

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:

School of Earth and Environment

Subject(s):

Sustainability

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MSc Sustainability (Business and Corporate Responsibility)

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

MSc

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

No. The programme is designed well, marking was thorough and the whole process handled well

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?

No. In the light of my positive experience, I see no need for this.

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

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.

Aims and ILOs were appropriate for the MSc and comparable to other UK institutions I'm familiar with.

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.

Aims and ILO are comparable with other UK programmes I'm familiar with.

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.

Assessment was well designed and thoroughly executed. Perhaps a slight over-assessment. I'll keep an eye on this for future years.

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, in my view students were given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of aims and ILOs

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.

N/A

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.

There is good evidence of personal research by the teaching team informing the design of the programme.

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

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

adequate

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, was sufficient

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

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. Level of questions was appropriate

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

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

Yes

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?

Admin arrangements were good - many thanks! Unfortunately I had my own Exam Board at the same time, but this year only

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

School of Earth and Environment

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

20 January 2015

Dear

Re: Response to External Examiner's Report - MSc Sustainability (Ecological Economics); MSc Sustainability (Environmental Consultancy & Project Management); MSc Sustainability (Business, Environment & Corporate Responsibility); 2013-14

Sincere thanks for examining our MSc programmes for the last academic session. Your views are an essential part of our quality assurance mechanism and we very much welcome your input into our teaching processes.

We are very pleased to hear that you are satisfied with the overall quality of the Masters programmes and that you consider our programmes to be well designed, appropriate and generally well received by students.

With regard to assessment – we recognise the risk of over assessment that you have highlighted. We are currently mapping assessment types (and deadlines) across all programme variants with a view making slight changes which will ensure effective assessment in future years.

We are also considering the following to enhance the information available to you, as external examiner:

1. A proposal to hold future meetings with students earlier in the year, possibly by Skype, to ensure that more students are able to attend;
2. Proposing to make more coursework, especially dissertations, available for scrutiny in advance of visits;
3. Have changed the way that we seek feedback on student satisfaction with modules, resulting in a significant improvement in response rates this year.

We will be writing to all external examiners to consult about the proposals for points (1) and (2) above.

Overall, it is encouraging that you felt that all the modules you scrutinised were of a good quality and that no urgent modifications are necessary. We have identified some issues at module level which it might be helpful to bring to your attention so that you have full background when you review the programmes again for 2014-15:

SOEE5281 Introduction to Sustainability – The first essay had a low average mark and a high number of fails because it is often the first social science essay written by many students. We recruit a high number of overseas students and students from engineering or science backgrounds, who have never written an academic essay like this before. We do take great care to explain our expectations to students, and to provide them with support. The module leader gives a one hour lecture on how to do well in the assignment, a number of drop in sessions are arranged with a graduate teaching assistant, and students are made aware of central support available, such as through the library. This will continue in future. It is worth noting that no student failed this module solely because they failed this first assignment, but rather because they also failed other assignments in the module. As of this year (2014-15), this essay is formative rather than contributing to the module mark, in response to student feedback. In order to enhance student learning from the assignment, anonymous peer marking has also been introduced alongside the module leader's marking. So far this academic year, the front-loaded delivery of this module has been well received by staff and students as it allows accelerated learning of fundamental concepts. This should also assist students in their learning.

SOEE5051 Business, Environment & Sustainability – A revised (and hopefully clearer) marking sheet has now been included in the module handbook for VLE postings. In addition, the module leader provides in-class comments right after each of the five individual VLE assignments are submitted, highlighting best practice and how the marking criteria apply to these individual assignments. Students should therefore have a very clear idea about what is expected from them and how their assignments will be marked.

We apologise that due to building work going on in the School at the time of your visit there was some limitation with regards to work space. We will do our best to provide a larger working area for your next visit and note that a more central hotel location, providing easy access to Leeds train station is preferable.

We trust this response clarifies our direction forwards and provides useful information as background to your future scrutiny of our programmes. We are very grateful for your encouragement. We believe your input will make a positive difference to our programmes over the next few years.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School
School of Earth and Environment
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