

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

**PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION**

*Subject area and awards being examined:*

<b>School of:</b> <b>Programme(s) / Module(s):</b> <b>Russian Studies (Single Honours)</b> <b>Russian (Joint Honours)</b> <b>Joint Honours with Russian civilisation</b>	<b>Subject(s):</b> <b>awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)</b> <b>BA</b>
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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](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.*

***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.*

**Base room system:** GRASS has been using the base room system of external moderation for four years now, i.e. since the first year of my term as external examiner. Whilst it took some getting used to, I am now of the view that it is a very efficient and cost-effective system (efficient from my point of view as external examiner, and cost-effective for the University). It suits the Leeds classification system well: since spread of marks is not taken into account in this system, the external is not required to invest a lot of time reading work with a view to assessing its value according to class. S/he can therefore devote the limited time available to checking the consistency of marking and the rigour of marking procedures. It is also possible for the external to get a good sense of student performance across the range of modules taken, as well as of the range of types of assessment. The efficiency of the base room system depends highly on the provision of full documentation: a mark sheet for each module; a list of modules and their

assessment methods; a full record of markers' and moderators' comments; essay questions and/or exam papers for each module; module handbooks, etc. In this respect I have seen improvements year on year: this session I was supplied also with a very useful checklist of what I should have been provided with, and scripts were mostly arranged in order of merit to facilitate efficient location of specific scripts. I particularly commend the use of mark/feedback sheets for batches of exam scripts and for oral examinations (examples of best practice from which my own institution can learn). The use of moderation forms in cases of disputes between first and second markers was also very helpful where present.

Programme design and positive changes from 2008-09 resulting from the comprehensive review of provision in 2007-08: The overhaul of Russian programmes from 2008-09 has resulted in course structures that are more efficiently tailored to the expertise of the teaching staff, and better designed to offer the widest possible coverage of Russian culture given the limited number of staff in the subject area. It eliminated the practice of teaching level 2 and level 3 students in the same class, about which I had concerns in 2007-08. It also made more transparent discrepancies in the amount of assessment apportioned to individual modules, which from time to time I have had cause to point out. I believe my suggestions have always been acted upon.

Language teaching provision and assessment: Russian at Leeds is blessed in <<<>>> with a language teacher of the highest calibre. In consequence I have had cause to remark each year upon the very high levels of achievement in oral and written Russian by her students compared to students at my own institution. Nevertheless I have been concerned (particularly in 2008-09, the first year of the redesigned programmes) that the spread of marks achieved was too narrow, and the average mark too high, relative to other institutions of which I have experience. I made a number of recommendations as to how the students might be better stretched in their language assessment, many of which have been taken on board. As a result the percentage of first class marks has fallen to a more acceptable level. This is an area in which I would advise vigilance both to the Department and to my successor as external examiner.

## 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 intended learning outcomes were in all cases appropriate for the modules and programmes that I moderated. Standards were appropriate for the award of BA.

### 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 programmes are broadly comparable with similar programmes in Russian at other institutions of which I have experience, and meet national benchmarks. From 2008-09 they were overhauled in a systematic and thorough way: I was invited to comment on the new structures at the time, so please see my report for detailed comments. The only one I would repeat here is that the modest staffing levels in Russian result in a relatively narrow range of cultural options, particularly at final-year level, compared with a broader range of modules offered elsewhere. I see this as a necessary evil that in no way reflects negatively on the staff concerned. The programmes have been carefully designed in such a way as to achieve maximum benefit for the students from the range of expertise available. The modules are very well designed, methodologically and thematically coherent, interesting and stimulating.

### 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 Department employs a wide range of assessment methods in both its cultural and language modules which test the students' knowledge and skills in an appropriate way in depth and breadth. Student performance indicates very high quality of teaching and assessment methods, both in Russian language and in the cultural modules.

Concerns I had about certain marking practices last year (presentation of batches of essays and exams; recording of markers' comments on exam scripts; moderation of very low marks) were all met this year (see also my comments as outgoing external examiner, above).

