

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	Faculty of Biological Sciences, School of Biology
Subject(s):	<i>Genetics</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BSc Genetics and its associated modules: Human Genetics 2296, Human Populations 2175, Comparative Genomics 3291, Applied Genetics 3110, Epigenetics, Advanced Topics in Human Genetics 3152, Sex to Death 3135, Research Project 3340, Literature Project 3021
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BSc

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

Points of innovation and/or good practice

This program and the associated modules are heavily influenced by the research expertise of the academic staff teaching on the modules. This provides up to date material and ensures that the final year program is delivering current up to date knowledge to the students supported by recent research, including research undertaken by staff in Leeds as well as in the published literature from the relevant fields. The various modules throughout the degree program are delivered through a range of teaching approaches, from traditional lectures, via small group teaching and through practical work, alongside guided self study in the form of the final year literature projects. A variety of assessment methods accompany the different forms of teaching delivery which in combination represent good pedagogic practice.

Enhancements made from the previous year

In previous years I have commented on the importance of second marking and annotation of exam scripts by the markers to indicate how specific marks are awarded and it is good to see that this is widespread across the various modules. I have also commented on the variation in exam paper format, and again it was good to see some progress towards more standardised exam paper formats, but I have some comments later on specific points related to this comment. There are no specific enhancements to propose as the course is already well run and professionally delivered.

Matters for Urgent Attention

There are no matters for urgent attention

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y / N
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	Y / N
3.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Mentor?	Y / N

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	Y / N
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y / N
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y / N
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	Y / N

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.

A key point to note is that the course material is up to date and relevant to the discipline, this reflects a year on year refreshment of subject material in fast paced subjects that has kept the course aligned in a timely way to new knowledge and understanding. It is good to see the well embedded second marking and in most cases the clear paper trails of discussion and agreement when marks inevitably differ. The core structure and content of the course as well established and mature when I took on my role, and it is good to see the progressive development of assessment and audit aspects of course administration. I am only too aware of the additional burden that second marking and document and moderation of makes takes during the examination period so it is a credit to the staff and School that this has become embedded within standard practice.

Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Y
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y
<p>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</p> <p>The program is very well structured with an opportunity for student choice to enable specialisation without a blinkered perspective. The balance is well struck between stand-alone modules, and relevant crosstalk between modules without evident overlap of content. The combination of taught components and independent student and group learning through research and literature projects is good and will prepare those students well for further research, as well as the learning of relevant transferable skills for those who do not continue on research based career paths. The aims of the course are well met and the students gain broad and detailed exposure to the core elements of the discipline as well as state of the art techniques, concepts and data. In combination I am very satisfied that the program delivers the intended learning outcomes.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p>Please explain how this is/could be achieved (examples might include: curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research)</p> <p>The course is taught by a broad range of academics staff who are established leaders in their respective research disciplines, this combined expertise is integrated into the relevant modules which together comprise the degree. ETCETC</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</p> <p>N/A</p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<p>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</p> <p>N/A</p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<p>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</p> <p>N/A</p>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs, in particular: 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.</i></p> <p>The program utilises a range of assessment methods, from examination through in course assessment and the marking of project work. These are entirely appropriate for a discipline that requires the integration of theoretical and practical skills. The varied assessment methods enable students to demonstrate different skills and capture the advances made through different learning styles. The final year project in particular is an excellent example of assessment that measures independent learning achievements. The available evidence demonstrates rigour through dual marking and well documented moderation of different marks where this inevitably occurs. There is predominantly a good use of the full mark scale which enables students to receive well deserved recognition for excellent performance. However, one module, Comparative Genomics 3291, did stand out as having a noticeably lower mean mark than other modules with noticeably fewer 2i and 1 class marks; I would recommend analysis of this module to understand and resolve the discrepancy between the achievements in this and other modules. Overall the module assessment tests the student learning and good use of the mark scale reflects the high standard of teaching and learning.</p>		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on 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:</i></p> <p>The academic standard is comparable, in my experience, to other similar degree programs in other comparable universities. Some students are clearly enabled to demonstrate a very high standard of achievement indeed with some very strong 1st class marks in some modules, although there were few overall first class marks for the program. This metric will vary between institutions and between cohorts year on year so my comment is not intended to highlight a perceived problem, just the observation. The assessment methods enable appropriate differentiation between different levels of attainment, and overall provide a robust measure of student achievement. The only module, as highlighted above where there might be some room for improvement between learning, and evaluation of that learning, is Comparative Genomics 3291 where the mean marks were noticeably lower with fewer 1st class marks awarded. Either the complexity of the content, the examination questions, or the recognition of learning through examination needs further reflection to bring this module in line with others</p>		
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i></p> <p>I have no further comments</p>		

The Progression and Awards Process

20.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiner's role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Y
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y

28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p> <p>No Further Comments</p>		

Other comments

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

No Further Comments

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)*Title and Name of Responder:**Position*:**Faculty / School of:**Address for communication:**Email:**Telephone:***If the individual responding to the report is not the Head of School please state their position within the School.***Completing the School response**

The completed School response (including the full original report) should be attached to an e-mail and sent to the Pro-Dean for Student Education in the relevant Faculty. Following approval by the Pro-Dean for Student Education, the School must send the response (including the full original report) directly to the External Examiner. A copy must also be emailed to the Quality Assurance Team at qat@leeds.ac.uk. External Examiners should receive a formal response no later than six weeks after receipt of the original report.

Response to Points of innovation and/or good practice

We are gratified that the examiner recognises the Genetics programmes continue to be research led.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

As a school, we have made considerable efforts to improve the process of second marking and are pleased this has been recognised. With regard to the nature of the examinations, where appropriate we have made changes to harmonise the process across modules, but we also recognise that it is important to maintain a range of assessment procedures appropriate to the different subjects and modules, something that the examiner singles out in his review as good practice.

Response to Matters for Urgent Attention

If any areas have been identified for urgent attention before the programme is offered again please provide a specific response to them here:

No areas have been identified for urgent attention.

Response to questions 1-7 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

The examiner is wholly satisfied with our approach to teaching and learning, and the provision of opportunities for the development of a broad range of transferable skills. Additionally, the administration of the module and the audit of the assessment process is praised. These are very positive comments, and reflect the hard work of the programme team in ensuring that the course content is continually refreshed, and that of the Student Office support staff with regard to quality assurance.

Standards**Response to questions 8 to 16 (and related comments)**

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

Genetics is a core discipline within the biological sciences and impacts on all aspects of biology from biotechnology to population genetics, and from medical genetics to evolutionary processes. We aim to provide as

broad a view of the field as is possible, using the widest range of expertise available to us across the Faculty and beyond (e.g. in the Faculty of Medicine and Health). The examiner clearly appreciates the depth of the field and our success in providing a high-quality education across its breadth.

Assessment and Feedback

Response to questions 17 to 19 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

The examiner raises one specific concern, namely:

“However, one module, Comparative Genomics 3291, did stand out as having a noticeably lower mean mark than other modules with noticeably fewer 2i and 1 class marks”

I have examined this claim and cannot find support for the statement. The principal examined modules (as opposed to those assessed by continuous assessment) taken by Genetics students are the compulsory modules BLGY3110 (Applied Genetics) and BLGY3152 (Advanced Topics in Human Genetics) – each 20 credits, and a selection from the optional modules BLGY3232 (Epigenetics: 20cr), BLGY3246 (Evolutionary & Population Genetics :10cr) BLGY3291 (Comparative Genomics: 10cr); BLGY3251 (Animal Development: 10cr); BLGY3252 (Plant Development: 10cr) and BIOC3900 (Cancer Biology: 10cr). The mean module mark average across these 8 modules is 60 (S.D. \pm 3.6), with the mean mark for BLGY3291 being 59.7%. This is well within the expected range for final year module mean marks, and it is certainly not the case that this module has a noticeably lower mean mark than other modules taken by Genetics students. The only observation that I can make regarding this module is that the mean mark was accompanied by a standard deviation of 12.1, reflecting a wide range of achievement by the 32 students who took the module – this was a consequence of three students who failed this module, with very low marks (one, having originally obtained 24% subsequently passed the resit, bringing the mean mark up to 63%). It was also not the case that a relatively low number of First-Class marks were awarded in this module: 4 students (12.5%) obtained a first-class grade, and two others missed out by 1 mark.

Finally, historically, the mean mark achieved in BLGY3291 in 2017 does not differ significantly from those achieved over the last 6 years (61.2 ± 3.1).

The Progression and Awards Process

Response to questions 20-35 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

No points were raised.

Other comments

Response to items included in the 'Other Comments' section of the report

No other comments were made.