

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

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

Faculty / School of:	Mathematics
Subject(s):	<i>Actuarial Science</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MATH1710, 1712, 1510, 2515, 2715, 2750, 2775, 3510, 3520
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.

Most of the innovations mentioned below fall under the umbrella of student engagement. I have highlighted some things the department does now and some things that I understand that they would like to implement.

Things they are doing now:

- piloted computer based assessment for exams in level 1 statistics.
- employ student led workshops in level 3 actuarial modules to give students the opportunity to explain technical concepts to peers (as they may be required to do early on in graduate roles)
- have recently appointed an actuary to their external advisory board

Things which are in the pipeline:

- As well as student led workshops, they are aiming to introduce peer to peer assessment (for formative purposes) in level 3 actuarial modules

In addition, I understand that they are looking to develop closer relationships with local actuarial employers through

regular events for undergraduate students (which at the moment tend to be rather ad hoc).

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

In my 2015/16 report, I said the following:

"I have two comments to make in relation to my Independent Examiner duties referred to in section 1 above. So these comments relate to the course offering exemptions from the corresponding professional actuarial subjects:

1. The Leeds University website seems to advertise an exemption mark of 60%. However, the mark is set by the Independent Examiner and can vary from year to year. I suggested that any reference to an exemption mark of 60% should be removed from the University's marketing literature.
2. The modules corresponding to exemption subjects tended to have a choice of questions (e.g. students choose 3 from 4 questions in section B). However, this inevitably means that each student will not be tested on some part of the syllabus. The Actuarial Profession gets around this issue by making all the questions on an exam paper compulsory. I suggest that the department considers adopting this approach for those modules which correspond to an exemption subject."

I am very pleased to report that these comments were acted upon in the following ways:

- The marketing literature for the programme was changed before 2016/17 started so that there is now no implication that the exemption mark would be fixed at 60% for each CT subject
- The department implemented my suggestion that, in future, the modules counting towards the CT exemptions should include no choice of questions. I felt that greatly improved the exam papers since more of the syllabus was being tested.

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

Not applicable

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

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.

Overall, I am happy with the design, structure and aims of the programme.

I believe that the ILOs were commensurate with the level of the award. I also confirm that the standards are appropriate for the award under consideration. I should also add that I am also appointed by the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA) as Independent Examiner to ensure that the standards are the same as those required by the Actuarial Profession for the award of exemptions from the professional subjects. By and large, I am satisfied that the standards are the same.

I am satisfied that the aims and ILOs met the expectations of the national subject benchmark. In particular, I have been External Examiner at a number of institutions over the years and I am satisfied that the standards here are the same as those elsewhere.

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)

I am responsible for the modules which lead to exemptions from the appropriate actuarial professional subjects. As such, the modules follow the profession's syllabus very closely (as I would expect). Therefore, there is very little scope for academic research to feature in the syllabus for those modules. I would stress that this does not constitute a weakness of the programme – it is simply the corollary to offering exemptions from professional examinations.

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)?	Yes and no!
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

The programme is not “accredited” by the actuarial profession, as such. However, the programme has an exemption recognition agreement with the actuarial profession.

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 believe that the student performance suggests that the teaching, learning and assessment methods are appropriate and are of high quality.</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>I believe that the students were given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and ILOs. The students' overall performance was comparable to that at other institutions.</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>Scaling seems to be used much more widely at Leeds than I am used to at other places (including my own) – and it wasn't apparent that it had been used in all cases until I received the spreadsheet helping me to determine the exemption threshold marks for the professional exams. Next year, I will be asking the department to make it clearer when and why scaling is used. I did look at the issue in respect of this year's marks and decided that it wasn't a problem, but I did, of course, factor it in when setting the exemption mark.</p>		

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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

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:

Please note my comment about scaling above.

I thought the administrative arrangements were excellent, and I was very happy with how the Progression and Awards Board meeting was handled.

Other comments

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

The department will need to think carefully about the changes it will need to make over the next year or so to cope with the actuarial profession's new examination system under what they call "Curriculum 2019." I am sure that must be happening!

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

*Mathematics*School of Mathematics, University of Leeds,
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 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

notes several ongoing innovative practices in our School, such as increasing use of electronic assessment and peer assessment. These form part of our wider continuing efforts to improve our degree programmes, particularly their assessment. The appointment of an actuarial adviser reflects our commitment to improving and widening the scope of our actuarial programmes.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

We are pleased to have been able to implement earlier suggestions regarding marketing literature and the structure of exams, in particular to make our assessments more rigorous.

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:

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:

We are pleased that _____ feels that our standards are comparable not only with other institutions but also with the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries.

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 recognise _____ concern over excessive use of scaling. We do in fact already supply external examiners with explanations in cases where heavy scaling is applied: lecturers who apply heavy scaling are required to provide explanations on the module marksheet, and any adjustments to scaling made by the Examinations Monitoring Group are recorded in the minutes of that meeting. If _____ is aware of any specific instances where scaling is not justified we would encourage _____ to inform us.

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:

We are pleased to hear that _____ felt our organisation of progression and classification were excellent.

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

We are aware of the forthcoming changes to the actuarial profession's examination system and are planning changes to our modular structure in order to accommodate them.