

**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:	Biological Sciences
Subject(s):	<i>Microbiology and related degrees</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BSc, MBIol

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

**Points of innovation and/or good practice**

It is clear that the degrees in the School of Biological Sciences are research led and that this has a positive effect on the educational outcomes of the students. This is most evident in the advanced courses and final year projects.

**Enhancements made from the previous year**

I did not recognise any significant enhancements from the previous year.

**Matters for Urgent Attention**

None

**For Examiners in the first year of appointment**

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

**For Examiners completing their term of appointment**

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

This is my second year as External Examiner and the format of the assessment has not change significantly. As previously, I was provided with data sheets containing a detailed breakdown of the marks for each assessed module. These are extremely useful. In addition, a printed copy of the combined uploaded marks was provided. I therefore had access to all the data I required to perform my duties. I also received support from both administrative and academic members of staff.

However, this year's external examination process did not go as smoothly as in the previous year, and I believe this to be due the resignation of an experienced member of the admin staff and other admin staff with less examination experience having to step in. Access to the work of certain students took some time to arrive and some formal documents had to be signed electronically after my visit.

The three external examiners are located in a rather small room and as a result, the admin staff had to trawl through the examination scripts at another location to provide us with requested student scripts and project reports. At other universities these are organised in advance and direct accessible to the external examiners.

In the case of the intercalating Medical students, only the average mark from the one-year course was provided on the summary sheet, making it difficult to access the answers for these students.

## 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><i>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</i></p> <p>The intended learning outcomes are appropriate for BSc/MBiol degrees at a leading UK university. The course is structured so that in each year the students build on and extend information given in the earlier elements of the course, it is therefore surprising, as I noted last year, that equal weight can be given to the modules in the final two years. I have not noted this approach at other equivalent universities who consider the progressive nature of the course to be important, and weighted accordingly. I have yet to be provided with an adequate justification for this approach and in my opinion it does make sound academic sense. Since this is a University-wide policy, perhaps the equivalent of my university's Teaching and Learning committee could provide me with a justification.</p> <p>A valuable element of the programme is the course designed for intercalating Medical Students since this provides an opportunity to introduce to these potential clinicians important aspects of microbiology that are nowadays only superficially covered in the regular MBBS degree programme. It is notable that this cohort of students performs well – a reflection presumably of their entry qualification.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p>The final year of the degree programme and the intercalating programme benefit from the fact that the majority of the teaching staff are research active, and as a result the degree programme is genuinely research led. One consequence is that the breadth of the final year course is correspondingly restricted, which I perceive as a strength rather than a weakness. The research interests of the staff are reflected in the final year advanced topic units and research projects. The course can legitimately claim to be research led, and it is therefore all the more surprising, as indicated above, these modules can carry the same weighting as modules in the penultimate year. While the curriculum is progressive, the assessment is not.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i>  <b>Not applicable</b></p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i>  <i>Not applicable</i></p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i>  <b>Not applicable</b></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 intended learning outcomes are appropriate for BSc/MBiol degrees and the assessment criteria for each of the modules are appropriate for these ILOs. A clear set of instructions is provided to markers of exam scripts. The first marker annotates the script in detail, indicating factually correct and inaccurate information, and evidence of supplementary reading. The script, together with the mark scheme is then passed to a moderator. If the marks of the moderator vary by more than +/- 5% then a moderated mark is agreed. These procedures appear to work well. I have commented previously on the conversion of the 100% marking scale to a 20-90% scale. Again I can see no obvious rationale for this, and it seems to me to favour students at the bottom end of the marking scale. The school was unable to provide me with a rationale for this approach.</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 cohort of students demonstrated a range of abilities, and as a result there was a spread of final degree classifications from first to lower seconds class. The exception to this was the 13 intercalating medical students, three quarters of who gained first class degrees. While this cohort will have entered Leeds University with high examination grades, I think the content of their course should be reviewed to ensure that the course and its assessment is sufficiently rigorous.</p> <p>As expected, many student produced outstanding project/dissertation reports and examination answers, while others either failed to adequately address the question or relied too heavily on material delivered in the lectures.</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 additional comments to make other than to emphasise again the balance of the assessment between the final two years.</p>		

## The Progression and Awards Process

20.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiners 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, but only after a some specific requests
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?	N, see comment below
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
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i>		

### Other comments

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

I am grateful for the support I received from the admin and academic staff prior to and during my visit. This year I sensed that the admin staff in particular were more stretched, not helped by their lack of experience from previous years. It would be useful for the examiner to have more space and direct access to the students work.

As is now common at UK universities, the opportunity to meet the students is limited, in fact to a one-hour session over lunch with a self-selected group of students. I have suggested that we could instead be invited to the student poster presentation session, which would provide an opportunity to discuss academic issues with the students and provide a clearer impression of their academic qualities. At my university, the external examiners are invited to attend the students' oral presentations of their project work, and this seems to be popular with our external examiners.

**Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)**

Title and Name of  
Responder:

Position\*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for  
communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Programme Leader for Microbiology
<i>School of Molecular Biology, Faculty of Biological Sciences</i>
<i>School of Molecular Biology, Faculty of Biological Sciences, University of Leeds</i>

*\*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](mailto: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 thank \_\_\_\_\_ for the recognition of our research led teaching as a key strength in our programmes. This is something we endeavour to embed in our programmes by utilising the world-leading expertise of academic staff in microbiology and the molecular biosciences.

**Response to Enhancements made from the previous year**

No significant changes to the degrees were made in 2015-16 and correspondingly \_\_\_\_\_ makes no comments on enhancements.

**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 matters for urgent attention were raised.

**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:*

\_\_\_\_\_ comments focus on the external examination process. Although the format of the assessment has not changed significantly, \_\_\_\_\_ did highlight some issues that arose in the external examination process. These issues were due to key administrative staff leaving shortly before the exam process. We take on board his comments and we will ensure that he has access to all the necessary material for all of the students in next year's exam period.

**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:*

--

discusses in response whether it is appropriate that equal weight can be given to the modules in the final two years given that this approach is not used in many other universities. A 1:1 or 1:2 ratio for Year 2 and Year 3 marks is used to calculate the final degree mark, with the combination that gives the highest average being used. This is University-wide approach that we are obliged to use, but we will raise this issue with the University.

## 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:*

No significant issues with the assessment and feedback process are raised and comments that the procedures work well. However, repeats comments from last year about the conversion of the 100% marking scale to a 20-90% scale and the failure of the School to provide a rationale for this approach. The University undertook a review of its approach to marking and classification during 2015-16 and have agreed to implement a revised classification scale from 2018-19 academic year, removing the 20-90 scale. We thank and other External Examiners for being part of the driving force for this overdue change.

also raises the high level of attainment for the intercalating medical students, the majority of whom graduate with a first class degree. suggests that the content of their course should be reviewed to ensure that the course and its assessment is sufficiently rigorous. It is important to note that 50% of the credits for the medical students, an ATU module and the project module, are shared with the Year 3 BSc students. The performance of the medical students in these modules is comparable to the BSc students who graduate with first class degrees. In addition, the content and assessment of the Skills module for the medical students is being updated. This 40-credit module includes practical classes and tutorials and is being developed by a new teaching fellow, who will be encouraged to ensure the content and assessment are appropriately challenging.

## 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:*

commented on some deficiencies in the provision of information for the external examination process. As discussed above this was due to administrative staff leaving immediately before the exam period. comments have been noted and will be addressed for the next academic year. We apologise for these shortcomings, which were beyond the control of the School.

requests that he can attend the final year projects poster session, as this would provide with an opportunity to meet and discuss with the students their work. I believe that this is an excellent idea and will look into inviting you to the poster session in the next academic year.

## Other comments

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

Finally, as Programme Leader, and on behalf of all of the staff who contribute to the teaching of Microbiology, I would like to thank in role as External Examiner and for producing a thorough and insightful report.



24 July 2017

Dear

I am responding on behalf of the University of Leeds to an issue you raise in your external examiner's report for Microbiology programmes, in the Faculty of Biological Sciences, received on 13 July 2017.

I note that in your recent report you reflect on the University practice of the 20-90 scale and the award of degree classifications based on either a 1:1 or 1:2 split for Level 2 and 3 marks. For your information, attached is an explanation of both the 20-90 Grade Scale and the University's approach to weighting to derive the classification average.

I would like to take the opportunity to reassure you that the University takes 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.

During the 2015-16 academic year the University undertook a review of the institutional approach to marking and classification and have agreed to implement a revised classification scale from 2018-19 academic year, removing the 20-90 grade scale.

I hope that this response goes some way to reassuring you that the University values greatly the time, effort and experience contributed by its External Examiners to the assurance of the standards and quality of its taught programme provision. May I also take this opportunity to thank you for your support as an external examiner.

Yours sincerely,

Head of Quality Assurance