

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

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	School of English
Subject(s):	<i>English Language and Literature</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BA Joint Honours Programmes with English Language and Literature BA English Language and Literature
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

**Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**

**Completed report**

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to [exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk).

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Academic Quality and Standards**  
Academic Quality and Standards Team  
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building  
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

**Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards**

**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*

N/A

**Only applicable in first year of appointment**

*Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?*

I was not provided with copies of reports or responses. I presume none was relevant.

**For Examiners completing their term of appointment**

*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*

N/A

## Standards

**1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award**

- *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

The intended learning outcomes were all met by the structure and content of the programme. Standards were high and entirely appropriate for the awards under consideration.

**2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?**

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

The programme is compatible with other UK institutions and meets all national benchmarks and the current Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

**3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs**

- *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.*

The school employs a wide variety of assessment methods, which are designed to support and test the students across a wide variety of subject areas. The school uses both anonymous and personalised marking as appropriate for the task in hand (exams are always anonymous, but longer topic projects which emerge from a dialogue, journal or workshop element cannot by nature be anonymous). Moderation is carried out scrupulously. Classification of the final degree award is monitored by the whole School and the external examiners.

Student performance indicates a very high quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods. As I indicated at the Examination Board meeting, the School takes 'A' grade students and turns a high proportion of them into independent thinkers.

**4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?**

- *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.*

The students demonstrated very high academic standards. The high first-class work was of publishable quality; the top 2.1 work was exceptionally good and compares very favourably with the undergraduate work I have seen in my own institution and postgraduate work elsewhere in the UK.

The students as a cohort cover the usual broad range (as with the 'A' grade at 'A' level). Strengths are perceptive engagement with literary and other texts, ability to engage in current critical debate, scholarly research skills, argumentative skills, presentational skills, poised and elegant use of English. Weaknesses are passive use of critical material, over-reliance on theoretical ideas at the expense of independent engagement with the texts, clumsy expression, poor grammar, poor spelling and poor paragraphing. I only saw one fail paper where the English was so bad as to be unintelligible; for the most part, students in the School of English write to a very high standard and are encouraged to do so by their markers.

**5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum**

N/A

**6. Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year**

*It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.*

N/A

**7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching**

*This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.*

All the teaching in the School of English is research-led and this is evident in the fresh approaches to canonical and non-canonical texts that one sees in the students' work, particularly the dissertations and longer assessed essays. The students have a command of a wide range of periods and genres and are alert to the latest critical and theoretical debates (editorial scholarship could easily be added to this list). Essay and exam work provide evidence of dedicated and inspirational teaching.

**8. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements**

N/A

**9. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.**

- *Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.*

Yes.

**10. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?**

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

Yes. The supporting documentation is very full.

**11. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?**

Yes. I raised a small number of queries about the phrasing of questions and alerted the School to a major problem in one of the Medieval papers where a central computer had scrambled all non-modern English characters in the passages for close reading. This last problem was solved with great efficiency by the Examinations Officer and the Departmental Administrator.

**12. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?**

Yes. It is helpful to see full runs of assessed work throughout the year in order to track the way that students respond to the excellent feedback they receive. It is also very helpful to be given the top 2.1 non-borderline run of papers as a sample at the end of the year as this enables a fair and fully informed assessment of the 1<sup>st</sup>/2.1 borderline cases.

I raised one query about an examination rubric violation that appeared to have gone unremarked (a first class mark had been awarded). In this case (I agreed that it was first-class level work), the violation was in relation to what I suggested might be an unnecessarily prescriptive rubric. I suggested that it might be preferable to have a more open rubric rather than stipulating set numbers of authors and specific genres. More open rubrics would enable students to adopt narrow a focus if they chose and for markers to be free to reward in-depth focus as well as broad coverage, as appropriate.

External examiners do not see marginally annotated essays, but a copy of the summary feedback sheet is attached to a clean copy of the essay. Feedback sheets offer full, detailed and supportive comments on all levels of work. The work in the fail and 2.2 range that I saw also received praise for what limited strengths were evident and helpful, supportive guidance about how to build on those good points.

As I mentioned at the Examination Board meeting, I wondered if the value of the extensive typed feedback on exam performance via VLE might be compromised by the fact that the students cannot re-read their scripts at the same time and thus see what the markers were discussing. Summative assessment does not necessarily require extensive feedback and it is difficult for the assessment to be fully 'formative' in the absence of the original work and/or at the very end of a programme of study. I understand that it is possible for students to request to see their exam scripts through their personal tutor, but that few choose to do so. I hope that painstakingly typed exam feedback is considered by all the recipients with the same levels of care and attention that the markers have shown in providing it.

