

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 Earth & Environment
Subject(s):	<i>Environment and Business</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BA Environment & Business SOEE2032, 2310, 2570, 2610, 3202, 3270 and 3310
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

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

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?

Yes – both by email back in the autumn and again in hard copy when I visited Leeds in June

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

Not applicable

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 programme aims and ILOs are fully commensurate with the award of a BA. Good to see clear progression in ILOs and attainment from year 2 to year 3 of the undergraduate programme.

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 ILOs are comparable with other institutions with which I am familiar (e.g. <<<>>>). This is an interdisciplinary programme, so it can be difficult to match against national subject benchmarks precisely. The programme catalogue for BA Environment & Business states that the relevant QAA subject benchmarks are Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies. I suggest that the programme team also take a look at the subject benchmarks for 'General Business and Management'. They may find some ideas here for how to ratchet up the attainment expectations of students in Year 2 (especially in SOEE2032 and SOEE 2310).

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 programme includes a wide variety of assessment methods that allow comprehensive evaluation of students' performance against the ILOs. In some cases, assessment methods are quite innovative, and I will share these with the teaching team in my own institution (e.g. the individual data collection but then aggregated data analysis format in SOEE2570; hooking the SOEE 3202 coursework around a specified intervention).

I would note that there was only one exam in this entire set of modules, which I found to be an unusually low proportion of assessment over the programme. It is possible that by the time electives and other modules are taken into account the overall assessment balance includes more exams. However, as it is I would encourage the team to consider whether assessing almost all attainment by coursework is fully appropriate, particularly in the final year. (I do not have a firm view on this, simply that the very low number of exams across my sample of modules surprised me).

Based on the combination of paper-based and VLE-based materials I saw, there appear to be excellent arrangements for marking and moderation that provide a high level of confidence in the assessment process.

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 academic standard of the students, particularly by the third year, is impressive. While the proportion of upper second or first class degrees is quite high (14 out of 19), this does seem justified from looking at the submitted work. I do have some comments on whether the Year 2 assessment really allows differentiation between 1st and upper 2nd class work, particularly in SOEE2032 and SOEE2310. I have shared some ideas on this with the team, and look forward to seeing how opportunities to demonstrate higher level capacities in critical analysis, integration and synthesis can be offered to students in these modules.

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.

This is my first year as external examiner at Leeds. However, based on last year's examiner reports and responses, I can see several changes that have been successfully implemented this year. First, I was offered the opportunity to meet with students to solicit their feedback on the programme in April (i.e. away from the busy May/June period). Second, I was asked to comment on draft exams in February, offering the welcome possibility of beginning a feedback conversation earlier in the year. Third, I can see that there used to be student portfolios, but that these have been phased out – I have not missed them.

With regard to good practice, I would like to commend the school on their return of moderated marks form. These were extremely useful in making transparent the moderating and auditing processes used within the school, and are a great example of how to make these conversations about professional judgements clearer to outsiders.

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.

Students undertaking research: the SOEE2570 course in "Research in Social Science" provides two excellent opportunities for students to hone their research skills – though the dummy carbon footprint project (literature review, data collection and analysis) and through the field trip. This module is excellent preparation for the Year 3 Environment Enterprise Project (SOEE3310). At the top end, there is some truly outstanding work for the undergraduate level in SOEE3310.

Teaching informed by research: the school has a very strong research team in issues related to the economy, business and sustainability. It was great to see some of this coming through in the modules (e.g. steady state economy in SOEE2610; CSR and corporate citizenship in SOEE3270).

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

As a new external examiner at Leeds, I was allocated a mentor earlier in the year and we had a few email exchanges. It's good to know he's there, but I have not had to draw on his experience. The format for the externals reviewing work in the same room the day before the final board, and then having dinner with the programme leads provides nice opportunities for sharing and informal advice during the June visit.

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 – everything was clear and timely.

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 – everything I needed. No problem.

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 provided with draft examination papers in February. I did provide comments at the time, but since the ones relating to the Year 2 exam were quite extensive (i.e. inviting discussion about the short-question format itself, rather than the details of the questions) I did not expect to see a change made in the time available. I note in the SOEE2310 moderated marks form that the module leader plans to revisit the format next year, so I look forward to seeing how this develops.

All arrangements were excellent and timely.

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 – the paperwork was all in excellent order. Thanks! This made the task much easier.

