

# The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2015-2016

### Part A: General Information

#### Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	Biological Sciences
Subject(s):	<i>Biochemistry</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BSc, MBIol

#### 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*

#### 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?*

#### 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*

I have been pleased with the degree to which academic staff have been engaged with the student learning process and assessment. The Faculty has responded positively to suggestions I have made. The biggest change I have seen, though, is with the successful introduction of the MBIol programme, extending the learning offered to students and meanwhile ensuring high standards both in this programme and the BSc.

## 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.*

The ILOs for both the BSc and MBIol programmes are very appropriate and the programmes prepare students for careers in a wide range of careers by developing generic skills as well as those specifically pertaining to science.
  
- 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. The content and standards of Biochemistry programmes at Leeds are comparable to other leading institutions.
  
- 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.*

My comments from last year still stand. The marking of the Advanced Topic Unit exam essays has changed over the past few years with a better use of the full range of the marking scale by some, but not all, markers. More work is needed to ensure a higher level of consistency.
  
- 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. Over the degree programme, a wide range of assessments is used, allowing students with different strengths to shine. The best students are very good and would do well in any university. There is a noticeable tail but the less gifted students are well supported to complete their programmes of study.
  
- 5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum**
  
- 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 MBIol has now bedded in well and the major research project in the final year are particularly commendable.
  
- 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.*

The research focus in years 3 and 4 is particularly strong, preparing students for a career in which they either pursue scientific research or use their understanding of the scientific process.
  
- 8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD**

## 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**

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 was provided with all the relevant information. Staff in the Faculty were very responsive and helpful in providing any additional information on request.

**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?**

Yes. All the comments I made were taken into account in finalising the exam papers.

**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, a good range of assessed material at all levels was made available. Annotation of scripts was generally good but I did suggest modifying the project assessment form to ensure the inclusion of comments to help external examiners understand how marks had been derived.

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

Yes, a very good range of projects is made available to students.

**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, a great deal of care is taken to ensure that due process is followed and that the appropriate outcomes are reached.

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

Yes, FBS takes great care with students who have experienced difficulties and does all it can to ensure that their academic achievement is appropriately recognised without compromising standards.

Other comments

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

I remain baffled by the conversion of percentage marks onto a scale from 2-9. This makes it very difficult to follow the impacts of particular assessments on overall classification. I see no justification for this conversion in science courses. Not only did it confuse me and the other external examiners, the Leeds academic staff also have difficulty in explaining and understanding the details.

One of the year 3 examinations this year experienced a very regrettable circumstance. About half of the class were allowed by the invigilators to enter the exam hall and begin the exam while the remaining students waited outside. After about ten minutes the remainder of the students were seated, disrupting the exam for those who had started but clearly giving the second batch of students a disadvantage in the time available. This failure of process has undermined the assessment process and gave the exam board difficulties in its deliberations. The university must act urgently to ensure that no incidents like this occur in future.

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

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



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

7 November 2016

Dear

**RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2015/16**

**BSc Biochemistry – all programme variants**

**BSc Biochemistry in Relation to Medicine**

**BSc Medical Biochemistry – all programme variants**

**MBiol, BSc Biochemistry (Integrated Masters) – all programme variants**

**MBiol, BSc Medical Biochemistry (Integrated Masters) – all programme variants**

First of all, I would like to thank you for your critical input into our Biochemistry degrees over the years, which has helped us to enhance the student experience and maintain high standards. As you may know, I was appointed to replace [redacted] last September at rather short notice, the original plan being to serve as a deputy for a year to give me enough time to step up. Fortunately, I have inherited the programme in excellent state with good support from academics and staff in the Student Education Office.

Under your critical oversight, many aspects of the programme have improved. We have introduced measures to ensure fairer marking and better guidance for markers. Scripts are being checked for adequate annotation and justification of marks. Student attainment on many modules and student satisfaction (as reflected in NSS scores) has improved. I am pleased with your positive evaluation of the MBiol programme which has been the main new feature introduced within the Biochemistry suite of degree programmes.

I am pleased you found our overall procedures of a good standard in your last report. However, you have identified one regrettable exam-related incident and two areas of improvement in marking and assessment. The regrettable event was caused by incompetent invigilators who significantly disrupted a third-year examination. As discussed at the examination board meeting this was beyond the control of the Faculty since invigilators are provided by the University's Central Teaching Support, which is also responsible for their training. We lodged a formal complaint with CTS, which, as a consequence, is improving the training given to invigilators. When possible, we will also delegate a Faculty representative to supervise the process.

You have duly questioned the sense of converting the perfectly transparent 0-100% mark onto 2-9 mark scale. There are now indications from the University that this process will be phased out in the near future.

We agree with you that while progress has been made with ATU assessments and exam setting, more needs to be done. We are in process of re-vamping the ATU content and delivery with a new module manager in place and new topics being introduced in lieu of outdated content. We have introduced workshops for the students to support their preparation for the exams and will follow up with online revision packs that include examples of marking at each level of classification. The latter will also serve as a guide for academics to ensure parity in marking.

With thanks and best wishes,

Programme Leader

Tel: 0113 34  
 Email: