

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 06/09/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Geography

Subject(s):

Geography

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BSc Geography

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

BSc

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.

- Compilation of Module Moderation forms. Module leaders and moderators provide an excellent level of detail and the reflection on student performance and feedback is particularly commendable. The compilation of forms was an excellent starting point for an overview of the degree programme and it is clear to me that the forms themselves also help the lecturers to continually reflect, develop and improve their modules each year.
- Staff engagement as demonstrated by their commitment to continually build and improve on the delivery of modules and the student experience (as evidenced by the module moderation forms).
- Marking criteria. Distinct marking criteria for every type of assessment are detailed and clearly outlined - a valuable resource for students.
- Module handbook and guidelines for dissertation. The handbook and guidelines for dissertation students are comprehensive with a clearly defined timetable to help students plan and manage their progress. The pass-to-progress elements provide well-defined goals and there is an excellent outline of student and supervisor expectations. This independent research module is well-structured and provides a solid platform for students to excel.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

I understand that assessment at Level 3 has been streamlined in response to comments from my predecessor. All assessment for Level 3 students is now based on coursework with a reduction in the volume of assignments. Across the different modules, these assignments are varied in nature giving students an opportunity to test and develop their skills. The students are clearly achieving good degree outcomes.

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

- Resolving mark disparities in dissertation module. There is almost always a clear paper trail to demonstrate how mark disparities are resolved and I observed that third markers are used when 1st and 2nd markers disagree significantly e.g. 18-20%. There are however, a number of instances where mark disparities are still significant (e.g. 10-15%) but not resolved by a 3rd marker. I suggest that clearer guidelines are established to outline how these disparities are resolved and if a 3rd marker should be consulted. These guidelines are important to ensure that some students are not disadvantaged.
- Consistency during moderation. Moderation forms are exceptional in their detail, as noted above. However, there were some instances where moderators need to close the loop and explicitly state whether or not the moderators recommendation were accepted or not. Furthermore, I noticed that in some instances modifications were accepted for the entire module cohort, but in other instances only marks for individual students were modified following moderation. The latter scenario, may well be disadvantaging students whose work was not considered by the moderator.

Matters for consideration by the teaching team

1. Using the full range of the marking scale

I believe that there is justification for stretching the marks in the 1st class bracket. From reading some of the first class dissertations, I believe that some would merit higher marks, pushing them into the super first categories (>80%). Some markers were using whether or not dissertations were of publishable quality as the main criteria in the 1st class brackets. Is this a justifiable reason for holding back students within this bracket and is the balance of marks awarded for being of publishable quality versus other criteria employed consistently by markers? The degree of originality was also a criterion that held some students back on the 2i/1st boundary. Inevitably, some projects may evolve in consultation with supervisors and I would encourage review of the wording in the marking criteria to reflect the wider development of dissertation ideas. As it currently stands, some students may be limiting their chances to gain a first class mark based on their initial topic choice, early in the process.

In addition, for moderation of other modules, staff may want to consider flagging individual students within the 70-74 and 75-79 brackets to see whether their work merit higher marks. This may help to ensure consistent use of the full range of the marking scale.

2. Field Trip: New Zealand (GEOG3895) This is a well-designed module that challenges the student and provides a very strong foundation for undertaking independent research. I looked at this module due to the higher module average and I confirm that the student reports are of a very high standard and marks awarded are in line with the marking criteria. The module clearly stretches the students. I would, however, like to raise a minor issue regarding including the assessment of "field performance". It may be more appropriate that the general fieldwork skills such as time-keeping, problem solving, resourcefulness and team-work are not included in the assessed component but instead as "pass-to-progress" elements. It seems more appropriate to assess sampling and data collection and the quality of the field notebook rather than these generic skills.

3. Separation of dissertation pathways I understand that the BA and BSc dissertation pathways will be separated from next year. I am intrigued as to what this will mean for the students and look forward to hear more about its implementation next year. I also ask staff to reflect on what these different pathways may mean for students that have chosen a dissertation topic that bridges the BA and BSc schemes.

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 (but BSc unavailable)
3.	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	Y

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
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.