**13. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?**

The dissertations I saw were based on well-formulated topics, which had been well supervised and very fully marked.

**14. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?**

All administrative matters were handled very smoothly. The Board of Examiners meeting was as efficient as it is possible for these things to be. I was able to attend the meeting and supported all the recommendations of the Board

**15. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?**

The mitigating circumstances meeting took place before the externals arrived in Leeds. I am satisfied that all due consideration was given to these cases. I was asked to read the work of a candidate who was awarded a discretionary first due to mitigating circumstances and I supported this award.

## Other comments

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

4 borderline cases (full runs), 4 sample class award essays (final year runs) and 7 fail papers, amounting to 5kg of reading material (much of it handwritten) is about the limit of what one can read with due care and attention in the 3 full working days before the Examination Board meeting. It is also about the limit of what one person can carry alone if the material needs to be transported back to Leeds to be available at the Exam Board meeting. In the event of a greater number of borderline cases, more time and a same-day courier service would be necessary.

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School of English  
The University of Leeds  
Leeds LS2 9JT

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20 January 2012

Dear <>

Thank you for your very helpful report as External Examiner on our BA programmes for the 2011-12 session.

Your report has now been considered by the School's Taught Student Education Committee and I have incorporated the Committee's response into my comments here.

We are extremely grateful for your general perception of the 'very high quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods' which can be inferred from the student performance and also for your observation that moderation is carried out 'scrupulously'. We are most particularly pleased by your sense that the School takes high quality students and 'turns a high proportion of them into independent thinkers' and that 'all the teaching in the School is research-led' and that this leads to 'fresh approaches' to both canonical and non-canonical texts.

Your more particular points about more open examination paper rubrics and your commentary on our extensive typed feedback on exam performance not surprisingly generated extensive discussion by the Committee. In the case of the former, we have already pushed towards a more consistent set of rubrics across papers and these will in any case have to change as we move away from core modules which are assessed solely by sit-down examination. Your suggestion of more open rubrics which offer a specific test to the students is one which we will take forward in our discussions and bear in mind during our planning exercises. We are also currently re-assessing our typed exam feedback in the light of the practice you described as taking place at <>.

On behalf of the School, I would like to thank you for all your excellent work for us this last year.

Yours sincerely,

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Head of School

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

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

**Part A: General Information****Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	School of English
Subject(s):	English Literature
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Joint Honours Programmes with English Language and Literature
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

**Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner****Completed report**

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**Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards****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

**Only applicable in first year of appointment**

*Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?*

Yes

**For Examiners completing their term of appointment**

*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*

**1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award**

- *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

The programme Aims and ILOs are fully commensurate with the level of the award. The standards represented by these aims and objectives are entirely appropriate to the awards.

**2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?**

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

The range and depth of the English Literature undergraduate curriculum at Leeds ensures that it comprehensively covers national subject benchmarks. The programmes are fully comparable to similar programmes at other HEIs in my experience, and exceed some in their breadth and rigour.

**3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs**

- *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.*

Assessment methods are carefully designed to fulfil Intended Learning Outcomes. These methods follow a traditional format, combining term essays with examinations. Marking procedures are exemplary and there is a clear relation between these procedures and the classification of awards.

Very high levels of student attainment confirm that teaching, learning and assessment methods are both enabling and challenging.

**4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?**

- *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.*

As indicated above, the academic standards demonstrated are very high and exceed those of some comparable HEI English departments in my experience. At first class level, I have seen outstanding work which is certainly already at postgraduate standard and in some cases very close to publishable. Across the cohort there is a preponderance of marks in the upper second category and much of this work shows the same kinds of sophistication of argument and approach, and seriousness of research and attention to the balance between theoretical perspective and close textual analysis, as characterise the first class band – the same markers of excellence are in place, differing only in extent and consistency of application. At the lower levels of attainment the student work does not appear to be beset with the kind of literacy problems that can be encountered in programmes elsewhere, and I have only seen one (failing) script this year which suggested that the student did not know how to write an academic essay.

