

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:

Institute of Psychological Sciences

Subject(s):

Psychology

Programme(s) / Module(s):

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

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

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

The Institute has been doing a good job throughout my time as external examiner and generally there were very few issues that I felt needed attention. In my first year there was a very high number of first class degrees awarded which was identified as a problem and over the intervening years the proportion of firsts has returned to normal historical levels. I think this is entirely appropriate. The staff have responded constructively to the issues I have raised such as, for e.g. leaving brief comments on exam scripts so that I could see where students had gone right or wrong. All in all I come away feeling that this is a good department doing a good job with good students.

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.*

All the modules I saw had ILOs in line with what I would expect at similar institutions. The course design and content were as I would expect for a BPS accredited psychology degree.

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, they tie in with the BPS requirements as expected.

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.*

There is a good range of assessment types being used and they tie in with the ILOs in a sensible way.

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 cohort does not have any general strengths or weaknesses – they are a cohort that contains some variability in ability as you would expect. The good students really are very good indeed but there are also some less good ones and they receive lower marks as would be expected.

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.

More of the staff now write brief comments on exam scripts which is useful both for external examiners and internal moderators. These allow those who may not know the relevant field that well to work out why the marks were given. They also serve a secondary purpose in allowing students to see where they went wrong if/when they ask to see their scripts.

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.

As noted in previous years there are a number of really rather interesting final year modules that clearly reflect staff research interests. This makes reading the students' work more enjoyable for me as an external examiner since I feel that I am also learning something! As always, the dissertations reflect the Institute's particular research strengths which means that the quality of the reports is quite high.

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

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, all information needed was at hand though there is rather a lot of it which does not encourage the reading of it....

- 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, <> has been excellent throughout the 4 years.

- 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

- 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 to both.

- 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?**

I reiterate my answer to 11 above and confirm that the board was managed in an entirely professional and appropriate way.

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

As the team use a special committee for this and, entirely appropriately, external examiners are not exposed to confidential student information I can only comment that the procedure seemed well thought out and appropriate.

Other comments

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

Last year I said "A minor point but it does remain an oddity that the degree class borderlines are effectively 48.5/58.5/68.5% which means that student transcripts could show a 'first class' student with an average mark of only 68.51% and I would have thought it more conventional to shift this (and marking criteria if necessary) to 69.5% which seems to be the normative practice."

This year the boundaries are even more arbitrary looking at 6.85/5.90/4.95 and 4.00 which I assume means 68.5%, 59.0%, 49.5% and 40.0%. There seems to be no logic to this at all and it looks like a backward step. In my experience most of the rest of the sector use 69.5/59.5/49.5 and 39.5% it might be worth revisiting these boundaries and coming in to line with your peer institutions.



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

<>

Head (Chair) of School
School of Psychology
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT

<>

31 July 2014

<>

Dear <>

External Examining Report 2013/14

I wanted to thank you (again!) for all of your great help over the past four years as an external examiner – and all of the outstanding work you have done over the time I have been head. I was really grateful for your positive and thorough report and I greatly appreciate the ongoing feedback you provided with regard to our assessments and marking standards.

As always, we have found your comments extremely helpful and reassuring. We have discussed the points raised by yourself and <> in your formal reports together with some of the issues we talked about during your recent visit. I have outlined below our thoughts:

Degree class thresholds

Thank you for again highlighting your views on the idiosyncratic classification thresholds at Leeds. Most staff concur with your view that it is worth revisiting these boundaries and coming in to line with our peer institutions where 69.5/59.5/49.5 and 39.5% are generally used. I am sorry that the Academic Quality and Standards Office did not come back to you on this issue last year. They have again received your report so we might hear further on this in the future.

Once again, I have really enjoyed your presence in Leeds and I am extremely grateful for all of your help. The team who have worked with you over the past four years have commented on what a constructive and pleasurable experience it has been.

On a personal level, I have always enjoyed working with you and found your input to be most useful as a lever to change. I look forward to interacting with you as a foot soldier as I return to the day job!

Yours sincerely,

<>

Head of Institute

cc: Academic Quality and Standards Team

cc: <>, incoming Head of School

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:	Psychology, Faculty of Medicine and Health
Subject(s):	<i>Psychology</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	All ug programmes and Modules in Psychology
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	All ug Psychology awards (BSc)

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**Completed report**

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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

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 degrees offered by the Institute embody all the ILOs one would expect of a high quality honours programme, relating both to core and specialist knowledge as well as relevant skills, both discipline-related and generic. The courses and assessments are pitched at an appropriately discriminating level for the award of BSc.

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.*

All the core curricular areas – as stipulated by the British Psychological Society, and as one would expect to find in comparable institutions - are covered in the programme. At honours level there are also a broad range of specialist modules informed by contemporary research, including that being conducted by the members of staff delivering the modules. This is precisely what one would expect from a research active Institute.

