

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

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

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	School of Earth and Environment
<i>Subject(s):</i>	Environmental Management / Sustainable Development
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	BA Environmental Sustainability; BA Environmental Management; BA Environmental Management (Industry); BSc Sustainability and Environmental Management; BSc Sustainability and Environmental Management (Industry).
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	BA; BSc

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. The support I have received has been excellent. I was sent the previous External Examiner's report and the School's response by email in November 2014, shortly after my appointment.

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

This is my first year as External Examiner on the programme.

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.*

In reviewing the module programmes/outlines and the School Handbook for Undergraduates, I believe that the intended learning outcomes are appropriate and commensurate with the level of the awards offered. The ILOs for the programme appear to be well aligned with course content and assessment activities.

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. I have carefully reviewed the National Subject Benchmark Statement for Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies. This document defines what can be expected of a graduate in the field of environmental management and sustainability, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their programme. I feel that the aims, ILOs and general standards of the programme at Leeds meet the national expectations, and in many respects go beyond. As far as I am aware, the standards of students' performance on the BA in Sustainability and Environmental Management are all consistent with the standards of those in similar programmes at other Universities.

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 types of assessment available to students appear to be diverse across the programme, (exams, essays, group posters, management plans, fieldwork reports, policy briefs, group presentations, dissertation projects, etc.), and appropriate for the material being taught. Some modules demand a range of assessment tasks from students, which is a positive feature of the course design because it allows for differentiation among the student body. In cases where there are a number of assessments within modules, they are generally well joined-up with their intended learning outcomes. There are, however, a few modules that appear to be 100% assessed by a single assignment (e.g. SOEE2670, SOEE2680, or SOEE3112). In cases where there is only a single summative assessment, it is good academic practice to have some kind of formative assessment as well (even if it is not given a formal grade).

Overall, I found the standard and consistency of marking to be fair and consistent, with generally clear commentary explaining why a certain mark was being given. Feedback was on the whole very good, and it is clear that staff appear to take this part of their work very seriously. There were a number of occasions where I was asked to review specific dissertation marks, particularly when there was a discrepancy between markers, or a new mark was being recommended by the moderators (see attached sheet on dissertations for comments).

One question that I have concerns the process that is undertaken when assessing group work (e.g. the group poster for SOEE2690, or the group presentation for SOEE3780). Are the criteria used to assess group work module-specific or is there a school set of criteria that are used to assess group work?

In terms of moderation of assignments, I found this process to be exemplary. Moderators' comments on work were generally thoughtful and comprehensive. The moderation form makes the whole process very transparent with a section for the module leader, a section for the moderator's

comments and then a final response from the module leader. This is an excellent example of good academic practice.

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 far as I am aware, the standards of students' performance on the BSc in Sustainability and Environmental Management are consistent with the standards of those in similar programmes at other Universities.

Within the specific modules I reviewed, there was a range in ability between students, as is to be expected. But overall, I was impressed by the quality of student work and the dedication of staff to high quality teaching and learning. Perhaps the main weakness flagged up in students' work was that some coursework tended to be overly descriptive and failed to engage in critical analysis; and that some students were unable to structure their points in a way that allowed them to build and sustain a coherent argument. That being said, I also saw some excellent pieces of work at the top end that reflected very competent performance.

I was pleased to see that the use of the software 'Turnitin' has been so comprehensively adopted across all the programmes. We have also adopted this policy at <>, and have found that it has helped to ensure better academic conventions are adhered to.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

Not applicable.

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 difficult for me to accurately assess since it is my first year as External Examiner on the programme. I should have a much better sense of the effectiveness of enhancements and how my comments have been considered next year. However, I should note that I have reviewed the report submitted last year by the previous external and the response from the School, and it appears that the feedback received has been taken seriously. The previous External also commented that students appear to be well cared for, and that Administrative staff are proactive, quick to perceive problems and respond to them.

