

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):	MA in Asia Pacific Studies, MA in Chinese, MA in Chinese and Business, MA in Chinese Business and the Asia Pacific, MA in Chinese Studies, MA in East Asian Regional Development, MA in Japanese Business, MA in Japanese Studies, MA in Southeast Asian Studies, MA in Mongolian Studies, Online MA Asia Pacific Studies.
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	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

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

During the period of my appointment as the external examiner, I have seen considerable improvement of the MA programmes in East Asian Studies. There is clear evidence indicating that the programme team has made a serious and sustained effort to strengthen the delivery of the programmes and the assessment system. The team has considered my comments carefully and has introduced some changes in response to my suggestions. The programme contents are impressive in terms of the breadth of expertise and the depth of scholarship. The standards of teaching and assessment are consistently high, and student performance has been good in the past four years. The team should be congratulated for its success in delivering a wide range of interesting and high-quality programmes to the students. There is no doubt that all UK universities will be working in a tougher and more challenging environment in the coming years, but the programme team should be in a strong position to face this challenge. Indeed, the department has consolidated its status as one of the best centres of East Asian Studies in the world. I wish the programme team the very best in the future.

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 structure and content of the programmes are appropriate for the aims and intended learning outcomes of the programmes under consideration. The standards of the programmes are also appropriate for the MA award.

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.

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 performance of students in 2011-12 indicates high-quality teaching and well-designed assessment methods. The methods of assessment are appropriate for the intended learning outcomes of the programmes. The programme team continued to use a variety of traditional and non-traditional assessment methods on testing students' subject knowledge and understanding of the significant issues covered by various modules. They include academic essays, examinations, role-play exercises, 48 hours take-away questions/text analyses, and reports on investment decisions. The students performed well in responding to the challenge of various non-conventional assessment strategies.

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, students were given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and intended learning outcomes through various types of traditional and non-traditional methods of assessment (please see my comments in Section 3 above). Having looked at the coursework and examination scripts of a whole range of modules in the department for four years, I can confirm that the standard of student performance for the MA programmes was comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions. In general, the performance from the cohort considered for awards at the 2011-12 Board of Examiners was better than that of the previous academic year with some modules maintaining similar level of performance.

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.

Please see my comments in Section 4 above.

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 teaching of the MA programmes in East Asian studies reflects the variety of research interests of the programme team. A number of modules are clearly based on the module leaders' research expertise and publications, and the students have benefited considerably from their scholarship.

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, the material provided by the university and the School was clear and it was sufficient for me to perform my role as an External Examiner for the programmes.

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, I received the documentation relating to the programmes for which I am responsible at the start of the academic year. I was also provided with relevant module handbooks with module curricula, lecture/seminar programmes and assessment details prior to the assessment/examination period.

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 provided with draft examination papers and other assessment information. The nature, contents and level of the assessment questions were appropriate.

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, I had access to a sufficiently large sample of assessed/examined work for some modules and all of the assessed work for others. The scripts were clearly marked with detailed feedback on coursework. Moreover, over half of the dissertations were sent to me for moderation. I was therefore in a position to make an overall judgement of the standard of work produced by students across the programmes.

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

The choice of subjects for the dissertation is appropriate. In fact, some of the dissertation topics are quite original seeking to explore various under-studied or neglected research areas. The topics of the distinction dissertations are very interesting and well-conceived, which include such projects as Western study of Chinese garden, the teaching of Chinese language, and Western business activity in China. The good dissertations are based on extensive primary research and informed by the theoretical debate in the field.

The method and standard of dissertation assessment is also appropriate. There is a set of well-designed and comprehensive dissertation marking guidelines detailing specific criteria for each assessment component for different percentage ranges, including research questions/aims and objectives, literature review, methodology and data collection, theoretical and critical awareness, sources and referencing, and so on. These guidelines have been applied to the assessment of the dissertations rigorously. Indeed, the dissertation marking is very thorough with critical yet constructive comments. There is clear evidence of discussion between the internal markers before a final mark is agreed. As a result, the standard of the dissertations is high with 5 distinctions and 23 merits. Some dissertations in the merit range have the potential of achieving distinction marks. I appreciate the importance of maintaining a balance between providing guidance and encouraging independent research. But a bit more intervention from the supervisors would assist the good students to achieve even better results. Overall, the dissertations are strong with some exceptionally good performance.

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 administrative arrangements for the whole assessment process were satisfactory and the Board of Examiners was conducted in an equitable and appropriate manner. I was able to attend all the meetings and was satisfied with the recommendations of the Board.

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

Yes, appropriate procedures were in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence.

Other comments

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

All in all, the modules on the MA programmes are well-designed and delivered effectively. The module handbooks are clearly written with detailed information on module aims, lecture/seminar programmes, assessment details, and extensive reading lists. Clear instructions on the assessment are given in the module handbooks. I have noticed that some students tend to choose rather broad topics and try to tackle too many issues in one single piece of work. It would therefore be useful for the programme team to provide the students with more guidance on the selection of project topics.

The marking of the exam scripts and coursework is on the whole consistent, fair and transparent. There is clear evidence of internal moderation across a range of modules with rigorous second-marking. The quality of feedback is good – it is detailed, constructive and helpful to students. The second-marker often provide additional comments on the scripts, even though there is no obvious disagreement of marks between the internal markers. This is clearly a good practice. The feedback on examination scripts is normally shorter but it is adequate in terms of justifying the marks given. I am particularly impressed by the quality of the feedback for a number of modules. For example:

Principles and Practice of Research I: Excellent feedback – very extensive and extremely detailed feedback.
Chinese Politics: Very detailed and helpful feedback on examination scripts – both text comments and overall feedback. The 20-30 minutes one-to-one oral feedback for the exam was especially useful to the students.

The performance of a number of modules is very good this year. For example:

Political Economy of the Pacific Rim: Excellent performance with 3 distinctions and 6 merits. The assignments indicate that students engaged actively with International Political Economy theories in the role-play exercises. This year's performance is the best compared with that of the past two years.
Korea: Impressive performance with 3 distinctions and 5 merits.
China's Development: Excellent performance with 3 distinctions and 6 merits.

In addition, the submitted work for online modules has been assessed fairly with the same rigour and good feedback.

Finally, I would like to thank the head of East Asian Studies, the MA programme manager, the online course director, and the MA secretary for providing me with the necessary assistance, which has been helpful to me in performing my duties as the external examiner for the MA programmes.

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4 January 2013

**Re: External Examiner's Report 2011-12
TPG Programmes, East Asian Studies**

Dear <>

Thank you for your External Examiner's Report 2011-12 which contains valuable comments and recommendations for further improvement, as well as your views on the way the portfolio has developed during your tenure as external examiner.

We note with appreciation your positive comments about the considerable improvement in the delivery and assessment of the programmes during the last four years and the fact that Leeds has consolidated its status as one of the best centres for East Asian Studies in the world. Your view that the overall performance of this year's students is better than that of last year's cohort means that the efforts of the programme delivery team have been effective.

Over the last four years we have benefited greatly from your insightful suggestions. The high standard of this year's dissertations is partly thanks to you: your suggestions for linking closely the research methods module to the dissertation projects and for the introduction of detailed and specific dissertation marking criteria which were implemented last year, clearly played a role in the achieved high standard of the dissertations this year.

We will make sure that the students receive more guidance on choosing their dissertation topics and more involved supervision so that indeed some of the large number of merit marks can potentially become firsts.

On behalf of all the staff involved in the East Asian Studies TPG programmes, I would like to thank you again for your advice and encouragement during these four years. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with an external examiner like you.

With best wishes

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EAS MA Programme Manager