

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

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION*Subject area and awards being examined:*

School of: Modern Languages and Cultures	Subject(s): Spanish
Programme(s) / Module(s): SPPO2010, SPPO2011, SPPO2160, SPPO2580, SPPO2581, SPPO3010, SPPO3140, SPPO3420	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) BA(Hons) Spanish BA(Hons) Spanish, Portuguese & Latin American Studies

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.

These are the main areas the Department of Spanish should consider with respect to the language provision. Please note that it might be the case that some of these aspects are already in place and I have missed them in my first year as examiner. Apologies in advance for any misunderstanding:

1. Assessment material and marking schemes should be handled as confidential and teachers and external examiners should either use the post or a secure server to access this information. E-mail should not be used for sharing confidential assessment information.
2. Assessment material for external inspection should be accompanied by the corresponding assessment criteria and marking schemes or answer keys by agreed deadlines.
3. Assessment weightings for individual exercises could be simplified, for instance, awarding a round number of marks for each correct answer. Some times values are not straight forward forcing unnecessarily complicated calculations and percentages.
4. Explicit cultural outcomes should be included in language modules.
5. The current University Module Grade Scale does not reflect a straight forward numerical system of marks. Language teams could argue for a mathematical logic behind very low and very high marks.
6. Assessment marks could be pegged in sets of fives (e.g. 40, 45, 50..).
7. The Department could select samples from top, middle and low marks and fails to support external examiner's understanding of students' performance and therefore my contribution to the Board of Examiners.
8. The Spanish team should consider integrating the current Portfolio in the year abroad.
9. Guidelines for second marking should be recorded in writing and send to external examiners.
10. Information on how the Board of Examiners deals with borderline cases should be redefined, stated at the beginning of the Board and made available to all present.
11. Provide access to external examiner to online portfolio work prior the Board.

(Specific information on each of these points below)

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?

No. I have not seen previous reports from other external examiners or responses to these but I think this is because there were not any external examiners in the past.

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.*

The aims and ILOs are appropriate for the different levels in terms of the four basic language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing), transferable skills and specific learning strategies. The programme, however, does not make any reference (unless I missed them!) to the cultural aspect of language learning. An explicit mention to cultural objectives is currently in place in other institutions and teaching materials. This is particularly relevant to the translation modules where a learning outcome could be expressed in these or similar terms: Ability to solve specific linguistic and cultural problems; or Develop an understanding of the differences and similarities between source and target languages and cultures. Incorporating this type of cultural outcomes in every module of the Spanish programme should not be a problem since in practice the modules already seem to be integrating both dimensions in the teaching of Spanish. In fact, the teaching team could benefit from the objectives already spelled out in the Spanish modules at the Language Centre.

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.*

Aims and ILOs compare well with that of similar language departments. The different modules are appropriately mapped and described in the outlines following the Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The Department also enjoys a strong relationship with the Instituto Cervantes and has clearly made great efforts in order to benefit from this.

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 modules include standard language assessment methods as well as methods that are powerful for independent learning and reflection such as the Portfolio. The online portfolio used by the department has an innovative design that is particularly efficient for developing students' language and culture skills. Such a feature of the programme could in fact be further exploited to a maximum benefit by incorporating it in the year abroad. This year I did not have much time to go through samples of student portfolios but I hope that in future years I will be able to access some.

The assessment samples I had the chance to monitor demonstrated that learning is achieved by students of the Spanish language modules to the right level.

I have not seen any documentation around the Department's guidelines for second marking. Again, these already exist in writing for the language centre and maybe this is an area for a possible fruitful discussion between both units.

Assessment marks use currently each point of the scale. It was discussed with the teaching staff the possibility of using pegged marks, which could be awarded in sets of fives (e.g. 40, 45, 50..). This will facilitate marking procedures and agreement in double marking.

Assessment weightings for individual exercises could be simplified, for instance, awarding a round number of marks for each correct answer. Some times values are not straight forward forcing unnecessarily complicated calculations and percentages, this seemed to be especially complicated for SPP3010. In relation to this, I would like to point out that the current University Module Grade Scale does not reflect a straight forward numerical system of marks. Although still very much in use by many institutions, a scale 20-90 is particularly awkward for assessment tasks whose results are numerically higher or lower. For instance, a student should be able to achieve 100 if that is the real mark obtained in a particular assessment exercise. Language teams could argue to the University for a mathematical logic behind very low and very high marks. This traditional scale (20-90) has already been revised and substituted for a full scale in other institutions (0-100) making all calculations easier and more transparent for students and staff.

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.*

All the language skills are adequately assessed.

Standards achieved by students in the different modules are in line with elsewhere. At the Board of Examiners I saw some very high quality outcomes from students that demonstrated their motivation as well as their linguistic, cultural and ICT competences.

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.

This is my first year as external examiner and therefore I can not comment on this.

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.

The Spanish programme is composed by various modules that reflect a communicative approach to language education. Assessment strategies have been carefully considered for each module and demonstrate a fine awareness of the role of formative and summative assessment, motivational strategies and new technologies in the languages curriculum.

Language and culture have been identified as inseparable in foreign language research, the link is clearly present in the teaching of the Department's Spanish modules but, as mentioned above, not explicit in the descriptions of these modules. Similarly, affective factors have been demonstrated to have a key role in students' language learning experiences. The Spanish module are clearly good engaging students cognitive skills but perhaps their affective engagement could be further explored in the current activities and assessment tasks.

The use of a portfolio is evidence of awareness of the importance of students' independent study, self-evaluation and reflection. This also allows for creative results meaningful to individual students. I particularly enjoyed this year some of the translation tasks that provided an opportunity for cultivating an understanding of the challenges of taking account of language, context and culture in the translation of any communicative message.

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 university guidance was clear and sufficient for me to understand my responsibilities and act accordingly.

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.*

I was sent samples of all papers including resits. I received most samples of the documentation for the Spanish language modules, except for SPP3140. I did not receive all marking schemes or marking criteria for all modules, but I did have access to all before of the Board of Examiners.

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

Throughout this academic year, I have been asked to comment on specific exam papers and had very quick responses from the teachers involved. I would like to advise that we exchange exam scripts, markingschemes and criteria by post rather than via email in order to keep them confidential. Also a calendar with deadlines specifying by when I will be receiving the scripts and when I need to send them back will be very much appreciated.

During my visit for attendance to the Board of Examiners, I had the opportunity to discuss at length current practices in the Spanish programme with the exams officer and some of the main teaching staff. I found these conversations very useful and informative. I did have all the examination work available to me on the day of the Board. Although access to all the assessed work is of great value, I discussed with the Department the possibility of just looking at samples of each task in future years. I believe that I could make a better use of my time and a more accurate judgement of the evaluation process and the standards achieved if samples from top, middle and low marks or fails could be selected beforehand rather than me going through the whole lot.

Since portfolios are online, access to this work before my meeting with the Board will be very useful.

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

The administrative arrangements were satisfactory. As discussed at the Board of Examiners, in future Boards, the rationale for considering borderline cases should be refined in order to be consistent and fair to all students.

I was very impressed with the system used by the Centre to keep a record of absent students on the day of the final examinations.

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

Yes, they were.

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.

N/A

Other Comments

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

I want to express my gratitude to the Department's exams officer, teachers and administrators for their welcoming attitude and patience guiding me during my first year as external examiner. All the staff has been very supportive and responsive to my comments and queries.

The Spanish department is well known across the UK for its creative approaches to language education. I was indeed very impressed with the high quality of the teaching staff and their approaches to language learning and assessment.

I would like to raise a few further comments related to efficiencies that could be achieved in the next coming years:

Firstly, my impression is that there is a relative isolation of efforts among the teaching staff. Documentation comes in different forms and formats. It seems to me that level coordinators could work together towards the production of generic templates with different purposes (e.g. for module outlines, assessment tasks, etc.) that could be consistently used across the curriculum.

Secondly, a few practical Spanish tests based on right/wrong grammar choices could be easily prepared to be computer marked.

Thirdly, one aspect that I discussed with the teaching team was how oral skills could be assessed in a less time-consuming way than it is currently the case. One possibility could be introducing formative but compulsory elements and/or making available online recorded oral feedback about students' oral performances which they could listen to instead of providing this feedback via individual tutorials.

Finally, it is a real pity that there is no current consistent collaboration between the Language Centre and the Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies. Although students are different in each of these programmes, I believe that opportunities for sharing expertise and materials could be created in the future for the benefit of both units. I am looking forward to seeing further collaboration between the Language Centre and the Department of Spanish.

All these measures should facilitate the production of documentation and assessment but also they should lighten the load of the teaching staff.

Dear <<<>>,</p></div>
<div data-bbox="115 142 882 235" data-label="Text">
<p>We are of course very gratified by your positive comments regarding the way we organise formative and summative assessment, the operation of our portfolio, motivational strategies, the way in which language skills and cultural content are integrated in the Translation module, and the new technologies we introduce in the languages curriculum.</p></div>
<div data-bbox="115 242 882 524" data-label="Text">
<p>We will take on board your valuable comments in relation to the cultural and affective components of our Spanish Language programme, which are very much in line with the changes that had already been approved in January 2011. Following these earlier changes, there is now a stronger emphasis on cultural outcomes within the Year 2 Spanish Language module (SPPO 2010/2011), as the language learning experience is organised around social and cultural themes. Consequently, the assessment criteria for course work and exams will have to include explicit mentions to cultural content. A precise definition of cultural objectives will also be offered in the module outline for 2012/2013. In Final Year Language (SPPO 3010) the affective component has already been enhanced as part of these January 2011 changes. Students' work in the module is now based on tutor-supported research projects on topics chosen by them. The outcome of the projects will be a number of authentic publishable pieces of writing in Spanish. Your suggestions are therefore in line with the course of direction proposed earlier in November 2010, following the 2009/2010 Programme Review.</p></div>
<div data-bbox="115 532 882 644" data-label="Text">
<p>A number further points you raise will be noted not only by Language module co-ordinators but by our School Learning and Teaching Director, as they relate either to specific suggestions on module documentation or to the broader questions of procedure in the areas of student anonymity, grading transparency, assessment of the Year Abroad, relationship with the Language Centre, access to VLE by External Examiners and general communication with External Examiners,</p></div>
<div data-bbox="115 678 267 696" data-label="Text">
<p>Yours sincerely,</p></div>