

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18 QAT Received 18/12/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

School of Molecular and Cellular Biology

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MSc Bioscience
MSc Plant Science and Biotechnology

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

MSc

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. As in previous years, the emphasis on laboratory work and hands-on research training is unusually impressive. The level of close administrative support is also exceptional and students commented on this on several occasions.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box. No specific enhancements were noted but the written feedback to students on assessments appeared to have improved in terms of quantity and quality.

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
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 / N
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	Y

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

The courses have evolved over the period of my appointment. When I started the overall standard was already high but the assessment systems have improved and several modules have improved in terms of content and delivery.

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>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</p> <p>My overall impression is that these courses are of an extremely high quality. The content is challenging but rewarding; students are not spoon-fed but have to grapple with difficult - though important - subjects and they have to carry out cutting-edge research projects. At the same time, they are given a great deal of support from academic staff and administrative staff. The balance is good and the net outcome is that students undergo a course that is challenging but very rewarding.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p>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)</p> <p>There is considerable emphasis on research in both the taught modules (eg through use of state of the art technologies) and the extensive laboratory research project.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</p> <p>The MSc is excellent training for a PhD</p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<p>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<p>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</p>		

Assessment and Feedback

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

Assessment is regular and varied. The marks awarded are appropriate and the feedback is comprehensive		
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><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: The students naturally vary in terms of ability and results but two points are important. First, they act as a cohort and there is a real sense of cohort identity in their attitudes. Secondly, their overall, or average, performance is very good. The best students are phenomenal although there are invariably a small number of weaker students.</i></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>		

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
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p>		

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

The exam board operates very professionally and it was notable that students with ILPs/ other problems had received a considerable amount of assistance when required.
Overall, this is an excellent course.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

MSc Bioscience, MSc Plant Science and Biotechnology

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MSC-BIOL/BS
MSC-BSGS/PSB

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

MSc

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Programme Leader for MSC Bioscience suite of programmes

Faculty / School of:

Molecular and Cellular Biology

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

Thank you for your kind comments and for your help in improving our programmes during your tenure as our external examiner.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Not applicable

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:

Not applicable no urgent matters 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:

No comments to address

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:

No specific comments to address

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:

Thank you. The programme team have worked hard to improve quality and consistency of 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 issues to address

Other comments

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

Thank you for your warm comments.

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 26/11/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

School of Molecular & Cellular Biology

Subject(s):

Infection, Immunity and human disease

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MSc Bioscience programmes

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

MSc

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.
Broad coverage of a variety of topics that was well received by students.
Overall the lab projects seemed well organised and there was good support from faculty. Poster session gave the students a good chance to present their work.
The Course administrator was singled out for praise by the students. They felt provided excellent support, made them feel welcome and gave the cohort a feeling of identity.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

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
1. Coursework being returned to students is done so to preserve student anonymity (do not return work via a shared pigeonhole where the student ID flap has been lifted so everyone can see the student name, grade and feedback).
2. Introduce an opportunity for students to write a non-assessed essay and receive feedback before the first assessed essay. This is particularly important for international students where English may not be their first language. I believe this may already have been introduced after feedback given in September.

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? Not required	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
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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
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

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

A good degree covering a range of biomedical and medical topics providing students with a very good opportunity to expand their knowledge and skill sets. Projects were well received and provided excellent lab skills training. From viewing poster presentations, it was clear that students enjoyed their projects and were well supported by faculty. There was a good mix of teaching activities including lectures, tutorials and seminars that matched well to the learning outcomes.

Some students commented that the first term was very heavily loaded with material.

13.	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)

Yes, this is brought in to the topics taught in lectures and in the 3 month lab-based projects.

14.	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:

15.	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:

16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

Assessment and Feedback

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

Assessment methods were appropriate. Marking was carried out appropriately and in line with marking criteria. Some students raised the fact that some coursework essays were worth more credits than others and that they would like to understand what was different in 2000-word essays worth different numbers of credits. This could probably be explained at the start of the programme and seems like a simple misunderstanding of the relationship between credit weighting and the relative proportion of a course assessed by each method of assessment.

Students commented that all deadlines were clustered at the end of the second term and this overlapped with starting their projects. I see that this has been raised before. Even though students are informed that this will be the case, for students who struggle to manage their workload, this will always be a problem. Consideration could be given to assessing earlier in the term for some modules.

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

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:

Students performed well overall, but there was a spread of marks with some students doing less well in some parts of the course. Weaker students tended to perform less well across the course as expected. The spread of marks and student performance was similar to other Masters courses at other universities and reflects the fact that some international students in particular, find coursework and in some cases exam-based essay writing tricky. See above for the suggestion of a formative essay early in the term to help with this.

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:

The extent of feedback provided on coursework was described as variable from different tutors and some students found handwriting hard to read.

Students didn't see why they were submitting electronically and on paper. At we have moved all coursework to e-submission and marking online across the university. This would alleviate the handwriting issues and streamline processes. This could be considered but would likely require University-wide action however.

See the anonymity issue raised above.

Assessing research seminar attendance through a submitted set of notes on each talk seemed a problematic and unnecessary process that caused stress to students and took up a lot of faculty time. I would suggest taking attendance registers and asking for a single 500-word summary of one lecture of the students choice to be submitted. This would allow the students to select a topic they were most interested in and encourage scientific freedom.

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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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:

Some students asked that there was more choice of subjects for final year projects particularly in the virology area. Although infectious disease projects were offered, these were mostly on bacteria.

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):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

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

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Programme Manager

Biological Sciences

*If the individual responding to the report is not the Head of School please state their position within the School.

Completing the School response

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Response to Points of innovation and/or good practice

We thank the examiner for supportive comments regarding the overall content of the programme.
We echo support for who provides exemplary support to both staff and students.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

n/a

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:

- 1) Anonymity of coursework. Coursework should be anonymised by students sealing the tab on the front of coursework – there is no reason why other students should be able to access this information once the coursework has been posted into the sealed box available for this purpose. However we will ensure that this is the case.
- 2) Formative essay. Early on in the course the students write a short essay on GFP which, although marked, is only worth a very small proportion of the total in the module (BIOL5373M). The students get extensive individual feedback on their essays. We will consider making this formative and stressing that this is an opportunity to get feedback/feed-forward on essay writing skills.

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:

As the majority of the taught part of the programme is in the first term it is inevitable that this leads to the first term being 'very heavily loaded with material'

Some concerns about bunching of deadlines. We reiterate that the students are informed of deadlines at the beginning of term and told to plan their time appropriately. As this is a coursework only programme it is only possible to assess progress once some teaching activities are completed. This inevitably leads to bunching in the second half of the term.

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 apparent variation in allocated marks for assignments is a valid comment. We will review the balance and weighting of assignments to ensure more consistency, where there are differences we will ensure that the students are aware of the reasons.

Variation in feedback/handwriting is inevitable – we will reiterate to markers the need to use the proformas provided and write useful feedback in a legible way.

The point about research seminar attendance is well made. However we do think that students need to be encouraged to attend these seminars – it is part of the training in becoming a scientific researcher. We will consider alternative mechanisms such as taking a register but only expecting a limited number of reports to be produced.

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:

Virology researchers have been encouraged to submit research projects.

Other comments

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