

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:	Leeds Institute of Health Sciences
Subject(s):	<i>Public Health (International)</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Master in Public Health, with core and optional modules
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	<i>MPH</i>

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

No matters of urgent attention, on the whole, the program lives up to international standards and assessments are generally fair.

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?

Not applicable.

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

Not applicable either, I have been asked for another year.

Standards

- 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 Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme are appropriate for such an International Masters in Public health.
- 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.*

They are, they are very comparable to the standards that I know from my home institute in <<>>, as well as other institutions in the TroEd network, that I am familiar with. Besides, the learning outcomes are meeting the standards and benchmarks as described in the literature.

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.*

Assessment methods are appropriate for the learning outcomes. There is a strong emphasis on written, essay-type of assignments; in past years, these often had a similar structure (analysis of a problem situation, defining objectives, choosing and prioritising among options, resourcing and scheduling of planned activities), and the emphasis on writing skills may favour students who have had English as first language in the past, or at home. I have the impression that assignments have become slightly more varied, some with a specific focus, for instance a poster presentation, or writing a concrete supervision plan for an identified category of human resources, comparing and applying two HR frameworks, etc. This variation in assignments is positive, and it requires from the coordinator of the whole programme a kind of awareness and alertness on the assessment types used across different 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.*

Strengths: ample opportunities of demonstrating writing skills; in a variety of assignments, and within well-structured assignments;
Weaknesses (not specific to international students in Leeds, I'm afraid): handling and interpreting data, where students tend to 'forget' skills acquired during epidemiology and statistics classes; too instrumental use of certain tools like for literature review (Prisma diagram), stakeholder analysis, option appraisal;
Students get of course ample opportunity demonstrating their skills in the integrated final assessment of their dissertation: see also question 14.

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

Not applicable

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.

These have been highlighted under other points.

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.

Across various assignments, students are required to come up with evidence that can support their arguments. Not all students succeed in really using evidence in a structured and critical way. Often one or another study is used to support a point, without due consideration of limitations or validity of respective studies, or a critical discussion of other studies that might contradict these findings. The critical reading and interpretation of scientific studies remains an important challenge, that merits more attention; one assignment in the FIH module was more of a matching exercise, where students were required to find answers to a set of questions through 'matching' pieces of the original text...

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

Not applicable

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

Not applicable

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 am very satisfied with the documentation on the programme, and on my role as external examiner.

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.

The course management has demonstrated very proactive in this matter: I get updates on modules taken; with an invitation to make a choice on samples of assessments that I want to see. I have also been able to speak to the students midway the course, to discuss their perspective and satisfaction with the course as a whole and with assessments in particular.

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, see also question number 13. I got the impression that across the programme, the variety of assignments has improved over the years, with a number of assignments getting into very practical skills or the analysis of such skills..

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, in fact, it is up to me to choose the range and size of samples that I want to see, they are made readily available, together with module overview, assignments, grading grid, and grading reports.
Scripts were generally clearly annotated, comments for some assignments or by some examiners was sometimes shorter than for others; on the whole, the quality of the comments was of a good level, with sufficient opportunities for students to learn from the feedback given.

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

The choice of the topics was appropriate, and varied.
The very structured format of the dissertation makes assessment easier. The application of some of the tools used in the process may need some more guidance; this is particularly the case for the (1) process of literature searching and the use of the Prisma diagram, (2) the choice and application of a conceptual framework, and (3) the use of the option appraisal, that I have commented upon earlier, and that appears to force students in a too tight jacket, at least in the sample of dissertation that I read. This has been discussed in the board meeting.
One other point of attention is that in a number of cases (again, within a small sample of 5 dissertations that I read; but I remember that this was also an issue in past years) students start on a combination of problem definition and objectives that from the start looks illogical, sometimes already apparent in the title of a dissertation. The question then emerges whether the course management should accept student to invest so much energy and work on continuing on this topic, or whether one should be a bit more 'paternalistic' and challenge the respective student to get more focussed, to prevent them from continuing on an illogical pathway altogether.

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, fully satisfied. For the last three years, I have been able to attend the meeting twice a year.

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

Yes, they are in place, and they are being used or considered in most of the meetings that I attended.

Other comments

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

No further comments.

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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

10 December 2015

Dear

External Examiner's report for Public Health (International) 2014-15

As the School of Medicine's Director of Postgraduate Studies, I receive all the External Examiners' reports for the twenty five subjects offered at Master's level in 2014-15. Thank you for assembling the 2014-15 report for the programme in Public Health (International).

I note that there were no urgent matters for attention. You comment that the academic standards and content of student work are appropriate for the level of award.

Good practice

You note that the students are assessed using different methods and this diversity is important for students to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes. You comment that you meet the students during the programme and I should like to thank you for your frequent trips to Leeds and engagement with successive cohorts of students.

Programme Leader's response

I have enclosed with this letter a response assembled by _____ Programme Leader. _____ addresses the points made about the development of critical skills and the guidance provided to dissertation supervisors. I plan to meet the programme team in January to discuss the points you raised.

Thank you so much for your report as External Examiner. Your contributions to the Public Health (International) programme are much valued.

Yours sincerely

Enc:

7 December 2015

Director of Postgraduate Studies



MPH (International) course leader

To

Leeds, 7 December 2015

Dear

Thank you for your clear and comprehensive report about the MPH (International) course which the University of Leeds has received on 5 November 2015. The points which you have raised in your letter during have already been discussed during your meeting with the course leader on 6 October 2015. has included them in the Action Plan for the academic year 2015/16.

We agree with your comments that there is a strong focus on writing skills and essays in the assessments of our students. We think that these skills are very important for international public health students. However, we also want to continue with our approach and further diversify the assessment of our students.

We are aware of the challenge that some students tend to use tools such as the option appraisal or the prisma flow diagram for the literature review in a superficial and instrumental way without adequate critical analysis. The critical and appropriate use of tools will be a cross-sectional teaching issue and also considered in the assessment of our students.

The same applies to the critical interpretation and summary of scientific studies. It is a persistent challenge to make students aware about the need to analyse the validity of a study and also search for studies which may contradict the findings of a study which is presented in an assignment or the dissertation.

The supervisors and other teaching colleague will strengthen their guidance for dissertation students so that the title, aim and objectives present a coherent research approach. There is clearly a tension and challenge between the student's freedom to choose her/his topic and objectives and the task of the supervisor to assist and guide each student to develop a logical and concise dissertation project. We will discuss in our teachers' meetings how this challenge can be best addressed.

Finally we would like to thank you as external examiner for the strong support of the course and your ideas over the past 4 years. Your contributions have been very much appreciated by academic and non-academic staff alike. We hope that our request to extend your period as external examiner will be accepted by the University of Leeds.

Yours sincerely