

**The University of Leeds**  
**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 23/07/2018

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

Biological Sciences

*Subject(s):*

*Programme(s) / Module(s):*

Human Physiology

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

BSc and UG masters

**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.*  
Within the Human Physiology programme there are many areas of good practice. As identified in my previous reports, the Advanced Topics modules at level 3 continues to provide the students with an opportunity to take ownership of their learning. This module gives them the freedom to select specific research areas of interest and after an initial lecture by academic staff utilise the research literature to explore the areas in more depth. In addition, the broad range of final year projects on offer allow students to work to their strengths, and students can focus on projects types that fit with their career aspirations. It is also excellent to see the programme developing the data handling and interpretation skills of the students, skills that are essential for a Physiology graduate irrespective of their final career pathway.

**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 previous report I flagged that students felt that communication could be improved at times. Unfortunately, due to adverse weather conditions I was unable to attend the March visit this year, meet the students and see whether there had been any communication issues in 2017/18. It should be noted that staff had also raised communication with me in 2016/17. In my visit in June 2018 academic staff did not raise any communication issues from the 17/18 academic year.

**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*

No matters require attention.

**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*

In my four years as external at Leeds I have seen many instances of excellent learning and teaching practice, along with many examples of outstanding pieces of student work. The Human Physiology programme is an excellent example of a vertically integrated degree, that develops and enhances the complexity of student skills each year. The broad range of teaching methods, the use of suitable and effective assessment methods, together with the provision of feedback provides an opportunity for students to develop a wide range of subject specific and transferable skills. Over the years I have seen a number of positive changes. In particular, when I first took this role on the feedback on scripts was sometimes lacking. This meant it was not always obvious to me as external why a particular grade had been awarded. Over the year this has improved, and now the majority of scripts have this (although a very small minority do not). There have also been improvements in terms of noting on scripts why an agreed mark has been awarded when two markers had a large difference. In terms of the processes at the Examination Board, the detailed discussion around the award of prizes now takes place in advance, with only minor discussion needed. Doing this in advance ensures that all aspects of performance are reviewed, and additional information can be pulled up as needed. I have always been very impressed with the quality of the assessments in the Human Physiology programme and by the standard of marking by staff. Student performance has always aligned well with what would be expected compared to other institutions. The Human physiology team should be congratulated for their outstanding learning and teaching approaches over the last four years. I would also like to specifically thank the two programme leads, , for providing support in my role. I would also like to thank the support staff for their outstanding organisation throughout my four years as external.

## Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Y / N
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y / N
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y / N
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y / N
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y / N

*Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.*

The design of the programme (core and optional modules) provides the students with the opportunity to meet key learning outcomes that relate to Physiology, but also have the flexibility to dip into other biological areas of interest. Learning and teaching activities utilise a wide variety of approaches, including, but not limited to, lectures, practical work, problem solving and also independent study (for example project work). The skills developed by the students equip them well for possible research careers, but these skills are also key for graduates going into a wide and diverse range of careers. The learning outcomes align with the benchmark requirements, and the degree programme produces graduates with a high level of academic knowledge and understanding in the discipline and with strong transferable skills.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y / N
-----	---	-------

*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)*

Academic staff teaching on the programme are research active, with many of them teaching in their specialist area as well as more broadly across the discipline. This means that students are exposed to the most current concepts and thoughts in the field of Physiology. However, research influence is not only about research staff teaching, it is also about providing opportunities for students to develop their own research skills, and this is something the Human Physiology programme does well. Utilising strong practical teaching (something the programme should be commended for) allows students to develop skills around data analysis and interpretation. Their project work gives

additional opportunities for higher level skills in critical analysis and synthesis. Overall the programme builds on the research skills of the students through each subsequent level of study.		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	Y / N
Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD: NA		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	Y / N
Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here: NA		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y / N
Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:  The masters course (and any students taking a year in industry) has accreditation from the Royal Society of Biology. Such accreditation reflects the large research component of the programme.		

### Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y / N
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.  The programme utilises a variety of assessment methods that start with an assessment of knowledge and understanding early on, and then build to assess student application of knowledge, critical analysis and synthesis skills later in the degree programme. These assessment methods include coursework and examinations. For coursework there are open book essays, literature reviews and laboratory reports. Examinations cover MCQ questions, short answer questions, essays and data handling exercises. The variety of assessment methods and how they are utilised provides good vertical integration, with complex and challenging learning outcomes assessed in later years. Some work requires double marking given that the work is not anonymous, (e.g. final level projects). The process for double marking is clearly visible to external examiners, and there is a policy in place for aligning primary and secondary grades. On the majority of examination scripts, it was clear to me as external examiner why a specific grade had been awarded. The comments and feedback clearly aligned with the final grades awarded. As in previous years, the feedback rubrics for the projects were an excellent way of indicating to students areas they did well and areas for improvement.		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y / N
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y / N
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:  During my visit I had the opportunity to view a variety of scripts from a wide range of modules. The majority of my time during the visit was spent checking overall module grades, comparing these to previous years and also to other institutions. I can confirm that the overall module grades were very consistent with what would be awarded to students on similar courses at other institutions. There was a range of student performances, as would be expected, with some pieces of excellent student work achieving well deserved high grades. I did note a small number of modules that this year seemed to show a change in performance compared to previous years. One module was a level 2 module on Cardiovascular and Respiratory Physiology and Pharmacology (2117). In this module the number of upper second class grades dropped, and there was a large increase in third class grades compared to the previous year. This difference was not reflected in other level 2 modules, so it was not simply an impact of the cohort across the board. Discussions with the programme lead revealed that changes to the module structure on another degree programme meant that a subset of strong students no longer took this module, and this could explain some of the changes observed. It was interesting that the 2117 student group did less well in the Pharmacology questions, despite the content and academic staff delivering these sessions being unchanged. I am therefore not concerned about the drop in performance this year, although I		

would ask the programme lead to look in detail at this module next year to ensure that there is no long term issue. At the other end of the spectrum Exercise Physiology in Health and Disease (2216, delivered by Sports Science) saw a large increase in first class grades. This module has undergone some changes this year, with staff previously in Physiology no longer delivering teaching or marking examination scripts. The large uplift in grades may be a reflection of these changes, particularly if Sports Science have taken the lead in setting some of the questions that would have been set by Physiology staff previously. Again, it will be important for the programme lead to liaise with Sports Science to ensure a more appropriate module distribution moving forward. All other modules had grade profiles that were similar to previous years and in line with what would be expected. Overall I was very happy with the quality of the student work in relation to the grades and degree classifications awarded.

*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 Examiner's role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Y / <del>N</del>
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y / <del>N</del>
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / <del>N</del>
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / <del>N</del>
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / <del>N</del>
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y / <del>N</del>
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y / <del>N</del>
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y / <del>N</del>
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y / <del>N</del>
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y / <del>N</del>
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y / <del>N</del>
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y / <del>N</del>
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / <del>N</del>
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y / <del>N</del>
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / <del>N</del>
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / <del>N</del>

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

### Other comments

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

In 2017/18 there was of course the UCU strike action, which took place over a number of days in February / March. One of my key questions to the programme lead was about the impact the strike may have had on learning and teaching in the Human Physiology degree. It was brought to my attention that it was level 2 where there had been an impact, particularly in the Experimental Skills in Physiology module (2228) as a number of practical sessions did not run. However, sample data was provided to the students so that they could still develop their data handling and interpretation skills. There were no concerns raised by students to the programme lead. The grades in this module were very similar to previous years, and the students were still able to meet the module learning outcomes. Therefore, while the module was impacted this has not disadvantaged the students. The programme lead should of course ensure that consideration is given next year if any of the in lab approaches that were not delivered are needed for practical work in level 3.

