

**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:	School of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Health
Subject(s):	Epidemiology and Biostatistics
Programme(s) / Module(s):	<u>MSc Epidemiology and Biostatistics</u> EPIB5001M – Research Project EPIB5022M – Core Epidemiology EPIB5023M – Introduction to Modelling EPIB5024M – Statistical Inference EPIB5025M – Multilevel and Latent Variable Modelling EPIB5026M – Advanced Modelling EPIB5027M – Advanced Epidemiology EPIB5030M – Professional Spine EPIB5032M – Introduction to Genetic Epidemiology EPIB5034M – Project in Epidemiology and Biostatistics EPIB5035M – Non-Communicable Disease Epidemiology EPIB3036 – Introduction to Clinical Trials PHLT5110M – Communicable Disease Control and Non-infectious Epidemiology PHLT5125M – Population Health Principles and Practices
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*

N/A

**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

### 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 programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes are commensurate with the level of the award and the structure and content of the programme. The standards set are appropriate for the qualification of Master's degree and are of a high standard.

### 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.*

The Aims and ILOs meet the subject benchmark for similar programmes including Masters in Public Health, and are comparable to, or higher than, other programmes with which I am familiar.

### 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 good range of assessment methods used by the programme (eg. coursework, examination, projects, exercises, essays, critical appraisal and self-reflection logs). The arrangements for marking and moderation were fair and the classification of awards carefully considered at the Exam Board. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods were of a high standard in the material I observed. I was shown samples of student work for 3 students of different abilities and the marks fairly reflected the quality of the work. In one module PHLT5110M there seemed to be quite a narrow range of marks (50-60) for an essay assignment suggesting the marking criteria may need some attention to better discriminate between students. In the Genetic Epidemiology module I did not see the feedback comments for the essay assignment, and there were no marks on the exam scripts for the EPIB5023M module.

The three dissertation projects and videos of oral presentations that I was shown were interesting, demonstrated good student engagement and covered a good range of topics. Even at the lower end of the scale in one dissertation the student had been quite innovative in their approach to their project. I queried dissertation marker discrepancies at the top end of the scale for one project, observing a mark of 99.5 out of 100 from one marker and 73 from the other marker. This was discussed at the exam board. More specific guidance for each component of the dissertation assessment is to be drawn up, as discussed previously. It would also be useful to include the detailed aims and objectives in the main body of the report (not in the Appendix) to better follow and understand the content of the journal article (and to aid structure in presentation of methods and results).

### 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.*

The academic standards demonstrated by the students were appropriate for the Masters degree programme and their performance comparable to other schemes. The strengths and weaknesses of the student cohort were reflected in their coursework marks, with most showing some improvement in their learning over the year across modules.

Students were given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the learning objectives and seemed to engage well with their learning. Most students were able to demonstrate their skills clearly through their written work. Two students who worked closely together had been warned about ensuring independent working and using their own words with respect to plagiarism when handing in assignments or creating posters from published articles.

### 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.*

- I have previously suggested that it would be good practice at MSc level if one or two coursework assignments could be written up in a standard reporting-style for certain modules. Improvements were seen but perhaps more explicit written instructions are needed of the structure (eg. section headings etc) required.
- The reflective logs that I could not view last year I saw on the day of my visit this year via the VLE. They were interesting and useful for the tutor to gauge student learning but the VLE does not seem to allow them to be extracted from the system.
- The exam marks for the Genetic Epidemiology module were put on the exam scripts as requested.
- It was good to see that sample size was put back into the Professional Spine module.

- The Core Epidemiology module was discussed again and is to be revised to have one CBT element rather than two.
- Marking guidance for the dissertations is quite broad as discussed last year and will be made more detailed.

**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 an interesting programme that uses a range of modern techniques and methods of assessment that allow students to demonstrate their individual strengths and capabilities. The programme curriculum operates from within a research-led framework, and the majority of assessments include some components that are influenced by research. This is a particular strength of the programme.

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

The programme is very appropriate and relevant as training for a quantitative PhD in the subject.

**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 the guidance was sufficient for me to act as EE.

**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 I was provided with draft examination papers and the nature and level was appropriate. Any comments I made were acted upon.

**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 saw a selection of all the assessed work across all modules which gave me confidence in my evaluation of the standard of student assessment.

I was provided with a breakdown of marks for different coursework components, which enabled me to check that the range of marks and variability in marks for each individual student within each coursework component.

