

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT received 21/10/19

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:	Faculty of Biological Sciences
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc/MRes Biodiversity & Conservation
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc MRes

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.
 The insect and plant identification modules are particularly useful and innovative and will stand graduate in good stead in their future careers.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

None of which I am aware

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 only

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?	N

For Examiners completing their term of appointment only

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
<p><i>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</i></p> <p>I was very impressed with the programme overall; it compares well with other similar programmes and in my opinion, surpasses those at some other Russell Group institutions with which I am familiar.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p><i>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)</i></p> <p>It is very clear that the research interests of the academic staff influences the overall teaching and delivery of the course. This is particularly evident in the subject matter of the research projects. I was very impressed by a number of the projects.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p> <p>N/A</p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i></p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p>		

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>		

There is a good breadth of assessment methods and they are appropriate to the ILOs. The marking guidelines are all very clear and followed, in the main, by the staff. Student coursework is of a high standard and most of the dissertations were of an equally high standard.		
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
<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>In the main, the majority of the students performed at a very good level (Merit & Distinction) and their performance was entirely comparable with that of students on similar programmes elsewhere.</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>I note that the Research projects are marked by both the supervisor and an independent marker and that these marks are given equal weighting. Best practice, as I have seen at other comparable institutions, is either to have two independent assessors or to give less weight to the mark of the supervisor. I appreciate that this may be difficult in all situations if the Department lacks depth in certain areas. I do not see this as a serious flaw as it is evident that there is discussion between markers to arrive at an agreed mark and that the marking rubric, if used fully, should minimise disagreement.</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> <p>Appropriate discussion preceded each decision made at the Exam Board and the reasons for the decisions made were valid and fair.</p>		

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):

Biodiversity and Conservation

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MSc Biodiversity and Conservation (incl. part-time, African Field Course variants)
MRes Biodiversity and Conservation (incl. part-time, African Field Course variants)

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

MSc/MRes

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Programme Leader

Faculty / School of:

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) must be sent 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

We note the positive comments on the Insect and Plant identification modules

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:

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:

We are pleased to note the positive comments on the quality of the programme, and on the influence of research on the learning and teaching.

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 note the positive comments on assessment and student performance.

The only concern identified by the external examiner this year is about project marking. Last year we highlighted to academic staff the need for more detailed notes on the agreed mark and, as noted, there has been more discussion between markers this year. We have considered the suggestion that the projects might be marked by two independent assessors, and we agree that this has some advantages. However, we feel that for a number of projects it would be difficult to find two staff with expertise in the project area, and in general we think that the project supervisor provides a useful perspective. Marks awarded by the supervisor and independent assessor are very similar (69 vs 68, $P=0.40$). On balance, we think it preferable to keep the current system.

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:

We note the positive comments

Other comments

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

n/a