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 content of the 13 modules I reviewed all appeared to be current and reflected an up-to-date knowledge of debates and literature. It is also clear that in many cases, module leaders were personally engaged in research that related to the topic of the module, suggesting that there is a good relationship between teaching and research. The wide range of interdisciplinary skills and expertise contributing to teaching activities is impressive, but also necessary for a programme such as this that is uniquely located at the interface between human activity and the environment.

In terms of curriculum design, there are two outstanding features that strengthen the teaching-research nexus in the programme. First, the four available pathways allow students to tailor their

programmes to specific research interests and at the same time should allow them to develop practical knowledge/skills for particular sectors. Second, Fieldwork is an important aspect of teaching on the programme, which provides students with the opportunity to put research methods into practice during fieldtrips.

The (limited) feedback I have received from students on the programme suggests that they feel the relationship between teaching and research is an important feature of the degree. A Skype call was set up for me in May with the Student Rep for the programme, and feedback was also very positive. The one comment of concern made in this meeting, however, was that the structure of the pathways available on the programme needs to be rethought – it was explained that many students were diverging away from the compulsory pathway modules early in the pathway, which was having implications for their programmes in the second and third years. In last year's External Examiners report, there was also some reference made to the problem of selecting units for the pathways, so this is something that needs to be looked into. I have since spoken to the Programme Leader, and I understand that he has been reviewing the structure of the pathways over the past year.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

Not Applicable.

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

Not Applicable.

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, I have had sufficient access to the material needed to fulfil my responsibilities as External Examiner. Over the year, I have had very good contact with programme administrators and in particular, <> has been very responsive to any requests I have had.

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 School contacted me last November shortly after my appointment and all the necessary documentation was forwarded to me. I have since had fairly regular contact with the programme administrators, who have forwarded material for scrutiny, and kept me informed about the programme.

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?

Over the duration of the year, the programme administrators emailed me examination papers to

scrutinise – for example, I was asked to provide comments on the Semester 2 examination papers for Levels 1 2 and 3 programmes. This process was very well organised, and I was given adequate time to assess these materials.

The organisation of coursework at the external examiners meeting was also very good. The arrangements and procedures for scrutinizing scripts were sound, with materials well organised in file boxes, or available electronically on VLE or a penstick. As far as I can see, the nature and level of the assignment questions are all appropriate for the programme and are a good reflection of the materials being examined.

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, this was all fine. The School made exam scripts, essays and project work available to me during the June visit. All the material was very well organised. I also received my username and VLE password in April, which meant that there was plenty of time to view some of the coursework material before for the examiners' visit in June.

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

There was a good range of dissertations available to scrutinize. Topics were also wide ranging, indicating the diversity of interests across the student cohort. But on the whole, I felt that both the subjects and range of marks were appropriate. Standards of assessment were also fine. In a number of cases, the topics of selected allowed students to gain valuable practical skills carrying out research in a timely area, which should likely improve employability prospects.

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, administrative arrangements were excellent. I was present at the Board of Examiners meeting, and was happy with the way operations took place and the recommendations that were made.

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

Yes, it appears that the procedures and discretionary criteria are in place for considering mitigating circumstances and medical evidence. These procedures seem to be followed well.

Other comments

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

Thank you. I have enjoyed my first year as External Examiner on the BSc Sustainability and Environmental Management programme. I hope my comments and feedback are helpful.

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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

28 August 2015

Dr Maconachie
3 East, Department of Social and Policy Sciences
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RE: Response to External Examiner's Report - BA Environmental Sustainability; BA Environmental Management; BA Environmental Management (Industry); BSc Sustainability and Environmental Management; BSc Sustainability and Environmental Management (Industry); 2014-15

Dear Dr Maconachie,

We thank you for your external examining this year. We are glad that you are pleased with the quality of the programmes in terms of national subject benchmarks, diversity of teaching and assessment, moderation processes, use of Turnitin and use of research in teaching.