The programme is well-structured with clearly defined pathways for students as they progress to higher levels. The curriculum summary sheets are simple and effective in highlighting linkages between different modules across the three levels. The curriculum is contemporary, diverse and appealing to students with clearly defined aims and learning outcomes. Students have plenty of optional modules to choose from at Level 3 and this may be something for the teaching team to reflect upon, especially as some modules have very small numbers.

My overall impression is that the BSc programme is an excellent degree scheme, delivering an excellent portfolio of modules across the full range of Physical Geography and strongly underpinned by a focus on employability.

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)

Module content is research-led according to staff expertise and this is especially evident from the breadth of modules on offer at Level 3. Students are also well-prepared for undertaking independent research via the compulsory skills and fieldwork modules at Level 2 which directly links to the dissertation and field trip modules at Level 3.

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
<p><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> <p>The assessment methods are varied and appropriate to the ILOs. I am particularly impressed by the move to sole assessment by coursework at Level 3 and the students are achieving good degree outcomes.</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><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> <p>Student performance is aligned with the wider sector, although very few (if any) students are awarded a 2ii classification.</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> <p><u>Dissertation Feedback to students</u> I would encourage staff to consider an appropriate process to return dissertation feedback to students. Although feedback is available on request, it seems appropriate to compile a synthesis of comments from 1st and 2nd markers and return these to all students. These comments would be valuable for students that are pursuing postgraduate courses and for those that are preparing for job opportunities. I am confident that the detailed and constructive feedback would be helpful to graduates, giving additional context and evidence of performance on this independent research 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
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?	N/A due to unforeseen circumstances
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	N/A
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	N/A
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> <p>The Progression and Awards Board meeting was conducted effectively and transparently.</p>		

Other comments

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

I would very much like to meet some of the students to gain insight into their experiences of the BSc degree programme. I hope that this can be arranged for next year.

I would also like to extend my thanks to all staff for the welcome and support in my first year as examiner. The introduction and overview of the degree programme was exemplary. I look forward to my visit next year.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

BSc Geography

Programme(s) / Module(s):

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

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

Geography

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

- Compilation of Module Moderation forms. We will continue to use a standard module moderation procedure with unambiguous forms. The programme leader will ask all module leaders to continue to add the necessary amount of detail and reflect on student feedback and performance.
- Staff engagement. We will continue to continually build and improve on the delivery of modules and the student experience.
- Marking criteria. We will expand our portfolio of extensive marking criteria by developing criteria specifically for field notebooks (see attached).
- Module handbook and guidelines for dissertation. We will continue to use our standard module handbook templates and guidelines for dissertations.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Our streamlined assessment portfolio at level 3 is now fully embedded in the programme. This continues to work well. The programme leader will continue to monitor the module specifications to ensure there is a wide range of assessment types to ensure students have the potential to achieve good degree outcomes.

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:

- Resolving mark disparities in dissertation module. We have now developed a third marker policy document (attached) outlining new rules for resolving mark disparities in the dissertation (third marking when marks differ by 10 percentage points or more).
- Consistency during moderation. Programme leader will ask all moderators to ensure that module leaders have “closed the loop” and explicitly state whether or not the moderators recommendation were accepted or not. We will review all moderation forms to ensure students are not disadvantaged by uneven changes to marks.

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 response required.

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 reviewer’s for highlighting that our “overall impression is that the BSc programme is an excellent degree scheme, delivering an excellent portfolio of modules across the full range of Physical Geography and strongly underpinned by a focus on employability”.

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 will now compile a synthesis of comments from 1st and 2nd markers and return these to all students. We agree with the external examiner that these comments would be valuable for students that are pursuing postgraduate courses and for those that are preparing for job opportunities.

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 response required.

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

We will also expand our portfolio of extensive marking criteria by developing criteria specifically for field notebooks.

We will ensure that some students are available to meet the external examiner next time, so can get more of an insight into their experiences of the BSc degree.

We thank the external examiner for a thorough job and giving us constructive feedback.

Attachment: Physical Geography Dissertation - Third Marking Policy

Attachment: Marking criteria for field notebooks