

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014-15

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

Faculty / School of:	School of Earth & Environment
Subject(s):	<i>Engineering Geology</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Entire MSc programme
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc

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

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.*

Aims and learning outcomes are well met by the blended nature of the assessment for each Unit. Unit content is appropriate for the subject and level of the award.

- 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 Masters level course is one of three currently being offered in the UK. This course compares well with the others being currently offered in the UK and internationally.

- 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.*

There is a blended form of both lectures and assessment which ensures that all student needs are met. The assessment marking and feedback is appropriate for this level of course. The issues raised in my report last year on the timeliness of feedback has been addressed which is good to see and the lecturing staff should be commended for their efforts in this respect.

- 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 is a blended learning approach to this course which ensures students are able to demonstrate their strengths and build on their weaknesses. The coursework content is particularly well liked and does apply theory to practice – however, the amount of credit given to the coursework artefacts does in general not reflect the amount of effort in producing the coursework – this was expressed by the students and I support their concern. The projects are generally of a high standard. There is however a feeling that preparation for the projects is left too late in the year (May) leaving only three months for completion. I have discussed these issues with the course team and have agreed a way forward.

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

NA

- 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.

The issues of timeliness of feedback and the bunching of assessments have now been addressed. However, the process of project allocation does not appear to have been adequately resolved from last year as the student's feedback is almost identical on this issue. Although much work is done "behind the scenes" the students are still starting their project preparation too late – this is going to be accentuated by the large intake this current academic year (40+).

- 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.

Aspects of research are contained in the curriculum and are evident in the projects with a large number being research focussed. Whilst the increase in the role of research in the programme is definitely applauded, a clear emphasis must remain on the application of theory and research to practice as this is primarily a course which leads into employment in the ground engineering sector.

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

NA

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

NA

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

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 – these were all sent in a timely fashion

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 – all exam scripts, coursework and projects were available

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 standard of marking and feedback was very good.

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

Yes, I have looked at a selection of projects covering the range of marks. The projects have been marked appropriately. I would encourage the team to give the excellent feedback on these projects back to the students as this is the final major piece of work but they receive no formal feedback.

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

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

I have attached my notes to verbal feedback for the student cohort gathered on 11TH February 2015 and 13-14th August 2015 during the project presentations conference.

One additional area I do have concern about is the large number of students being allowed onto the course in 2015-16 at 40+ - I do not believe that these numbers are sustainable without the appointment of another core member of the Engineering Geology team. The pressure on the core team, especially when dealing with 40+ project students over the summer will be significant and has the potential to significantly affect the student feedback and experience, which in the longer term may impact on student numbers. I trust the University will take this issue seriously and consider employing another member of staff.



School of Earth and Environment

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07 December 2015

Dear

**RE: Response to External Examiner's Report, MSc Engineering Geology
2014/15**

I would like to thank you again for acting as external examiner, and for spending time taking feedback from our students. Thanks also for your report and for commending the teaching staff with respect to improving the timeliness of feedback on assessed work. It was gratifying to hear that the Masters in Engineering Geology compares well with similar courses offered in the UK and internationally, that the assessment and marking is appropriate that the blended learning approach is appropriate for the cohort, that the coursework component was well-liked, that the projects are of high standard (with a number being research focussed), and that the marking / feedback standards are appropriate. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight our intended responses regarding other specific points as follows:

1. The amount of credit given to the coursework artefacts does in general not reflect the amount of effort in producing the coursework (SOEE5531 and SOEE5015 in particular).

The Module Leader feels that a highly weighted unseen examination is necessary in order to fully assess learning outcomes and encourage students to undertake the required background reading. However, the Programme Team will discuss this at their meeting with the Industry Advisory Board in December.

2. The process of project allocation does not appear to have been adequately resolved from last year; the students are still starting their project preparation too late.

The Dissertation Project Module Leader is reviewing the process for project formulation, with a view to involving the students themselves at an earlier stage. To be discussed further at the forthcoming Programme Delivery Team meeting.

3. Feedback on dissertation projects. I would encourage the team to give the excellent feedback on these projects back to the students as this is the final major piece of work but they receive no formal feedback.

We will discuss the way in which feedback is given in other Masters programmes in the School in the Masters sub-committee, in particular the programmes in which the feedback from markers is collated by the first marker for subsequent distribution to the students after the exam board meetings.

4. Large number of students on the course; necessity for the appointment of another core member of the Engineering Geology team to deal with additional lab practical sessions/marketing/project supervision.

The School agreed the appointment of a 60% FTE TA from Oct-Dec to assist as a stopgap measure, and we will ensure that staffing on the programme is reviewed.

Once again, I would like to thank you for the time you have spent with our MSc students and staff. Your comments make a very valuable contribution to the course and we look forward to your continuing input to our programme in the New Year,

Yours sincerely,

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