

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: Biological Sciences

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s): Human Physiology

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc): 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.

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.*

The structure and content of the degree programme fits well with the intended learning outcomes for the Human Physiology degree. The standards of attainment by the students are consistent with the level required for a BSc.

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.*

Having acted as external examiner at two other institutions, and being heavily involved in programme design and assessment at my own institution, I can confirm that the aims and intended learning objectives easily match the high standards observed 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 degree programme utilises a variety of assessment methods. In the examinations this includes MCQ questions, short answers, essays and data handling exercises. There are also a variety of coursework assessment methods, including open book essays, extended literature reviews and also laboratory reports. These assessment methods are appropriate to assess the learning objectives of the modules, with a good progression in the complexity of assessment during the degree.

The marking of the short answer / essays from the examinations is entirely appropriate, and some scripts are double marked. It is clear from the comments made the reasons behind the award of a grade, and where there is some initial discrepancy between markers this is resolved as a consequence of discussions to agree a final grade. For the dissertation (project) reports there is an extremely useful feedback sheet, which allows markers to highlight the level of performance in the different areas of assessment. While useful, I did note a small number of cases where more statements were ringed in one degree classification, while the final grade awarded (which was appropriate) was in the degree classification below. This is due to an unavoidable issue with the wording, and is a minor limitation of the system. In such cases it would be useful if the marker could indicate in the free text box the reasons why the specific grade was awarded even though the areas ringed suggest a higher grade.

All grades and scripts were made available to me during my two visits, and I was also able to view the overall module grades and statistics. For all modules I reviewed there were no concerns or issues. The mean module grades were similar to previous years, with a small number of modules demonstrating a small increase in overall performance.

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.*

There were a range of overall student performances, with the very best students producing some excellent pieces of work. Although there were a few students towards the lower end of the spectrum who struggled with some aspects of the course and assessment, this is similar to other institutions and is not a concern. I particularly liked the Advance Topics module, where students were able to research a selection of areas independently. I was also very impressed by the examples of the schools and industry research projects I observed. These really pushed the students out of their comfort zones and they rose to the challenge.

In terms of assessment there were no areas where the student as a group struggled. However, I do note one weakness in terms of student approach to their learning. When I met with them in March 2015 they flagged a sports science module, where they only do a subset of the lectures. They stated that they found this module a challenge due to only completing a subset of all of the lectures delivered on this topic. I understand from the programme director that a significant amount of additional online resources are available to the students for this module, but that these are not well utilised. The lack of engagement with such resources is a common finding at other institutions as well, and changing this attitude is challenging.

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, and I therefore cannot comment directly on any enhancements since the 13/14 academic year. However, I do note that some changes introduced towards the end of the appointment of the previous external examiner have successfully continued in the 14/15 academic year, for example the Advanced Topics module.

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.

Level 3 is a research led year, with students exposed to research by teaching from research active staff. They have the opportunity to complete a wet lab based research project, working on a specific research area. These students therefore directly engage with the methods and principles underpinning scientific research. Alternatively students can complete an extended literature review, being exposed to research via interactions with supervisors and the published research field in a particular area. All students are also exposed to research through the Advanced Topics module, where research active staff deliver talks on their areas and students complete independent research on the area.

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.

I was provided with all the information needed to act as external examiner. During the year and on both visits staff always let me know that if I required any additional information then all I had to do was ask. The administrator I dealt with was excellent.

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.

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 reviewed all draft examination scripts, and any minor issues I flagged were addressed. The level of the questions was appropriate for the level of assessment.

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?

I had access to all examination scripts, and also all project work during my visits. Scripts / projects reports were marked appropriately, and guidance on the reasons behind the award of a specific grade was given. I have noted a minor issue with the feedback sheets for project reports in point 3 above.

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

Not all students completed a wet based laboratory project, a common finding in the current era of increased student numbers. This is not an issue, as not all students on the degree programme will be planning a research career after graduation. These students benefit from a variety of suitable alternatives, including extended literature reviews, schools work and work with industry. I was particularly impressed by the projects I read from students who had completed the schools or industry options. I also liked the self-reflections written by the students at the end of their projects. The grades awarded to the projects were appropriate, and there were some excellent reports.

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?

The arrangements were excellent. Draft examination scripts were delivered with sufficient time to available to review and report back. Scripts were available to read across all relevant modules and students. On my second visit in June 2015 the method of classification and the borderline criteria were fully explained. In this academic year there were no borderline students I had to consider. During the board of examiner meeting the final decisions for students were clearly presented. Overall I am extremely happy with the assessment procedures, marking and the final exam board procedures.

16. 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

Having met with a variety of students during my visit in March 2105, it is clear that they enjoy the course and are very complimentary about modules and staff. There was a high degree of satisfaction of many aspects of the course.

I do feel that an in depth discussion of the awarding of the prizes to the graduating students should take place before the examination board meeting in June 2016. At the end of the meeting in June 2015 there was extensive discussion about the awarding of the prizes, and the fact that no physiology student was being awarded a Physiological Society membership prize. With the move away from specialist degrees, and the use of the modular system, it is common for students taking a general degree (for example medical science) to have a strong Physiology basis and therefore be eligible for consideration for prizes linked to a specific discipline. A number of members of the exam board expressed their disquiet at the lack of prizes for physiology, and I can see their point given that these are aimed at Physiologists. A conversation is therefore needed to review and evaluate the criteria for the awarding of the prizes.

Faculty of Biological Sciences
Student Education Service

Student Education Office
Irene Manton Building
University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT, UK



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

8 October 2015

Dear

RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2014/15
BSc Human Physiology – all programme variants
BSc Human Physiology in Relation to Medicine
MBiol, BSc Human Physiology (Integrated Masters)

Firstly, as Programme Leader, I would like to thank you for agreeing to take on the role of External Examiner for our Human Physiology programmes. I know from personal experience that it requires a certain amount of work and commitment through the academic year, especially in the first year when there is an unavoidable level of unfamiliarity with the course, its modules and the assessment/examination rubrics. Your efficiency and input through 2014-15 is much appreciated and we look forward to working with you in the next academic year too.

Your comprehensive end-of-year programme report has been read with interest and will be distributed to members of the Human Physiology Programme Team. We were pleased that no matters for urgent attention were identified and that based on your experience as External Examiner at comparable institutions *“the aims and intended learning objectives easily match the high standards observed in similar programmes at other universities”*. With respect to our assessment/examination methods, we note that these were deemed as *“appropriate to assess the learning objectives of the modules, with a good progression in the complexity of assessment during the degree”* and that *“marking of the short answer/essays from the examinations is entirely appropriate”*. A specific issue was raised regarding the occasional mismatch between the assessment criteria sheet and the final mark awarded – *“a small number of cases where more statements were ringed in one degree classification, while the final grade awarded (which was appropriate) was in the degree classification below”*. As you indicate, the assessment sheet is highlighted by the marker to provide some guidance/feedback on the performance in the different areas being assessed, but there is no direct numerical link to the final mark. However, there should be an obvious association between the two and where this is not so obvious then we agree that the reason for the final awarded grade should be clarified on the feedback sheet.

Your positive comments on the evident embedding of research-led teaching e.g. within the Level 3 Advanced Topics modules and the strong range of dissertations offered to our Level 3 students within the programme are noted (*“I was particularly impressed by the projects I read from students who had completed the schools or industry options. I also liked the self-reflections written by the students at the end of their projects. The grades awarded to the projects were appropriate, and there were some excellent reports”*). At Level 2, we note the issues raised via student feedback concerning one module in particular, BMSC2216/Exercise Physiology in Health & Disease. As we discussed, there is a substantial amount of support material provided on-line and via the VLE for the module content but evidence suggests that these are not well utilized by the students. It is also worth noting that the performance of students on this module, in terms of final grades achieved, is not substantially out of step with other modules that we offer. However, in the coming academic year we will consider ways to encourage improved engagement by the students with this valuable learning

resource. The point you raised under "other comments" concerning the lengthy discussions that took place during the Final Exam Board meeting on the awarding of the prizes to graduating students is well made. I agree that it is timely for the Programme Leaders in SBMS to consider the criteria and eligibility for these various prizes, especially since we understand that some of the prizes that were listed as supported by The Physiological Society do not actually exist anymore.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of all of the team connected with Human Physiology to thank you for your valuable input which will help us to continue to develop and improve the quality of our degree programmes.

Yours sincerely,

Programme Leader

Tel:

Email: