

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): MATHEMATICS & SCIENCE 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?

Yes

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.*

The aims and outcomes seem entirely suitable for a masters level 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.*

The aims and outcomes fit well with similar awards at other institutions.

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 are assessed through written essays, with considerable freedom of choice allowed to enable the students to specialise throughout. The opportunity to obtain formative feedback varies between the two programmes (draft essays vs short initial submissions) but both have their merits. The critical study permits some much deeper engagement with a specialist area. The evidence of the student performance and comments from the students suggests high quality teaching and, particularly, a good level of engagement between staff and students.

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.*

The design of the assessment allows ample opportunities for the students to demonstrate the learning outcomes. The nature of the courses seemed to allow for students with quite different backgrounds and future plans to engage with the aims and learning outcomes and staff appear to have used the difference in backgrounds to enhance the learning across the cohort.

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.

It was good to see that, across the MA programme as a whole, previous comments regarding the use of plagiarism software had been acted upon. In addition, the induction programme and the personal tutoring system seem to be areas of enhancement which are worthy of note and wider dissemination.

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.

Students engage with the research literature in all modules and, particularly through the critical study, they are able to engage with the research process. More thought may need to be given across the programme as a whole to how research methods is taught so that all students are equally able to engage with empirical work at the critical study level. The critical study might also benefit from more work on ensuring consistency of support (such as a handbook for this module)

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.*

This information was 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.*

Yes.

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

Yes.

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

Yes.

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.

The course tutors showed an admirable level of care for individual students and exhibited a very personal approach to engaging with the students' learning processes. There was some discussion about the variable level of feedback given, particularly with respect to the critical study, but again tutors seemed very willing to engage in discussion about the issue to find the right level for the programme.

1st February 2012

Dear

On behalf of the School of Education, I would like to thank you for your detailed and comprehensive report for the 2010-11 Mathematics Education and Science Education MA programmes.

We were pleased to receive your positive comments on

- course design
- engagement with research
- teaching methods
- tutor diligence
- staff-student relationships
- tutor marking
- administrative procedures

Three of your remarks require specific replies. I have underlined the specific remarks and included the surrounding remarks to give them context.

Paragraph 3

"The modules are assessed through written essays, with considerable freedom of choice allowed to enable the students to specialise throughout. The opportunity to obtain formative feedback varies between the two programmes (draft essays vs short initial submissions) but both have their merits."

Response

The school now has statement on formative assessment which aims to clarify what students can expect but which also allows for a flexible approach to reflect programme requirements and students' needs.

Paragraph 7

"Students engage with the research literature in all modules and, particularly through the critical study, they are able to engage with the research process. More thought may need to be given across the programme as a whole to how research methods is taught so that all students are equally able to engage with empirical work at the critical study level. The critical study might also benefit from more work on ensuring consistency of support (such as a handbook for this module) "

Response

As part of a wider school curriculum review a working party is investigating ways to improve the critical study learning experience.

Other Comments

"The course tutors showed an admirable level of care for individual students and exhibited a very personal approach to engaging with the students' learning processes. There was some discussion about the variable level of feedback given, particularly with respect to the critical study, but again tutors seemed very willing to engage in discussion about the issue to find the right level for the programme."

Response

I believe that this comment derives from the fact that Mathematics Education tutors viewed the 'real feedback' as coming in the final draft but these tutors will change their practices to ensure that full feedback is provided for the submitted assignment. Further to this, as part of a wider school curriculum review, a working party is seeking to improve procedures for marking students' work and provide greater consistency in format and quality of feedback.

Yours sincerely

Head, School of Education