During my visit I was also made aware of changes to the location of the delivery of practical teaching on the programme. One of the strengths of Leeds is the quality of the practical teaching, and I would like to formally state that it will be important for the institution and the faculty to ensure that this strength is not lost with any changes to where practicals are delivered.

Finally, last year I flagged in the Examination Board the case of a student who had no first class marks in her final year, but had had a very strong performance in second year, and as a consequence of the degree classification formula was awarded a first class degree. Student skills should develop as they go through the programme, and I would expect a first class student to be demonstrating first class performance in level 3. There was a similar case this year, where a student only had 30 credits in the first class range out of the 120 total, but again due to a strong level 2 performance was awarded a first class degree. I would therefore like to raise this with the institution for consideration. I am aware that the faculty is utilising an institutional wide formula, and therefore there are likely to be other instances across the institution where this is happening. The institution would benefit from a consideration and discussion of whether a student be awarded a first class degree with few or no first class marks in final year. This is particularly pertinent given the recent discussion on the percentage of firsts being awarded by institutions across the UK.

## Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report

### Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

*Human Physiology*

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BSc, MBIol Human Physiology  
BSc Human Physiology in Relation to Medicine

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

BSc, MBIol

Title and Name of Responder:

Position\*:

Programme Leader

Faculty / School of:

*School of Biomedical Sciences*

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 [qat@leeds.ac.uk](mailto: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**

We thank the External Examiner for highlighting (a) the vertical integration of the subject matter through the course, with increasing complexity, (b) the standard of marking and quality of exam script annotation, and (c) the opportunity for students to develop practical and research skills.

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

We agree that the increase in quality of exam script annotation and recording how project mark discrepancies have been resolved have enhanced consistency and transparency of assessment. Similarly, the recommendations for prizes being agreed before the final exam board has streamlined this process. We will, however, continue to push for a good level of annotation on all scripts by improving the consistency between assessors.

#### **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:*

There are no matters for urgent attention.

#### **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:*

We thank the External Examiner for the complimentary comments on the provision and delivery of the Programmes, particularly around assessment. Whilst there have been improvements in the quality and detail of comments on exam scripts, we agree that there are a small minority of cases where this is not so. Module managers and moderators need to identify these cases (due to a small number of staff) and redress this, which we will communicate during the next academic session.

### 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 thank the External Examiner for acknowledging that “The learning outcomes align with the benchmark requirements, and the degree programme produces graduates with a high level of academic knowledge and understanding in the discipline and with strong transferable skills.”

**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:*

Following changes to the provision of BMSC2117, where a shortened 10 credit version is now available to accommodate alternative modules for some student programmes, and BMSC2216, where there have been changes to the staff delivering and assessing the module, we will continue to monitor performance. In particular, performance will be compared with student cohorts who are taking identical assessment components, but in alternative versions of the module.

**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:*

There are no specific points raised by the External Examiner regarding these processes.

**Other comments**

**Response to items included in the ‘Other Comments’ section of the report**

We thank the External Examiner for looking at modules and assessments that had the potential to have been disrupted by strike action during Semester 2, and we agree with their appraisal. It is unlikely that lost practical time will affect studies in Level 3 since the modules with laboratory components (BMSC3301 and BMSC3126) do not have BMSC2228 as a pre-requisite module, nor will rely on specific laboratory skills obtained therein.

In agreement with the External Examiner, we see our practical provision as a key aspect of our course that attracts quality students and that the Faculty Management should ensure that these are not disrupted through anticipated changes to practical provision.

The External Examiner raises an issue from an isolated case that arose in the 2016-2017 session. It is University policy that the Quality Assurance team will respond to matters relating to institutional policy, and it is hoped that this will also be communicated to the School.

Finally, we would like to thank \_\_\_\_\_ for the extremely valuable input during the course of \_\_\_\_\_ 4 years in the role of External Examiner of the Human Physiology undergraduate degree programmes.