

## 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):	<i>Biodiversity and Conservation</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	<b>MSc/MRes Biodiversity and Conservation</b>
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	<b>MSc/MRes</b>

**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*

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*

## 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.*

This MSc/MRes programme has appropriate aims and ILOs for this level of award. A broad range of modules are provided, covering conceptual and empirical approaches in ecology and conservation, field courses, practical skills, opportunities to carry out high quality and relevant research studies.

### 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.*

This programme is comparable to other MSc programmes covering similar topics elsewhere in the UK.

### 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.*

An impressive breadth of assessments is available through the modules in this programme, giving students the opportunity to learn a wide range of skills of relevance to their future employment. The marking and classification procedures are all clear and the high level of student performance on the assessments indicates appropriate engagement and understanding.

One module in the programme (BLGY5112M: Advanced Statistics) has a pass/fail assessment, in which pass is awarded for demonstrating 'ability to complete set analyses within practical classes to show evidence of satisfactory understanding'. While this system allows students to undertake a potentially challenging module without fear of being able to complete an assessment, good quality students may miss an opportunity to achieve a grade which allows their skills to be assessed. The module organiser and course director may therefore wish to consider whether this assessment structure is still appropriate.

### 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.*

Yes, the academic standards of the students were clearly demonstrated through the wide range of coursework marks and, in particular, in their research projects. The performance of the students was similar to those on comparable courses with which I am familiar. The cohort was good quality, with all bar one student achieving a merit or distinction grade.

### 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 don't think there have been any specific enhancements to any of the modules in this year.

### 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 I noted last year, it is very evident that the strong research base of the faculty is clearly key in the delivery of such a high quality programme. Strong research approaches are emphasised in all relevant modules, and this clearly comes together well in the research projects. The direct links of many projects to the research interests of faculty is highly beneficial to the design and delivery of strong, relevant projects.

### 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, I had access to all necessary materials and information.

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, I had access to all relevant documentation for the programme, including handbooks, module descriptions and marking criteria.

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?

N/A

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 had access to all of the research projects (with marks and comments) and to samples of a wide range of coursework assignments. This was very helpful in displaying the extensive feedback on assignments that is provided to the students throughout the programme.

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

Yes, the range of subjects available for projects was appropriate and impressive, and the standard of assessment was thorough and appropriate.

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, all arrangements were satisfactory. I did attend the Exam Board meeting and I was satisfied with all recommendations.

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

Once again I was very impressed by the breadth of modules available to the students and the range of skills that they can thus develop. The module range means that students can essentially 'design' the programme that is best suited to their needs, and this is very likely to contribute to the great success of the programme.

**Faculty of Biological Sciences**  
**Student Education Service**

Student Education Office  
Irene Manton Building  
University of Leeds  
Leeds  
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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

23 November 2015

Dear

**RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2014/15**  
**MRes/MSc Biodiversity and Conservation**

Thank you for your report and for the generally very positive comments on our programmes. We note that you highlight the breadth of modules and strong research approach as positive features of the programmes, and were also pleased that you commented on the extensive feedback that is provided to students.

Your report highlighted only one issue for consideration, the assessment for BLGY5112 Advanced Statistics. This module is assessed as pass/fail based on performance during the module, rather than given a numerical mark based on marked coursework. The reason for this is, as commented, to allow students to develop their skills in a difficult subject without fear of low marks. We consider this advantage to over-ride the disadvantage that strong students are not able to demonstrate their statistical abilities, as these abilities are assessed in BLGY5107 (though at a less advanced level), and also in the research project. This will be discussed further with the Module Manager and Programme Team.

Unfortunately, it was not possible for you to meet our students at the end of the course this year, but we will arrange a meeting earlier in the course for the coming year.

Yours sincerely,

Programme Leader

Tel:  
Email: