

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

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION*Subject area and awards being examined:***School of:****Programme(s) / Module(s):****ENGLISH****Subject(s): MA****awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)**

Victorian literature MA

Romantic Literature and Culture MA

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.

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.

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.*

As last year, I finished my reading very impressed by the seriousness of the work you and your students do on these MAs. I am hugely pleased by the theoretical engagement that your strongest candidates achieve, the sensitivity of some of the close-reading apparent here, and also by the precision and scrupulousness of the scholarly apparatus in most cases, too. These are intellectually demanding MA courses which are clearly stretching even the best of your candidates, and I have a sense, reading across the semesters, that they offer the framework for a real trajectory for intellectual development. There is an enormous amount to be proud of here.

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, this MA course seems to be functioning at a level considerably higher than the national benchmark

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 marking I saw seemed to me to be mostly spot on. There was very little I would have changed, had I had the power. The comment sheets I saw were striking in the detail of their feedback and the clear sense of involvement with each student's work and each individual's intellectual development on the course more generally. There is real pedagogic value in this written feedback which reveals a very close attention to the student's text, and the double marking seemed to me on the whole to offer an example of very good practice.

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.*

I will reiterate my feeling that marks remain a little low when placed against other comparable MA courses across the country (I teach on one, and have recently acted as external examiner on another). I found it, for example, very easy to upgrade a borderline pass/merit to a merit this year. I would encourage examiners to reward excellence from your students with more truly excellent grades. I say this with an eye to the lower end of the marking scale, where I see an admirable rigor and absolutely no evidence of any grade inflation. I can detect no queasiness about awarding marks in the 50s when they are appropriate, but I do still see a certain queasiness about awarding 85s.

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.

It was good to see a larger cohort of about 20 students on the **Victorian Literature MA** this year – with some clear talent amongst them. From my point of view, this gave me a satisfying sense of the range of

your students. As last year, I felt that even the weakest students seemed to know what they were doing when writing their essays, and they also write with a confidence that reflects very well on your teaching and support in the seminar room. Nobody seemed to be bewildered by the task before them.

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.

There is clear evidence of research-led teaching on both the **Victorian Literature MA** and the **MA in Romantic Literature and Culture**. I also see excellent use being made of formative assignments (unassessed) on all courses which I wholeheartedly applaud. I have no doubt this adds to marking loads at inconvenient moments, but I do think the results are palpable in the summative assessments that I have seen – as I said last year, you teach your students how to write a really good essay at Leeds and this seems to me to be one of the crucial strengths of your MA provision. It was good, too, to see some of the dissertation work – notably that on Blake, clearly building on ideas encountered on and engendered by one of the courses.

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.*

Yes

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, highly satisfactory

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

Yes

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

20 February 2012

Dear

Many thanks for your very helpful report on our MA programmes in Victorian Literature and Romantic Literature and Culture. This has now been considered by our Taught Student Education Committee. Colleagues are pleased that you write so positively about the work you've seen produced on these two programmes and in particular your strong sense that they are 'intellectual demanding' and that they 'offer a framework for a real trajectory for intellectual development'. We are also delighted to hear that our MA seems to be 'functioning at a level considerably higher than the national benchmark'. This last is particularly pleasing in that you also draw attention to the pedagogical focus of our feedback and deduce that even in these to some extent mixed cohorts all students are working and producing at an appropriate level for their ability.

You also offer some useful and supportive observations on our use of formative assignments and reassure us that there is some evidence of good dissertations developing out of our specialist modules.

Although you comment on the general accuracy of our marking, you do make a point about our use of the full range of marks, indicating your satisfaction with our use of the lower end, but offering a cautionary observation about our seeming reluctance to use the full scope at the higher end which you put pithily and helpfully in terms of a 'queasiness about awarding 85s'. This is something which we are already debating and we will now add your contribution as an External Examiner to that ongoing debate.

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

With best wishes,

Head of School