

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:	Faculty of Arts/School of Modern Languages and Cultures
Subject(s):	<i>Linguistics and phonetics</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BA in Linguistics and Phonetics
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

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 exadmin@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?

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

This is my third year serving as external examiner on the BA Linguistics & Phonetics. I have been informally asked to extend my appointment for another year. In principle I am happy to do so, but I have brought to the attention of the exams officer, <<>>, that I will be spending next academic year abroad during a research fellowships and that therefore logistic arrangements to have access to scripts and attendance of the Board of Examiners in June will be somewhat more complicated.

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.*

Throughout the degree programme the intended learning outcomes are entirely appropriate for single and joint honours degrees in Linguistics and Phonetics.

The standards set for students' work are appropriate for an undergraduate degree. The marking guidelines and the marks awarded clearly discriminate between different classification bands.

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 degree programme fully complies with national benchmarks. The ILOs are entirely compatible with those of similar degree programmes at other UK HEIs.

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.*

Every module has composite assessment, typically one exam and one piece of coursework. Some of the phonetics and phonology modules also have oral and aural assessed components. The range of tasks in the assignments (e.g. data analysis, traditional essay style work, literature reviews) and the different exam formats (e.g. MCQs, short questions, longer overview questions) allow students to show the depth and breadth of their learning tapping into different but complementary sets of skills and areas of knowledge.

The system in place for awarding marks to individual pieces of work and for final degree classifications is very transparent and robust. Most tutors also provided a very detailed set of marking guidelines to moderators and external examiner allowing for a very robust assessment process.

Once again the overall high standard of students' work over the three years with peaks of excellence, especially evident in some final year dissertations, is testament to the excellent quality of the teaching and to the competence dedication of the staff on the BA in Linguistics and Phonetics.

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 range of assessment formats allows ample opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in relation to the degree programme's ILOs, allowing for students' individual strengths in either exams or coursework.

The marks are typically normally distributed showing a good range of top marks in the high 70s and a small minority of fails.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

NA

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.

At the previous exam board the teaching team was encouraged to be more explicit about the appropriateness of topics for final year dissertations. Although the written guidelines are already clear it was felt that students should be reminded that their choice of topic and the content of their work must reflect the fact that they are studying for a degree in Linguistics and Phonetics.

I am satisfied to confirm that the guidance offered to final year student has indeed been made more explicit and that this year the topics selected were entirely appropriate for a BA Linguistics & Phonetics.

Areas of good practice: Extreme clear assignment guidelines and marking criteria; extreme detailed feedback on coursework giving very clear indications of areas of strengths and of points for improvement.

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 breadth and depth of the excellent research expertise of all members of the teaching staff is evident in the content of the modules, in the good range of different assessment used and in their enthusiasm for their subject which clearly inspires the students, as shown by the very positive feedback received for all the modules I have seen. Most assessment included an independent research component that tested students' abilities as proactive thinkers and learners.

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

NA

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.*

Guidance was transparent and timely, additional information and clarifications were promptly provided when 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, all documentation was provided in a timely fashion and was adequately informative.

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 was consulted on exam questions and on coursework tasks. I provided feedback as required and I was satisfied that my comments had been taken into account in the clarification/reformulation of a few exam questions/coursework tasks.

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, the sample for each module contained a good range of scripts and the feedback on the work was clearly marked and made available to me alongside the scripts and the complete marking grids.

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

Yes, the choice of topics was entirely appropriate this year and both the method and standard of assessment were adequate with a good level of agreement between first markers and moderators. Only on a couple of occasions was I required to consider major discrepancies.

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 arrangements were appropriate. I attended the Board of Examiners' meeting on 15th June. After the board a series of inaccuracies in some students' marks were brought to my attention and I had to approve the final marks by signing and sending back forms as appropriate.

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

Yes, students' personal and medical special circumstances were taken in due consideration.

Other comments

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

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Dear <>>

Thank you for your external examiner report which I received on 5 July. I am very pleased that you found all the processes worked well to provide you with the information and samples of student work which you needed. On behalf of colleagues in Linguistics & Phonetics I would like to say how much we have enjoyed working with you and benefiting from your comments and suggestions since you started as external examiner for our BA Hons in Linguistics & Phonetics three years ago. We are very happy that you agree in principle to serve for a fourth year but note the possible practical difficulties you identify which your absence from the UK might pose. We will need to give this some thought and get back to you soon about it.

In particular, I would like to give the following responses to the items in your report.

1, 2, 3, 4) It is very satisfying and re-assuring that you judged our learning outcomes and marking guidelines to be appropriate and to comply with national benchmarks, that our assessment diets are well designed to assess students comprehensively, our marking procedures are transparent, and that student work is of a generally high standard. We will try to ensure that in future not just most but *all* module tutors provide adequate marking guidelines to moderators and to the external examiner.

6, 7) I am glad you think we successfully addressed the issue of dissertation topics being appropriate for the programme and discipline. As a team we shared your concern on this point and <<>> had it very much in mind when advising students in the early stages of their dissertation planning. Feedback is a perennial issue these days with the NSS etc so I'm pleased you found the feedback we provide to students is clear and detailed. It's frustrating for us when some students don't always take note of it or appreciate it – I'm sure we're not alone in that.

9-15) In the first year of new SMLC structures and procedures, it is very gratifying to hear that our administrative support team did so well in facilitating the external examining process and supporting our exams officer<<>>. The inaccuracies which came to light were very unfortunate, though it's fortunate they did indeed come to light! I'd like to thank you for your understanding and for dealing with them so promptly.

With best wishes,

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Subject Leader and Programme Manager

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