

**External Examiner’s annual report for the academic year 2018/19**

Please complete this form and return it to the University of York, via your University email address, to [examiners@york.ac.uk](mailto:examiners@york.ac.uk).

**Reports should be submitted within six weeks of the final Programme (Ratification Panel) Board.**

**Name: Kun Guo**

**Institution: School of Psychology, University of Lincoln**

**Degree Programme/ Modules Examined: MSc in Cognitive Neuroscience and MSc in Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience**

**Academic year appointment started: 2017-2018**

**Attendance at Boards of Examiners meetings**

*It is a University expectation that the External Examiner physically attend the Module Board of Examiners (where they also provide their oral report)*.

Did you attend the Module Board of Examiners? YES

If not, please explain why you were unable to attend, and the ways in which you participated (if not in person).

*It is a University expectation that at least one the External Examiner attend* *the Programme Board of Examiners (also referred to as the Ratification Panel). The External Examiner need not be physically present, but may take part by phone or Skype, provided they have access to the full documentation.*

Did you attend (either in person or remotely) the Programme Board of Examiners? YES

Please use the space below if you have any comment about attendance at the Programme Board.

You are invited to comment freely and **fully** on the programme(s) / module(s) for which you are responsible. Please support your commentary with appropriate evidence where relevant and provide sufficient detail to aid departments in reviewing and enhancing their programmes. If this is the end of your term of office please also complete section j giving an overview of quality and standards covering your term. Note that reports are shared with student representatives and that individual staff and students should not be named and details should not be included which might identify a student (for example specifying a dissertation title).

Please comment on the following:

**Standards**

1. the appropriateness of course structure and content to the level of the qualification and to the relevant subject benchmark statement: including the appropriateness of the learning outcomes of the programme and all its elements to its educational aims, and where relevant, whether the programme reflects additional Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body requirements;

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| This report covers two closely related taught master programmes, MSc in Cognitive Neuroscience and MSc in Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, delivered by the Department of Psychology in an impressively high- quality and innovative manner. The main aim of the programmes is to provide a bridge between undergraduate study and PhD/post-graduate research in these fields. I believe the courses offered have achieved the stated objectives and benchmarks extremely well, and have built a solid subject knowledge and research skill base for those students pursuing an academic career. Furthermore, the broad range of transferable skills developed via these courses have provided an excellent preparation for those students following other careers paths.  The overall course structure and content are fit for the purpose, and remain of an excellent standard. I have been very impressed by the degree of thought that has gone into the construction of the curriculum, allowing for broad coverage of subject knowledge, research and transferable skills, learning and assessment styles, and clear progression. The learning outcomes have been well mapped onto each module, individual modules are interlinked for continuous knowledge and skill development, and each module has been well integrated into the broader degree programme. The variety of teaching and assessment methods have ensured the students to maximize their potential. These have been mirrored by largely positively course feedback from the students.  One thing particularly stood out for me is the excellent balance between theoretical subject knowledge and practical, applied research and transferrable skills in module contents. In addition, the outstanding expertise of staff teaching on these courses reflects the cutting edge of research and technical development in cognitive neuroscience, and allows the students to gain a critical insight about neuroimaging research and application. |

1. the appropriateness of the marking scheme/grading criteria and the extent to which the grading criteria have been rigorously and consistently applied;

I have looked through students’ assignments, grading and feedback in a few modules (Topics in Cognitive Neuroscience, Basic Principles in Neuroimaging, Research Design and Analysis in Neuroimaging, Transferable Skills, Programming in Neuroimaging, Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, Current Questions in Developmental Research, and thesis research project). Overall, there is an excellent variety of assessment methods to meet individual students’ needs and learning style, to develop their skill sets, and to enable them to achieve their potentials. The marking scheme and grading criteria are clear, well-constructed and informed, and consistently applied. In fact, there was little discrepancy in grading between 1st and 2nd marker (often in 1 grading category, such as in thesis project marking). The moderating process is also fair, consistent and clearly communicated between 1st and 2nd markers. I was further impressed by detailed and constructive feedback to the students.

1. threshold standards[[1]](#footnote-1): the standard of students’ performances in terms of their knowledge, skills and understanding in reflecting the level of the qualification;

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| The students’ performances in the above mentioned modules reflected a spread of ability, knowledge understanding and engagement by the students. Overall, majority of the students have demonstrated an outstanding performance for these modules at Masters level. Furthermore, even with a larger 2018-2019 cohort, students have achieved higher averaged grade in majority of the modules than those in 2017-2018 cohort, and have demonstrated superior academic writing and presentation skills in their course work, reflecting a continuously enhanced teaching quality and student support in the Department of Psychology.  The work from the upper end of the cohort was particularly astounding, clearly reflecting those students’ knowledge base and skill sets, and high-quality teaching and supervision by the staff at York. I was particularly impressed by the high quality and large number of almost ready-to-be–submitted-for-publication thesis project reports from those high-achieving students. |

