

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):	English
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA English Literature; MA Romantic Literature and Culture; MA Victorian 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.

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

I have seen a consistently well-managed and well-delivered collection of MA programmes in the English Department. Academic standards are high and have remained so over the three years of my term as an examiner. I have been pleased to see a broader range of marks being used particularly at the top end of the scale in response to encouragement from myself and other external examiners. It seems to me that cohorts of widely varying abilities are being well trained and taught and all students gain from their experience of the courses.

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.*

Aims and learning outcomes seem viable and appropriate.

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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.*

Anecdotally from my own experience of other MA programmes in the UK, the programmes at Leeds seem amply to meet national benchmarks.

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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 robust second-marking system shows staff fully engaged with the intellectual development of their individual students. Feedback is full and constructive and forms part of an ongoing conversation with the student about their trajectory on the course.

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

As is now the case across the land, I think, Leeds is dealing with a very mixed ability cohort of students at MA level, a cohort which presents a very particular set of pedagogical challenges. At the top end of the cohort I saw some quite outstandingly brilliant work - a dissertation on things in eighteenth-century narrative stood out, as does an essay applying Barthes's idea of the 'punctum' to Henry James's novel, *The Wings of the Dove*, but there was plenty to applaud across the board and across all modules and MA programmes. But there are also dealing with some weak students and some who are clearly struggling with English as a second language. It seems to me that generally the challenge of this wide spread of student need and ability has been met very well. As I have said in previous years, there is a sense that even the weaker students are being taught well and are progressing in their writing and thinking and critical skills.

- *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.*

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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

I have not previously seen Creative Writing work. I was impressed by the level at which some students are working and I saw two portfolios of particularly impressive work. But perhaps more importantly, I also saw signs of discipline and self-reflection in the weaker submissions. Clearly this is a course which asks all

students to engage consciously with the literary traditions in which they are writing. While some creative writing courses stand in a somewhat anomalous relation to a traditional English degree, I felt that disciplined and sustained attention to genre and an emphasis on researching materials makes this course relate well to the students' more historical and literary critical course *It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.*

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

It is clear that the teaching in the Leeds English department is all research-led and of a high calibre.

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

MA students are encouraged to undertake independent research and are rewarded for doing so, particularly in their work for their MA dissertations.

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

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 plenty of clear guidelines and examples sent to me.

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

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 I was sent quite long samples from each module but I appreciated the opportunity to read across the full range.

Yes

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

Yes, the meeting was very well run and <<>> has been exemplary in <> efficiency throughout the year.

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

I believe so although I was not involved in these matters.

Other comments

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

As I have said before I think the academic standards at Leeds are reassuringly high and, certainly in comparison to other MA courses I have externally examined, this is a strong and intellectually robust MA programme. A lot is expected of your students, they write long and full essays and they are clearly being given excellent support in doing that. I see no sign of 'dumbing down' here and the fact that some students are able to write with clarity and precision on, for example, <> and <> speaks very well of the range and depth of the education you are offering.

The written conversations I was allowed to overhear between first and second markers were impressively engaged and serious and increased my confidence in the intellectual probity of this programme. Where staff are taking students' work this seriously, there is clearly a good student-centred culture and duty of care on the course as a whole.

As this is my last year as External Examiner, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for inviting me, and to wish everyone in the English Department at Leeds University well for the future.

School of English
The University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

20 January 2013

Dear

Thank you for your very helpful report as External Examiner on our MA 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 comments commending the organization and delivery of our programmes as well as for your perceptions that we have in place a robust system of second-marking and that our students are properly encouraged in their independent learning, particularly in their dissertations.

More particularly, we take note of your comments about the way in which we successfully manage a cohort which contains a range of ability. Once again, you commend our provision and at the same draw attention to the way in which students at their different levels manage to achieve. We will include your observations in our thinking about the nature and range of our cohort as we set about a major reflection on our PGT provision.

It was also valuable to have your observations and reflections on our recently inaugurated creative writing module. It was particularly pleasing to have your confirmation that our offering in this field is of a kind which fits properly within the literary and historical domain of our more general provision in English studies.

Finally, on behalf of the School, I would like to offer you my warmest thanks for your work over the last four years. We are extremely grateful for your significant contribution to our process of examining and for your always perceptive, illuminating, and informed reflections on our practices and the achievements of our students.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School