

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

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

School of: Education	Subject(s): ICT and Education
Programme(s) / Module(s):	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.

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?

I do not recall seeing these. However, there was some confusion about early paperwork following my appointment: material which went astray (we are still not sure at which end). I think there is no clear fault attached to this – but I would appreciate copies of this material if that is still possible.

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.*

I believe that the programme content complements well the stated learning outcomes. Standards of work that I have seen are high and certainly well within what is expected for Masters level qualification. The programme is structured in an interesting and creative way. There are many challenges in producing distance versions of Masters level curricula and the present solutions seem very imaginative.

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.*

I am not aware of national subject benchmarks for this subject area.

However, the majority of students successfully met the national standards required for Masters degrees (as specified in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2008). They demonstrated a “systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights”, including

- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student: to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline; to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

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 assessment methods were largely through traditional essay work. Particularly with distance learning students it difficult to orchestrate formats for exposition or debate that depart from this format. However, I would encourage continued consideration of assessment methods that (perhaps indirectly) challenge students to make full use of digital tools relating to knowledge - in terms of its management and presentation, as well as opportunities for collaboration that could be created around it.

The written work that I did see suggested that teaching was of high quality and support for students is good – including many opportunities for interacting creatively with peers in discussion.

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.*

As indicated above, I believe these students perform at and above the standards of similar courses that I have scrutinised elsewhere. I see no particular weaknesses. Strengths would relate to their enthusiasm for taking part in online discussion and apparent ability to take advantage of this.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

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.

No applicable – first year

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 material is taught in a research-oriented manner and appears to be up-to-date in relation to the relevant literature. I would encourage more active use of the digital technologies – particularly as they are at the heart of the curriculum. Perhaps activities could be cultivated that encouraged the students to show confidence with (for example) web 2.0 tools and, thereby, furnish openings for creative formative or summative assessment that used them..

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 it was sufficient. Apart from relevant handbooks, I was able to look directly at curriculum materials and witness systems in use that were recruited into student dialogue.

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 did receive appropriate documentation. I felt that the Examination Board was professionally managed and yet convivial in tone. We were given a chance, as a group of examiners, to compare experiences. However, I found the method of reporting that experience at the Board unusual – at least in relation to my experience of such occasions elsewhere. A spokesperson was nominated (by us) to synthesise our conversations. I suggest that this aggregation of comments tends to produce a kind of ‘regression to the mean’, whereby comments that are at the more extreme positive and negative poles of opinion tend to get lost in what must be a rather general summary. Of course individual Examiner’s reports do follow but the overarching commentary is minuted and therefore does have a serious status in the records.

I would appreciate receiving scripts and marksheets in digitally filed format. I found this large amount of paper arriving in the post a little unusual – it was cumbersome to manage and return by post. It might also seem surprising that an e-learning course did not employ more digital transmission of such material. I am happy to continue with current methods if there are technical obstacles but would encourage a review of this process as it also provides an opportunity to make the total corpus of assessed material visible and this can only strengthen the School’s standing in relation to quality management issues.

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

It might be stronger practice to make all examples of distinction marked assignments visible to the External Examiners. More generally, in some cases I was given access to a relatively small sample of the total set of scripts.

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

See comments above. The general tone of the meeting was positive and helpful. The full procedures were diligently followed

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.

Other Comments

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



24 January 2011

Dear

Thank you very much for your report and for your contributions to the external examiners' meeting in June.

I note that you would like copies of previous external examiner's reports and will ask the Student Admin Office to resend these to you.

I am very pleased to note that you believe the MA ICT and Education (full-time and distance learning) to be interesting and creative; that our teaching is of high quality; we support our students well and that our approach to distance learning is imaginative. I am also very glad to see that you believe our programme meets the National Qualifications Framework standards for M-level. Like you, I am not aware of any national subject benchmarks for ICT in Education MA programmes.

I note your comments that you "would encourage continued consideration of assessment methods that (perhaps indirectly) challenge students to make full use of digital tools relating to knowledge - in terms of its management and presentation, as well as opportunities for collaboration that could be created around it" and also that you " would encourage more active use of digital technologies... and web 2.0 tools". However, we do encourage students to use digital technologies, including web 2.0 tools extensively on this programme and that much of the assessed work asks students to reflect on their experiences with these tools. Examples of technologies and tools used on the MA ICT in Education include (in addition to the Leeds VLE, *BlackBoard*) virtual classrooms; alternative VLEs such as *Moodle*; PLEs; wikis; blogs; *YouTube* (and the Leeds University alternative *LUTube*); collaborative tools such as *Prezi*; *iEtherpad* and *Mind42*; social bookmarking such as *Diigo*; microblogging (e.g. *Edmodo*); programming (e.g. *Scratch*); app development tools such as *App Inventor* and social networking, particularly *FaceBook*. The exact technologies and tools will, of course, vary from year to year and *EDUC5253M Design and Evaluation of Web-based Learning Environments* is currently being updated to have a more explicit focus on web 2.0.

We have considered alternative forms of assessment but believe that the 6,000 word assignment, whether essay or report, is most equitable and offers a rich opportunity for students to reflect on and consolidate their learning at MA level. As you point out "with distance learning students it is difficult to orchestrate formats for exposition or debate that depart from this format" particularly as students have differential access to technology. In some countries, for example, access to *YouTube* is forbidden and so it would not be fair to have an assignment which relied on *YouTube*. With 6,000

written assignments students are constrained only by their ability and their command of English academic writing and we are able to provide equitable support with the latter.

I note your comments with regard to the examiners' meeting, in particular our practice of asking a representative of the external examiners to give a collective report that synthesises the comments of the examiners and would like to point out that we do also offer the opportunity for any external examiner to give additional, individual feedback in the meeting so that their comments can be minuted.

I note your preference to receive digital rather than paper copies of material for examination and confirm that we can provide these. I also note your comments with regard to sending a sample of scripts rather than the entire cohort. It is neither school nor university policy to supply the complete cohort of scripts to examiners; the Code of Practice on Assessment details the policy on sampling. The sample is selected randomly by staff in the Student Admin Office to make sure that it is representative. The majority of our external examiners would not wish to receive a complete cohort of scripts. I note your comments with regard to making all distinction level work available to examiners and again would refer you to the Code of Practice on Assessment. The sample includes examples of work at distinction level. However, we will continue to keep this policy under review.

I am very pleased to note that you found the examination processes and the examiners' meeting to be professional, useful and convivial. I will make sure that this feedback is passed on to the staff who are responsible for the organisation and management of the meeting.

Finally, I would like again to thank you for the work that you put into examining our programmes and for your very useful feedback. Your work is an important contribution to maintaining the quality of our programmes and is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Head, School of Education