

**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:	School of Earth and Environment
Subject(s):	Environmental Management/Sustainable Development
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BS-ENV/SEM – BSc Sustainability and Environmental Management (3 years)  BS-ENV/SEM4 – BSc Sustainability and Environmental Management (Ind) (4 years)
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BSc

**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.*

I continue to be impressed by the diverse range of assessment methods that have been adopted across the modules I've been asked to review – assessments include exams, essays, group posters, management plans, fieldwork reports, policy briefs, group presentations, and dissertations. This is important and demonstrates good practice because it accommodates differentiation within the student body, and allows students to develop a wide range of skills.

Within the various assessment methods used across the modules, a number allow students to apply their knowledge in practical activities, which further helps them to gain the skills needed to enter the job market after completing their degrees (e.g. the biodiversity management plan in Managing Biodiversity module - SOEE2690).

**Enhancements made from the previous year**

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

I am pleased to note that wherever possible, the comments I have made in my previous reports have been taken on board to enhance the SEM programme. For example, last year I commented about the importance of enhancing student performance through the development of 'critical thinking' skills. In response to this, first year skills modules were overhauled to accelerate and improve students' acquisition of university-level critical thinking and analytical skills, so that later modules could build on them. Secondly, I made a comment about the importance of having a clear and transparent moderation process that is supported by documentation. This point was discussed at the Exam Board meeting for all programmes, and it was agreed that the same format used for PG level would be adopted at the UG level.

**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
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?	Y
3.	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	N

**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?	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*

As I complete my third and final year as External Examiner on the SEM programme, I really only have positive things to say about the teaching and learning process, the commitment of academic staff members to the programme, and their desire to constantly improve the student experience at Leeds. Over my term as EE, I have made a number of suggestions as to where the focus of (minor) improvements should lie, and these comments have always been received openly and with a commitment to taking them on board whenever possible. Below are some of my suggestions over the 3 years, with the response from module convenors:

- Concerns raised about some 10 credit modules which have one single summative assignment.  
**ACTION TAKEN:** Formative assessments added. However, for small modules, it was noted that there is a reluctance to either have two summative assignments or to add a formative assignment, to avoid over-assessing students and to give them the chance to write a substantive and detailed longer piece of work rather than shorter but more superficial pieces.
- Comment made on assessment of group work and group presentations, and the need for specific criteria.  
**ACTION TAKEN:** A committee called 'Making Group Work Work' was launched (led by the DSE). As part of this process, module leaders and students were interviewed and asked to look at course rubrics and identify good practice in order to develop school guidance. New guidance was produced for the academic year 2016-17, but conversations about good practice in group work has been ongoing.
- Concerns raised about the pathways structure of the BSc Sustainability and Environmental Management degree.  
**ACTION TAKEN:** The Student Education Service team now audits all student module choices at the start of semester to ensure that all students are following the pathway structure, or have the programme leader's permission to deviate.
- Comment made about the need to improve the process of choosing modules, to make things clearer and easier.  
**ACTION TAKEN:** Firstly, a flow chart for incoming first year undergraduates was created to guide them through the process, explaining whether they need to take refresher modules in maths and

chemistry, and providing guidance on how to choose pathways. Secondly, a programme planner was created that quickly and easily illustrates how module choices in one year may affect subsequent years of study, and how the pathways progress from year to year. Thirdly, a school-wide alternative module catalogue was created, to supplement the official module catalogue, where students can write descriptions of modules they have studied to help guide future students in their module choice, as surveys have found that the official module catalogue does not necessarily contain the kind of information that students are seeking.

5. Concerns raised about the need to document the moderation process more effectively.

**ACTION TAKEN:** There is now more effective and transparent documentation of the moderation process both, in the form of a moderation report and an email paper trail.

## 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>After carefully reviewing the 11 modules I am responsible for, and the programme as a whole, I feel that the programme structure, design and aims are well aligned with the ILOs. Moreover, the content of taught material and the methods of assessment are also both appropriate for the ILOS.</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>The content of the 11 modules are all up-to-date and reflect current knowledge and debates around sustainability and environmental management. Module leaders are often personally engaged in research related to the focus of the module, and appear to be committed to letting their research inform their teaching. The wide range of interdisciplinary skills and research-driven expertise contributing to the curriculum design is impressive.</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> <p>Not applicable.</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> <p>An industry (4 year) version of the degree is offered, which provides students with valuable practical experience. As noted above, there are a number of assessments in different modules within the programme, which allow students to apply their knowledge in practical activities. This further helps them to gain the</p>		

skills needed to enter the job market after completing their degrees (e.g. the biodiversity management plan in Managing Biodiversity module - SOEE2690).		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i>		
Not applicable.		

