

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2015– 2016

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

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|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Faculty / School of: | Biological Sciences |
| Subject(s): | |
| Programme(s) / Module(s): | Human Physiology |
| 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

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

N/A

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 programme continues to fit well with the intended learning outcomes for the Human Physiology degree in terms of both structure and content. The standards of attainment by the students are consistent with the level required for a BSc.
- 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 intended learning objectives easily match the high standards observed in similar programmes at other universities.

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.*

The degree programme continues to utilise a variety of assessment methods. There is both coursework and formal examinations, with the latter including MCQ questions, short answers, essays and data handling exercises. The coursework assessment methods include open book essays, extended literature reviews and laboratory reports.

These assessment methods are appropriate to assess the learning objectives of the modules, with a good progression in the complexity of assessment during the degree. The grades awarded to the short answer / essays and coursework reports I observed are entirely appropriate. It is good to see that there is some double marking of scripts. It is clear from the comments made on exam scripts and in the dissertation feedback sheets the reasons behind the award of a grade, and in most cases two marks awarded in the marking process were closely aligned. However, in a small number of cases there was a large difference between markers. Although this was resolved after discussions the specific reasons for award of the final agreed mark in such cases was not always clear to me as external examiner. It would be useful in the case of a large difference for a short record of the discussions to agree the final grade to be made on the feedback sheet. All grades and scripts were made available to me during my visit. For all modules I reviewed there were no concerns or issues.

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.*

As in the previous academic year there were a range of student performances, with the very best students producing some excellent pieces of work. The range in performances observed is similar to other institutions and is not a concern. I was once again very impressed with the Advanced Topics module, where students were able to research a selection of areas independently. There were also many dissertations of a very high standard. Those that involved more educational / schools research showed that the students were able to adapt their research skills to more unusual situations. In some dissertation reports I did notice a tendency for students to report percentage data, but not the original values. The reporting of raw data in scientific reports is considered excellent practise (and is something that is required for publication of any research data), and I would therefore like to flag this issue with the programme director and make a recommendation that this is addressed for the next academic year.

In terms of assessment there were no areas where the students as a group struggled. There was one final year module that experienced some issues with the temperature of the room, and the grades in this module were on the low side compared to other modules. However, this was noted by the exam board and taken into consideration in discussions.

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 14/15 I flagged that sometimes the dissertation feedback sheets were not always completed, and this has been addressed in 15/16.

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.

Level 3 is a research led year, with students exposed to research by teaching from research active staff. They have the opportunity to complete a wet lab based research project, working on a specific research area. These students therefore directly engage with the methods and principles underpinning scientific research. Alternatively students can complete an extended literature review, being exposed to research via interactions with supervisors and the published research field in a particular area. Another group of project students complete pedagogical research by engaging with schools and educational topics. In addition, all students are also exposed to research through the Advanced Topics module, where research active staff deliver talks on their areas and students complete independent research on the area.

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

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 was provided with all the information needed to act as external examiner during the year. Unfortunately, due to illness I was unable to take part in the mid-year external examiners visit. However, I was able to see scripts from the early part of the year on my visit in June 2016. During the year and my visit staff always let me know that if I required any additional information then all I had to do was ask. The administrator I dealt with was excellent.

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 reviewed all draft examination scripts, and any minor issues I flagged were addressed. The questions were appropriate for the level of assessment and the learning objectives being assessed.

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?

I had access to all examination scripts, and also all project work during my visit. I looked at one borderline candidate as part of my visit, but also had the opportunity to review the scripts of other students. The scripts / projects reports were marked appropriately, and guidance on the reasons behind the award of a specific grade was given. It was good to see that the dissertation feedback sheets were all completed this year. I have noted an issue in point 3 above relating to the recording of discussions when grades differ and a final grade is subsequently agreed upon.

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

There are a variety of project types available to students. These include wet laboratory, literature review and also schools / education projects. Having a selection of project types available is good, as not all students wish to complete a wet lab project, and having choice allows students to target to their strengths and career development. Students therefore benefit from a variety of suitable alternatives. I was particularly impressed by the projects I read from students who had completed the schools option, as they demonstrated an ability to apply their research training skills. The grades awarded to the projects were appropriate. I have noted in point 4 above that some students did not report raw data in their dissertation reports, and this is something that needs addressing.

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?

As last year the arrangements were excellent. Draft examination scripts were delivered with sufficient time to available to review and report back. Issues raised on these draft examinations were dealt with in a timely manner. During my visit in June 2016 scripts were available to read across all relevant modules and students. In this academic year there was one borderline student I had to consider and I was able to review their work. I did also examine work from a number of other students who were not borderline, and this work was at a standard consistent with degree classification. During the board of examiners meeting the final decisions for all students were reviewed and clearly presented. Overall I am extremely happy with the assessment procedures, marking and the final exam board procedures.

