

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

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT received 08/10/19

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

Faculty of Biological Sciences, School of Molecular and Cellular Biology

*Subject(s):*

*Biochemistry / Medical Biochemistry*

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

BSc Biochemistry – all programme variants;  
BSc Biochemistry in Relation to Medicine;  
BSc Medical Biochemistry – all programme variants;  
MBiol, BSc Biochemistry (Integrated Masters) – all programme variants;  
MBiol, BSc Medical Biochemistry (Integrated Masters) – all programme variants;

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

BSc, 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.*

The Biochemistry degrees at Leeds are among the best in the country in terms of their content, relevance and delivery. Students are challenged from year 1 and are therefore well prepared for years 2, 3 and 4. Key to making these courses relevant is that the courses concentrate on fundamentals and principles rather than volume – there is far too much content for any student to fully grasp molecular science but by concentrating on the principles students are shown how to apply their knowledge to a broad range of problems. Students are also introduced to the main challenges of biochemistry and at the same time kept abreast of the latest techniques. As I stated last year, the teaching integrates the research of the department's academics extremely well, such that in the final year students learn about research not only through project work but also in the advanced topics modules. This combination gives rise to extremely well-rounded students who not only learn detail on the subject but also gain insight into how such processes are discovered. Students who undertake the year in industry do exceptionally well.

As with last year, I thought the examination papers contained a broad range of excellent questions that tested the knowledge of the students both fairly and proportionally. The scripts were extremely well marked and annotated clearly to help highlight both the good and the bad. The marking was very fair. There are some courses that have higher marks than others – and this probably needs to be looked at.

**Enhancements made from the previous year**

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

In general, the process was much more professional than last year. Examiners were provided with a better room in which to look at scripts. There was much better communication between the academic and administrative sides. These improvements were greatly appreciated.

**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*

I met with the students in May around the time of their project vivas. The final year students were generally satisfied with the way the course was run and particularly enjoyed the project work. However, there were a large number of second year students (~15) who were unhappy with aspects of their course, specifically to do with a practical module. As the students suggested that this was "messing with their mental health" I reported this straight away to the "Head of Department". It is obviously important that staff interact with their students and course reps to ensure

that this kind of situation is addressed at an early stage. I presume action has been taken to address the issues raised by the students.

After the final examiners meeting in June, I was informed that mistakes had been made in the correlation of marks on a specific final year module. This effectively had the effect of adding between 6-10% to the exam paper and, significantly, moved several students up into the next boundary. This situation should not happen – and it should have been picked up by not only by the module convenor but also by myself when I was looking at the scripts. However, this year course marks were provided on a laptop and not on a spread-sheet, meaning that it was difficult to see how everything was calculated. Therefore, I recommend that processes are put in place to ensure that greater transparency is provided on the accumulation of marks for each individual module – and that separate spread sheets are provided for each module. This is obviously a serious issue and I trust it will be looked at closely.

**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?   | NR |

**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.*

|     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 13. | Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear? | Y |
|-----|---|---|

*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)*

|     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 14. | Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD? | N |
|-----|--|---|

*Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:*

|     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 15. | Does the programme include clinical practice components? | N |
|-----|--|---|

*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 |
|-----|--|---|

*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>There is a combination of practical work, course work and end of term examinations. These are used sensibly to provide continued and integrated learning across the years.</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>Knowledge of the students seems very high and they have learnt from first principles – and applied these appropriately. The students have an excellent grasp of theory, knowledge and experimental experience.</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> |  |   |

**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):

*Biochemistry/ Medical Biochemistry*

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BSc Biochemistry – all programme variants;  
 BSc Biochemistry in Relation to Medicine;  
 BSc Medical Biochemistry – all programme variants;  
 MBiol, BSc Biochemistry (Integrated Masters) – all programme variants;  
 MBiol, BSc Medical Biochemistry (Integrated Masters) – all programme variants;

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

MBiol / BSc

Title and Name of Responder:

Position\*:

Programme Leader Biochemistry

Faculty / School of:

*Faculty of Biological Sciences, School of Molecular & 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) 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**

We thank \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ comments on the quality of the programme. While the modules affected were not noted, we believe average module mark disparities arise due to the different weighting of course-work and examinations in the skills, practical and lecture modules. Efforts to increase discrimination for the practical modules are on-going.

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

We are pleased that the changes implemented were effective.

**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. Practical module: academic staff were already dealing with some of these issues prior to visit. The DSE and PL liaised closely with the module manager (and frequent communication with the students) to ensure smooth provision of teaching and assessment to minimise student stress. New module managers are now running L1 and L2 practicals. Feedback so far is good (the PL met with L2 students in the last week of Oct in a new strategy to increase communication).
2. The School recognises that such errors are unacceptable. As a consequence of these errors new standard operating procedures have been introduced. We note your request for easy to view summary top sheets for both module and module weighted year averages and are working with the Student Education Office to facilitate this.

**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:

## 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:*

## 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 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:*

## Other comments

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