In one module the feedback from the tutor was missing for the essay component of the assessment but the standard of those seen was observed to be high.

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

The choice of subjects for dissertations was excellent. The method and standard of assessment was appropriate. The marking criteria for one part of the dissertation assessment for the journal article component will be changed to be made clearer for next year (as mentioned above and discussed at the Exam Board).

**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?**

The whole process was well organised. I am grateful to <<>> and <<>> for the time and effort they put into providing everything I needed in advance or on the day of the two Boards I attended. I was satisfied with the recommendations of the Exam Board

**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**

This is an excellent and well-organised programme, run by a dedicated and enthusiastic team. It offers a range of contemporary modules that provide students with a good grounding in research methods and biostatistics for their future careers.

The students benefit from working within a research-led environment and this is seen in their work. The assessment methods are varied and they enhance students' learning and enable students to express themselves in a range of innovative ways.

The professional approach of the team provides students with the skills they need for increased employability within the workplace, both in terms of study design and quantitative analysis.

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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

<<>>

19 November 2016

Dear <<>>

**External Examiner's report for Epidemiology and Biostatistics 2015-16**

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. First, let me thank you for assembling the 2015-16 report for the programmes in Epidemiology and Biostatistics.

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.

**Programme Leader's response**

I have enclosed with this letter a response assembled by <<>>, Programme Leader. <<>> addresses the points made about marking criteria, structured report writing and feedback comments. I have every confidence that the programme team will implement the changes he outlines.

**Good practice**

You note that the curriculum operates within a research-led framework, and the majority of assessments include some components that are influenced by research. This is good practice. I was pleased to learn that the programme delivers excellent training for conducting a PhD.

You comment on the meetings of the Boards of Examiners and I was glad to learn of the efficient arrangements of the administrator, <<>>, and the programme team.

Thank you so much for your detailed report as External Examiner. Your contributions to the Epidemiology and Biostatistics programme are much valued.

Yours sincerely

<<>>

<<>>

Enc: <<>> 11 November 2016

**Director of Postgraduate Studies**  
<<>>



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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

11/11/2016

Dear ,

**Re: Response to External Examiner's Report (Academic Year 2015– 2016)**

I write in response to report on the MSc in Epidemiology & Biostatistics for which I am programme leader.

The teaching team was pleased with positive and supportive responses in this, third year as external examiner. In particular, *"this is an interesting programme that uses a range of modern techniques"* and that *"the programme curriculum operates from within a research-led framework"*. confirms that *"assessment methods are varied and they enhance students' learning and enable students to express themselves in a range of innovative ways"* and that *"this is an excellent and well-organised programme, run by a dedicated and enthusiastic team"*.

Although did not raise any matters for urgent attention, a number of issues were described in report. The following strategies have been enacted to address them:

- a. *"In (PHLT5110M) there seemed to be quite a narrow range of marks (50-60) for an essay assignment suggesting the marking criteria may need some attention"*  
PHLT5110M was a new module for the MSc Epidemiology & Biostatistics in 2015/16 (having previously been part of the Master's in Public Health). The methods by which the marking criteria are articulated to students will be revised (e.g. use of examples, marking grids). Changes in approach will be discussed with the module team for implementation when the module runs in Semester 2 2016/17.
- b. *"In the Genetic Epidemiology module I did not see the feedback comments for the essay assignment, and there were no marks on the exam scripts for EPIB5023M"*  
These issues have been discussed at Programme Management Committee and will be addressed when the module runs in Semester 2 2016/17.
- c. *"More specific guidance for each component of the dissertation assessment is to be drawn up, as discussed previously"*  
This issue was raised in report last year but could not be implemented for the 2015/16 cohort as the EPIB5001M module handbook had already been released to students. Changes have been agreed by the Programme Management Committee and will be rolled out for the 2016/17 cohort.
- d. *"I have previously suggested that it would be good practice at MSc level if one or two coursework assignments could be written up in a standard reporting-style for certain modules. Improvements were seen but perhaps more explicit written instructions are needed of the structure (eg. section headings etc) required"*  
Further changes are planned for the 2016/17 cohort (in the two coursework assessments for the Semester 1 module EPIB5023M) to introduce a standardized report format, supported by new guidance to students.

Yours sincerely,

Programme Leader – MSc in Epidemiology & Biostatistics