

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Biological Sciences / School of Biology

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Biology (please get list of modules from Exams Officer, Andrew Peel).

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

B.Sc.

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.

There is good integration of practical and theoretical materials, so that students can take a coherent view of their learning.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

It's really good to see that comments from last year have been followed up. All examiners had noted in the previous year, a very compressed use of the marks scales (between 35-75%), and felt that this did not reward the work of the really excellent students, nor sufficiently reflect work that was clearly below passable quality. There was (apparently) some relaxing of this compression this year; very high quality work was awarded suitably high marks (as is appropriate in the Leeds / Faculty COPA).

In addition, one module on my list previously had (in my view) too much assessment, and showed depressed scores. This module has now been revised, and the balance of assessment and student marks were much more in line with comparable modules.

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

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y /
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	Y /
3.	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	Y

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
	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y/N
6.	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

7.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Y
8.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y
9.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Yes, See below
10.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Yes, See below
11.	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.

I have been asked, so far, to moderate and comment on individual modules. I have not (to my knowledge) received programme-level documentation, nor have I been asked to discuss the suitability of the programme *per se* in relation to ILO's, Aims, benchmarks etc.

What I can say is that - yes, academic standards and general educational approach are comparable with similar Russell-group Life & BioSciences programmes. Programme structure seems coherent and appropriate for each year of study.

For Biology as a mostly "whole-organism" subject, it is good to see quite a lot of plant and some agricultural sciences in the portfolio; really good to see these subjects in the curriculum.

12.	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)

There is plenty of evidence that students are exposed to the research culture of the staff members. Research projects and esp. third year modules bring genuine and exciting research to the UG students.

13.	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:

14.	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:

15.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p> <p>This programme is accredited by the Royal Society of Biology (hence, no doubt they have looked at benchmarks, programme coherence etc).</p>		

Assessment and Feedback

16.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	See below
<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>As I say above, I don't think I have been given programme level ILOs or discussed these with staff at Leeds. These discussions happen more normally during Periodic Review or re-accreditation. I am happy to do programme-level review & commentary if Faculty wants it, but it would need to be scheduled in to visits, and I suspect that moderation of modules is the higher priority.</p> <p>Note also that this programme is a generalist one, and can take modules from several individual programmes, so I can not directly comment based only on the modules that I act as external examiner for.</p> <p>What I can say is that there is good progression of academic level between years; that the students are challenged in good and interesting ways throughout; that there is a clear commitment by staff to robust assessments in keeping with a degree in a university of this type. So, while I can not at this point judge alignment of programme ILOs and assessment, what I have seen is entirely consistent with a well designed programme in which assessment is embedded in a thoughtful and considerate manner.</p>		
17.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y
18.	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>Academic standards are robust and well understood by staff who teach on the modules on this programme. Student performance is appropriate for the grades obtained.</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>I found feedback on exam scripts to be very good across modules. Staff are good at explaining the marks in ways that students should be able to understand. This is to be commended.</p>		

The Progression and Awards Process

19.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiner's role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Y
20.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y

21.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	See below
22.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
23.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
24.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y
25.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
26.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y
27.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y
28.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y
29.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y
30.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y
31.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
32.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y
33.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
34.	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>I have not seen any student feedback on modules either last year or this year. It is pretty standard elsewhere for examiners to see this as they review and give comments on modules.</p>		

Other comments

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

Some staff will know that I struggle a bit with the exam format in which staff have short answer questions (plus essays). In some cases I can not see that the SAQs are different to essay questions (i.e. they could be set as full essays).

These can be hard to moderate, as External Examiner, because the question and the model answers may arguably be unsuitable for the 15 or 20 minutes of writing that the students have to complete the question. The difficulty in moderation is then how to decide what marks should be given. Even where the SAQ is appropriately short, it can be unclear how marks are awarded and prioritised for particular points, because the model answer does not address this.

I would encourage staff from across modules to meet and discuss the educational purposes of these SAQs; to look at each other's sample questions and to try to ensure consistency and parity; to decide when SAQs should have subsections indicating the % mark awarded to each (as is more normal, I think, for SAQs vs Essays).

Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report**Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)***Title and Name of Examiner:**Subject(s):*

Biology

*Programme(s) / Module(s):*MBiol, BSc Biology
BSc Biology
MBiol, BSc Biology with Enterprise
BSc Biology with Enterprise*Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):*

BSc, MBiol

*Title and Name of Responders:**Position*:*

Programme Leaders, Biology and Biology with Enterprise

Faculty / School of:

Faculty of Biological Sciences, School of Biology

*Address for communication:*School of Biology
Faculty of Biological Sciences
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT*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. 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 thank the examiner for thorough and thoughtful assessment of the degree programmes and in particular, recognition of the quality of mark justification and feedback provided to students in coursework and exam script annotations.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

As stated by the External Examiner, over the past academic year we have acted on previous recommendations to improve our programmes in line with his advice. This included a revision of one module highlighted as having a disproportionate workload. This has led to both improved marks and greatly improved student feedback in that module, as evidenced by comments reported in the staff:student forum.

Staff were encouraged to use the full range of marks when assessing student work and as noted by the external, this has resulted in improved differentiation between submitted assignments and exam essays.

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:

None raised

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:

The External raised the issue of programme level learning outcomes. These are clearly in place and will be highlighted for discussion with the External. input will be particularly timely with the prospect of subject level TEF in the coming years.

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 school continues to improve quality and transparency of assessment and feedback which consistently receives relatively low NSS scores across the sector. Raising awareness of current processes and understanding student expectations are priorities for the next academic year.

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:

Student feedback on their modules and programme of study is collected through Faculty and University level programme surveys, in addition to the staff:student forum, and we will ensure these are made available to the externals in the future.

Other comments

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

The issue raised about the distinction between the expectation of detail in the answers for essay questions and short answer questions is valid and important. We have been pushing through a reform and harmonisation of module examinations over the last two years in which we have sought to address this very issue. There is clearly more to be done in this regard and we have put this on the agenda for our school away day, at which we will discuss the matter further to highlight the importance of making these changes.