

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

QAT Received 05/01/2017

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	School of Chemical and Process Engineering
Subject(s):	Materials
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc Materials Science and Engineering. Materials modules.
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.

This was the second running of the MSc programme, with a larger cohort of students having a much broader mix of academic ability and background. The programme appears to be running smoothly and is becoming established.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

No significant changes made, except having to deal with a more varied student cohort.

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 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

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 a 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
<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 MSc programme is a coherent and well-designed general advanced materials programme. It covers a good selection of materials science and materials engineering topics, at levels appropriate for the students' background (which is quite varied). The students I spoke with were really engaged and motivated by the broad range of materials modules and options available to them.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p><i>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)</i></p> <p>A number of modules, and particularly the summer research projects/dissertations, make excellent use of the research strengths of the academic staff involved. The summer projects were all based around genuine research problems, and allowed students to become engaged within research groups and work with research students. Many provided genuine opportunities to utilise state-of-art experimental research facilities. As a consequence, almost all the students I spoke with were motivated to pursue PhD research study.</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></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></p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y / N
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p> <p>I am not sure whether IoM3 accreditation is planned or is in the process of application, but I cannot see any reason why accreditation would not be successful. Comparable programmes elsewhere are accredited by the IoM3.</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 mix of exams and coursework, including project-work, set high expectations of students, but are entirely appropriate for the subject and ILOs at this level. I particularly like the “publishable paper” produced to complement each project dissertation.</p> <p>The students did comment on the very heavy coursework loading near the end of semester 1, and this should be looked into.</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 standards set are high, but entirely appropriate for a programme at this level. They are comparable to, or above, the standards at some other UK Universities.</p> <p>This was the first year that non-native English speakers were taking the course. The course does contain a lot of coursework. It was noticeable that no Chinese students achieved a distinction, with all “Pass” awards and one failure being Chinese. Poor marks and high failure rates amongst Chinese students were also occurring in some modules (e.g. CAPE5750, CAPE5770). The lowest four marks in the project dissertation module (CAPE5000) were also Chinese students. Numbers are relatively low, so it is difficult to be certain, but my feeling was that English language issues may be a factor, and that identification and targeted support for such students early in semester 1 may be beneficial.</p> <p>Related to this, it was noticeable that students with significant numbers of module resits in August, also did badly on their summer project. This may just be related to academic ability, but it may be appropriate to consider a longer dissertation extension for students with lots of resits. In some Universities, students stop their research project completely during the summer for the extension period so they can focus on their resits.</p> <p>Research projects were produced to a high standard, and accurately marked. One or two had poor Abstracts, or omitted clear statements of the project aims. But it was very pleasing to see so many experimental projects, as this is always difficult to manage over the summer. Some students did raise issues about restricted access to research labs over the summer, which they found frustrating. They also suggested training on essential equipment could be undertaken earlier (in semester 2 when projects are identified) rather than at the start of the summer, and this could be something for the School to consider..</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>		

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
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p> <p>The Progression and Award Board meeting was efficiently organised, and appropriate consideration was given to all students, and decisions made were appropriate and justified.</p> <p>I would like to acknowledge the help and effective communication provided by all the academic and administrative staff involved in the examination process, and the hospitality I received on my visit.</p>		

Other comments

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

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Responder:	
Position*:	Head of School
Faculty / School of:	Chemical and Process Engineering
Address for communication:	University of Leeds
Email:	Leeds
Telephone:	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

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Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

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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:

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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:

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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:

Thank you for the validation of the standards of this programme and for conveying the opinion of the students whom you met. We believe it is important to expose our students to state-of-the-art research techniques and contemporary issues within a research group in their final year projects. A number of the cohort have indeed been accepted onto PhD programmes both at Leeds and at other universities.

We have applied for Accreditation through IoM3 and a visit is scheduled for 21st February 2018.

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 have scrutinised the coursework loading at the end of both semesters and reorganised deadlines to address this issue. Thank you for raising the issue of the performance of non-native language speakers (we did have two students from Iraq in the previous year who both achieved distinctions). We think that this is an issue worthy of investigation in case this is contributing to poor performance. The University does have an extensive programme of language support so if we can better identify those struggling we should be able to direct them appropriately. The policy on multiple re-sits is one decided at Faculty level – we will raise this with the Chair of the Faculty Assessment Standards Group. The School has encountered difficulties with equipment access for both researchers and taught students due to the extensive backlog maintenance programme – where necessary, allowances were made for this through changes in project focus or extensions to submission deadlines. We anticipate that there will be far fewer issues going forward but, in addition, we have set in place a project review process so that issues with access to consumables, samples or equipment can be identified at an earlier stage and any necessary adjustments made without resorting to extensions.

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 comments on the efficiency of the Programmes and Award Board procedures. I will pass on your thanks to those involved.

Other comments

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