1. comparability of standards: the standard of particular degree classifications/distinctions/passes awarded in comparison with those students on similar programmes of study in other UK degree-awarding bodies (with which you are familiar), particularly if the distribution of classifications departs from relevant national patterns;

*While there is no expectation that the distribution of classifications should necessarily conform to national patterns, external examiners’ comments on this issue are valuable in evaluating the University's standards.*

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| The performance of students at York is on a par, or exceeds, that seen at other UK institutions. The degree classification is also in line with my expectation for a University at the level of York. |

**Assessment**

1. Please comment on the appropriateness of the assessment methods (for the subject, level of study and learning outcomes) and, if applicable, how effectively the requirements of any relevant Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body have been addressed in the assessment process;

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| For those modules I looked, the range and appropriateness of the assessment method is exemplary, clearly indicating an impressive amount of effort put into the module and assessment design. The learning objectives, step-by-step task or project instruction, assessment expectation, and marking criteria have been clearly communicated to the students with sufficient details. The marking scheme and moderating process are transparent and appropriate. The feedback is detailed and constructive.  When comparing with practice in other institutions I am aware of, the coverage of practical and transferable skills (e.g. project design, programming, presentation, reporting) embedded in the course assessment at York is remarkable, and should further benefit students in their future career development. |

1. the conduct of, and the procedures followed by, the Board of Examiners (specifically whether the University rules relating to assessment, progression and award and procedures governing exceptional circumstances affecting assessment and academic misconduct have been fairly and equitably applied);

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| The Board of Examiners meeting was very well organised and efficient. The process mirrored the best practice in the sector.  All the relevant information was clearly presented and communicated, the exam officers and teaching staff present were highly engaged and very helpful in providing course details and extra information. |

1. the effectiveness of the external examining administrative arrangements (for example the time available for reviewing scripts, availability of documentation needed to carry out the external examiner role);

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| The whole process is very well organized by the admin team. The clarity and support from them has been excellent in a timely and detailed manner. I have had a pleasant experience. |

**Quality of teaching and learning**

1. in so far as you are able, please comment on the quality of teaching and learning (including the quality of feedback to students) as revealed in exam scripts/other assessments, and by the level of student performance;

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| As detailed in my comments in the section of “Standards”, I am deeply impressed by the teaching quality and coverage, assessment methods, research supervision and support (especially for thesis project), marking and moderating process, and feedback provided to the students. These have ensured York as a prestigious and competitive institution at the international level. The University and the students are fortunate to work with such dedicated and knowledgeable experts in the field. |

**Induction (if applicable)**

1. **To be completed by those commencing their period of appointment as an External Examiner at the University in the reporting year.**   
     
   How effective were the procedures for induction and preparation for your role?

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| N/A |

**End of term of office overview (if applicable)**

1. **To be completed by those whose term of office is now concluded.**  
     
   Please provide an overview of quality and standards, for example indicating whether improvements have been made to the quality of provision, covering the duration of your term of office.

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| N/A |

**Previous issues**

1. if *particular* issues were raised in your report last year, have they been considered and, where appropriate, addressed?

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| **Yes** | **No** | **n/a** *(no issues raised / first report)* |  |
| Yes |  |  |
| *(Please comment as required)*   1. Last year we asked for additional documents regarding for the past performance from students in previous cohorts and student module evaluation. We have been provided the detailed data in a timely fashion. 2. Last year we also raised an enquiry about the module mark distribution (with relatively few marks at the very top end of spectrum) and poor academic writing and academic performance for a few weaker students. The marking criteria have been justified, and the student support practice have been reviewed. | | | |

**Additional comments - optional**

1. any other remarks **not covered** by the above, examples of good/innovative practice identified, opportunities to enhance the quality of learning opportunities based on your experience, any issues to be drawn to the attention of the Board of Examiners or the University;

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| N/A |

**Feedback regarding the report form - optional**

1. this form is reviewed annually and any feedback on this form is welcome and will be considered as part of the annual review;

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| N/A |

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| **Please give your overall opinion (delete as appropriate) on whether:** |
| a) the standards set for this/these award(s) are appropriate for qualifications at this level, in this subject: YES |
| b) the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK degree-awarding bodies with which you are familiar :  YES |
| c) the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and fairly conducted in line with the University’s regulations and procedures:  YES |

Signed:  Date: 08/10/2019

1. *Threshold academic standards* – that is the **minimum** acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic qualification (for example an honours degree or master’s degree) or credit. Threshold level of achievement is agreed nationally and is defined in the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (QAA, 2014), the Higher Education Credit Framework for England (QAA, 2008) and QAA Characteristics’ Statements and Subject Benchmark Statements. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)