This session, exceptionally, a number of unsatisfactory assessment practices arose as a result of health issues in the case of one member of staff. The précis element of Applied Russian 3 was not delivered as set out in the module handbook and alternative assessment had to be set; some January assessed essays for SLAV2105/6 were mislaid, delaying the confirmation of marks and provision of feedback to students, and classwork tests for the same module were not carried out; November assessed Russian-English translations for SLAV2103/4 were lost by the second marker, necessitating the reconstruction of marks from feedback sheets; a number of final-year dissertations were not second marked. It is unlikely that this will happen again, but the Department might want to review its practices in order to minimise the likelihood of such lapses again. I would recommend the following:

- The first marker should always record marks on feedback sheets and retain a copy of these, or enter provisional marks on the computer prior to passing work to the second marker;
- And/or feedback sheets with carbon copies might be adopted (these are used at Bristol), with a copy being retained by the administrative staff/the first marker;
- Since students are asked to keep copies of all work handed in, these should be solicited in a timely fashion as soon as any loss is discovered;
- To prevent delays in uncovering the loss of material, the administrative staff could be given more responsibility for chasing marks (particularly after the January assessment period) and entering them onto grids at an early stage.

I noted a discrepancy in the practice for awarding marks in the case of a 'non-answer' (where the student does not attempt the question): one unit recorded 20; others 0.

### 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, they were. They perform to a high standard broadly in line with students on comparable courses, and to a higher standard in oral and written Russian, particularly at Level 3.

At Level 2 this session's cohort performed noticeably less well in language than previous cohorts. However, strong performance by a few indicates that this is not related to the strictness of the assessment.

**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.*

The consistent use of mark sheets for oral examinations and exam scripts was very helpful and is an example of best practice.

**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.*

All cultural modules are research-led in terms of their content. Some benefitted especially this year from the presence in the Department of the visiting professor <<<>>>. In terms of teaching methods themselves, I would comment as I did last year that the Russian language tutor is at the top of the game with regards to language teaching methodology.

## ***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, the guidance provided is sufficient.

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. Please see my detailed comments on the base room system in the box for outgoing externals, above.

10. **Was sufficient assessed/examination work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?**

Yes, with certain exceptions due to the problems detailed at 3, above.

11. **Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners?**

Yes.

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.*

I was asked to act as mentor for two incoming German externals, but neither called upon my advice, so please don't pay me for this work that I have not done.

### ***Other Comments***

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

I should just like to say that I have found the staff in GRASS to be warm, helpful, professional, and highly dedicated to their students. It has been a pleasure to work with them.

**re : External Examiner Report – 2010-11**

Dear,

Many thanks for your External Examiner report and helpful feedback. I would also like to thank you for your professionalism and concern for maintaining and improving standards and sharing best practice. We have benefited enormously from your advice and experience over the four years of your activities as External Examiner at Leeds as well as enjoying your company during your annual visits. Your comments on our base room system are welcome, as we also believe that this system, properly managed, provides the best overview of student performance across a number of modules. It also allows for efficient comparison of marking and teaching across modules with a view to standardising best practice. We also note your comments on the restructured programme in Russian and thank you for your input during its design. We hope very much to expand the narrow range of specialised research-led modules offered at Level 3 in future years once staffing in Russian has been consolidated.

I am delighted as in previous years with your comments about our language teaching methodology and in particular for your praise for <<<<>>>, who has been Director of Language Teaching since 2009. She is indeed a dedicated and highly accomplished teacher who continues to develop her skills and provide leadership in this area to the great benefit of our students.

This year was, as you note, an exceptional year in that we did slip below the high standards our students have every right to expect in three of our modules. Once we became aware of the problems, we worked hard to ensure that no student was disadvantaged by this lapse and we thank you for your advice and support in reaching the best solution. The particular set of circumstances will not arise again and in future years we will certainly follow your sensible suggestions for good practice in recording marks and detecting problems at an early stage.

I am delighted that you found so much to praise in our programme and teaching and am pleased to note the positive effects of the changes implemented at your suggestion.

On behalf of the whole of GRASS I would like to thank you for your constructive criticism, sensible and positive suggestions and kind praise over the four years of your appointment.

Best wishes,