

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 03/07/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Faculty of Biological Sciences

Subject(s):

Neuroscience

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BSc Neuroscience, BSc Neuroscience in Relation to Medicine, MBiol, BSc (Integrated Masters) Neuroscience

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

Excellent innovation in delivery of research led education as detailed in the section after q 35.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Introduction of new module Cognitive Neuroscience, as detailed in the section after q 35.

Matters for Urgent Attention

None

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?	n/a
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	y

I have acted as external examiner for the Neurosciences programmes for the last 4 years, 2014-2018. During this time I dealt directly with the Programme Leads, _____ and latterly _____. When I was appointed _____ went to considerable efforts to acquaint me with the content of the programme, how it is delivered and with the opportunity to meet with representative cohorts of the BSc, and latterly including MBiol students. I have also

been efficiently supported in my role by your professional services in particular _____, who has ensured timely delivery of all the paperwork, expert guidance in process, and seamless organisation.

There are two aspects of the programme that have struck me as being particularly distinctive and noteworthy for their excellence in terms of academic content and enhancement of the student experience. The first of these is the breadth of provision of practical science. I find it most impressive for example, that second year students are given the chance to experience electrophysiological recording techniques first hand. The practical content within the programme adds a richness that is only found at a few Russell Group Universities that I know of. It requires considerable expertise, dedication and effort on the part of the academic staff to provide this experience for students. I had been concerned that this may be unsustainable given the increasing pressures on academic staff however they are to be highly commended for continuing to provide this in the face of other pressures. This is no mean feat and it needs to be recognised as such.

The second very strong feature is the delivery of research led education. The research interests, expertise and networks of the academic staff provides the platform for exciting module content, particularly in the third and fourth years of study, and facilitates the students in their progression by linking them to external stakeholders which must have a beneficial effect for employability. This is evidenced by the opportunities provided to students through their year in industry and through research led modules e.g. the Advanced Topics series.

During my time as examiner I have also been impressed to see how the academic staff are continually reviewing and improving the curriculum e.g. through the introduction of the MBIol and the addition of new modules e.g. in Cognitive Neuroscience. The lead academics have also been very responsive to areas that have been identified where improvements could be made, for example around pastoral support.

I have found the marking to be fair and careful. Some of the modules have a large proportion of 1st class marks but where I have sampled the work this assessment has been justified.

Overall I have enjoyed my time as examiner. Given the application of the algorithm to boundary cases I have had no decisions to make but rather have had the opportunity to observe and comment on the robustness of the process and the quality of the students. I have seen examples of best practise in education. I am entirely satisfied with the quality of your programme and impressed by the achievements of your students.

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
<i>See above</i>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<i>see above</i>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i>		

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	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)?	N
<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<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>		
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
<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>		
<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
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:

Unfortunately this year I was unable to meet with the students in the spring due

The modules have an interesting breadth of assessments e.g. in the second year the 'Topics in....' series. However, on paper it would seem there are a relatively large number of assessments for 10 credits and it would have been interesting to discuss with the students if they had any views about the workload and if it is particularly burdensome. In previous years they have been very appreciative of Panopto recordings of lectures and adamant that this does not impair lecture attendance. I would have liked to have explored this topic with them again. Last year I met the first cohort of MBiol and they had commented on workload and an unexpectedly high load at the commencement of the programme. I would have liked to have explored whether this had been ameliorated for the new cohort.

Previously students have commented on feeling less than optimally prepared for the transition between years and this is probably a good issue to keep on the radar.

This year during my summer visit I looked at a few specific modules to review the module content and assess the quality of student work

The students are given the opportunity to study aspects of professional development: CV and job applications are prepared and a formal interview conducted. Students give oral communications and defend grant proposals. Students work as groups for some tutorials and the grant proposals encourage creativity and enterprise. Time management, coping under pressure, critical analysis and written communication skills are all enhanced through this module. This is an excellent aspect of the curriculum.

Biomedical Nanotechnology is a module with very few students which was a minor concern last year because of the proportion of fails. This year there were also very few students however reassuringly there were no fails.

