

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:	Computing
Subject(s):	<i>Artificial intelligence</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Various
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BSc Computer Science, BSc Artificial Intelligence

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

Points of innovation and/or good practice

- Using student names in the assessment process (rather than numbers) is best practice. This reduces possible errors – which is much more important than the slim possibility that an identified student might be treated unfairly.
- Lack of optionality in examinations is good – it is fairer to students *and* reduces staff load.
- Project assessment processes are notably good – particularly the division of projects into categories, and the processes for resolving disagreements between project marks awarded by supervisor and assessor.
- We had to pleasure of meeting a very enthusiastic and eloquent group of students (allegedly *not* hand-picked ☺) who were highly enthusiastic about the course and the University. Students really appreciate face-to-face interactive teaching – and a particular junior member of staff was singled out for praise as a highly effective teacher.

Enhancements made from the previous year

- It is clear that the Department is paying attention to external comments:
 - The minutes from the preliminary board were made available to externals
 - Information was provided as to overall module averages. Note this information, in conjunction with scatter plots, should provide strong evidence to support scaling of exam marks in some cases – if 100 students agree that the exam was too hard/easy through marks obtained, then in my opinion this should outweigh the view of a member of academic staff who set and marked the exam.
 - The range of citations in projects seemed slightly improved.

Matters for Urgent Attention

In my opinion, it is very important that the board is able to use discretion around class boundaries, to raise students above the boundary in cases where there is a strong academic argument for doing so. Students should only ever be advantaged by such discretion. Apparently algorithmic methods for making such decisions will always have flaws – resulting, for example, in a student being disadvantaged by taking a module with a lower-than-average score.

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 a External Examiner Mentor?	Y /N
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For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	Y
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 a External Examiner Mentor?	Y

Some of the comments I would have made have been made in the “Enhancements made from the previous year” and “Points of innovation and/or good practice” boxes above.

- My mentorship process was informal, and I provided similar informal mentoring to the incoming externals – which I feel to be appropriate when experienced staff are involved.
- I have confidence in the assessment processes, and this confidence has grown throughout my appointment.
- There is still some way to go in terms of closing the loop on externals’ comments on exams. In the exam information which the externals get before the board, I would expect to see
 - the external’s comments on the exam
 - the module leaders response in terms of changes made
 - The module leaders comments on the mark distribution, and arguments for/against scaling if the distribution is sufficiently far outside the expectation. It is never enough for the module leader to simply say “see attached”.
 - The scatter plot of marks
 - Any other issues such as student complaints about the exam
 - The exam as sat by the students
- Exam quality has improved, through reducing optionality, reducing bookwork and increasing the requirements for application of knowledge and analysis/interpretation. There are still a few exams that I feel I made similar comments on year-on-year (most particularly for exams which asked for too much regurgitation of bookwork) and pressure should continue to be applied for fairer, more interesting exams testing application of knowledge and ability to think critically.
- Very little use is made of multiple choice questions – these are highly effective for certain types of knowledge-testing questions.
- During my time I have spent little time looking at coursework – focussing on exams and projects. If the volume of coursework assessment increases, then externals need to be facilitated in accessing and commenting on coursework assessments.
- Staff have been very helpful and friendly – I have enjoyed my time as an external at Leeds!

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
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme aims and outcomes were clear and the level of the award was appropriate to students attending a University with the high standing of the University of Leeds. 	
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was welcome evidence of research finding its way into the curriculum and its assessment Several of the projects had a clear research focus (and might lead on to PhD work). I raised a point about poor referencing in student projects in previous years (even for ones scoring high marks). This seems improved 	

overall – though I believe there is still some way to go and students need to be encouraged to reference scholarly papers in their project work.		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some of the advanced taught modules and the top projects seem to provide a good platform for PhD research (maybe if further boosted by advanced taught Masters). A larger final-year project would provide still-better training for the top students (while also providing problems for weaker students). 		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I believe some programmes are accredited by BCS / IET. The value of these accreditations to students is increasingly in doubt. 		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally speaking there was a good an appropriate spread of marks. I understand that there has been an effort to access the higher range of marks this year – particularly for projects – this is a welcome initiative that should be continued and extended. 		
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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was a good balance of examinations and coursework – although there may be unexploited opportunities to move to a single large coursework in some modules. Most assessments were carefully crafted – though there was still a little too much bookwork in a few of the examinations. Generally, standards were high – and with a programme of this size and breadth there is always a chance of exceptions. Last year I criticised the Software engineering module 2541 and the assessment for this module is now much improved. 		
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the comments I would have made here have been given in my answers prior to question 8. 		

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
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:

Good processes and practices. A well-run board with appropriate levels of care and consideration given to each student. I made extensive comments on these processes on last year's form, and these suggestions have been carefully considered and acted on in many cases.

Other comments

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

I would like to reemphasise from my comments from previous years: it is important that students are not narrowly expecting that they only need to learn things which are clearly signposted in lectures – students at Universities such as Leeds should be encouraged to go further and conduct their own research with lectures, seminars and tutorials as a basis for further learning rather than the last word.

I'd also like to remark on how much the presence of _____ was missed at the board, and wish _____ all the best for a speedy recovery. _____ can rest assured that the department is running smoothly in _____ absence – although it is clear that people want _____ back!

Overall the students, academic staff and support staff at Leeds show enthusiasm and care in assessment.