

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:	Modern Languages and Cultures
Subject(s):	East Asian Studies
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Chinese (all aspects); Inner Asia (History and culture modules only, not language)
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA / 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

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

N/A

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.*

Fine

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.*

Standard of the language teaching is very high

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.*

Fine

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.*

Yes

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.

Some discussion last year about one language module (Media and Communication, level 2) being perhaps too difficult were addressed this year, with adjustment in level of materials and assessment.

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.

I was not looking for this specifically, but certainly the second and final year modules are informed by research of staff.

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.*

Yes

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. I suggested very minor adjustments to a few papers, all of which were adopted.

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. Staff have generally done an excellent job leaving clear indications of how they arrived at marks, and feedback on essays was often extensive and constructive.

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

Yes. I was happy to see that students were able to incorporate Chinese-language sources for the dissertations.

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. Board meeting was very ably conducted in a clear manner; support staff were excellent.

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

Yes, full consideration was given.

Other comments

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

A discussion regarding the use of the 20-90 scale versus 1-100 for individual components of assessment in a module occurred because in a language class, staff were instructed to use the 20-90 scale for each assignment, even though in a basic language class the tasks are quite mechanical ones where a clear right/wrong standard applies. The staff felt that 1-100 scale was more appropriate for such assessment, and that only after averaging the marks should they be converted to the 20-90 scale. Immediate conversion to 20-90 scale meant a student who had a 'real' average of 38 (fail) received a 41 (bare pass) this year. For language classes especially, no one is well served by passing marginal students. Typically they do poorly in the next year of study, finding it difficult to keep up because they are already behind everyone else. They also inhibit the learning experience of other students in the classroom, and take up a disproportionate amount of staff time. The use of the 20-90 scale in such situations, then, can only be described as poor practice.

On a separate matter, I detected some hesitation among certain members of staff to award marks higher than 71 or 72. Having attended the school classification board in the following week, I could not help noticing that Chinese had relatively few firsts among single honours students, and I cannot help wondering if this is because good first-class work is only being given weak

first-class marks. While not in favour of grade inflation, and not wanting to suggest that any individual marks in the 60 range should be raised to 70 or above, if a marker writes "excellent; exemplary in all respects" on a paper, they should not be afraid to give a commensurate mark in the 75-80 range, or even higher in exceptional circumstances. This will also help ensure that the very best students have a good chance to compete nationally for scholarships should they choose to pursue MA or PhD study.

School of Modern Languages and Cultures

FACULTY OF ARTS



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

12 October 2012

Dear

First of all, my apologies for the very slow response to your External Examiner's Report for 2011-12, and of course thank you very much for acting as our External, attending both meetings, and doing such a thorough and conscientious job.

I am glad to note that you felt satisfied with the standards of the programme, and particularly that you commended the standard of the language teaching. We do feel very fortunate in having such a strong group of Chinese language teachers, including our part-timers.

I was also pleased to see that you found that 'feedback on essays was often extensive and constructive', as feedback is something we have been making great efforts to improve in recent years. The use of Chinese-language sources in UG dissertations, noted by you, is also something that we have been putting emphasis on recently, so I am glad to see you feel that this has had results. You commented on the apparent reluctance of some staff to employ the full range of marks at the upper end; we will try to be more consistent in this for the future.

The issue you raise about the distortion of students' marks resulting from the use of the 20-90 scale for all components of basic Chinese language modules, which you describe as 'poor practice', is a very serious one. As you say, it is in no-one's interest, least of all the students concerned, for them to scrape through and continue to struggle when their actual performance constitutes a fail. Unfortunately, as I understand it, this method of marking is University policy. I will ask the incoming subject leader for East Asian Studies to raise this matter at the earliest opportunity at the School Taught Student Education Committee. I expect it may be something which the other ab initio languages are also concerned about, and we may therefore be able to gather support for changing the policy.

Thank you again for all the hard work you do as our External Examiner.

Yours sincerely,

Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies