

**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 Earth and Environment
Subject(s):	Sustainability and Business
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Various modules on MSc programmes listed below
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc Sustainability and Consultancy MSc Sustainability and Business

**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*

No matters for urgent attention

**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 enjoyed having been associated with the programmes over the last four years. I found the programme design to be of high standard. Indeed, the two programmes occupy a salient niche position in the increasingly crowded UK PG market. I found the marking to be both rigorous and consistent, with plenty of evidence of marks being discussed between markers and moderators. Last but not least, my visits were well handled and the Boards of Examiners ran smoothly. Much of this is due to the committed work by <<>>.

## 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.*

Programme aims and learning outcomes are commensurate with level of award.

**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.*

Programme aims and learning outcomes are comparable with other UK universities I am familiar with.

**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 was thorough and used a range of methods. In general, it was appropriate to the ILOs.

The two programmes try to strike a balance between academic rigour and application to practice. They by and large succeed in achieving this. One area where assessment perhaps could be changed concerns SOEE5175 Sustainability Consulting Project. The marking here could perhaps combine a practical, client-facing assessment with a more academic one, where students are invited to reflect on their consulting experience in the light of theoretical frameworks the programme covered.

Given a growing number of overseas students with varying levels of English language skills, the programme teams could consider forms of assessment that allow a greater distinction between whether a student did not understand the content of a module or is hampered in expressing that knowledge. Non-verbal assessment, e.g. using posters, might be an answer.

**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. Student feedback and the marks themselves testify to the high quality of the teaching on the programmes.

**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.*

The two programmes are now more clearly differentiated from each other. Simplifying their names should help communicate their distinct emphases to new student generations.

**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.*

Research by the School and particularly by the Sustainability Research Institute clearly infuses teaching.

**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

## 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.*

The roles were well explained, any material was sent well in time.

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 all the material. The nature of the assessment was appropriate.

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, sufficient student work was available. There was clear evidence of rigorous marking and of discussions between markers.

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

Yes. As I said above, for the consultancy project you could consider a combination of practitioner-focussed output (the current report, perhaps even shorter) and a more theory-driven reflection on the learning process and its outcomes.

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?

Very much so! Preparation and execution of the board were very smooth. This is to a large measure due to the hard work of <<>>.

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

I am very disappointed to learn that the Faculty administration recently decided not to formally appoint <<>> to the role of coordinator of the examination scrutiny process. Not only has he been fulfilling this role anyway, he has done so with great energy and utmost attention to detail. The fact that the board and the wider external examination process went so smoothly is largely due to his personal commitment.

**School of Earth and Environment**

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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

16 December 2016

Dear

**Re: Response to External Examiner's Report - MSc Sustainability & Consultancy and MSc Sustainability & Business for the academic year 2015-2016**

Thank you very much for examining our MSc programmes for the last academic session once again. Your views are an essential part of our quality assurance mechanism and we very much welcome your input into our teaching processes.

Overall, it is encouraging that you felt that all the modules you scrutinised were of a good quality and that no urgent modifications are necessary. Thank you for noting that the assessed work, and marks awarded, suggest that learning outcomes are appropriate and teaching overall is high quality. We also appreciate your positive comments about the evidence of discussion between markers and moderators, as you will appreciate that this can be a difficult process to get right.

You identified a couple of areas where there is scope to review and potentially improve our teaching and its impacts

- SOEE5175 Sustainability Consultancy Project – we continue to adjust the assessment on this 60 credit module to ensure that the learning outcomes are appropriate for PG study in the social sciences. Your suggestions about further differentiating the written elements of the assessment to separate the client output and the reflective, academic analysis are particularly helpful to us and will be used to guide further adjustments.
- English language skills – you are correct that while we welcome the diverse perspective that an increasingly international cohort brings to PG study, we need to continue to check that our assessments allow for students to demonstrate an understanding of concepts and appropriate critical analysis without being disproportionately penalised for inaccurate grammar. We recognise that we may be over-reliant on the social science essay and take note to evaluate other options such as posters.

It also seems appropriate to update you on how we have developed modules that ran in 2015-16 and which you have previously commented upon (in 2014-15), to demonstrate how we continue to use and learn from your review:

- SOEE5192 Project Management: Developing and Managing Environmental Contracts and SOEE5222: Project Management: Sustainability, People and Resources.  
These modules were problematic when introduced in 2014-15 and whilst, as you have observed, they raised no specific issues in 2015-16 we are still finding it challenging to deliver what we had hoped in terms of two dovetailed 15 credit modules covering project management for sustainability. Therefore, in 2016-17 we are replacing SOEE5222 with [SOEE5223: Delivering Sustainability through Projects](#) which is open to a wider range of students beyond the MSc Sustainability & Consultancy programme.
- SOEE5041: Standards and Tools for Business, Environment and Corporate Social Responsibility. This module was reviewed following your previous feedback but even moving to team teaching to ensure a variety of teaching styles and methods, developing further the practical experience of audit and applying standards, this continues to be a module from which students report less learning and engagement.

This year, we note in particular your recognition of the efforts made by Andrew Bowdin to support you as external examiner more effectively and are glad that you have found the process effective. We are pleased to note that Andrew continues to play a valued role in our Student Education Service at school level in supporting the examination (and other) processes, including for the programmes for which you were external examiner.

We are very pleased to hear that you are satisfied with the overall quality of the Masters programmes and that you consider our programmes to be well designed, occupying clear niches in a crowded area of provision and generally well received by students. We are planning to build on your feedback by further developing the focus of the MSc Sustainability & Business so that enterprise and entrepreneurship become the main motivations for the programme.

We trust this response indicates how carefully we consider your feedback and clarifies how we use that information. We are very grateful for your encouragement. We believe your input has made a positive difference to our programmes.

Yours sincerely,

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