

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):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Human Physiology
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BSc UG masters

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

Points of innovation and/or good practice

The programme continues to offer a variety of modules with a range of different assessment methods. Of particular note is the Advanced Topics module, which allows students the freedom to focus on research in a number of different areas. The final year project work is also an example of very good practice. The types of projects available to the students allows them to target project work to gain skills in a career relevant manner (e.g. wet laboratory research, schools activities). Given my expertise in science communication this year I also was asked to review FOBS2240 Communicating Research– a cross faculty module. I was really excited to see such a novel, cross faculty approach, that allows students to work on communicating research in their degree programme area to a lay audience. The skills demonstrated by the students are not specific to the biological sciences, and the opportunity to interact with other disciplines brings added value to the student module experience.

Enhancements made from the previous year

In my last report I highlighted two areas for consideration.

- 1. When there was a large difference in grades between markers it was sometimes difficult to see how the final grade was agreed. This has been addressed this year, with those I looked at providing clear reasons for the agreed grade.*
- 2. I also reported that in some dissertation reports students were not reporting raw data, but percentages. While I was not able to look at all of the laboratory project dissertations, the ones I did review had appropriate reporting of their experimental data.*

Matters for Urgent Attention

N/A

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

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

Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Y / N
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y / N
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y / N
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y / N
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y / N

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

The programme has a good mix of core and optional module choices. This allows students to get to grips with those topics seen as essential in Physiology, but also dip into a variety of related biological areas. The mix of lecture, practical and project work provides opportunities for students to meet the intended learning outcomes of the programme. Students develop the necessary skills for future work in research, but also more generic graduate skills that allow them to move into a variety of careers, including those outside of the field of Physiology. The learning outcomes align with the benchmark requirements, and overall the degree programme is producing graduates with a high level of academic knowledge and understanding in the discipline and with strong transferable skills.

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

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)

Academic staff delivering learning and teaching on the modules in the programme are research active, and in many cases are delivering sessions in their research area. All level 3 students participate in at least one Advanced Topics module (1 and 2). These modules deliver sessions on research topics, and then require the students to go away and complete independent work around research publications in the field. Level 3 students complete a research project, and they directly engage with the methods and principles underpinning scientific and pedagogical research. This is a consequence of the variety of projects that are on offer, which include laboratory research, extended literature reviews, and projects around engaging with schools and educational topics.

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

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

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

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

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

Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

The programme has interim accreditation from the Royal Society of Biology. Moving towards full accreditation is one of the aims of the programme (as stated on the programme website). Achieving this will enhance the standing of the programme within the Physiology community.

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y / N
<p>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.</p> <p>Programme assessment methods are appropriate to assess the learning outcomes of the programme, each year and individual modules. These include coursework (open book essays, extended literature reviews and laboratory reports), project work, and formal examinations (including MCQ questions, short answers, essays and data handling exercises). There is good vertical integration across each of the years, with more complex and challenging learning outcomes assessed in later years. Where needed work is double marked (e.g. level projects), and there is a policy in place for aligning primary and secondary grades that is clear. Feedback on why grades are awarded was present for the majority of exam scripts. I again want to flag that the use of the feedback and grading rubric for the projects is an excellent approach. It shows clear alignment of the project learning outcomes to the grade awarded.</p> <p>I was able to talk to one level 2 student during my visit to the university in April 2017. This student was very supportive of the teaching, commenting on the high quality and support offered to students. They did raise that sometimes communication to students could be improved, and this was discussed with the programme team during my visit.</p>		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y / N
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y / N
<p>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:</p> <p>All grades and scripts were made available to me during my visit. For all modules I reviewed there were no concerns or issues. The mean grades for individual modules are consistent with performances at other institutions, and in the main show good discrimination between the students. The very best students produced some excellent coursework and also examination answers. These answers showed strong synthesis and analysis, higher level graduate attributes. It was good to see the Scientific Skills module reporting a mean grade that was more in line with other modules. Previously this module had a skewed distribution towards the top grades. Changes that were implemented this year have clearly addressed this issue.</p> <p>Overall I was very happy with the quality of the student work in relation to the grades and degree classifications awarded.</p>		
<p>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</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 / N
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y / N

22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y / N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y / N
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y / N
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y / N
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y / N
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y / N
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y / N
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y / N
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p>		

Other comments

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

A discussion with academic staff during my visit in June revealed that the programme does not currently accept the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). This is something you may want to consider. The research skills developed by the students completing an EPQ are a fantastic introduction to the skills they need in their university studies, and students succeeding in this qualification will have an advantage in terms of their studies.

There is a shift in UK universities towards more programme level working. This work lies around programme level learning outcomes and also assessment. The programme team may find it useful (if they have not already done so) to map these. From the assessment point of view, taking a programme level approach to assessment allows a review of the amount of assessment, the types utilised and how they map to what you expect from a Leeds Physiology graduate.

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:

Programme Leader, Human Physiology

*School of Biomedical Sciences*Faculty of Biological Sciences,
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT**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 thank you for highlighting the ways by which we have enabled students to (a) study research areas of interest in depth, and (b) develop skills that will enhance employability.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

We agree that the enhancements have improved the transparency and robustness of assessment of projects, and we will continue to encourage students to report data in formats consistent with published scientific literature.

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:

N/A

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:

N/A

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 thank you for highlighting both the subject-specific and transferable aspects of the programme. Full accreditation for each programme variant can be achieved once the first cohort has graduated. To date, BSc Human Physiology (Industrial) has received full accreditation.

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:

Thank you for your comments on assessment and feedback, particularly regarding the use of the marking rubric for projects. The incident relating to the student's comment on communication referred to late module exam mark being returned as a result of staff illness. Students received some mixed messages, which we will improve upon on the 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:

Thank you for your responses to the questions relating to progression and awards and for your contribution to this process.

Other comments

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

We have looked at Extended Project Qualification as an admissions criterion. Whilst we do not specify them as a requirement for entry to the programme, they do contribute to our holistic consideration of a UCAS application and provide a discriminator in deciding to which students who have missed their offer grades we offer a place.

As part of a University-wide initiative we have mapped all our assessments to both module-and programme-level learning criteria, and we are reviewing whether we can optimise the assessment process.