

**The University of Leeds**  
**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT received 28/10/19

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

Biological Sciences

*Subject(s):*

*Bioscience, Plant Science and Biotechnology*

*Programme(s) / Module(s):*

Biosciences, Plant Science and Biotechnology programmes:  
MSc Bioscience  
PGDip Bioscience  
MSc Plant Science and Biotechnology

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

MSc /PGDip

**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.*

Although I was not provided with an external mentor as per question below, I was allowed to come to the board a year ago which meant I was able to meet with and discuss things with the team and also the outgoing external. This was extremely helpful.

The office and all the Programme team were extremely supportive throughout the year and answered questions promptly and provided information in a timely manner. Where needed they were also adaptable to address specific areas (eg issues with accessing the material online).

Attending the poster session and having an opportunity to meet with the students is very good practice.

On the whole the marking criteria and feedback sheets are very clear.

**Enhancements made from the previous year**

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

1<sup>st</sup> year as external examiner – but style of project has changed from last year so that it is presented in the style of a journal paper and this approach builds on the assessment approach in an earlier unit.

**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*

A wider issue is the problems around gaining access to the online information and the failure of the username etc to work. This seemed to be a problem for other externals and so was not unique to my being an external for the first time. Although IT were very supportive, the approach to getting this support is not quick. Unfortunately I had personal circumstances impacting on my availability to sit on the phone for long periods of time whilst waiting for a person from IT to be available to help me. When I did get through IT were very good, but the Faculty did have to make interim methods to ensure I received material before IT were able to support me. I hope the process will be smoother running next year.

**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?	N
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

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

Overall the programme is well designed and provides opportunities for students to develop and research their own independent areas of interest,

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)*

Research underpins the work being presented and also the assessments of the learning. There are a number of cases where assessments provide flexibility for students to identify particular examples and use these to illustrate and develop their understanding of specific topics. The research project represents 80 credits and represents unique research.

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?	N
<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>		
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>As noted below the students questioned whether there were too many assessments for specific units and also the timing of the assessment. But the assessments are appropriate for the level of the award. The full marking range was used and students received a range of marks based on individual performance.</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>The students commented on the timing and number of deadlines, I recognise that this is an area the team have been working on and continue to review. Similarly the number of assessments per unit should be considered, In places the deadlines for work was miscommunicated between different sources.</p> <p>Questions were raised about lack of feedback on exams and that some assessment feedback was quite superficial and did not support the students on how to improve in the future. Finally a number of students were concerned about the delivery of the bioinformatic unit and clarity over what was expected for the bioimaging assessment.</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 / N See comments
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:*

Although marking criteria are clear and rubrics easy to use, there were occasions on scripts and also projects where feedback comments were not provided. In the case of the projects justification of final mark awarded was generally clear and where there was a discussion between the markers of the final mark awarded this was generally clear. However in some places the circling of the rubric was only partially completed and the mark awarded did not reflect the final mark awarded. Where there were no comments to justify the mark awarded this made it difficult to understand the thinking. Reviewing scripts and projects I do not disagree with the final marks awarded, but would appreciate clearer guidance from ALL people involved in the marking process in future and clear access to all the marking sheets.

#### Other comments

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

The opportunity to meet with the students at the poster session was very useful. It was good to hear that the students generally felt their experience on the Programmes was positive. They specifically commented on how helpful the course leaders and office staff were. Although at times the course reps felt that some points they raised were not taken seriously and were dismissed with little explanation or justification. Students did question why they had to submit hard as well as electronic copies, this is an area that I would encourage the programme teams to review.

**Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)**

Title and Name of  
Examiner:

Subject(s):

*Bioscience, Plant Science and Biotechnology*

Programme(s) /  
Module(s):

Biosciences, Plant Science and Biotechnology programmes:  
MSc Bioscience  
PGDip Bioscience  
MSc Plant Science and Biotechnology

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

MSc / PGDip

Title and Name of  
Responder:

Position\*:

Programme Leader, Bioscience

Faculty / School of:

Faculty of Biological Sciences, School of Molecular and Cellular Biology

Address for  
communication:

Manton Building, 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) must be sent directly to the External Examiner. A copy must also be emailed to the Quality Assurance Team at [gat@leeds.ac.uk](mailto: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 the positive comments

**Response to Enhancements made from the previous year**

The change to writing the research project up as a research paper rather than a 10,000 word dissertation went smoothly. You did comment at the exam board on some variation in styles and we will communicate more clearly that the students are expected to submit a manuscript form. They do not need to make the submitted work look like the published paper.

**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:*

I am very sorry to hear about the problems you experienced with IT. This has recently been reorganised and centralised and has caused a lot of problems. Slow response and systems not working as they should is not, unfortunately, news to me. I have requested that the pro Dean for Teaching and Learning raise this at the appropriate level to ensure this does not happen again next year. On the other hand I am happy to hear the Faculty office staff stepped in to provide interim solutions.

**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:*

I am sorry that you were not given access to the previous externals report.

I am sorry you were not formally provided with a mentor, which was an oversight on our part. However who is the external examiner was present at the same time examining the Infection, Immunity and Human Disease programme for the second year running and I hope that she was able to give you any support 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:*

Thank you for your positive comments. No issues raised here requiring a response.

## 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:*

You answered N to Q17 but did not add any comment. If you think there is a problem between the alignment of assessment and learning outcomes please clarify so that we can address them.

I have looked at the number of assessments in the programme. For Plant Science and Biotechnology there are 12 assessments in semester 1 and 14 in semester 2. The project is assessed after Easter and there are 4 components to the assessment- the supervisors assessment of performance, the research paper, the poster and the viva. Since the course has no end of module or end of semester exams we don't feel this is unreasonable, but as part of the programme review we will look at any individual modules than have a higher than average number of assessments to see if they can be combined or reduced and still meet the learning outcomes. For Bioscience the number will be the same or slightly less depending on the particular modules chosen. We aim to spread the deadlines out and set the work well in advance to allow students to plan their time. I am was not made aware by the students of any miscommunication of deadlines during the course of the year. They are told that the module outline (which is on Minerva) is the date unless superseded by a formal announcement (also via Minerva). Staff are aware that they are expected to provide informative feedback and we do communicate to the students (via talk in induction week and via the student reps) that they should speak to the marker if they are unclear how to use the feedback to improve. I spoke at length with the student reps about the bioinformatics module and passed their concerns on to the member of staff. I was not made aware of any problems with the bioimaging module. Some students do not read the instructions given.

## 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 will remind project markers of the importance of giving clear explanation of how the mark is arrived at when the work is sent out for marking.

## Other comments

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

We do take the issues raised by the course reps seriously and in fact I wrote them a long detailed response to the issues raised. There is a tension between some students desire to be told exactly what to do and our philosophy that at MSc level we should be providing guidance and support but not step by step instructions to allow students to develop initiative and independence.

We ask them to submit electronic copies of work to allow plagiarism detection. Hard copies are a useful back up if Minerva has an outage. Also some staff do not wish to mark electronically and not all work is easy to mark that way.