

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:	Civil Engineering
Subject(s):	<i>Structural Engineering</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc (Eng) Structural Engineering
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.

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 Aims and ILOs are very appropriate for an MSc in Structural Engineering.

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 level is at least comparable with other Masters degrees.

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 an excellent balance of coursework and exams. Several of the modules have common teaching and exams with 10 credit MEng modules, but there is an additional 5 credit piece of coursework, which is appropriate. Based on the student performance, from their results and my review of their work, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is very good.

For Advanced Steel and Composite Design the coursework had a mean mark of 97%. This is too high, even though the mean for the exam was relatively low so the overall mean module mark was acceptable. I understand that the coursework was designed to ensure that all students, from various different backgrounds, met a certain standard. This is reasonable, but I would suggest that for this type of assessment it would be more appropriate to make it a pass/fail element, rather than awarding extremely high coursework marks that then skew the module marks. This could also be considered for other modules.

For the classification of awards, for borderline candidates there is perhaps too much emphasis on the dissertation mark. Whereas it is the largest module and clearly very important, there is inevitably a certain amount of subjectivity in the assessment, which is done by different members of staff. I believe the process to deal with discrepancies between markers is as fair as is reasonably possible, but the module mark may still be subject to uncertainty of a few percent. For a borderline candidate, the difference between 69% and 70%, for example, can determine the degree classification awarded, based on Clause 8.6c of the Code of Practice for Assessment. Hence the uncertainty in the dissertation mark can potentially have major consequences. This is on top of the high weighting of the module towards the year average.

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. As well as the excellent balance of coursework and exams, there is also an excellent balance of theoretical and practical subjects, giving students the opportunity to show their abilities in different areas. The average marks for all modules are within a reasonable range. The low marks in Design Optimisation from last year appear to have been addressed.

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 presentation for the dissertation module was properly assessed this year, giving a reasonable range of marks. The dissertation marking system was modified so that the two markers could not see each other's marks and comments to ensure that they were independent.

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.

Staff research interests clearly come through in the topics of the dissertations and many students make good progress in their research. Some of the taught modules also have a good link with staff research.

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

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.

Sufficient information was provided.

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. Draft exam papers were provided. The nature and level of the questions were appropriate. However, there were a lot of minor errors on them, which should have been corrected at an earlier stage. Also it would be good practice to show the marking scheme on the solutions.

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. All of the exam scripts and nearly all of the coursework was made available. The marking was appropriate and some of the feedback on coursework was excellent, particularly for design work.

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

Yes. There was a good range of subjects for the dissertations. I believe the marking was fair and of an appropriate standard, but I have a few concerns about the process. Last year I raised a concern that the marking scheme could restrict the range of possible marks, especially for very top dissertations. In the Head of School's response to my report last year it was stated that the full 0 to 100 range of marks would be possible this year, but I understand that that change was not actually implemented. This year it appears there were not any outstanding dissertations that were affected, but for the future I suggest that the marking scheme be revisited. It was also mentioned in the Head of School's letter that a mark for 'effort' would be re-introduced. I would be against such a mark if it is not based on clear evidence. The School may also wish to consider not using the supervisor as an assessor, although I appreciate for some topics there may not be two independent specialists in the area who could act as assessors.

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, the administrative arrangements were satisfactory, I was able to attend the meeting and I was satisfied with the outcomes. One minor point is that it does not seem appropriate to record a decision of 'fail' for students who in fact have another attempt at certain modules, e.g. because of mitigating circumstances.

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

Yes. The reporting was clearer than last year.

Other comments

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

There is a lack of group work in the programme. Whereas last year there was a small element of coursework for the dissertation presentations, I understand that this year it was removed. It seems the assessment of the presentations was better in itself, but this has left no group work in the whole degree programme, which seems rather an omission.

The School could consider more industry input into the course.

Despite raising some minor concerns in this report, overall I am more than satisfied that this is a very good degree programme, with good teaching, administration and standards.

Faculty of Engineering

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13 January 2016



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Dear

MSc(Eng): Structural Engineering

Thank you very much for your report on the MSc(Eng) Structural Engineering and for the positive comments. I am also grateful for your observations made during the Examiners' meeting in October, some of which have also been confirmed in your report.

Your point about the coursework for some modules, in particular that for Advanced Steel and Composite Design, is valid. Whilst the coursework exercises are offered to assess and accommodate the different learning styles and backgrounds of students, the mark for these exercises should not dominate the overall module mark. The coursework assessment should test a range of depth of understanding such that an average for the cohort of 97% should not be possible. I am aware that the students this year did commit an unusually high amount of effort to the coursework. Even so, such high marks were a surprise; to confirm, this will be reviewed for the 2016/17 session.

I would also like to offer my apologies with respect to the exam papers you received and the minor errors that you found. We do endeavour to identify these errors in our internal review process.

The discussion that we had in the October meeting on the topic of Dissertations was very interesting, particularly your observations on whether a mark for 'effort' should be awarded and whether the supervisor should actually act as an assessor. These points will be discussed at the next School Teaching and Student Education Committee meeting to be held in the first quarter of 2017. Interestingly, further discussions during the 2015/16 session resulted in no mark for 'effort' being awarded this year, which actually is in-line with your recommendations, however, this is not consistent across all programmes, hence the School discussions in January. With respect to the marking scale, it is now possible to adjust the scale individually for each programme and a scale of 0 to 100 will be trialled for the 2016/17 session. Your observation on how the Dissertation mark can potentially be used to elevate students whose marks are in the discretionary band is a University regulation which I have to uphold. I think that the marks of

did highlight a potential issue with this regulation which has been noted. However, hopefully by opening up the marking scale to 0 to 100 this will negate any cases like this or certainly reduce your concerns about the regulation in the future.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank you again for your time and consideration; your observations are very important to the continuous review of the content and the direction of the programme.

Yours sincerely

Head of School
Chair of Structural Engineering