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

Students with mitigating circumstances were flagged and consideration given.

Other comments

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

I have two additional points I wish to comment on:

1. There was one student who was awarded a first class degree but had no level 3 grades in the first class category. The award of their degree was a consequence of a very high performance in level 2 together with the algorithm utilised at Leeds (the 1:1 versus 1:2 approach). This is of concern to me. As a student progresses through their degree we expect

them to demonstrate a higher level of understanding and skills. Our expectations at level 2 are therefore different to those at level 3. For this particular student, while they were working at first class in level 2, their work was very much of upper second class at level 3. The examination board stated that this was the first time this had happened. I would like to recommend that the university notes this situation and reviews whether this is something they need to investigate further and act upon.

2. In 14/15 there was some concerns raised about the awarding of prizes. It was good to see that this had been resolved for 2015/16.

**Faculty of Biological Sciences
Student Education Service**

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

7 November 2016

Dear

RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2015/16

BSc Human Physiology – all programme variants

BSc Human Physiology in Relation to Medicine

MBiol, BSc Human Physiology (Integrated Masters) – all programme variants

Firstly, as Programme Leader, I would like to thank you for your efficiency and input through 2015-16. Your commitment and hard work on behalf of our programme is very much appreciated. As you know, my term as Programme Leader is coming to an end now and for the next academic year [redacted] will be taking on this role. I am sure that I can say on [redacted] and other members of the programme team's behalf that we look forward to working with you in the next academic year too.

Your comprehensive end-of-year programme report has been read with interest and will be distributed to members of the Human Physiology Programme Team. I can assure you that appropriate measures will be actioned where they have been requested by you. However, we were pleased that overall no matters for urgent attention were identified and that based on your experience as External Examiner at comparable institutions *“the aims and intended learning objectives easily match the high standards observed in similar programmes at other universities”* and there is a good fit to the *“intended learning outcomes for the Human Physiology degree in terms of structure and content”*. You comment that *“Overall I am extremely happy with the assessment procedures, marking and the final exam board procedures”*.

With respect to our assessment/examination methods, we note that these were deemed as *“appropriate to assess the learning objectives of the modules, with a good progression in the complexity of assessment during the degree”* and that grades awarded to short answer/essays from the examinations and coursework reports are *“entirely appropriate”*. You highlighted our double marking for some scripts as an example of good practice and commented favourably on the high level of congruence that existed between the two markers in most cases. A specific issue was raised regarding the occasional mismatch between two markers and the process followed to agree a final mark, stating *“the specific reasons for award of the final agreed mark in such cases was not always clear to me as External Examiner”*. You have made the reasonable request that *“a short record of the discussions to agree the final grade to be made on the feedback sheet”*. I will, of course, ensure that [redacted] and our DSE [redacted] are alerted to this and will personally raise it as an item for consideration at our next BMS programme meeting.

Your positive appraisal of the performance and achievements of our students and the finding that many dissertations were *“of a very high standard”* is acknowledged. However, you raised a valid concern over the *“tendency for students to report percentage data but not the original values”* and correctly point out that reporting raw data is considered excellent practice and closer to what is required for a scientific publication. We will take positive steps to ensure that all supervisors are aware of this issue and agree with you that students should be providing/reporting actual data as would be appropriate for best practice. Your comments on the evident embedding of research-led teaching e.g. within the Level 3 Advanced Topics modules and the

impressive range of dissertations, including options for literature reviews or pedagogical research, offered to our Level 3 students within the programme are noted.

At the final Exam Board meeting you highlighted an area of concern regarding the classification of a first class degree for a candidate who had performed well at Level 2 but had no first class marks for modules studied at Level 3. This arose as a result of the 1:1 versus 1:2 algorithm applied by University of Leeds to calculate the final overall degree classification. One of the reasons for adopting this method is to allow for so-called “exit velocity” where students perform strongly at Level 3. To my memory, and that of the Exam Board, this was the first time we observed such an outcome. Your statements that at Level 3 “*we expect them to demonstrate a higher level of understanding and skills*” and that in this case their work was “*very much of upper second class at level 3*” are apposite. Your concerns are noted and it is something that certainly requires future monitoring. My current understanding is that there is no immediate intention to change this university-wide classification approach but, if we deem it right to do so, we will feedback recommendations as appropriate.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of all of the team connected with Human Physiology to thank you for your valuable input which will help us to continue to develop and improve the quality of our degree programmes.

Yours sincerely,

Programme Leader

Tel: 0113
Email: