

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):

Pharmacology

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BMSC3101 Inherited Disorders
 BMSC3143 Advanced Topics in Pharmacology I
 BMSC3149 Drug Development: pre-clinical to practice
 BMSC3302 Medical Pharmacology
 BMSC1210 Introduction to Pharmacology
 BMSC2210 Chemotherapy
 BMSC2214 Introduction to toxicology
 BMSC2223 Neuropharmacology
 BMSC2224 Principles of Drug Discovery
 BMSC3233 Advanced Topics in Pharmacology II
 BMSC2117 Cardio-respiratory Pharmacology
 BMSC1190 Experimental Skills
 BMSC2118 Neurobiology
 BMSC3140 Advanced Scientific Skills

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
There are no matters arising from my examination of the course and the scripts that require urgent attention.

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?

All required materials were provided and support staff were efficient and helpful.

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.*

Programme ILOs were appropriate to the year of study and to the level of the award in all modules. The courses have been very well planned and their content is both relevant and rigorous.

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.*

The aims and ILOs were of a standard that I would expect from most UK institutions offering degrees in Pharmacology and Biomedical Sciences at BSc. level. The breadth of the material covered, as well as the level of detail, was excellent, and the broad range of pharmacology and neuroscience-based research at Leeds meant that the course offered a rich and diverse array of subject material with which to engage the student.

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.*

In general, assessment across the scripts I reviewed was of the short answer or essay format, with some questions based upon calculations or problem solving. All of the methods of assessment were appropriate to the subject material and were in line with assessment methods at my own and other institutions of which I have knowledge. Answer plans were generally clear and the wording of the questions sufficient to allow candidates to prepare answers that were likely to be relevant. 3rd year examinations were strongly biased towards longer essay questions, which I feel is appropriate at that level and which allows the students to demonstrate deep knowledge and extra reading outside of material delivered in lectures. The classification of awards was appropriate and there was a clear spread across the range.

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.*

Students were clearly able to demonstrate achievement, with the better students scoring well across questions/modules and several outstanding individual performances in the final year. The Advanced Pharmacology modules, in particular, were useful in showing student engagement with topics they enjoyed, highlighting strong links to research and showing good evidence of students having read the literature in depth. In general that the students appeared to perform as well as those on similar courses on which I have taught and/or examined. On speaking to students during informal interviews in March, I was impressed by their drive and engagement, and can say that members of the pharmacology teaching staff are held in high regard. As ever, students made some minor complaints about there being too much work to do, but these are views held by the majority of students at many institutions!

In terms of student strengths, again this year many of the students showed evidence of having read around the subject with quotations and citations from journal articles used to underpin statements in essay questions. For obvious reasons, this was most apparent in the Advanced Topics modules; however, it was evident elsewhere on occasion too. Unfortunately, two students fared badly in the final year of the Pharmacology degree, and on checking the scripts it was clear that many questions had simply not been answered. It is difficult to conclude anything robust from two failures, and, although issues might have been expected to show up in second year examinations, there is no compelling reason to alter course assessment to try and 'pick up' students who may be likely to struggle in the final year. It seems possible that the two students who performed poorly may have suffered as a result of language issues.

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.

I have no comment to make in this regard as there have not been major changes in module content.

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.

As mentioned above, there is a clear thread of research informing the curriculum and I was very impressed by the links between research and teaching. I particularly enjoyed the laboratory visits in March, with students undertaking pharmacology and radiolabelling experiments showing real engagement with wet lab science. There is a great deal of hard work in running so many practical classes at a challenging level and the staff involved impressed me with their enthusiasm and engagement with students.

Again this year, some students had clearly experienced research-intensive placements, and had benefitted greatly from

the experience of working away from the University. It was notable that the students who had been on placement performed very well indeed at final examinations.

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, all materials were clear and were made available.

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.

All documentation was supplied.

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?**

Yes, I considered draft papers and made comments for feeding back to the relevant assessors.

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?**

Marking was often of a very high standard, and I was presented with a sufficiently large number of scripts to be certain they were representative. Some markers annotated scripts in great detail and this made examining them easy and informative. It would be excellent if all markers could annotate scripts as well as the best.

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

The dissertations were appropriate and were of a very high standard. I was particularly impressed with the range of topics, from wet lab work to meta-analysis and more socially based investigations e.g. of child learning. The level of detail in the feedback sheet for projects was very useful and informative and, I am sure, helped to ensure consistency between markers. I think this approach is excellent and will be recommending it to colleagues at my own institution.

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 examinations board was very well run (and commendably swift and fuss-free) and I agreed with all decisions and recommendations.

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

Mitigating circumstances were clearly taken into account and students were fairly treated, including being able to resit examinations where appropriate.

Other comments

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

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 Pharmacology – *all programme variants*

BSc Pharmacology in Relation to Medicine

MBiol, BSc Pharmacology (Integrated Masters) – *all programme variants*

Thank you for another year as our External Examiner and for your examiner's report with the many positive comments regarding the degree programmes' content, teaching and student performance.

As with last year, there were no issues to address regarding problems with particular modules. However, this year we unfortunately had two students who failed between 60-80 credits in their final year. Although you mentioned that there is no compelling reason to alter course assessment to try and 'pick up' students likely to struggle at level 3, we will nevertheless take a careful look back at these two cases to see if there is anything to learn for the future.

Thank you once again for the all the effort you have put into the role of External Examiner during the academic year and I look forward to working with you again next year.

Best wishes,

Pharmacology Programme Leader

Tel:
Email: