

# 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):	Bioscience
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Infection & Immunity Bioscience
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](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?*

N/A

#### 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*

My period as an external examiner for this programme at U Leeds has been a very positive personal experience, and professionally assisted me in better evaluating our own practices in my institution. The U Leeds Faculty members running the course are professional academics of high calibre, and even when there was some transition in composition of the team, this was well handled and no loss of quality in the teaching, nor of the learning opportunities, provided to the students occurred that I could discern. As external examiners, we did from time to time have some minor criticisms and suggestions for improvement. These were

always considered carefully, and where they could be identified, solutions put into place. I can therefore say with some confidence that this very good course was probably incrementally better year on year.

In addition to suggestions from the externals, the Faculty was committed to progressive development of the Bioscience Masters Programme, and changes were instigated (in particular the current offer, which I will not be involved in, has been re-organised for 2015-16 compared to previous years). These changes were discussed with us as externals, and clearly justified.

My overall impression of marking and assessment procedures at the School is that they are fair, administered with compassionate readiness to take students' circumstances into account, and that they are perhaps more rigorous than our own Masters programmes. This rigour is appropriate in my view, particularly as the student feedback indicates that a substantial proportion of candidates see the well managed research component of the Masters as a step towards research careers. This reputation for rigorous assessment in the programme will assist these students in future development as scientists. On this basis – the standard achieved is above what I would consider satisfactory for a programme of this nature.

## 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.*

Intended Learning Outcomes and Aims are appropriate, and well balanced, and if met by a candidate will certainly indicate that the student has satisfied recognised UK standards for a Masters of Science award.

The students have consistently told me that they had to work hard, but in general this was a positive thing, and the experience was rewarding for them. This tells me that the structure and content of the programme were well balanced and appropriate.

### 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 – in the case of MSc students at my own institution, this is certainly equivalent or better, particularly in the case of the research projects and the rigour of their assessment.

### 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.*

Marking was sometimes quite hard, both in teaching modules and research projects, and feedback was sometimes inadequate for a module here or there; although in general feedback provision was more than satisfactory, this could be improved further.

There could also be some further effort put into spacing of deadlines across different modules, particularly in first term during teaching and assessment of the Core modules.

### 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.*

Standards are good – the Distinction students from the Bioscience MSc would easily receive highest class degrees from other comparable UK Universities.

The students that take this course are quite different from the MSc student body in my own institution, and a particular strength is the presence of a number of very good U Leeds graduates who decide to take the MSc in order to receive further research training before proceeding to a PhD. I have also encountered a number of International students who, although in some cases may be struggling with language and writing issues, also included some strong candidates who saw the MSc at Leeds as an opportunity to enter a European academic stream, with possible progression to Doctoral studies either at home or abroad (UK or elsewhere). These people were another positive element within the student cohort.

### 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.*

In general, responses to examiners' suggestions and criticisms have been at least adequate, and often very good. An example has been in the efforts to reduce the overlap of too many course-work deadlines around the Core Modules; this has greatly improved over the three years although it does still register among the difficulties pointed out by the students.

I think this can be summarised by the statement that the MSc is run by a team with a positive and nurturing academic culture: the teaching faculty are not so arrogant as to think that they cannot be continually vigilant for opportunities to improve the programme, even though this may mean some effort. There is a focus on the students which is admirable, and this needs to be sustained.

### 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.*

This is a great feature of the programme, and year on year has been clearly identified by all external examiners, unanimously, as a great drawcard for the students and a well-crafted major element of the MSc.

This year in particular, in conversations with the students at the poster day, I could pick up the thread between their coursework and the development and execution of the projects. Of course, some students manage this better than others, but there has been some success in structuring the programme so that the research component is informing the course-work, and vice versa. However, this cannot be taken for granted, and needs to be monitored. As research activity develops with new technologies and new research questions, the course-work needs to be evaluated to ensure it retains this relevancy.

**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 – although this became easier once I had the experience of previous years. In my first year I was a bit overwhelmed, but I did benefit from a helpful mentor (who was on the same board).

**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 was provided with access to these, but given my large student load this year I needed most of my examination time to focus on the projects and their marking.

**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.

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

Yes – the variety of course reflects the range of academic interests among available supervisors. Assessment was appropriate, sometimes a little on the tough side, but generally fair. Some effort needs to be made to ensure that project assessors provide written feedback – this was missing for some project 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?**

Yes – and I was able to attend the Board. The recommendations were entirely satisfactory.

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

Yes – I have always been impressed with this aspect.

#### **Other comments**

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

Thanks for having me as an external – it was an enjoyable, enlightening and encouraging experience.

Wed 18<sup>h</sup> Nov 2015

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

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



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

8 January 2016

Dear

**RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2014/15**

***MSc Infection and Immunity***

***MSc Bioscience***

Thank you very much for your comments on these programmes. We welcome your broad support for the content and processes and appreciate your hard work over the past few years in providing a robust external insight and contribution to these programmes.

We note that you felt the marking was sometimes quite hard and more feedback could have been provided in some instances. Although clear guidance on marking criteria are provided to staff, we will review these and ensure that they are explicit and unambiguous, and that staff are made fully aware of their responsibilities with regard to marking and provision of feedback. This is also the case for the project supervisor reports.

We also note your comments about the spacing of deadlines. This is an issue that has been brought into sharp focus this semester, particularly for the new combined Infection, Immunity and Human Disease programme. We have proactively rearranged some of the deadlines to relieve some of the pressure on the students at the end of the term and will review these prior to next year's course to ensure they are more evenly spaced throughout the teaching time.

We will continue to monitor the teaching content and its relationship to the research projects offered. This is particularly important as we expand our academic staff with University Academic Fellows and senior staff who will bring new areas of expertise and interest which we would like to exploit to further enhance the Masters experience.

In conclusion, since this is your final year as our External Examiner, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of all the staff connected with the programmes, to thank you for your valuable input to our degrees which has helped us to develop and improve our provision.

Yours sincerely,

Programme Leader

Tel: 0113  
Email: