

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	Biology
Subject(s):	<i>BSc. Applied Biology: Biology {including variants "with Enterprise"; and MBiol }</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	<p>BLGY2137 Parasitology 10 credits BLGY2142 Animal Nutrition and Metabolism 20 credits BLGY3105 Applied Animal Science 10 credits BLGY3173 Plant Growth, Resources & Food Security 20 credits</p> <p>BLGY2225 Sustainable Food Production 10 credits BLGY2253 Animals as Pests 10 credits BLGY3246 Evolution & Population Genetics 10 credits BLGY3251 Animal Developmental Biology 10 credits BLGY3252 Plant Developmental Biology 10 credits BLGY3273 Animal Nutrition Science 20 credits</p>
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**

Please highlight areas of innovation or good practice within the programmes or processes you have been involved with in this box.

This is my first visit as examiner to Leeds School of Biology. I was impressed by a strong educational culture in which assessments are usually very well designed to both challenge students across ability levels, and provide good summative quantitative discriminations across those levels.

Marking by staff was often impressive; I read clear and thorough comments in feedback which would help students in a formative manner, and make clear why the marks I saw were awarded. This is to be strongly commended; it implies a robust assessment culture in the School and shows that staff are willing to invest the time in high quality assessment & feedback.

It is very good to see the range of modules, which cover both "pure" biological sciences and "applied" in the sense of exploring the biology of managed / agricultural plants and animals. This combination is not that common in universities of this type and it will clearly benefit students by giving them the opportunity to see how pure becomes applied sciences.

Projects offer a commendable diversity of research opportunities for UG students; I read a range of interesting reports that reflects well on research-connected teaching.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.

Can't comment here – as my first year. Pretty sure I have not seen/been sent last year's reports.

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

Project Marking: The exception to the comments above on consistency in feedback – it was often not clear why individual marks were awarded for project write-ups. On the one hand the rubric/marksheets were used consistently by staff, but on the other written comments could sometimes be on the slim side, and did not really explain how marks were derived by the assessor. Should students ask to see their marked reports, then they may well query how the marks were derived.

This is by no means a problem unique to Leeds School of Biology, we are trying to tackle just the same issue in In addition, I and other examiners saw really great feedback as well as examples that are more problematic.

SAQs: I think that the programmes should do some work on the deployment of short answer questions used in exams. I noted the following issues.

1) SAQs: variable maximum values between questions within exam papers. This is problematic, because it means that the possible marks distributions vary between questions. For example, *if* one question is marked out of 5, another out of 15 *then* there is a greater degree of quantitative variation possible in the mark set that comes from the latter, so students may get different marks for the same standard of work, because there are fewer mark-range "bins" in the former than the latter case. I suggest that SAQs of the same proportionate weighting are out of a standard total; perhaps making this common across modules?

2) SAQs: lack of structure and clear mark scheme. There is variation between modules in what a "shape" short answer questions take. Some have clear structure – e.g. parts a,b,c each worth 5%. Here it is easy to see how the marks are awarded (plus there is often very clear annotation, see above).

Others are more like short essays or of the "write notes on" format. Though these are generally quicker to devise, they pose problems in assessment.

First, it is not necessarily clear to students how much to write or how much depth they should go into. This ambiguity can easily be seen reading through answers; some students answer with a short paragraph, others write an essay; differences in marks may not be large. Also, some of these individual SAQs look a lot like essays, in the sense that quite a lot could indeed be written to answer them.

The second problem here is that the model answers to these sort of questions do not spell out how the marks will be allocated; they might list points that the examiner would like to see, but there is no guide as to how those points relate to the marks awarded – e.g. there is no " an excellent answer (90%+) will include a very good answer (70%+ will be as excellent, but for example lack ***). As a result, the marking can look rather impressionistic, and then hard to moderate.

I have some (I hope helpful) comments on individual modules, I will pass these to and

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

3.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Mentor?	Y
----	-----------------------------------------------------	---

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

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

Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.

There is obviously a very strong culture of well-informed Biology education in the School. Staff appear to be very well committed to UG education.

Programme structure - etc. Seem fine. I could comment in more depth if I had the formal Programme documents, but I assume my role is principally to agree module marks rather than scrutinise the Programme?

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
-----	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---

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)

There is clear evidence of staff using their research expertise in the design of module content, esp at year 3. There is also good evidence that the process of research influences approaches to teaching.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
-----	----------------------------------------------------	---

Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

No

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
-----	----------------------------------------------------------	---

Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:

No

16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y
-----	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---

<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i>		
Yes		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<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>		
Yes		
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
<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>		
Academic standards are clearly comparable with students in similar University settings. As it is my first year, I cannot comment as yet on the cohort.		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i>		
<p>I note that assessors tended to mark in a quite compressed range (rarely lower than 40%, rarely higher than 75%). While this certainly keeps grade inflation in check, I have some concern that real excellence at the top end is not being rewarded and possibly that weaker performances are given leniency. This is a hard issue to address, but worth the School considering marking in relation to the (really excellent) Faculty COPA guidelines.</p> <p>I was a bit surprised to go from reading the scripts straight to the Final Board. It would, I think, be very helpful to have an hour in between with Senior Programme Leads and Prof Services Lead, to chat through any detailed issues, which are worth discussing but are perhaps too granular for the FBOE examiner's comments section.</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?	N
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	N
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

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:

Check lists for each module appeared not to have been followed, so some modules lacked key assessment items, and we had to call up for them.

Access to electronically marked material needs a bit more work at the Leeds end.

Other comments

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

Just to thank, , and the team for their help,

Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report**Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)**

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

School of Biology		School of Biology

*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 gat@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 would like to begin by thanking _____ again for taking on the role of External Examiner and for the thoughtful comments in _____ report. These have been invaluable in helping on reflect upon and improve our Biology and Biology with Enterprise programmes. We are, of course, pleased that the Examiner was impressed with multiple aspects of our teaching and also recognised distinctive qualities of the programmes, for example, in the integrated teaching of both pure and applied aspects of biology.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

N/A – Note, the Examiner was not given access to previous reports.

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:

We thank the Examiner for highlighting the following:

Project marking: Achieving consistency across project markers in terms of the provision of sufficiently detailed comments is a constant challenge. The introduction of detailed, degree-class-specific, mark schemes has gone a long way to improving students' general understanding of the basis of their marks but clearly more can be done to improve the quality and quantity of summary comments from some markers. It is possible that some of these academics feel that the annotation of the marking rubric renders more detailed comments, superfluous. In advance of the next period of project marking we intend to re-emphasise the need for markers to provide specific comments on the quality of the report that will allow the student to understand the motivation for the mark awarded.

Short-answer questions (SAQs):

As a School we are in the process of harmonising exam formats across our programmes with a particular focus on exactly the issues that the Examiner raises. We are aware that students faced with a questions that can serve equally well as the basis for a 15 minute SAQ and a one-hour essay may fall into the trap of spending too much time on individual SAQs during the exam. To address this we are both reducing the occurrence of such questions in the SAQ format and emphasising the need for students to recognise the distribution of effort required within exams of different formats via our tutorial module. We also take the Examiner's point about variable maximum values and thank _____ for the module-specific comments passed to _____ and _____.

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:

We apologise to the Examiner for not providing copies of previous Examiner's reports and School responses. This will be rectified for subsequent years.

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:

We are glad to read the Examiner's positive impression of our teaching on the Biology and Biology with Enterprise programmes. In addition to the approval of marks, we would be very happy for the Examiner to give more detailed comments on the structure of our programmes and the relevant programme documentation can be provided in future.

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:

Again, we are pleased to read that the Examiner is happy that academic standards at Leeds are in line with expectations. We thank the Examiner for comments on the range of marks awarded. As a result we will be discussing this at the School of Biology away day in January, ahead of Semester 1 exam marking.

We also note the Examiner's comment on the timetable prior to the final Exam Board meeting. The opportunity to speak before that meeting would indeed be useful and we will aim to schedule such a meeting in future.

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:

Again, we apologise that the Examiner was not provided with all of the relevant programme and module documentation. This will be addressed for the coming year.

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

Once again, we thank the Examiner for time and useful feedback on our programmes.