There is inevitably some scrambling around when some of the assessment and feedback is available online, on USB stick and/or in hardcopy. However, I found the binder prepared by the admin team absolutely fantastic, and a very useful reference about what I could find where.

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

Yes. It was great to see a wide range of contemporary topics in the Environment Enterprise Project. I was asked to pay particular attention to a few of these borderline marks, and was happy to confirm the marks in all cases (except for one shift from a 59 to a 60 for consistency). Overall the method and standard of assessment was transparent, consistent and fair. Most of the dissertations had very extensive feedback – about 1 page single spaced. This level of attention to feedback is great to see.

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 meeting and was satisfied that the board made sound recommendations based on the copy of the regulations I was given.

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

Yes. I did mention at the exam board meeting that there were an unusually high number (and proportion) of students with mitigating circumstances flagged at the board. In discussion, it became clear that the flag in the student's file appears even for minor MCs (e.g. MC that led to a coursework extension during the second year). It would be useful to somehow separate these routine MCs that were dealt with at the time from more extensive, longer lasting, or not yet resolved MCs.

Having said this, I was satisfied that very careful and fair procedures were in place to deal with the full range of MCs.

Other comments

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

Thank you for making this job both easy and pleasurable. It's great to see such care and attention to detail in the paperwork and entire process.

School of Earth and Environment

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

28 August 2015

RE: Response to External Examiner's Report (BA Environment and Business) 2014-15

Dear

The Programme Delivery Team sincerely thank you for your positive comments and constructive criticism of the programme. Below I have included those comments that require a response. I also note, and am grateful for, your positive feedback on the support you received from the Student Education Service Office in providing the materials and arrangements necessary to assist you in your evaluation of the programme.

Highlights from the positive feedback on the programme include:

- Wide variety of assessment methods, including innovative practice particularly in SOEE2570 Research in the Environmental Social Sciences and SOEE3202 Sustainable Consumption
- High academic standard of students in the programme, particularly in third year
- Transparency and clarity in marking and moderation
- Teaching informed by research, particularly in SOEE2610 Economics and Sustainability and SOEE3270 Business and Sustainable Development
- Range of contemporary topics in the final year dissertation work
- Care and attention to detail in paperwork

1. QAA Benchmarks

Examiner's comments: *Aims and ILOs are comparable with other institutions with which I am familiar (e.g.). This is an interdisciplinary programme, so it can be difficult to match against national subject benchmarks precisely. The programme catalogue for BA Environment & Business states that the relevant QAA subject benchmarks are Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies. I suggest that the programme team also take a look at the subject benchmarks for 'General Business and Management'. They may find some ideas here for how to ratchet up the attainment expectations of students in Year 2 (especially in SOEE2032 and SOEE 2310).*

Response: This is an excellent suggestion and this will be raised at the next Programme Delivery Team meeting, with the view to integrating the relevant General Business and Management benchmarks into the programme, particularly in SOEE2032 Personal Development for Careers in the Environmental Sector and SOEE2310 Tools and Techniques for Business, Environment and Corporate Responsibility.

2. Assessment Methods

Examiner's comments: *The programme includes a wide variety of assessment methods that allow comprehensive evaluation of students' performance against the ILOs. In some cases, assessment methods are quite innovative, and I will share these with the teaching team in my own institution (e.g. the individual data collection but then aggregated data analysis format in SOEE2570; hooking the SOEE3202 coursework around a specified intervention).*

I would note that there was only one exam in this entire set of modules, which I found to be an unusually low proportion of assessment over the programme. It is possible that by the time electives and other modules are taken into account the overall assessment balance includes more exams. However, as it is I would encourage the team to consider whether assessing almost all attainment by coursework is fully appropriate, particularly in the final year. (I do not have a firm view on this, simply that the very low number of exams across my sample of modules surprised me).

Based on the combination of paper-based and VLE-based materials I saw, there appear to be excellent arrangements for marking and moderation that provide a high level of confidence in the assessment process.

Response: Thank you for the positive feedback, and for highlighting areas of best practice, particularly in modules SOEE2570 Research in the Environmental Social Sciences and SOEE3202 Sustainable Consumption.