### 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>		
<p>As I have noted in previous years, I continue to be impressed by the creative range of assessment methods offered across the modules in the programme, and their overall alignment with the ILOs of modules. Assessments include a wide range of methods such as exams, essays, group posters, management plans, fieldwork reports, policy briefs, group presentations, dissertation projects, etc. As I noted in my report last year, this diverse range of assessments is a positive feature of the course design because it accommodates differentiation within the student body. In most modules where there are a number of assessments, they are generally well joined-up with their intended learning outcomes. With respect to a couple of modules (e.g. Environmental Research Project – SOEE3030) that are assessed through the submission of a single assignment, formative assessments designed to provide feedback on progress are built into the work plan. This is good practice. Some assessment methods also allow students to apply their knowledge in a practical activity (e.g. the biodiversity management plan in SOEE2690), which has obvious benefits for skills enhancement and gaining experience that is useful for entering the job market after the degree is completed.</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
<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>As is the case in other Universities, the students who tend to do the best academically are generally the ones who go beyond description and employ critical thinking and analysis. But I believe that the quality of student work on the SEM programme, and the academic standards at Leeds more broadly, are high, when compared to other Universities where they are similar programmes.</p>		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i>		
<p>It seems to me that the academic staff who teach on the SEM programme are now doing a more effective job of using the full range of marks, and the written feedback I reviewed was generally excellent. Comments on the whole are constructive and well aligned with the marks given. I'm also pleased to see that there is now effective documentation of the moderation process both in the form of a moderation report, and an email paper trail.</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?	N
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>None.</p>		

#### Other comments

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

It's been a real pleasure to take up the role of EE for the SEM programme over the past 3 years, and I'd like to thank \_\_\_\_\_ and the admin team for an excellent job in organising all the material for scrutiny and making our jobs as External Examiners easy and enjoyable.

I wish you all the best for the future of the SEM programme!

## 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:*

*\*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](mailto: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 are very grateful to the external examiner for his extremely valuable input over the past three years. We believe that such input has contributed in a very important manner for the maintenance of the quality of our programme, and has clearly helped us improved it. We are delighted to hear that he feels that all the concerns that he has raised during this time as examiner have been looked at and addressed. We can confirm that each of these concerns have been discussed at the appropriate programme delivery team and incorporated into corresponding programme reviews.

#### **Response to Enhancements made from the previous year**

#### **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:*

#### **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:*

### 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:*

As an advancement for next year, we would like to inform the examiner of the following forthcoming programme changes:

We have changed the labels of the pathways. This only concerns the labels and not the content, which remain the same. The label changes were motivated by the new programme leader considering that, while academically sound, they were not informative enough for students. These changes were done in consultation with the programme delivery team and with students of all students across all years who were invited to participate in an online survey).

The new labels are as follow:

- Energy and the Built Environment (formerly, Sustainable Infrastructure)
- Natural Resources and Biodiversity (formerly, Managing Ecological Resources)
- Earth Systems (formerly, Environmental Science and Management)
- Business and sustainability (no change)

Following a School level initiative, we have revised the programme level learning outcomes. This was done as 'sanitation' measure, to make sure that they are still valid and amend them according to the natural evolution of the programme. No major changes were introduced, but rather updates and refinement.

### 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:*

### 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:*

### Other comments

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

We are currently under the process of re-submitting our application to IEMA's certification for both the BSc and the MEnv variants (note that the BSc variants are already accredited by this professional body, but they are required to be re-assessed regularly; for the MEnv this is a new application). This involves a very detailed mapping exercise in which learning outcomes of all modules are checked across IEMA's required learning outcomes. The preliminary results of this mapping exercise show that we essentially cover all of IEMA's learning outcomes, which is very reassuring regarding the demand of skills for future employability.