

# 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:	Medicine
Subject(s):	<i>Clinical Embryology</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Module 1: Fundamentals of Clinical Embryology Module 2: IVF and Embryo Culture Module 3: Micromanipulation Module 4: Cryobiology and Cryopreservation Module 5: Ethics and Law for Embryologists Module 6: Research Proposal
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](mailto: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?*

-

#### **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*

My experience of being external examiner for the Clinical Embryology course at the University of Leeds has been entirely positive. The staff could not have been more helpful or supportive in providing everything I needed when I needed it and all business was conducted extremely professionally but in good humour and with a positive attitude, which reflected the cheerful enthusiasm I saw when I was given the opportunity to observe interactions between staff and students. Coupled with outstanding teaching standards, this clearly benefits the students as demonstrated by the continued healthy demand for places on the course.

Over the 4 years I have been involved with the programme, standards of attainment seem to have improved gradually but over a relatively short time and with a high starting point, trends are inevitably difficult to distinguish from natural variation in the capabilities of different cohorts. Certainly the teaching team has maintained a programme of steady enhancement of teaching quality in a number of ways: being responsive to feedback from students and from myself; the introduction of different

specialisms through the recruitment of staff; and the development of some imaginative new approaches to the delivery and assessment of material that comes with experience of running the course. In addition, more mundane improvements such as an expansion of 2<sup>nd</sup> marking have helped both the quality and consistency of assessment but also that of feedback to the students.

**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 programme Aims are to enhance knowledge in the subject of embryology and the establishment of good practice in the field of Assisted Reproductive Technology, as well as the professional and academic development of clinical embryologists. A clear focus on these aims is evident throughout the course and gives the students the confidence and transferable skills they need for enhanced performance in employment. It is therefore entirely commensurate with the award of MSc.

The Intended Learning Outcomes are to enhance the students' depth of knowledge and understanding of topics and issues within and related to clinical embryology, and of ethical dilemmas posed by assisted reproductive technologies and rapid recent advances in those technologies. These are addressed directly in a series of modules in which learning is always related to the knowledge and understanding required by practising clinical embryologists, which is completely appropriate for a Master's degree.

It is a prerequisite that students have a clinical or clinical embryological background so the course is able to focus in depth and with abundant practical and applied emphasis on the constituent topics. My oversight of the programme confirms for me that in addition to that of the material provided, the standards of teaching are also appropriate for an MSc in Clinical Embryology.

**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.*

There is no national subject benchmark for clinical embryology and it is not covered by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. There are now a few Clinical Embryology MSc programmes in the UK but a new development is the launch of the NHS Scientist Training Programme, which offers a specialism of Reproductive Sciences. This will lead to a Masters level qualification through the University of Nottingham. This is not a competitor programme as recruitment to the Leeds course is almost exclusively from abroad. It is important however that the two courses, and hence the STP also, are aligned. Staff at Leeds take care to ensure this is the case and indeed some minor components are co-taught. By continuous monitoring of developments in the STP, I have every confidence that the Leeds course will compare very favourably to it and to those at <> and elsewhere in the country.

**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 diversity of assessment methods employed continues to be a major strength of the course. The imaginative approaches used in assessments and in learning support engage the students as was evident in numerous examples of enthusiastically completed work that I saw. The blend of MCQs, essays, short answer questions, group work, presentations, and in particular the laboratory design project, test a range of skills and is highly appropriate for a cohort of professionals studying part-time. I can therefore confirm that the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards that follow from this range of assessment tools are appropriate to the ILOs.

Given the high standards of the course discussed in the sections above, the relatively high proportion of Distinctions and Merits obtained by the students is clear evidence that the teaching, learning and assessment methods are also of high quality. The students are people who finished their previous education a variable number of years earlier and have a wide range of backgrounds, as is to be expected of a cohort drawn from around the world. Although the performance overall was very good this year, I do not think it is unexpected given previous performances so to maintain a high level of success from such a diverse group, year on year, is certainly testament to the quality of teaching and assessment.

**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.*

As discussed above, the Aims and ILOs of the programme are appropriate for the needs of the cohorts recruited and the assessment tools are appropriate for the material and students being assessed. Therefore, the students have ample opportunity to demonstrate that they have achieved the Aims and ILOs of the course.

The academic standards demonstrated this year are very good and there is every prospect this will be maintained in the future. I have no experience of students on comparable courses but can confirm that the standards are certainly comparable to Master's students on other courses in other universities with which I do have experience.

In general, the students perform rather better on coursework assessments than in examinations though that can depend in a minority of cases on how much time the students have available alongside commitments in their private and professional lives. The slightly weaker performance in examinations is likely to be an inevitable consequence of the time elapsed since some of the cohort were last undertaking exams, unfamiliarity with British examination styles (especially essay writing) and pressure on revision time. However, this not a major issue in most cases.

