

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**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.

Subject(s): East Asian Studies**awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)**

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***

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.

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 2010-11 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. I am pleased to see that the students have 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 three years, I can confirm that the standard of student performance for the MA programmes was comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions.

Overall, the performance from the cohort considered for awards at the 2010-11 Board of Examiners was quite impressive. The performance of several modules was substantially better than that of the previous academic year. These modules include *Japanese Economy* (4 distinctions, one of which had a mark of 84 – really excellent!), *China's Development* (3 distinctions and 6 merits with a few outstanding scripts), *Principles and Practice of Research I & II* (exceptionally good performance for a methods module – 4 distinctions and 19 merits; 3 distinctions and 15 merits). In addition, the standard of the dissertations was very high with 14 distinctions and 16 merits. The number of dissertations increased considerably this year but the quality of the submissions also increased. This reflected good supervision by staff and hard work on the part of the students as well as the excellent training for academic research offered by the department.

There were a few cases of suspected plagiarism associated with one particular module and the students who were involved in these cases seemed to have come from the same country in South East Asia. I have been informed that this issue has been discussed by the programme team, and that it is being dealt with by the department.

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.

Please see my comments in Section 4 above.

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 teaching on the MA programmes clearly reflects the wide range of research and expertise in the department. The active engagement of the academic staff in research and publications ensures that the course contents are informed by the latest scholarship in East Asian studies. This has had a positive impact on the teaching of many modules, particularly the dissertation module where students are trained to conduct academic research in their subjects.

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

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, 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. Draft examination papers were sent to me for comments and I was given sufficient time to moderate examination scripts and coursework.

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

Yes, I had access to a sufficiently large sample of assessed/examination work for some modules and all of the assessed work for others. 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.

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

Yes, the administrative arrangements for the assessment process were satisfactory and the Board of Examiners was conducted in an equitable and appropriate manner.

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.

N/A

Other Comments

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

As in previous years, the marking of student work is on the whole fair, consistent and rigorous. Overall, the feedback on coursework is very detailed with helpful advice and suggestions for improvement. For most modules, the comments on exam scripts are brief but adequate in terms of justifying the marks given. All scripts have been second-marked except those for two modules due to the sudden departure of a member of staff. Clearly, the

programme team has responded to the issues I raised last year regarding second-marking and comments on exam answers.

I am particularly impressed by the thoughtfulness and level of details in the feedback for a number of modules. For example:

Principles and Practice of Research – Detailed comments on each of the components of the assessment and clear advice on how to improve the work.

Japanese Economy – Detailed comments on each exam answer provided by the first and second markers. Evidence of discussion between the internal markers before a final mark was agreed.

Japan: Politics, Economy and Contemporary Society – Extensive comments on the essays pointing out both the strengths and weaknesses of students' work.

Political Economy of the Pacific Rim – Feedback on the 'role-play exercises' is detailed with constructive criticism.

International Politics of the Asia Pacific Region – Comments on the essays are clear and helpful with brief notes from the second marker.

Development Issues in South East Asia – Comments on the essays are extensive with clear explanations of where students have done well and what is lacking in the submitted work.

New Mongolia – Comments on the essays are extremely detailed offering a comprehensive assessment of the submitted work.

Chinese Business – Feedback on the essays from the first marker is quite detailed with brief comments from the second marker.

There are some very strong dissertations across a number of disciplines, including political economy, business and finance, international relations, philosophy, literature, cultural studies, and linguistics. Some dissertations are country-specific, while others deal with regional or sub-regional issues. The research topics of many dissertations are well-conceived and the findings are based on rich empirical data and sophisticated analyses. Students are familiar with the literature and making serious efforts to examine various issues within the relevant theoretical frameworks or using appropriate theoretical models. Some students have deliberately tried to theorise the issues under consideration. Indeed, I have enjoyed reading the dissertations. The good dissertation performance may well have been a result of the establishment of a closer link between the two research modules and the dissertation module – an effort made by the programme team in response to my suggestions.

This is the first year when the recently agreed dissertation marking guide is implemented. I have looked at the marking guidelines, which are well-designed and comprehensive. While I agree with the overall assessment of the dissertations by the internal markers, I am not entirely sure about the extent to which the markers have followed the marking criteria in forming their judgement. I am raising this issue not as a negative comment. I would just like to encourage the team to think more about the issue of fairness and consistency in marking the dissertations of so many disparate disciplines and subject areas. To increase the transparency of the marking, it might be useful to consider giving a mark to each of the key components of the dissertation as outlined in the marking guidelines (e.g. research question, literature review, methods and methodology, application of theory, etc.). In the end, the total mark of a dissertation based on the calculation of individual component marks may not be very different from a mark based on qualitative judgement, but the students would be fully aware of where they have gained marks and where they have lost marks.

Once again, the programme team should be congratulated for its success in delivering a wide range of interesting and high-quality programmes to the students in an increasingly challenging environment. There is much evidence indicating strong staff commitments to maintaining a high standard of teaching.

Finally, I would like to thank the head of department, the MA programme director, the on-line course director, and the MA secretary for providing me with all the necessary assistance in performing my duties as the External Examiner for the MA programmes.

**School of Modern Language & Cultures
Department of East Asian Studies**

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



2 February 2012

**Re: External Examiner's Report 2010-11
TPG Programmes, East Asian Studies**

Dear<<>>,

I am taking this opportunity to thank you for your External Examiner's Report 2010-11 and to introduce myself as the new manager for the East Asian Studies MA programmes. We note with appreciation your positive comments about the high quality of the teaching and the good design of the assessment methods and your characterization of the performance of our 2010-11 students as 'impressive'. Over the last three years we have benefited greatly from your insightful suggestions. The excellent student performance and the high standard of this year's dissertations is partly thanks to you. We are also grateful for your encouraging comments on the thoughtfulness and level of detail in the feedback provided to students.

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 this year for the first time following your feedback, clearly played a role in the achieved high standard of the dissertations this year.

We also paid close attention to your recommendation for providing first and second marker's comments on the exam scripts, in order to make the final mark and the assessment process in general, more transparent.

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.

Sincerely

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MA Programme Manager