

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012– 2013

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):	

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.

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

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?

N/A

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

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 continue to be fully commensurate with the level of the awards. The standards represented by these aims and ILOs also continue to be 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.*

Undergraduate English Literature at Leeds is fully comparable with the standards at other HEIs in my experience. The scale and depth of staff specialisms across the School means that QAA national benchmarks are more than adequately met.

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.*

A high premium is placed on the critical essay and end-of-module written examination, as the core and predominant elements of assessment across the School, and these are appropriate to the ILOs. Essays tend to be approached as opportunities to construct a resourceful and independent argument and this continues into the approach to the timed examination. Students receive sensitive, rigorous and detailed feedback in each of these elements, characterised by a sense of mutual endeavour. Students are also well trained in referencing and bibliographical practice and there is, as a result, a very high standard of presentation of assessed work. Across the range of achievement, there is a sense that students are fully aware of what is expected of them, notably with regard to the construction of argument and to the balancing of primary and secondary source materials, and this attests to high standards of teaching and learning. I would also commend the use of the non-assessed, i.e. formative, essay in some modules.

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 clear and direct approach to assessment through essay and examination (see above) gives students ample opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs. In particular a wide-ranging and imaginative approach to the setting of questions (in both coursework and examination) gives students a stimulating and varied range of options. There are no evident, distinguishing weaknesses across the cohort; distinctive strengths (i.e. not always to be found in comparable courses) include ambition of argument, engagement with the primary texts at the level of close reading, and good research habits and skills. As last year, I was struck by a brightness of approach in examinations, where students are aware of the need to be bold and propositional in their answers, and to see the answer as an opportunity to display their thinking and knowledge rather than as a 'test' in the narrow sense. Literacy skills on the whole are very good.

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.

I was not aware of any particular or general enhancements, other than the expected updating of scholarship on modules. Particular areas of good practice are the mode of address to students in feedback (rigorous yet at the same time non-hierarchical) and the wide and imaginative setting of questions in coursework and exams – in the latter case the effect is to solicit answers which give evidence of fresh thinking rather than the regurgitation of pre-prepared or standard material.

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.

The Literature contains an array of elective modules which demonstrate staff research interests. Curricula/reading lists are up to date and thought-provoking. Modules such as *States of Mind*, *Disposable Lives* and *Narratives of Memory* directly involve students in highly topical critical and theoretical issues, while it is gratifying to see students responding to the spirit of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and in a manner which responds to the many research/theoretical vistas this text opens out. It is clear that this is a strongly research-led School and that the benefits of these specialisms are being transmitted to students even at undergraduate level.

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

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.*

Yes, this was sufficient.

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 in an efficient and timely manner. External Examiner policies and procedures have been clearly explained and coherent. However, this year a change of regulations around the assessment of borderline cases introduced an element of confusion and a mis-direction of energies. As external examiners in English we were sent 'runs' of year 2 and year 3 work for those students poised on a borderline, yet were unable to adjudicate on these cases – begging the question of why we received them other than for monitoring purposes. This issue was aired in detail at the Board of Examiners, in particular relation to one run which I felt, under the previous regulations, would have achieved an uplift to the higher classification, and much valuable reflection took place on what might be involved in 'considering' a student on a borderline. The Chair also gave a full and persuasive explanation of the ways in which a borderline student did still benefit from 'consideration'; despite this change in regulations.

In addition, the requirement to monitor module samples from the second term of the previous academic year feels anomalous. Some clarification of the means/forum by which the examiner should deliver responses to this material (in order to justify the time spent monitoring it) might be helpful in future years.

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 to all. Very minor amendments were proposed in some cases and I am confident that these were considered and acted upon.

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.

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

Yes. Dissertation subjects evinced strong independent engagement on the part of the students, and assessment/feedback was duly conscientious and full.

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?

Yes in all cases – the administration and conduct of the Board of Examiners was exemplary and inspired full confidence. For future reference, if an external examiner is unable to attend and comments from said examiners are received in writing only, it will be important to table these at the appropriate moment.

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

These procedures are not in evidence at the Board of Examiners.

Other comments

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

No further comments, other than to congratulate the School on another excellent years' work, and to register thanks to the administrative team for their guidance and efficiency at all times.



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

10 December 2013

Dear

Thank you for your very helpful report as External Examiner on our undergraduate programmes for the 2012-13 session. This has now been considered by the School's Taught Student Education Committee and I have incorporated that committee's response into my comments.

Once again, we are extremely grateful for your very positive overall view of the degree here in the School and, in particular, for your comments about the imaginative setting of questions, the 'sensitive, rigorous, and detailed feedback' which our students receive and your observation of how they are inducted into a culture of research enabling them to manifest 'good research habits and skills'. So, too, your sense of our students producing 'evidence of fresh thinking rather than regurgitation of pre-prepared or standard material' in examinations is very pleasing to read as is your sense that 'dissertation subjects evinced strong independent engagement on the part of the students'.

We note your point about there being some confusion this year caused by a change in our regulations regarding the reading of borderline cases as a result of our need to conform to University policy. Please accept my apologies for this. You might be interested to know that the problematic run you refer to was later raised to the higher classification following appeal.

Along with another External Examiner you draw attention to the monitoring of module samples and suggest that we find a space for report on this important work. This we will do.

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

Yours sincerely,