

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

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

Faculty / School of:	Faculty of Environment / School of Earth and Environment
Subject(s):	<i>Structural Geology with Geophysics</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Structural Geology with Geophysics (MSC-SGEOL/GP)
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.

I met with all students individually, during informal viva discussions, and as a cohort during the group feedback session.

The students highlighted several areas of good feedback practice, including Applied Structural Models (SOEE5722M – led by), 3D Structure: Techniques and Visualisation (SOEE5763M – led by), various whole-class feedback sessions, and 's provision of annotated PDFs. I would encourage members of the teaching team to continue sharing these examples of good practice.

As in previous years, I have been impressed with the wide range of research project topics on offer. These include highly applied studies, in collaboration with an industrial partner, and “blue skies” projects, for example, investigating continental margin development and the structural geology of Mars. The provision of collaborative projects is particularly impressive given the ongoing downturn within the subsurface industries.

Students also highlighted the Spain fieldtrip as an excellent opportunity to consolidate their learning from across the course.

As in previous years, students were overwhelmingly positive about the support received from the School's IT and administrative staff. They particularly appreciated the attention to detail (e.g. support staff knowing individuals by name) and assistance provided in both academic and non-academic matters (e.g. facilitating council tax exemptions). These support activities are essential to the student experience.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

- Marking of theses: (i) The module leader for Structural Geology Independent Project (SOEE5111M –) ensures that markers use the full mark range for projects falling into the “Distinction” category; (ii) efforts have been made to improve the consistency of the marking procedure by including one Leeds supervisors on the marking team.
- More use is made of group feedback sessions; these sessions are appreciated by the students.
- Changes have been made to shared teaching with Exploration Geophysics as part of the new integrated module (SOEE5174M).

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

a) I was disappointed to note that the issue with delayed and inconsistent feedback ()'s material), which was noted in my report last year, was again raised by students this year. I understand from the Course Leader that strategic use of Teaching Fellows in 2017/18, to supplement existing teaching staff, should mitigate this issue in future. Nevertheless, I would emphasise the need to communicate with the students if there is likely to be a delay in returning feedback. Staff should ensure that feedback comments are constructive and help students to understand *why* they received a particular mark.

b) There were a few issues raised by the International students during the individual vivas. I am not clear to what extent these comments are individual concerns, or are due to more general cultural differences between the UK and their home countries. Nevertheless, I think they are worth bringing to the attention of the programme team for their consideration. (i) Two international students felt that they made the wrong choice of research project topic, but were not sufficiently confident to approach their supervisor/module leader to discuss their concerns. In one case, I understand that this led to a student experiencing anxiety/mental health problems. (ii) One student felt that the IELTS requirements did not prepare them sufficiently for the pace of the course. They had difficulty following all the material, but were able to access informal support from his peers in order to catch up. (iii) Two international students with physics/geophysics and mining engineering backgrounds felt that the course content and requirements could be more explicit. They were particularly challenged by the cross-sections/3D thinking exercises, and also by the uncertainty inherent in geological interpretations.

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
 N/A

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)?	N/A
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 focusses on the application of technical/specialist knowledge, with strong emphasis on 3D and 4D geological thinking. This knowledge and these skills are essential for structural geologists working in the hydrocarbon and mineral exploration industries. They also provide excellent preparation for PhD research in structural geology. The link with the Exploration Geophysics programme ensures that students gain a

strong understanding of subsurface data. There is also a strong emphasis on professional skills development, such as teamwork and presentation skills.		
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>I had the opportunity to review all of the Structural Geology Independent Project theses (the major part of a 60 credit module). A significant number of projects were closely linked to the supervisor's cutting-edge research interests. All the projects involved the students undertaking independent research in aspects of either "pure" or applied structural geology.</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>N/A</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>N/A</p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p> <p>N/A</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>I had the opportunity to review four key pieces of assessment: the Structural Geology Independent Project theses and Oral Presentations (SOEE5111M), the Individual Poster Presentations in Applied Geodynamics & Basin Evolution (SOEE5752M) and the Salt Tectonics practical. I also had an informal viva discussion with each of the students. The assessments are appropriate to the learning outcomes. The project work, poster presentation and salt tectonics practical provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their 3D and 4D geological thinking. The arrangements for marking the project work were rigorous and fair, and I was glad to see that efforts were made to include one of the Leeds supervisors as either first or second marker. Any discrepancies between first and second markers are discussed thoroughly, and all thesis marks were cross-checked against the independently-derived External Examiner marks. I was glad to see that markers carefully considered using the full mark range for theses falling within the Distinction category.</p> <p>There was one assessment in which feedback was significantly delayed and students were unclear of the marking criteria. A similar problem with this same assessment arose last year (mentioned in my report). I understand from the Course Leader that strategic use of Teaching Fellows in 2017/18, to supplement existing teaching staff, should mitigate this issue in future.</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>		

The academic standards were appropriate for MSc level. The students' oral presentation skills were particularly impressive – all students were able to communicate complex ideas, keep to time, and respond to questions in a professional manner. Some Distinction-level theses included elements of publishable work, which is a hugely impressive achievement given the short timescale to complete and submit the project work.

I found that the clarity of the aims and objectives in project theses was variable. It would be useful to emphasise to the students the importance of the aims and objectives in framing/defining the study.

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:

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?	Not known
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:
Regarding Q.29, I did not see examples of marked/annotated examination scripts. During discussion with the cohort (following the individual vivas), students made it clear that they would appreciate seeing feedback on their exams. It would be useful to get the School's view on whether exam feedback can be provided to students.

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*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Head of School	
<i>Faculty of Environment / School of Earth and Environment</i>	
School of Earth and Environment Maths/Earth and Environment Building The University of Leeds Leeds. LS2 9JT United Kingdom	

*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

Dear _____, first I want to sincerely thank you for your extremely helpful comments and feedback as well as your visit to Leeds during the presentations week, they are greatly appreciated.

I was delighted to read about the good feedback from the students regarding the various examples of good practice within the MSc. We will endeavour to continue sharing these practices with the rest of the School. I was also pleased to hear that you found the project topics interesting and relevant, and I agree that they offer a good range of both applied and blue-skies topics.

I agree also that the IT and student support within the School has been a great asset to the course and to the student learning within the School in general.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

I am pleased to hear that comments have been taken onboard. Using the full marking scale and improving on consistency is particularly important, as is good and efficient feedback, and we will aim at maintaining that.

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:

I am sorry to hear that there have still been issues with delayed and inconsistent feedback from certain staff members. This has clearly been a major point of dissatisfaction for the students. You are correct, however, that a change in teaching roles is imminent, with a new Teaching Fellow starting in January – as a result, I anticipate this issue will not arise again in the current academic year. The Director of Student Education and the Head of School will be reminding staff of their obligations and professional standards, and supporting them in ensuring these get delivered.

I thank you for flagging up potential concerns with some international students regarding the project choices and their ability to communicate their wishes to the project module leader. We will do our best to mitigate this in the future. I anticipate this is probably best done through individual discussions with students before the projects start. The language problem may be more difficult to solve, as the IELTS results are nominally sufficient to ensure adequate language skills. However, I am aware that these results do not necessarily reflect the students' practical language skills correctly. We will consider potential ways on the programme and, possibly, at School level to address this and note that there has been University level project to better understand the on-course language needs of international PGT students for whom English is an additional language, from which we may be able to learn.-

As for the final point, the course structure does assume that not all students have sufficient background in dealing with 3D thinking and geological uncertainty. In addition to the detailed information on the MSc School website, the

successful applicants receive a preparation pack which contains introduction materials, aimed at ensuring that all students have the necessary background knowledge and are aware of the initial expectations of the MSc. In addition, a significant amount of time is spent in the first semester to try to mitigate any gaps in knowledge, in order to ensure that, as far as possible, everyone has the necessary skills to undertake the rest of the course. We will think on how to further improve these preparation and induction elements, however.

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:

Thank you for the comments, I am pleased that you find the standards of the course appropriate.

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:

I am happy to hear that you found the majority of the feedback and assessment appropriate, with the exception of one issue that has been addressed in a previous point of this form.
We will endeavour to improve on giving feedback on how to construct research aims and objectives.

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:

It is School policy that exam scripts are not returned to the students. However, we will encourage staff to give generic group feedback to the students.

Other comments

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

My sincere thanks again for your contribution this year and in the coming year. We aim at maintaining and continually improving the high standards of the programme, and this process would not be possible without the valuable input from the external examiners.