Cognitive Neuroscience: The process underlying cognition is a new second year module and it is good to see the curriculum constantly in development. This addressed a recurring student concern that neuroscience is an under-represented subject area in the second year. I was impressed by the challenging nature of the course work which was a set essay on a controversial topic relating to long-term memory retrieval. The students performed very well with an average of 63.9%.

I was impressed, as in previous years, by the range and quality of third year projects and the inclusion of a piece on self-reflection at the end of projects. I like the project design for the MBiol students in which they do a scientific skills module and project preparation e.g. in the form of a literature review in the third year prior to their extended fourth year laboratory project.

The assessment and feedback is fair and comprehensive. I particularly like the use of detailed feedback sheets that the students are provided with. The annotation of scripts has improved over the years and encouragement should be given to continue in this vein.

Other comments

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

The examiners might be happier in a room with windows i.e. natural daylight when doing their assessments!

It might be worthwhile considering giving the examiners a chance to meet with the module coordinators and other staff over a sandwich lunch in place of going out for lunch. This would be a good way to gather further information and an overview of the programmes.

Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Neuroscience

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BSc Neuroscience, BSc Neuroscience in Relation to Medicine, MBIOL, BSc (Integrated Masters) Neuroscience

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

BSc, MBIOL

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Programme Leader, Neuroscience

Faculty / 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 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

The external examiner notes our constant changes to the curriculum, in particular the introduction of a Cognitive Neuroscience module for 2017-2018. also made mention of our detailed feedback to students which we recognise as being an important part of student development and an area that students particularly appreciate. previous request that we annotate dissertations was complied with. We recognise that the detail of feedback can vary between different markers and are endeavouring to improve this.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

The newly introduced Cognitive Neuroscience module (BMSC2121) was well received by students. A nomination for the Partnership awards stated 'I've really enjoyed the new Cognitive Neuroscience module, they've been the most interesting lectures I've been to this year'. The module also introduced a new critical thinking coursework element. This was aimed at addressing a point made by the external regarding the transition between years since it introduces students to the idea that science involves the weighing of arguments and evidence for a particular theory. The module also introduces students to the use of research papers as a primary information source. We hope to develop this module further in the coming years.

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 were identified.

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:

All response were positive.

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 examiner in comments considered the degree programme to be comparable to other Russell group degree programmes and has stated that one of the strengths of the programme is that its teaching is informed by the research being carried out in the department/faculty. This clearly provides our graduates with an up-to-date cutting edge understanding of a number of issues in the neuroscience area.

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:

No problems were identified with assessment and feedback. The external examiner comments later on our use of detailed feedback sheets and annotations to dissertations (the latter suggest by the external). Students generally seem happy with feedback although there can be differences in detail given between individual markers and differences in student expectation. We recognise this and are constantly trying to improve the standard and timeliness of our feedback.

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:

No problems were identified. As the external examiner noted, there is a University algorithm that is utilised to determine progression and awards which makes discretionary changes difficult to justify and which removes the ability of the external examiner to influence this process. However, the external is clear that our marking and assessment is fair and comparable to that in similar institutions.

The external noted that previously students have felt unprepared for transition between years. This has been addressed in part by the introduction of the Cognitive Neuroscience module which discusses seminal papers in lectures and also in the coursework component where students are asked to discuss a controversy in cognitive neuroscience. Furthermore, each year students at all levels are informed in their induction of the greater expectation that is placed on them year-on-year. It is possible that the level 1 to level 2 transition is less well catered for and it may be necessary to accommodate this in personal tutorials or in semester 2 academic tutorials.

The increase in workload for MBIOL students is also seen by level 3 BSc students since semester 1 is the same for both. The change probably comes in semester 2 where the scientific skills module and the literature reviews take up a lot of time. The scientific skills module has been modified for 2017-2018 to provide more technical support for students, removing the requirement that they culture their own cells each week. This has allowed them to focus on acquiring new scientific skills rather than repeating cell culture techniques on a weekly basis.

Other comments

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

We can find an alternative room with natural light to accommodate the external examiners. This will be discussed with the School administrator. For 2018-2019, lunch for all externals with programme leaders in the Faversham pub can be substituted with a programme-specific sandwich lunch in the School. This will be discussed with the programme administrator and the incoming external examiner.