

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:

Faculty of Biological Sciences

Subject(s):

Ecology, Zoology (and programme variants)

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BSc Zoology – all programme variants
 BSc Zoology in Relation to Medicine and Veterinary Science
 BSc Ecology and Environmental Biology – all programme variants
 MBIol, BSc Zoology (Integrated Masters) – all programme variants
 MBIol, BSc Ecology and Environmental Biology (Integrated Masters) – all programme variants

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

BSc/MBiol

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 note new modules and some refreshed content leading to more contemporary subject matter. This has been well received by the students that I interviewed. The students on the courses I examined are stretched and rigorously assessed, leading to an excellent student experience. It is also shown in the quality of the work that I examined, including coursework and final year projects. I'd like to thank the Examinations Officer for prompt feedback to the comments I made to draft exam scripts over the past year.

There is improvement in the level of detailed feedback that students receive, both on scripts and coursework. Students appreciate the video-recorded lectures. There is evidence of some project supervisors "who go the extra mile" in supporting students.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.
 Module changes, especially more 20 credit modules, have generally been well received by students, allowing them to focus and do better in exams. New modules and some refreshed content has enhanced programmes, with other changes in the pipeline. Students have commented on improved feedback.

There have been improvements in the use of 'Mark Disagreement Forms' forms for final year projects, providing a better rationale for how final marks are determined.

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

None

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 / 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 programme structures, design, aims and intended learning outcomes are excellent. I acknowledge that some academics do very well with the limited resources they have to manage large class sizes in some modules, although clearly it is preferable to have smaller classes in the 2nd and 3rd year.

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)

From discussions with students, they acknowledge that the teaching is, on the whole, research-led and benefit from this. As stated last year, within individual modules, academics could be encouraged to not only teach the current 'paradigm', but perhaps make it explicit how their research contributes or even challenges this. This would potentially encourage more critical thinking.

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:

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	Y / N
-----	--	-------

<i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y / N
<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i>		
<p>These programmes are accredited by the Royal Society of Biology. Advanced degree accreditation by the Society recognises academic excellence in the biosciences, and highlights degrees that educate the research and development leaders of the future. The advanced accreditation criteria require evidence that graduates from the programme meet defined sets of learning outcomes, including gaining a substantial period of research experience.</p>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y / N
<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>There are clear (and ongoing) improvements to ILOs and assessments across the board. As in previous years I continue to encourage diversity of assessment types and I recommend a greater focus on problem solving assessments (although acknowledge this is not always possible in large class sizes). There should be a move towards smaller classes in later stages of the degree programmes.</p>		
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
<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 students on the courses that I assessed are stretched and rigorously assessed to a very high academic standard. Overall, this leads to an excellent student experience.</p>		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i>		

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 / N
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y / N
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y / N

26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y / N
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y / N
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y / N
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y / N
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y / N
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y / N
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y / N
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i>		

Other comments

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

I am very satisfied with both the process and improvements made to the degree programmes these past 3 years. Any comments I have are minor. I would like to see a better use of the 'Mark Disagreement Forms' for final year projects and/or a more appropriate allocation of suitably qualified second markers (although I appreciate some of the practical difficulties). I recommend an example of good practice is identified and shared. An example where markers re-evaluated particular sections of a report and how the marking criteria was then used to get to the final mark outcome could be provided.

I could find no evidence of students being disadvantaged by industrial strike action.

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

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Ecology and Conservation Biology, Zoology

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BSc, MBIol Ecology and Conservation Biology
BSc, MBIol Zoology
BSc Zoology in Relation to Medicine and Veterinary Science

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

BSc/MBiol

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Programme Leader Ecology and Conservation Biology

Faculty / School of:

School of Biology

Address for communication:

8.08 Manton
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

New modules, refreshed content, contemporary subject matter, well received by the students. Students stretched and rigorously assessed, excellent student experience. It is also shown in the quality of the work that I examined, including coursework and final year projects. Improvement in the level of detailed feedback, both on scripts and coursework. Students appreciate the video-recorded lectures. Evidence of some project supervisors "who go the extra mile" in supporting students.

