

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010– 2011

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION*Subject area and awards being examined:*

School of: English Programme(s) / Module(s): English Language	Subject(s): English Language awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) MA
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The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than 6 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.

There are no matters requiring urgent attention.

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.

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 MA in English Language at Leeds fully meets expectations regarding appropriate generic learning outcomes associated with postgraduate qualifications of this kind. The degree offers the students the opportunity to gain insight into a range of topics associated with Modern English usage. Perhaps one thing to offer if possible would be a course on the structure of Modern English, though I appreciate this is dependent on appropriate levels of staffing and sufficient resources being allocated to teaching, learning and research on the English language at Leeds.

I did think that there was a tendency towards generosity at the higher end of the scale when marks were sent to me. I communicated this to the department, and was advised that this comment would be considered in future sessions.

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.*

Yes

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 course offers students the opportunity to submit work relating to particular areas of interest. I was impressed by the way that the students had engaged with the research literature, and were keen to pursue their own research both as part of the taught courses and more clearly in the dissertation.

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.*

There were three students taking the MA this year; one received a pass, one a merit and one a distinction. This struck me as appropriate, given the performance of each candidate throughout the year. The distinction candidate performed extremely well across all modules, and the result was well-deserved.

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. 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.

This was my first year of appointment; unfortunately, it appears that the MA in English Language will not be offered next year. However, when the MA is reintroduced, one of the strengths of the programme seems to me to be the encouragement that students get to pursue their own research interests in the taught modules. (Even though this is a taught degree, I saw evidence of innovative research and new directions for study in the coursework associated with the taught component.)

7. 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 strong research ethic that is associated with English Language at Leeds comes across very clearly in the curriculum design.

The Examination Process

8. **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.*

All the information provided to me allowed me to conduct my business as external appropriately. I was surprised that the external examiner was not allowed to change individual marks. It seems to me that is something that the external should be entitled to do, and strikes me as an anomaly compared to other institutions where I have served as external.

9. **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?**

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

Yes

10. **Was sufficient assessed/examination work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?**

Yes.

11. **Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners?**

Yes. The administrative arrangements were excellent and I would like to thank both <<<>> and <<<>> for their excellent work supporting me as external examiner.

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

Yes, though this was not relevant in the case of the MA English Language students.

For Examiners involved in Mentoring Arrangements

If you have acted as a mentor to a new external examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements.

Other Comments

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

Head of School
School of English
The University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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9 February 2012

Dear

Many thanks for your helpful report on our MA programmes in English Language. This has now been considered by our Taught Student Education Committee. Colleagues are pleased that you write so positively about the evidence of a strong research culture in the programme as a whole and in the samples of work you considered. We also note that you felt the three candidates had been marked appropriately.

We have taken on board your comment about generosity at the higher end of the range of marks and have reflected on this in relation to the very small size of the cohort and in relation to your satisfaction that the candidates received the appropriate classification in each case.

Your comments about the research challenge in the programme and its capacity to induct students into a research culture in preparation for doctoral study are very welcome and will be borne in mind when, as we hope, the programme is reinstated in the near future.

You also comment that you think our practice of the role of External Examiner is anomalous in that we stipulate you should not have the right to change marks. Once again, this might be something which is exacerbated by the size of the cohort. Our standard practice is to employ Externals to read some essays and assignments as samples, in which case we ask you to tell us whether the marking is appropriate. On other occasions, we do ask externals to adjudicate on performances, in which case they can indeed change marks. This combination is a familiar one at most of the institutions at which I have examined over recent years. Institutions at which the external Examiner is given carte blanche to change marks are now, in my extensive experience, very few in number and decreasing.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the School to thank you for all your work for us across the academic year.

Your sincerely,

Head of School