

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012– 2013

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

Faculty / School of:	Mathematics
Subject(s):	<i>Statistics</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc Statistics MSc Statistics with Applications to Finance
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 Academic Quality and Standards**
Academic Quality and Standards Team
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

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.*

Structure, content and learning outcomes are all appropriate.
Standards are broadly in keeping with those of peer institutions.

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.

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 and marking were good.

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.*

Students had ample opportunity to demonstrate their achievements.
Overall, students were quite strong.

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 a substantial gap between the level of MSc course material and current research, so I would not expect to see research having a major influence on the MSc curriculum. The key point for me is that the course material should be up to date and address important application areas --- and this is the case.

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

8. 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

9. 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.*

This was fine.

10. 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.*

Documentation was more than adequate.

11. 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?

I was provided with draft examination papers and solutions. The nature and level of the questions was fine in most cases. When I made comments, these were considered and acted upon.

12. 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.

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

The dissertation topics were good and a good standard was achieved. Projects are assessed without a pre-specified marking scheme to lay out the goals of the project. I believe the provision of such a marking scheme would help assess the students' achievements better, and also achieve greater consistency in marking. (Moreover, it is good discipline to work towards a specified objective.)

14. 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 reports I received showed that the assessment process was conducted satisfactorily and I was satisfied with the recommendations made.
I did not attend the meeting.

15. 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 approach taken to supervising dissertations appears to be to encourage students to work as independently as possible. In some cases, it was reported that the supervisor met the student only once or twice during the dissertation period. The mark given for "independence" promotes such behaviour.

I do not believe it is reasonable to expect students at this level to work with so little supervision. A challenging project is bound to raise questions that a student can usefully discuss with their supervisor. I would encourage students to meet their supervisors on a weekly basis, at least in the first part of the project (a PhD student would expect as much supervision and at this earlier stage, there is a greater need for advice and guidance). I do not mean to imply that students should be spoon fed. It is quite possible to use supervision meetings to lead a student towards more challenging topics, and follow up ideas which they would not have had the confidence to pursue if working completely on their own.

I would urge the Department to review its policy here, to meet the best interests of the students and make the most of the opportunities that a dissertation project presents.

**University of Leeds
School of Mathematics**

**Response to the External Examiner's Report on the MSc Statistics and MSc Statistics with
Application to Finance programmes 2012/13**

We would like to thank _____ for _____ thorough work in examining our programmes. We are pleased by _____ positive comments on the overall quality of the programmes, teaching and assessment.

While commenting positively on the range of topics for dissertations and the level of student achievement, _____ suggested that consistency in marking could be improved by using a pre-specified marking scheme that lays out the goals of the project. It was noted by the School Taught Student Education Committee that the module handbook for Dissertations in Mathematics currently provides detailed criteria for various mark ranges, thus enabling uniformity of the approach to marking. The Committee felt that having project-specific marking criteria may, in contrast, lead to a less uniform process. In addition to that, we believe that it is beneficial to allow students to choose which parts of the project to study in greater depth, depending on their interest, so a pre-determined marking scheme would not be suitable.

_____ raised some concern about supervision process for dissertations, pointing out that in some cases students were allowed to work with very few supervision meetings. The School Taught Student Education Committee agrees that such practice should not be encouraged. Therefore, not seeking supervisor's advice and not attending supervision meetings should not be used as a sole criterion for independence. The Programme Coordinators will be asked for this approach to be reflected in the module handbook and other guidance given to students and supervisors.

Yours sincerely,

Head of the School of Mathematics
December 2014