

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014– 2015

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

Faculty / School of:	School of Dentistry
Subject(s):	Restorative Dentistry and Implantology
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Masters in Clinical Dentistry
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

Some of the students undertook an original research project and were required to secure ethical approval before they could proceed. This puts those students at a disadvantage relative to those asked to undertake a structured literature review (for which ethical approval is not required). Firstly, I think it is important to decide if students should be required or expected to complete an original research project. If so, then that should be required of all students in the programme. Secondly, if it is decided that students are required to complete an original research project, then the timeframe for completion of the degree needs to be revisited. Given the length of time, and many challenges, in securing ethical approval for clinical studies, then a two year timeframe for the degree may be more realistic. This is based on the reported experience of this year's cohort where some of the students took two years to complete their programme.

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?

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

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.*

I am not entirely sure if students are developing the skills to undertake research in a primary care setting. Students who do not undertake an original research project will not develop these skills, and some students are not doing this. There probably needs to be a reassessment of the programme learning outcomes, particularly to revisit if an original research project is required. If not, programme learning outcomes should be changed accordingly.

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.*

I think the concept of a distance learning programme is modern and in keeping with current trends in higher education. It is difficult to achieve this in clinical subject such as Dentistry. Unlike this programme which is theoretical in nature, some institutions offer a taught component.

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.*

I think this has improved substantially since last year. The main improvements are: 1) the introduction of a criterion referenced marking scheme – this has improved inter-examiner marking consistency; 2) a topic guide for the oral examination, which is also known to the students and therefore transparent; 3) a requirement for the student to make an oral presentation of their research project to the examiners.

My only concern relates to the small percentage of marks (5%) available for the defence of the dissertation. For me, this is far too low and does not appropriately reflect the importance of this part of the examination. During this 45 minute presentation in this section of the assessment, the examiners are able to assess the students ability to understand the process of conducting a research project, whether they have learned anything from the process, and their ability to process and present information in a coherent manner. I think this really separates the very good from the average student, but that is not possible with such a low percentage available for this part of the examination. I think this should be increased to at least 20%.

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.*

Some of the students were very good, and had clearly learned a lot from the process. This is not the case for all of the students, and there were two weak students in the cohort that I observed. With such a programme, there is a real risk that student will not fully engage with the research process. One of the students concerned commented how difficult it was to balance all of the competing calls on his time, but this is of course a challenge that must be faced. I think there should be a system of timelines implemented to see if students are meeting expected milestones of achievement during the course, and remedial actions agreed if they are not. It should not be acceptable for a student to submit a dissertation very late in the cycle with minimal input from the assigned supervisor.

This is not a problem for the stronger students, and those who performed well clearly rose to the challenge and had a good relationship with their assigned staff supervisors.

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.

As detailed in section 3. I think the requirement for the oral presentation of the research findings is particularly good and commend it.

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.

N/A

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, the guides are clear on my responsibilities

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, this was all fine.

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?

N/A, but I was sent copies in advance of the dissertations of candidates whose oral examinations I observed

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?

I think there is an issue in relation to the question of "original research" or "structured literature review" as I've alluded to earlier. In line with the programme objectives, I think an original research project is more appropriate. However, there are significant logistical challenges to this: length of time to get ethical approval; what to do if ethical approval is not granted; the level of support required for a complete novice in research, and, whether this is realistic in a distance learning programme; level of staff support available within the School. I think these are questions which need to be considered by the programme board.

The standard of assessment is fine, but I would like to see greater importance given to the defence of the dissertation in the oral examination.

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, I attended the examiners meetings and final Board where marks were ratified. This was all satisfactory.

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

There were no issues arising.

Other comments

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

I would like to thank the internal examiners and programme management team for their responses to my recommendations from last year. The assessment process is now more robust than last year.

School of Dentistry

University of Leeds
Clarendon Way
Leeds LS2 9LU



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

23 October 2015

Dear

Re: MSc in Clinical Dentistry (Implant Dentistry) Top-up programme (November 2014)

Thank you once more for being our External Examiner for the MSc in Clinical Dentistry (Implant Dentistry) Top-up programme. Your very detailed report is most welcome.

The original concept of the Top-up programme was that students would carry out a 'simple' research project in their clinical practice environment over 12 months. Changes to the ethical review process both by the University and NHS make clinical projects almost untenable. Equally, however, audit-style investigations are ineligible, as all work should have potential for publication.

Many students are now going beyond the 12-month timeframe, and still failing to bring a practice-based project to fruition. You have recognised the difficulties faced in running a distance-learning programme for busy general dental practitioners, who are not physically present.

We are taking a more pragmatic approach: students are being tasked with producing a time-limited (12 months only) Literature Review. (former External Examiner for the Restorative Dentistry Top-up programme) did indicate that perhaps this was the future development of the programme, i.e. for a 12-month period of study, in line with other Institutions with a distance-learning MSc degree.

We are looking at options for both MSc Top-up Programmes, in concert with the Senior Management Team and FGDP (UK).

Thank you for your supportive comments on the new assessment processes. We have worked hard to develop them, so that they are more transparent for both staff and students. We are looking at potentially rebalancing the mark allocation, although we will need to be careful that a very good oral presentation combined with a poor dissertation does not over-compensate.

We have taken your comments on board, and are incorporating them into our continued process of programme improvement. Thank you again for your valued input.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude and grateful thanks for your active involvement in our MSc programme, as you now leave the role of External Examiner, and we have enjoyed your engagement and all of the constructive feedback that you have given us over the past four years.

Yours sincerely,