There are some quite distinctive strengths across the cohort. I was particularly impressed by the levels of examination performance, where many students were able to write with style and poise in a way that seemed to belie examination conditions and the presentation of a previously unseen paper. This kind of examination performance was a reflection of the more broadly distinctive features of the undergraduate achievement in Literature: an 'essayistic' quality to the writing, in terms of structure and elegance; a sense of ownership of argument; and a serious interest in incorporating theoretical perspectives into the close discussion of literary texts. No general weaknesses were discernible across the cohort: it was noticeable however that both in examination and coursework, students who spread their discussion over a range of texts (more than 2 or 3, that is) tended to achieve less depth and consequently depressed marks. Given that the cultivation of critical/textual skills is generally high, perhaps student might be encouraged to build their arguments around a narrower range of texts, unless specific modular learning outcomes call for breadth of reference.

Another noteworthy sense in which students are given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement is in the range of essay options offered to them in examination and coursework conditions: essay questions in both contexts were invariably stimulating, sometimes unusual, and this helped to bring out the best in students.

**5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum**

Not applicable.

**6. Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year**

*It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.*

Not applicable as this is my first year of appointment.

**7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching**

*This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.*

There is a particularity of focus in modules which attests to a high degree of correlation with staff research interests. Examples of this might be 'Against the Great American Novel', where a certain critical question is already posed in the rationale of the module itself, and 'Fictions of Fallen Women.' There is a strong sense that the teaching team are translating their advanced research interests into the curriculum, and this in turn translates into a serious research orientation in much student work, including but not only at dissertation level.

**For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements**

**8. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements**

Not applicable

**The Examination/Assessment Process**

**9. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.**

- Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.*

I was given full and detailed guidance by the School in my first year of appointment and this included access to all necessary materials and an encouragement to contact the School with any queries however minor.

**10. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?**

- The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

All necessary documentation was provided to me.

**11. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?**

I saw all draft examination and assessment papers in advance. The nature and level of the questions was in all cases entirely appropriate. I was encouraged to suggest amendments, revisions or improvements where necessary, and final versions of papers evidenced the fact that in some cases these suggestions had been taken up.

**12. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?**

In order to moderate assessed work I was sent full module cohorts from selected modules. This was more than enough to be able to verify the quality of student work and of the nature of the assessment and feedback process. The marking and annotation of scripts was invariably clear, with the norm being typed and detailed comments provided for each item of assessment. This is a very high standard of practice.

**13. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?**

Choice of dissertation subjects and the assessment of dissertations were both fully appropriate.

**14. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?**

Administrative procedures throughout the year were exemplary, including clear guidance on expectations and practice, and the very efficient transmission of necessary materials. I was able to attend the Board of Examiners, which was also conducted with exemplary rigour and integrity.

**15. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?**

As external examiner in my first year the nature of these procedures was not visible to me. As, appropriately, such evidence was not presented at the Board of Examiners, the external examiner must take on trust the fact that these procedures are just and thorough.

**Other comments**

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

This comment may have featured in 3, above: but I would wish to commend the levels of feedback provided by staff on undergraduate assessment. This feedback was for the most part extremely detailed and in the best cases evidenced a real sense of critical dialogue between tutor and student. There was an excellent balance between praise and encouragement on the one hand, and penetrating criticism on the other: standards are exacting, students are being challenged, but there is no fear of giving unreserved praise where it is due. Students are fortunate to receive this highly conscientious level of feedback. Further to the above, I would like to congratulate the School on an excellent year's work.

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School of English  
The University of Leeds  
Leeds LS2 9JT

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30 November 2012

Dear <>

Thank you for your very helpful report as External Examiner on our BA programmes for 2011-12.

Your report has now been considered by the School's Taught Student Experience Committee and I have incorporated that committee's response into my comments.

We are extremely grateful for your very positive overall view of the degree here in the School in which you describe very high levels of student attainment and exemplary marking procedures.

We were particularly interested in your profiling of the relative strengths and weaknesses of our cohort and we made special note of your sense that our students write with 'style and poise' under exam conditions and that they can attain an 'essayistic' elegance in their writing. We take notice of your suggestion that we do more to offer advice to candidates so they do not spread themselves too thinly in their exam answers by writing about too many authors or texts.

We are also grateful for your careful description of the nature and the value of our feedback which in the best instances demonstrates a 'dialogue between tutor and student' and in which there is an admiral combination of support and challenge.

On behalf of the School, I would like to thank you for all your excellent work for us during the last session.

Yours sincerely,

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Head of School