In response to your note on the proportion of exams, I can confirm that there are three written and one oral examinations within the core modules of the programme, across the three years. Approximately one-third of the optional modules also contain exams, ranging from 20% to 100% of the module mark. The oral exam in SOEE3630 Strategic Energy Issues will be replaced next year by a written exam. This is, however, something to note and will be discussed at the next programme delivery team meeting in the context of our broader discussions about the overall map of assessment types and their relationship with learning objectives.

3. Achievement of Aims and ALO

Examiner's comments: *The academic standard of the students, particularly by the third year, is impressive. While the proportion of upper second or first class degrees is quite high (14 out of 19), this does seem justified from looking at the submitted work. I do have some comments on whether the Year 2 assessment really allows differentiation between 1st and upper 2nd class work, particularly in SOEE2032 and SOEE2310. I have shared some ideas on this with the team, and look forward to seeing how opportunities to demonstrate higher level capacities in critical analysis, integration and synthesis can be offered to students in these modules.*

Response: Thank you for these constructive ideas. The feedback received on the exam questions, and suggestions for critical analysis for SOEE2310, Tools and Techniques for Business, Environment and Corporate Responsibility, will be implemented in the 2015/16 academic year. Your notes on giving opportunities for students to demonstrate higher level capacities will also be raised at the next Programme Delivery Team meeting and implemented in 2015/16 where possible. Any larger changes to be made to the modules will be submitted in February 2016 for implementation in the 2016/17 academic year.

4. Enhancements since previous academic year

Examiner's comments: *This is my first year as external examiner at Leeds. However, based on last year's examiner reports and responses, I can see several changes that have been successfully implemented this year. First, I was offered the opportunity to meet with students to solicit their feedback on the programme in April (i.e. away from the busy May/June period). Second, I was asked to comment on draft exams in February, offering the welcome possibility of*

beginning a feedback conversation earlier in the year. Third, I can see that there used to be student portfolios, but that these have been phased out – I have not missed them.

With regard to good practice, I would like to commend the school on their return of moderated marks form. These were extremely useful in making transparent the moderating and auditing processes used within the school, and are a great example of how to make these conversations about professional judgements clearer to outsiders.

Response: Thank you for these positive comments. I would also like to acknowledge the staff in the Student Education Service Office who provide a high level of support for the academic staff and students on the programme.

5. Research-Led Teaching

Examiner's comments: *Students undertaking research: the SOEE2570 course in "Research in Social Science" provides two excellent opportunities for students to hone their research skills – through the dummy carbon footprint project (literature review, data collection and analysis) and through the field trip. This module is excellent preparation for the Year 3 Environment Enterprise Project (SOEE3310). At the top end, there is some truly outstanding work for the undergraduate level in SOEE3310.*

Teaching informed by research: the school has a very strong research team in issues related to the economy, business and sustainability. It was great to see some of this coming through in the modules (e.g. steady state economy in SOEE2610; CSR and corporate citizenship in SOEE3270).

Response: The Programme Delivery Team has a strong research focus and I am greatly heartened by your recognition that their research is being integrated effectively into our teaching. Thank you for these positive comments.

6. Examination Papers

Examiner's comments: *I was provided with draft examination papers in February. I did provide comments at the time, but since the ones relating to the Year 2 exam were quite extensive (i.e. inviting discussion about the short-question format itself, rather than the details of the questions) I did not expect to see a change made in the time available. I note in the SOEE2310 moderated marks form that the module leader plans to revisit the format next year, so I look forward to seeing how this develops.*

All arrangements were excellent and timely.

Response: As noted, SOEE2310 will be revisited in the 2015/16 academic year. Particularly, the case study questions will be revised to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their extended knowledge and to challenge the best students. The group presentation will be re-evaluated to ensure all students are challenged and have an opportunity to be evaluated appropriately.

7. Procedures for mitigating circumstances

Examiner's comments: *I did mention at the exam board meeting that there were an unusually high number (and proportion) of students with mitigating circumstances flagged at the board. In discussion, it became clear that the flag in the student's file appears even for minor MCs (e.g. MC that led to a coursework extension during the second year). It would be useful to somehow separate these routine MCs that were dealt with at the time from more extensive, longer lasting, or not yet resolved MCs.*

Having said this, I was satisfied that very careful and fair procedures were in place to deal with the full range of MCs.

Response: This is a useful comment and something that is being considered by the staff within the Student Support Function of our Student Education Service team.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School
School of Earth and Environment
University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT
Tel:
Email: