

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

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

Faculty / School of:	Civil Engineering
Subject(s):	<i>Structural Engineering</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc (Eng) Structural Engineering
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc

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. From discussions with current students, at two points during the year, they feel well supported by both academic and support staff, for which the School should be commended.

Feedback on some of the coursework during the year, especially design coursework, is excellent.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

Former differences in credits between the MEng and MSc versions of modules have been removed, thus making expectations clearer.

An element of group work, in the form of a joint presentation, was introduced this year into the Dissertation module.

The coursework for Advanced Steel and Composite Design was changed this year, resulting in a much better spread of marks than last year.

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

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 a 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
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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.

The programme structure has an excellent balance of theoretical and design-orientated modules. The standards are very appropriate, taking account of the different backgrounds of students, but stretching them at MSc level. There are currently no option choices available, which is something the School may wish to consider.

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

An excellent range of dissertation research topics is available. Aspects of staff research come through in various other modules.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
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Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
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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
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

The programme is accredited by the Joint Board of Moderators as meeting the requirements for Further Learning for a Chartered Engineer (CEng). I would say this accreditation is essential for an MSc in Structural Engineering, giving students a step towards membership of the Institution of Structural Engineers.

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
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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.

There is an excellent balance of coursework and exams, with many modules containing both to address the different ILOs. The quality of teaching is high and most students perform at a good level. They are able to demonstrate their strengths through the range of modules and assessment methods used.

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>I have reviewed student coursework, exam scripts and dissertations. The students are generally performing at a good level, and their marks reflect this. The standard of student work is as expected at MSc level.</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>It was noticeable this year that design-orientated dissertations often were awarded lower marks than research-orientated ones. Looking at the dissertations, it appears that the design ones generally included good reviews of previous projects and existing methods and included a lot of detailed design work. They were hence competent, but they lacked the flair needed to be awarded high marks. It is important that all students be given the guidance and opportunity to excel.</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>The information I received and the processes and arrangements for the Progression and Awards Board were all appropriate.</p>		

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

There is a lack of group work in the programme. This year a small element of group work was introduced, in the form of a joint presentation for the dissertation module. This was welcome, but since the dissertations are otherwise individual, the group working was rather contrived. Incidentally the presentations were also perhaps a bit early in the projects. It is recommended that the School considers introducing a more meaningful element of group work elsewhere in the programme.

I understand that some changes have been made to the dissertation marking scheme this year, but there is still the question of whether it appropriately covers dissertations at the very top and very bottom ends, and efforts should continue to be made to make the marking by different assessors as consistent as possible.

It is recommended that the School considers more input into the programme from industry, such as seminars or site visits.

There have been several cases of suspected plagiarism this year. Some cases have been dealt with and some other results are withheld pending investigation. I believe each case has been or is being dealt with appropriately, but it is important to stress to students, at the beginning of the year and during the year, the seriousness of plagiarism and to give clear guidance for avoiding plagiarism and on best practice for referencing, etc.

Overall, this is a very good programme, with good standards, and it is well run.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Head of School	
Civil Engineering	
The University of 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 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

This is good feedback for us – thank you.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Thank you – we are continually reviewing the course, however, sometimes changes / improvements have to be introduced progressively, which is the case with the introduction of the Group Working (see further comments later).

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:

The MSc was originally designed not to have any options; this decision was driven by the type of modules (short-fat), the structure of the course and the course content that was required to be covered and the lack of other relevant modules available. It is quite possible, however, that with the planned advent of several new ('related') MSc courses and the change to the delivery method of the modules over the last couple of years there will be the potential for options to be introduced.

For clarification (to what I think is just an oversight), the course is designed to prepare students for membership of IStructE and ICE.

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:

We believe it is important with this type of cohort to reflect the different learning abilities and will therefore continue to maintain this balance of coursework/examination assessment.

We have also noticed that there is a tendency for design dissertations to sometimes underperform in comparison with research dissertations (however, we do not think that there is a clear trend). As is stated by the External Examiner, the design projects are very good examples of design; they do, however, sometimes lack the critical review that is more easily included in research projects. We suspect that part of the reason for this is down to poor time-management with too much time being spent on the design aspects of the dissertation (often where the students feel more 'comfortable'). However, we also feel that it is more incumbent on the staff providing design based dissertations to provide greater emphasis on the need for critical review and 'flair' within these projects owing to the fact that this type of review is not quite as straightforward (although it has to be said that design in itself is a process of critical review) – supervisors offering design based dissertations will bear this in mind for the next session.

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:

N/A

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

As mentioned earlier, we are aware of the lack of Group Working within the course; we also agree that our attempt to introduce this type of working using the Dissertation Presentations was slightly contrived, although we still maintain that this did assess certain important soft skills such as communication and team-working. For clarification, the presentations were introduced to assess the students' presentation skills and were not therefore linked to the technical content of their dissertation or dependent on whether the dissertations were individually or group based. It does suggest to us, however, that perhaps another Presentation Day should take place, nearer the summer possibly after the exams, where the technical detail of the individual projects could also be assessed. A more robust form of group working could be introduced within individual modules. For example, one of the two pieces of coursework in the Advanced Concrete Design module could be set as a group working exercise (this would be equivalent to 25% of a 15 credit module) – other modules could also adopt this approach. This will be considered by the course team for potential introduction in the 2018/19 session.

To confirm, this year (2017/18), the marking range for the Dissertations will be changed in accordance with the External's comments. Unfortunately, a site visit specifically for the MSc cohort was not arranged this year, although they were allowed to join the visit arranged for the first year. We agree, this does need improved planning on our part. Also, although several modules do have lectures/seminars provided by industry as part of the individual modules, we agree, we should look to improve this aspect of the course for the following sessions.

Finally, we would also like to confirm that the students are warned about plagiarism during 'intro' week – they are given a presentation about the course which specifically mentions plagiarism. Warnings about plagiarism also appear regularly throughout the course, i.e. during library courses, from individual supervisors and on coursework submission sheets. Although we believe plagiarism (its definition/consequences) is emphasised sufficiently within the course we will endeavour to strengthen the message (through individual supervisors) in an attempt to eliminate the abnormal number of cases we have had this year.