We note your concern about some 10 credit modules which have one single summative assignment. In two of these modules identified (SOEE2670, second year Environmental Impact Assessment module, and SOEE3112, third year Environmental Risk module), students are given the opportunity to submit an outline or plan of their assignment. In the other (SOEE2680, second year Environmental Politics and Governance) students are required to submit an abstract of their essay. In all instances, students are given detailed feedback on their outline or abstract to help them develop their summative assignment, and there is further opportunity to meet and discuss the outline or abstract in a one to one meeting with the module leader or through email. For such small modules, we are reluctant to either have two summative assignments or to add a formative assignment, to avoid over-assessing students and to give them the chance to write a substantive and detailed longer piece of work rather than shorter but more superficial pieces.

We note your comment on assessment of group work and group presentations. At present we do not have any formal school guidelines on group work or assessment, however this has already been noted as a priority as across the school there is a diversity of practice and we have just launched a project called 'Making Group Work Work' led by the DSE. As part of this we plan to interview module leaders and students and to look at course rubrics and identify good practice in order to develop school guidance. We aim for this new guidance to be ready for academic year 2016-17, but a conversation about good practice in group work will be ongoing in the coming academic year.

We note that students have raised concerns about the pathways structure of the BSc Sustainability and Environmental Management degree. The cohort of students graduating in 2015 were the first to take this degree, and therefore the first to take the pathways structure. Pathways were introduced to minimise timetabling clashes, to bring coherence to the suite of optional modules taken, and to ensure that students took appropriate pre-requisite modules for courses in the second and third year of study. Students were advised to follow the structure, but were also told that they could change one quarter of their pathway modules, subject to

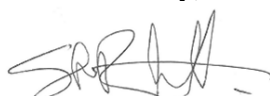
permission of the programme leader. Students are expected to provide a clear reason for wanting to take modules from outside of their pathway (for example, for careers aspirations), to identify which pathway modules they would drop to create space for the outside module, and to be aware of any consequences for later years. Students are very strongly encouraged not to drop modules that are pre-requisites for modules in later years of study. As the University module choice system allows students to select their own modules through a central system rather than through the school, there were some incidents when the graduating cohort were in their first year of study where some students deviated from this model without the programme leader's permission. In response to this, the Student Education Service team now audit all student module choices at the start of semester to ensure that all students are following the pathway structure, or have the programme leader's permission to deviate. This has worked well.

For the academic year 2015/16, we have worked to improve the process of choosing modules, to make things clearer and easier. Firstly, we have created a flow chart for incoming first year undergraduates which guides them through the process, explaining whether they need to take refresher modules in maths and chemistry, and providing guidance on how to choose pathways. This is now included in the information packs sent out to students prior to their arrival in Leeds. Secondly, we have created a programme planner that quickly and easily illustrates how module choices in one year may affect subsequent years of study, and how the pathways progress from year to year. This is available for incoming and current students. Thirdly, we are in the process of creating a school-wide alternative module catalogue, to supplement the official module catalogue, where students can write descriptions of modules they have studied to help guide future students in their module choice, as surveys have found that the official module catalogue does not necessarily contain the kind of information that students are seeking.

We have been reconsidering the pathway structure, and it is likely to have minimal changes – changes to a pollution and climate change module in third year to make it less dependent on prior advanced scientific knowledge means we can now include this in our Environmental Science and Management Pathway. We did consider broadening the compulsory modules and reducing pathway modules in first year so that students would not be limiting their choices for subsequent years of study at such an early stage. This has proven impossible as there are so many first year pathway modules which are pre-requisites for subsequent modules, so it is inevitable that students will have to limit their choices in their first year. However, students can take either two or three pathways (from four) in their first year, depending on their A-levels, and narrowing this down to one in their second year, so this is not a significant issue.

We also appreciate that you were pleased with the support that you were provided with by the School's Student Education Service administration team, and the manner in which work had been organised in preparation for scrutiny. We will continue to refine these processes over the course of the next session, and hope that it will be possible for you to meet with a greater number of students next year.

Yours sincerely,



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