

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

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18      QAT Received 22/06/2018

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

Chemistry

*Subject(s):*

*Chemistry, Medicinal Chemistry, Natural Sciences*

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

Degree programmes administered by the School of Chemistry

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

MChem and BSc

**Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards**

**Points of innovation and/or good practice**

I have been impressed by the range of examination questions and a good selection of problem solving questions have been set. The levels of the questions are appropriate for the year of study.

**Enhancements made from the previous year**

Improvements have been made to the assessment of final year projects.

**Matters for Urgent Attention**

There are no matters for urgent attention.

**For Examiners in the first year of appointment**

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

**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 an External Examiner Mentor?	N

Although no serious issues with the programmes were identified over my tenure as external examiner a number of minor improvements were suggested and acted on. The department is very open to suggestions from external examiners and responds positively to suggestions. The most significant change was a modification to the assessment of the final year projects which now provide a better distribution of marks.

**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>These are very much in line with those prescribed by the Royal Society of Chemistry, as to be expected for accredited degree programmes. The standards are comparable with those at competitor universities, with good challenging examination questions being set across a wide-ranging curriculum.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p>This is a key component of project work in the degree which forms a major part of the final assessment. Final year lecture courses are also clearly linked to the research interests of academic staff.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
N/A		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
N/A		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y
See answer to Q12 above.		

### Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<p>Assessment is conducted through a mix of examinations, lab work and project work. The examination papers are all scrutinised by the external examiners in order to assure quality and marking criteria. The examiners read a number of project reports produced by the students which were in line with the expectations for final year students.</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>The students graduating in chemistry from Leeds in 2017 are of a comparable standard to chemistry students graduating from other similar UK institutions, with the degree classifications in line with those awarded elsewhere. Students were able to demonstrate their achievements in a variety of ways, as appropriate to the learning outcomes. The examiners were very impressed by the poster presentation day in which 4<sup>th</sup> year MChem students were able to present their project work. The students who presented were of very high calibre and this is reflected in the high proportion of first class degrees awarded this year. When we visited in May some students commented that the feedback on project work (both MChem and BSc) that they were provided with was very variable and dependent on the particular assigned supervisor. Some guidelines on this would be useful.</p>		
<p>Some of the examinations are quite tough in terms of the sheer quantity of material that students are expected to have at their fingertips. This is compensated for by the use of coursework in which the students invariably obtain better marks. It is worth considering giving the students some degree of choice in order to allow them to play to their strengths, and/or possibly reducing the total amount of material covered in the final year advanced topics module.</p>		

### 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
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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

The department could work a little more on ensuring consistency in the annotation of the marked examination scripts, and particularly in ensuring that the total mark is clearly visible on the front of the paper. The external examiners would have appreciated receiving recommendations from the internal board on the outcome for borderline candidates and having all relevant scripts and reports available for those candidates (some were available, some had to be manually extracted). Although we were able to reach conclusions on borderline cases a steer would have been helpful. We were asked to consider the relatively low average mark for a second year module; in cases like this it would be most helpful if a histogram of marks could be provided (we were given this on request) so that action can be recommended. It would have been helpful to have a final class list for the MChem students listing all the final module marks so that we can look for trends and discrepancies; this is achieved in other institutions, so it should be possible to find a suitable format. We were a little concerned that the (large) number of first class degrees awarded did not correlate at all with the number of first class marks awarded in the final year advanced topics module. This is something that should be reflected on for the future. We were however pleased to see a better distribution of project marks than we saw last year, though perhaps the distribution is still a little narrow. The project marking process is robust, although a bit more clarity in the moderation process would be helpful. For example we saw one project where two markers had awarded very different marks. The student had ended up on a borderline, so the policy on dealing with the discrepancy was particularly critical in this instance. As externals we were able to adjudicate, but a more robust internal process might have avoided the issue. The department should also keep an eye on the "grade inflation" metric being piloted in TEF as a rising number of first class degrees is being awarded.

#### 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 Examiner:

Subject(s):

*Physical Chemistry*

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BSc Chemistry, BSc , MChem Chemistry &amp; variants

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

BSc, MChem

Title and Name of Responder:

Position\*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

*Chemistry*

Address for communication:

School of Chemistry,  
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 [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 are pleased that you have been impressed by the examination questions.

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

We are pleased that you approve of the changes to assessment of final year projects (final reports marked by two independent markers, not the project supervisor).

**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:

We are pleased that you have found the School to be receptive to suggestions. Many thanks for your help and your insightful recommendations over the 3 years.

**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 you have found our standards to be comparable to competitor Universities and that you have recognised the prominence of research-based learning in our curriculum.

## 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 are pleased that you have found our degree classifications to be in line with those awarded elsewhere, and that you were impressed by the MChem project presentations when you attended the presentation day in May.

Thank you for relaying the students' comments about variably useful feedback from project supervisors. We have put together a group to look at the assessment of the final year of the MChem programmes and, as part of this, will develop some expectations for project supervisors.

Thank you for the observation about the amount of material covered by exams. In response to this, we have changed the structure of physical chemistry exams on core modules at levels 1-3 such that these will now all contain some choice on Section B (previously Section Bs comprised two compulsory questions each worth 30 marks or three compulsory questions each worth 20 marks, students will now have a choice of either 2 out of 3 or 3 out of 4 optional questions). We have also changed the structure of the final year MChem Advanced Topics January paper this year, removing the requirement for students to answer at least one physical, one organic and one inorganic Section B question: students will now have a completely free choice.

## 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:*

Thank you for your considered comments:

*'The department could work a little more on ensuring consistency in the annotation of the marked examination scripts, and particularly in ensuring that the total mark is clearly visible on the front of the paper'*. We will emphasise this to staff marking papers in January and in June.

The external examiners would have appreciated receiving recommendations from the internal board on the outcome for borderline candidates and having all relevant scripts and reports available for those candidates (some were available, some had to be manually extracted). Although we were able to reach conclusions on borderline cases a steer would have been helpful. We were asked to consider the relatively low average mark for a second year module; in cases like this it would be most helpful if a histogram of marks could be provided (we were given this on request) so that action can be recommended. It would have been helpful to have a final class list for the MChem students listing all the final module marks so that we can look for trends and discrepancies; this is achieved in other institutions, so it should be possible to find a suitable format. We were a little concerned that the (large) number of first class degrees awarded did not correlate at all with the number of first class marks awarded in the final year advanced topics module. This is something that should be reflected on for the future. We were however pleased to see a better distribution of project marks than we saw last year, though perhaps the distribution is still a little narrow. The project marking process is robust, although a bit more clarity in the moderation process would be helpful. For example we saw one project where two markers had awarded very different marks. The student had ended up on a borderline, so the policy on dealing with the discrepancy was particularly critical in this instance. As externals we were able to adjudicate, but a more robust internal process might have avoided the issue. The department should also keep an eye on the "grade inflation" metric being piloted in TEF as a rising number of first class degrees is being awarded.

## Other comments

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