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.*

The enhancements to online learning resources mentioned last year have been continued this year and the students have access to an admirable range of resources and documentation. Undoubtedly for this type of course and student body, this constitutes a major underpinning of their learning and indeed their student experience. It is certainly a strength that could be rolled out as good practice to other programmes as appropriate.

Staff have also continued to respond positively to suggestions made regarding exam questions. I note that in several cases, stylistic proposals made previously have been adopted in the formulation of new questions.

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 course is delivered by active researchers, which naturally means that the material taught is relevant, up-to-date and leading-edge. Many of the students may have only limited opportunities for conducting their own research subsequent to taking this course but the benefits of absorbing the principles of good research are not limited to its practice. It is clear from the confident style of many of the research proposals and laboratory design reports that the students are comfortable with reading and understanding primary literature and in the main, of applying appropriate critical analysis. This will stand them in good stead for maintaining their level of knowledge throughout their careers.

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

I have not but as I am reaching the end of my appointment period, I am very willing to provide any advice or support that would be helpful to my successor.

#### 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 is admirably comprehensive and although lengthy, is more time-efficient than requiring external examiners to attend training sessions in person.

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, the Department has, as ever, been extremely helpful in providing all the hard- and electronic-copies I need of both assessments and student work. I particularly appreciate the way staff sought my views on how I felt I could most effectively appraise the work and developed a system to suit my preferences.

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?

I was indeed provided with everything I required and can confirm that the nature and 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. I was provided samples of the work electronically in advance of the meeting and all hard copies were available in the Department ahead of the meeting. I think this is the ideal blend and system as it allows me to assess the work adequately on the basis of 3 (each) high, medium, and low examples but also to get a feel for how the cohort as a whole has performed and see for myself the actual submissions and the accompanying annotation.

Annotation of the marking is another area that continues to improve – I think it has always been good but it has not always been easy to find comments from both markers. That has been rectified and the marking and double-marking is of an exemplary standard.

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

Yes, this is something that has not really changed from previous years as it has always been good. Students do two pieces of extended writing: a laboratory design exercise done partly in groups; and a project proposal. These are imaginative exercises that are directly related to the type of work they might encounter in their careers working in clinical embryology. The students are well prepared for the work and it is of a uniformly impressive standard with the best being very good indeed.

**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 to all questions. Once again, the support from staff in the department, especially from the administrator and the course leader, has been everything one could wish for. I was able to add some comments to the discussions at the Board meeting but felt that everything that was being said by the Board was in line with my views.

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

Yes. I have always been struck by the sympathy and pragmatism shown by the Board in reaching decisions about students with problems. Discussions about the correct course of action were dispassionate and thorough and one always has confidence that the staff have a strong sense of fairness in their dealings with such matters.

**Other comments**

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

I would just like to thank the University and staff in the Department for the opportunity to be External Examiner for this course. It was an honour to be invited and has been a thoroughly rewarding experience.

**Leeds Institute of Medical Education  
School of Medicine  
Faculty of Medicine and Health**

University of Leeds  
Worsley Building  
Clarendon Way



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

19 October 2015

Dear

**External Examiner's report for Clinical Embryology 2013-4**

As the School of Medicine's Director of Postgraduate Studies, I receive all the External Examiners' reports for the eighteen programmes offered in 2013-14. First, let me thank you for assembling the 2013-14 report for the distance learning programmes in Clinical Embryology. This is your final report.

**Good practice**

I note that your report states that there are no matters requiring urgent attention. You state "My experience of being external examiner for the Clinical Embryology course at the University of Leeds has been entirely positive. The staff could not have been more helpful or supportive in providing everything I needed when I needed it and all business was conducted extremely professionally but in good humour and with a positive attitude, which reflected the cheerful enthusiasm I saw when I was given the opportunity to observe interactions between staff and students. Coupled with outstanding teaching standards, this clearly benefits the students as demonstrated by the continued healthy demand for places on the course."

**Improvement**

I enclose a response assembled by the Programme Leader, \_\_\_\_\_ who notes your comments on the improvement in annotation made on assignments. This was a point you made in an earlier report and I am pleased that the team have standardised this.

*continues .*

Director of Postgraduate Studies



**Research input**

You note that the members of the teaching staff are all research active and that the programme has a strong research-base.

Your contributions to the Clinical Embryology programme are much valued. Thank you for such a positive report.

Yours sincerely

Enc:

15 September 2015

Division of Reproduction and Early Development  
Clarendon Way  
University of Leeds  
Leeds, LS2 9JT



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

15<sup>th</sup> September, 2015

**Re: Postgraduate Programmes in Clinical Embryology. Programme Leader's Response to External Examiner's Report 2013– 2014.**

Dear

Please find below our responses to our latest external examiner's report.

**Overview**

The Programme Leader (PL) is very pleased to receive and read the report from

We would like to thank for the positive and helpful comments on the Programmes and furthermore, for the time that has taken to assess the programme and attend the committee of examiners meetings. We are especially grateful that has been able to provide input based on significant experience of teaching and we feel that these suggestions have helped to improve the Programmes.

**Response to specific comments in the report.**

**Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards, For Examiners completing their term of appointment**

In this section, summarises observations over the term of the appointment. These comments are extremely encouraging in that they indicate a steady improvement in teaching standards and service given to students. We think that our response to student feedback has improved by virtue of a feedback session at the end of each workshop in Leeds, responding to comments received via the student representative in the preceding days of the workshop. That allows us to address issues and concerns as they arise. Secondly, the use of online surveys for Module feedback, Workshop feedback and Programme feedback has improved our understanding of the feedback data better and has prompted us to take action on the most important points through the Programme Review Quality Assurance (QA) process.

**Head of Division**



## **Part B**

### **Standards: 2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?**

With regards to comments on the NHS Scientist Training Programme (STP) we concur with [redacted] in that alignment to STP would be beneficial. On this subject, members of the Programme Management Team have been in discussion with the STP Committee of the Association of Clinical Embryologists (ACE), who have approached Leeds in 2015 with regards to delivering an accredited Reproductive Science Level 3 Programme (Accredited Additional Scientific Practice in Reproductive Science). Whilst many details remain to be worked out, it is hoped that this new development will also lead eventually to alignment of both our postgraduate programmes to the ACE STP requirements. We think this will be a very positive development for our Postgraduate Programmes in Clinical Embryology/ Clinical Embryology and Assisted Reproduction Technology.

### **Part B, Items 3 and 4 (assessment methods with relevance to Intended Learning Outcomes, academic standards and student performance).**

[redacted] has confirmed that the standards on the programmes are comparable to Master's students on other courses in other universities which [redacted] has experienced. Furthermore, that the high proportion of distinctions and merits has provided evidence that the teaching, learning and assessment methods are also of high quality and are also a reflection of a wide balance in assessment methods that are appropriate to the intended learning outcomes. We think that the external examiner's comments with regards to slightly reduced performance of our students in the exams are entirely accurate. Most students have travelled long distances and are dealing with adjustment to the UK time zone when they take their exams during the workshops in Leeds. The time available for preparation for the exams, is also a contributory factor. Probably, the demands of working full-time mean that our students probably have less time to revise than they would like, however we have now ensured that the coursework assessment schedule has been revised to give a longer time for exam preparation than that of any previous cohort. We also agree that adjustment to UK examination formats is another factor to consider.

### **Part B, Item 5. (The nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and Modules since the previous year)**

The online learning resources and ongoing enhancements to them have been identified as examples of good practice to be shared to other programmes as appropriate. The Programme

Leader's view is that the process of updates and enhancements will remain an ongoing process. The science, opinion and clinical practices that underlie Clinical Embryology change rapidly and this now requires that updates are performed much more regularly than ever before. Students are very aware of the latest developments in the field and student feedback has also been taken on board to rectify areas that were thought to be dated or lacking. For our distance learning programme in particular, the most significant improvement since 2014 has been the introduction of the Lecture Capture system. These lectures, captured at the workshops are now available to students from a distance and are ideal for revision and for supplementing the other blended learning material that we provide. The PL believes that the students on our Programmes will benefit hugely from these added resources, especially since this allows them to re-establish the connection to the lecture content quite some time after the event. Indeed the captured voice and slides allows the students to understand the emphasis and semantics placed within each lecture as opposed to that which would be obtained from lecture handouts and static web-based material.

**Part B, Item 7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching**

has stated that a positive aspect that has identified is that all staff are active in research and that this permeates through to the students and their research projects. We think that this aspect will have been improved more recently with the addition of a new Lecturer and University Academic Fellow (UAF) to the team, with research interests and skills that will complement the existing academic team.

**Part B, Item 13**

has stated that annotation of the marking is another area that continues to improve. This is encouraging, since we have held meetings when new members of staff have arrived to share examples of comments that are given to our students. We will repeat the meeting again as our new UAF becomes active in teaching. This also gives the opportunity for all staff to keep consistent with feedback styles. We have also moved to marking on the VLE which will also assist in making marking and feedback more consistent.

**Final Comments**

Since has now completed term of a appointment, we would like to express our sincere thanks to for acting as the external examiner for our Programmes over the last 4 years.

Yours sincerely,

Programme Leader, Postgraduate Programmes in Clinical Embryology  
**Leeds Institute of Cardiovascular and Metabolic Medicine (LICAMM)**

**Head of Division**