

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: | Computing |
| Subject(s): | <i>Artificial intelligence</i> |
| Programme(s) / Module(s): | Various |
| Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc): | BSc Computer Science, BSc Artificial Intelligence |

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

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 outcomes were clear and the level of the award was appropriate to students attending a University with the high standing of the University of Leeds.

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

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 was a good balance of examinations and coursework – although there may be unexploited opportunities to move to a single large coursework in some modules. Most assessments were carefully crafted – though there was still a little too much bookwork in some of the examinations.

Generally standards were high – and with a programme of this size and breadth there is always a chance of exceptions. One notable exception was the Software engineering module 2541 – while, while it was 100% coursework – essentially asked “exam style” questions as coursework (including bookwork) which had only limited critique and analysis. I understand that the module will run in a different way next year.

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 – generally speaking there was a good an appropriate spread of marks. I understand that there has been an effort to access the higher range of marks this year – particularly for projects – this is a welcome initiative that should be continued and extended.

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.

One excellent project achieved a very high mark – and this is a welcome development. The published criteria for project marking across 4 project types remain an example of very good practice.

While it is good to see modules accessing the higher range of marks, some modules took this to extremes with very high median and mean marks (e.g. where more than half the students in a significant cohort achieved first class marks). In these cases where students performance may be significantly affected by the choice of module or

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.

There was welcome evidence of research finding its way into the curriculum and its assessment Several of the projects had a clear research focus (and might lead on to PhD work). I raised a point about poor referencing in student projects last year (even ones scoring high marks). This seems improved overall – though I believe there is still some way to go and students need to be encouraged to reference scholarly papers in their project work.

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

None of the programmes I assessed were of this nature – but nevertheless it was clear that some of the top students were receiving training appropriate to PhD research.

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.

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 to exams. As I mentioned last year, the feedback loop needs to be closed in terms of using external feedback. Most of the exams I saw were well crafted but in some cases it would be useful to know whether external feedback had been fully taken into account (and what changes had been made).

The amount of optionality in exams is less – and I believe this is pedagogically more sound, as well as being fairer to students and less workload for staff.

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 – the organisation of scripts and projects was very good.

Last year I commented: “Where project resolution was undertaken it would be useful if the third marker focussed on the reasons for resolution rather than simply copy/pasting the other reports.” – I believe this is improved this year, but still a work in progress.

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

Yes – but see earlier comment on referencing and bibliographies. Bibliographies felt slightly better – but students need to be encouraged to reference scholarly papers.

The document describing assessment criteria for projects of each type and dividing into expectation for each marking band was exemplary.

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 – arrangements were good.

I find this form a little stifling – I have about 1-2 pages of comments and contents to feed back and would prefer a form with two or three questions (possibly with lots of pointers as to what to say) so that I could choose how to structure my content (and hence probably make it more readable and useful).

I was able to attend the meeting – which ran very smoothly.

I was satisfied with the recommendations of the board – though note:

- **A watch needs to be maintained on modules with very high average marks** (or less often very low marks) – especially if these could affect a degree classification. I've seen a few different methods for mitigating these effects, from (1) the rather drastic step of normalising every module mark to use the same mean mark as the mean-of-means across all modules and (2) publishing the average deviation of each student from their mean mark (essentially as given on the scatterplots – which are good practice). In any case, it might be useful to consider scaling more often where exams prove to be much easier or more difficult than expected. In the case of module COMP 1011 this is a first year module which it is possible for those from other schools to elect to take – but this had an extraordinary median mark of 79% (for a large cohort). Students from other schools may be unfairly advantaged by taking such a module – other departments should be alerted to this – **there is a strong argument for scaling in this case.**
- When scaling it seems overgenerous to allocate full marks to part questions (for example where there is an error in the question). Instead these question parts should be removed from consideration and the mark w=should be out of, say 96 rather than 100.

It was difficult to get a “big picture” understanding of assessment – e.g. by putting external examiner comments, module leader response, analysis of marks, narrative on marks from module leader, and internal board comments in one place for each module.

The **internal board minutes** are a very important signpost to external examiners that should be made available to external examiners.

The number of credits associated to a module wasn't easy to obtain from yamp reports.

It is confusing that the project “joint” report is entitled “individual report”.

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

Yes. Good practice here.

Other comments

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

We had the opportunity to meet students – which was very welcome. The ones we saw were highly eloquent/enthusiastic/engaged/intelligent – indeed the externals had so much fun talking to the students that we were slightly late for the board – sorry about that.

The demonstration of the top project (in robotics) was hugely impressive – and the very high mark well justified for this project.

I repeat from last year - it is important that students are not narrowly expecting that they only need to learn things which are clearly signposted in lectures – students at Universities such as Leeds should be encouraged to go further and conduct their own research with lectures as a basis for further learning rather than the last word.

For the board to retain discretion over degree awards (rather than an imposed formula) is good practice. Also that marks are not anonymous is good practice in avoiding any mistakes. A final admin check of marks is also good practice.

Overall the students, academic staff and support staff at Leeds show enthusiasm and care in assessment.

Quality Assurance Team

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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

11 July 2016

Dear

I am responding on behalf of the University of Leeds to an issue you raised in your external examiner's report for Computing programmes in the School of Computing, received on 8 July 2016.

We noted your comments regarding the external examiners report form. Universities UK and GuildHE undertook a review of external examining arrangements in universities and colleges in the UK, resulting in national guidance and recommendations.

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/external-examining-arrangements-review.aspx>

The current University of Leeds external examiners report form reflects the recommendations of the review and ensures consistency. However, if you would prefer to offer comments that do not necessarily correspond with the questions posed, you may wish to append such comments having provided assurances against each of the questions.

I hope the above addresses the query that you raised and I would like to thank you for your work in the role of external examiner for the School of Computing. We take very seriously the views of our external examiners and consider them thoroughly as part of our reflection on the standards of our awards and the quality of our students' experiences. If you wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Yours sincerely,

Head of Quality Assurance

Cc:

Dear

Thank you for completing the external examiner's reports for last session and the supportive comments you have made on our programmes and procedures. You raised a few points in your reports and at the board that I would like to take the opportunity to respond to.

In response to your comment on the undergraduate Software Engineering module, as you noted, the module is being run in a different format this year and the assessment is composed of both examination and coursework. We hope this will address this issue. In other modules where there has been a high mean mark we have reviewed the assessment and marking schemes of the coursework to ensure a broader range of marks is awarded that better recognises the best work completed by the students. We have also noted your comments on the possible methods of scaling.

You raised a concern at the board on the scope of the weaker projects that you looked out. In order to address this we are trialing the use of a small academic group for the MSc projects this year that will review all the scoping and planning documents to identify projects that are poorly defined and/or do not have clearly defined measurable objectives and provide feedback to the supervisors and students.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for your input to our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes over your period as external examiner to the school. We are very grateful for your support and hope you feel we have acted to address all the points you have raised.

I look forward to seeing you in June.

Yours sincerely

Director of Student Education