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.*

As I noted in previous years' reports, I think a major strength of the programme is in the broad range of assessment processes by which students get to demonstrate their accomplishments. These include examinations involving seen and unseen essay questions as well as multiple choice question formats. Coursework assignments also entail a range of types including presentations, essays, research protocols, literature critiques, etc. At the same time as this represents a strength of the programme, I think it also represents a challenge to ensure that a level of equivalence is maintained across modules and the assessment components that contribute to them. While I don't think this means homogenising formats across modules, it does require some careful Institute-level consideration of the student workload within each module and each component within it, so that marks are awarded in an equitable way. This would probably involve, inter alia, comparable weighting of equivalent components (e.g., an essay of a given length forming the same percentage of assessment across modules) as well as comparable marking criteria across modules for all components of a given type (e.g., the same marking criteria should be applied to oral presentations in similar modules at the same level). The Institute is to be commended for already establishing a working group to look into this aspect of the programme

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 cohort is as one would expect given the nature of the intake and in comparison to comparable institutions. The marking criteria and marking process provide ample opportunity for discrimination of students, with some outstanding pieces of work at the top of the scale being appropriately rewarded, along with discrimination across the range as one would expect. I believe the marking scale is set by the University, rather than the School, and while it does, in my view allow for appropriate discrimination across most of the range, I do think that a more graded scale might be appropriate to capture the range of performance at the bottom, below 40% (given that such instances are admittedly relatively rare)

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 had recommended that the Institute give some consideration to implementing an Institute-level overview of the appropriateness and accuracy of assessments across modules. I think this moderation of examination papers has led to real improvements in the draft versions of assessments that I've seen, and I hope this aspect of the Institutes processes will be maintained and consolidated, probably as part of the remit of the assessment strategy working group mentioned above.

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 research undertaken by members of the Institute plays a significant role, both in the content of the modules being taught (especially in the final year) as well as in the practical opportunities available to students, especially in their final year research projects, but also in other aspects of assessments, such as the research protocol on one of the modules and broader research-related skills (e.g., dissemination via oral presentations) in several of the modules.

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

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.

Provision of information was efficient and comprehensive. All the necessary materials were made available in electronic or hard copy as appropriate, and all in a timely fashion. I was able to liaise readily with the School Manager () and all my queries and comments were dealt with promptly and appropriately.

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.

I had access to all the necessary documentation, including access to all the relevant information on the Institute's web pages.

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?

All coursework and examination questions were provided to me, and while I had several comments and queries, they were all responded to promptly and appropriately.

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 was provided throughout the year and on my visit to the Institute with an appropriate selection of modules, assessment formats and mark range in order to confirm the appropriateness of the evaluation. All the assignments were appropriately documented, including when relevant, feedback forms, comments, etc.

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

Project topics covered the range of areas of research activity and expertise within the Institute, providing students with the opportunity to receive expert supervision. All the processes for assessment are appropriate and fully documented.

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 arrangements were excellent; clearly a great deal of preparatory work had been done by relevant members of academic and support staff. I had plenty of opportunity to discuss matters with all relevant parties and was able to attend and speak to the Board of Examiners. It's clear that careful and thorough processes are in place for marking and moderation of assessed work. The Board of Examiners meeting itself was clearly accorded all the significance it warrants and staff in the Institute all took a serious and considered approach to the business.

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

The Institute has a bespoke subcommittee of the BoE to consider mitigating circumstances and it's clear that careful consideration is given to all available evidence before award recommendations are made.

Other comments

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



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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Head (Chair) of School
School of Psychology
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31 July 2014

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Dear <>

External Examining Report 2013/14

I want to thank you (again!) for all of your great help this past year as an external examiner – and all of the outstanding work you have done over the time I have been head. I was really grateful for your positive and thorough report and I greatly appreciate the ongoing feedback you provided with regard to our assessments and marking standards.

As always, we have found your comments extremely helpful. We have discussed the points raised by yourself and <> in your formal reports together with some of the issues we talked about during your recent visit. I have outlined below our thoughts:

1) Assessment strategy and equivalence across modules

You welcomed the broad range of assessment within the programme but also identified that this represents a challenge in ensuring that a level of equivalence is maintained across modules and the assessment components that contribute to them.

Your input to this throughout the year has been instructive and led us to instigate the process whereby a group is in the process of formulating an assessment strategy with increased focus on the equity of weightings, equivalence of marking criteria etc.

2) Appropriateness and accuracy of assessments

Following your comments from semester 1, we are calling for exam papers and assessment titles earlier in the year to allow further time for scrutiny. In addition to our exam committee overview, second markers currently check the accuracy of papers but we are also now requiring them to sign to confirm they have done this. We have also instigated a panel comprising PhD students who we will be paid to road test any new MCQ exams.

3) Marking scale

Our Taught Student Education Committee is revising the marking scale and creating additional grade descriptors to more appropriately reflect the needs of different forms of assessment. This review was initiated following comments from some staff that the jump from the top mark in the 2:1 category to the lowest mark in the first class category feels too large, ie. 68 to 74. This exercise will also consider your comment about the grades below 40.

From next year, <> takes over from me as Head of School. <> four year external examining term also expires and you will be working alongside our new external examiner, <> from the University of <>.

We look forward to interacting with you via Skype at our 4 September Exam Board.

On a personal level, I have always enjoyed working with you and found your input to be most useful as a lever to change. I look forward to interacting with you as a foot soldier as I return to the day job!

Have a great summer

Yours sincerely

<>

<>

Head of School

cc: Academic Quality and Standards Team

cc: <>, incoming Head of School