

**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:	English
Subject(s):	<i>Literature</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA in Modern and Contemporary Literature MA in American Literature and Culture MA in Postcolonial Literary and Cultural Studies MA in English Renaissance Literature
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA

**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?*

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*

The MA programmes I have examined at Leeds since 08/09 have been of a consistently high standard. More specifically, the learning and teaching provision, standards achieved, and marking and assessment have been reassuringly consistent.

## 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 ILOS and standards are entirely appropriate for the MA programmes I examined

### 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 comparable to similar programmes at other institutions in the UK, while going beyond many of them in terms of the range of specialist modules on offer.

### 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 well conceived and consistently applied across the four MA programmes (for example the strong emphasis on students designing their own questions). The use of unassessed essays is a notable area of good practice, allowing students to learn from feedback prior to being assessed.

Marking across these programmes I saw different iterations of the feedback/cover sheet, and different levels of feedback (for example, some sheets record first and second marker comments, others just the first marker, some record both grades, others don't)

### 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 samples of work I saw this year ranged from fail to first-class work in the 80s. Work towards the top end of the grade range was particularly impressive, and it is clear these students are being very well trained as early career researchers. Most if not all of the weakest (and failing) work was by international students, and was often connected to written English, presentation and an inability to grasp the required academic conventions/standards. Leeds University does have systems in place to support these international students, and I recognise the limitations of what can be achieved within the context of an intensive MA programme that allows little space for reflection. However, it does seem more capacity is needed in this area if the MAs continue to attract high numbers of international students. I also thought that feedback on the coversheets could do more to signpost the availability of these support systems at an early stage.

### 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.*

The modules I examined on all 4 programmes are clearly informed by staff research, and offer innovative and often cutting edge content.

## 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

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.*

I had sufficient access to the material I needed, and I was encouraged to request further information as required.

**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 policies and procedures were clear and coherent.

**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

**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

**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

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

Yes

## Other comments

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

Grades achieved on the Renaissance MA this year were noticeably lower than those achieved on the other three MAs. This may be an accurate reflection of the quality of the students being assessed, but occasional sample cross-marking across the programmes might be something for course convenors to consider in future years to ensure parity.

As in previous years, I have been particularly struck by the quality of the feedback on assignment cover sheets. The level of intellectual engagement here is impressive, as is the robust dialogue that clearly takes place between first and second marker.

I would recommend the use of single coversheet for all programmes in future, and greater consistency in terms of the inclusion of second marker comments/grades.

School of English  
The University of Leeds  
Leeds LS2 9JT



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

3 January 2013

Dear

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

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

We are pleased that you once again commend the quality of our feedback and the high quality of our research-based provision.

We note your plea for greater consistency in our use of the cover sheet for markers and also your suggestion that in order to achieve - or rather guarantee - greater consistency course convenors might engage in 'occasional sample marking across programmes'.

On behalf of the School, I would like thank you for all your work for us over the last few years. We are grateful for the excellent contribution you have made to our examining process and for your always helpful and astute commentaries on our practices and the performances of our students.

Yours sincerely,

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Head of School