

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION

Subject area and awards being examined:

School of:	Modern Languages and Cultures	Subject(s):	Dept of Linguistics and Phonetics
Programme(s) / Module(s):		awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)	
MA in Linguistics		MA	
MA in Linguistics and English Language Teaching		MA	

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

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?

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.*

Like last year, the ILOs look entirely appropriate for an MA. The programme is well structured, with some compulsory foundational modules and some optional ones providing students with the opportunity to specialise in a certain field and start planning for the MA dissertation. The programme includes a high-quality compulsory module on research methods – its beneficial effects can clearly be seen in the dissertations written this year.

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 programme meets expectations and is fully comparable in width and depth with similar MA programmes in the UK.

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.*

Like last year, assessment was well designed – there was a good mix of assessment forms, allowing students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in diverse ways. Generous feedback continues to be provided about different aspects of students work, following a comprehensive feedback framework. Where I was sent module guides/assessment instructions, these included detailed instructions to the students on purpose, form, elements and approach to be taken in the different assessments.

With the first and second marker comments, I was also sent a sheet for each module recording any conversation between markers in the process of arriving at an agreed mark. This was very useful. It brings out well the considerations motivating marking decisions and the process of reasoning leading to the agreed mark. It was good to see the willingness to argue about professional practice shown here.

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.*

Student performance overall ranged from the weak to the excellent, in ways also found at other MAs in the field of linguistics that I am familiar with. Like last year, there was clear improvement and development in student performance over the course of the year, suggesting that the teaching was being taken fully on board.

In the dissertations this year, a wide range of topics was tackled, some well-established (e.g. pragmatic knowledge in a second language; transfer in language learning; methods in ELT; recent changes in varieties of English) and some more unusual (e.g. the processing of typographic conventions). There was a good deal of independent work, for example in test design and in statistical analysis, which was appropriately rewarded. All students showed a good awareness of the nature and role of research questions. Structuring and presentation was mostly good (though a few students wrote a Results chapter which consisted of little more than a set of Tables or Figures). The quality of the writing varied, but this year the dissertations included few examples of very poor work, so well done for the students and the supervisors.

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.

There have been no major changes to the content of the various modules. The research methods module seems to have been particularly successful this year, judging from the workmanlike quality of many of the 2nd semester essays and the dissertations.

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.

From the material that I have been able to see, it appears that the modules are all informed by recent and current research in the relevant subject area. This includes both content and methodology. Among the final essays and dissertations, there were several that engaged with their topic in a near-professional manner.

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.*

The material received was clear and 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.*

Like last year, I received appropriate documentation for the overall programme and also for most of the individual modules. I have asked for full materials for all modules and ways would be sought for giving me access to the VLE materials for all modules, but the first request has not been fully met and the second suggestions seems not to have been followed up.

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

As I requested, I received all assessed material for all modules, so was able to evaluate all of it.

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

Administrative arrangements this year too were entirely satisfactory and I am grateful to the School staff for sending me material in timely fashion. The BoE was conducted in the appropriate manner.

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

Mitigating and medical circumstances were fully taken into consideration. With regard to anonymity of students, I was pleased to see this was also maintained in the dissertations this year.

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.

Linguistics and Phonetics
School of Modern Languages and Cultures



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT

22nd of November 2011

Dear

Many thanks for your External Examiner's Report for the 2011-2012 MA programmes in Linguistics & Phonetics.

We were happy to read your positive comments about our programmes and about the quality of assessment and feedback, and the effectiveness of our teaching. In particular, your praise of the Research Methods module and its beneficial effects on the dissertations is very encouraging, especially as we had identified it as an area where further improvement was required. We note your positive comments about our new way of recording exchanges between first and second markers to motivate marking decisions, and will continue with this practice.

We agree with you that access to VLE materials would be beneficial and will continue pursuing this issue at School level (where such decisions are made). We note your disappointment at not having received full materials for all modules and will strive to do so more consistently this academic year.

Thank you for the comments on individual dissertations, which were very useful to have at the Board of Examiners meeting. We appreciate greatly your thoroughness and your genuine interest for our work and the performance of our students.

On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to thank you for your very helpful advice. We look forward to continue working with you this year.

Yours sincerely,

Director of Linguistics & Phonetics