We would like to thank the external examiner's recognition and support for the continuing improvement to our programmes as a result of his recommendations. We continue to stress to staff the necessity to provide clear, detailed and justifiable feedback on exam scripts and coursework; we believe our marking criteria and assessment forms help with this.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

"Module changes, especially more 20 credit modules, have been well received by students, allowing them to focus and do better in exams. New modules and some refreshed content has enhanced programmes, with other changes in the pipeline. Students have commented on improved feedback."

We are pleased that the changes at Level 3 in particular, motivated by our programme review meetings, changes of staff and the external examiner's suggestions, have been well-received. We will continue to look at content, delivery and assessment as new staff appointments are integrated.

"There have been improvements in the use of 'Mark Disagreement Forms' forms for final year projects, providing a better rationale for how final marks are determined."

We recently introduced an improved mechanism for resolving mark disagreement as a result of the examiner's recommendation. We continue to stress to staff the importance and necessity to be transparent about the process.

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:

N/A

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 programme structures, design, aims and intended learning outcomes are excellent. I acknowledge that some academics do very well with the limited resources they have to manage large class sizes in some modules, although clearly it is preferable to have smaller classes in the 2nd and 3rd year.”

We appreciate the examiner’s recognition of some of the challenges we face in delivering our programmes. The Ecology and Conservation Biology and Zoology programmes consistently have the largest class sizes at level 2 and 3, which does constrain teaching and assessments methods in some cases. This reflects the popularity of our zoology /ecology/whole organism facing modules which are also taken by many students from the other degree programmes. Nevertheless we have incorporated a wide range of assessment types, especially at level 3, with most modules comprising coursework and exam elements.

“Teaching is, on the whole, research-led and benefit from this. Academics could be encouraged to not only teach the current ‘paradigm’, but perhaps make it explicit how their research contributes or even challenges this. This would potentially encourage more critical thinking.”

We have taken on board the examiner’s comment last year and have changed content and assessments to encourage more critical thinking (e.g. Advanced Topics in Conservation Science, Advanced topics in Animal Behaviour). We will examine how we can do this more generally as we continue to refresh our programme contents.

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:

“There are clear (and ongoing) improvements to ILOs and assessments across the board. As in previous years I continue to encourage diversity of assessment types and I recommend a greater focus on problem solving assessments (although acknowledge this is not always possible in large class sizes). There should be a move towards smaller classes in later stages of the degree programmes. The students on the courses that I assessed are stretched and rigorously assessed to a very high academic standard. Overall, this leads to an excellent student experience.”

Almost all of our modules at Levels 2 and 3 (with the exception of Advanced Topics in Evolution, BLGY3245) comprise exam and coursework assessments. We believe that we have introduced multiple coursework assessments in most modules where class sizes allow and we shall continue to examine how we deliver and assess our material as content is refreshed. We would also like smaller class sizes at Level 3, but our modules are extremely popular beyond our immediate programmes.

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:

N/A

Other comments

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

“I would like to see a better use of the ‘Mark Disagreement Forms’ for final year projects and/or a more appropriate allocation of suitably qualified second markers (although I appreciate some of the practical difficulties). I recommend an example of good practice is identified and shared.”

For the most part we do allocate projects for second marking to staff with appropriate expertise. Following the recent introduction of the revised process when dealing with mark disagreement this will become common practice.

The DSE, Programme Leaders and student support staff will continue to ensure that this is done to an acceptable level. The examiner makes a good suggestion regarding examples of good practice and the DSE and Programme leaders will examine how to implement this most effectively.

"I could find no evidence of students being disadvantaged by industrial strike action."

We are very pleased that the examiner felt the students were not disadvantaged by the strike, which staff worked very hard to avoid.

We would like to thank the external examiner for his recognition, support and encouragement throughout the examination process.