than the current 10%-45% split.

[I noted three examples for year 4 projects where the assessor's mark for the report varied from that of the supervisor by 10% or more – in each case, the supervisor's mark was the higher. In such cases, might it be appropriate to ask a third person's view and take an average of the three marks?]

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?

Overall administrative arrangements were very good, overseen by well-motivated and dedicated staff. I was not able to attend the exam board due to my own time constraints.

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

None.

27 October 2014

Dear

Thank you very much for your examiner's report, which was discussed at the School's Taught Student Education Committee meeting on October 15. We are very pleased that you consider that our assessment methods and standards are appropriate.

Regarding your specific comments, the question of the relative weighting of the supervisor's and assessor's contributions to the project mark (point 14) was raised at the above meeting, and we will discuss the possibility of shifting the balance towards the assessor in the next few meetings.

We also acknowledge that there were a regrettably many typographical errors in some of the exam papers this year. We are taking steps to rectify this by a more rigorous checking procedure.

We would like to thank you for your efforts to maintain and improve the standards of our assessment process, and look forward to working with you to this end over the next few years.

Best wishes,

Head of School