

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): Special Educational Needs
Programme(s) / Module(s): Educational Needs	Taught MA Special Award: 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.

I have no issues to note that require urgent attention.

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?

Following my appointment, <<<>> met with me to discuss the programme in detail. As part of our meetings we have discussed the previous External Examiner reports and the issues that were raised. I have found my induction to the programme and School of Education to be exemplary. Any queries or questions were addressed swiftly and I have been made very welcome by students, and staff in the School of Education.

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.

Not applicable

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 programme aims and intended learning outcomes are commensurate with a Masters level award. The range of compulsory and taught modules is varied and provides a thorough insight into special educational needs. The core module for UK-based students on special educational needs: principles and practice provides a good context to the legislative and operational aspects of provision. In my meetings with students they found this module offered a good critique of current policy and practice and established a good basis for further work on the programme.

In relation to the international perspectives module this is enhanced by the range and diversity of students who are on the programme. Having students from a range of countries helps to exemplify practice and give insight into the varying practices of special educational provision worldwide. In addition, the modules with a more specific focus on developmental disorders, learning difficulties and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties provides specific insight into aspects of special educational provision. In my view the balance of broad contextual overviews of special educational needs and more focused work gives the programme a real strength and helps students develop critical insight into the young people concerned.

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.*

In my view the programme is comparable to other MA programmes nationally. In fact, I would suggest the programme is a leading programme nationally in the approach it takes to developing students' knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, in keeping the title 'special educational needs' rather than broader terms such as 'inclusion' this has positively influenced many students to choose the Leeds course over many of its competitors. Consequently, the term 'special educational needs' is key to student choice and I would like to suggest this is maintained rather than broaden the title to more generic aspects of inclusivity.

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 design and structure of assessment tasks are well thought through. Students have commented that they welcome the opportunity to tailor assignments to their specific professional and pedagogical interests and needs. I see this as a significant strength of the programme. The programme team have balanced the need for equal judgements on the broad thrust of assessments with the opportunity to link these to individual student need.

In relation to the marking of modules this is fair, balanced and thorough. Based on annotated feedback, students are clear in what they have done well and what they need to improve on in future assignments. In addition, the range of module marks is good and there is a desire to reward excellent work when it is evidenced, alongside also noting weak performance.

In relation to the quality of learning, teaching and assessment I have found this to be excellent. In my meetings with students they commented positively on the variety of learning experiences; opportunities for group interaction and learning from other students. Students also talk highly of opportunities for formative feedback both within and outside of lectures. From my analysis of the module content, I feel the variety of content and activities are very good and this is exemplified in feedback I received in my meetings with 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 academic standards are commensurate with students on comparable courses nationally. In my view, based on examining similar MA courses, students demonstrate a significant level of confidence and critical insight of special educational needs compared to other courses nationally. This is in no small part down to the excellent staff student relationships which I have witnessed on several occasions.

The strengths of the cohort are: Students critical insights into both the policy and practice of special educational needs and the diversity of international students. To date, I see no weaknesses in the student cohort and this is in

no small part down to the staff ensuring prospective students are clear about what the course involves and what is expected of them.

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

Not applicable

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.

A key issue that arose in my first meeting with staff was the lack of a core research methods module within the MA programme. In discussion with students this was not a significant issue as they felt research was embedded throughout the programme. However, in discussion other External Examiners on the other programmes within the School of Education this was raised at the examination board on the 21st June 2011. I supported consideration of a core research methods module in order to provide a thorough grounding on approaches to research design, analysis and presentation. The School took this feedback seriously and reported back on progress and action in the meeting of 8th November 2011.

In relation to examples of good practice worthy of further dissemination I would like to particularly note the following:

- Range of induction activities at the start of the programme
- Increased use of Turnitin software to detect plagiarism
- Variability of essay titles that are tailored to student needs
- Opportunities for formative feedback
- Support for students with dyslexia
- Off campus support facilities and the learning resource centre
- Maintaining the title 'special educational needs' within the programme title
- Excellent communication between staff and students
- Administrative support provided to students and the External Examiner

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.

It is evident from discussion with students and staff that research informs all aspects of learning, teaching and assessment within the programme. Students recognise this as a positive aspect of their studies and value the knowledge and experiences of their academic tutors. Students' critical studies are generally informed by research; however the range and extent of this varies which is to be expected.

I am confident in examining the programme and module handbooks; and student assessments that research and scholarship is embedded within all aspects of the programme. Staff work hard to integrate cutting edge research into the course and students are fortunate to have academics that are at the cutting edge of professional and pedagogic practice in special educational needs.

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.*

<<<<>> has regularly encouraged me to ask questions and seek any additional material as required to fulfil my role as External Examiner. All information provided was very helpful in assisting me to form judgements on the MA Special Educational Needs.

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.*

I received sufficient information regarding the programme. These included programme and module handbooks and assessment marking policies and processes. Furthermore, at the start of the academic year I received a copy of the External Examiner Handbook. All documentation was useful in assisting me understand the requirements of my role and if I did have any questions these were dealt with informatively by <<<>>>.

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

Sufficient work was made available to me to make informed judgements on the standard of student work. Each time work was sent to me it contained marking criteria, annotated feedback to students and a mark sheet with an overview of the cohorts progress.

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

The administration from the School of Education is in my view exemplary. The administration team are very efficient in sending out coursework to review, along with clear instructions of what is expected from External Examiners. Prior to any meetings and exam boards <<<>>> made a point of contacting me to check if all the arrangements were clear. <<<>>> also made me aware prior to my visit of meetings I would have with staff and students and any issues she wished to discuss. I found this process very useful in preparing for my visit.

In relation to the operation of the examination board this was conducted very efficiently. It was obvious that academic and administrative staffs knew the students being discussed and were able to address any queries immediately.

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

Procedures were in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances. These were noted at the examination boards I attended and I felt these were dealt with fairly and sensitively.

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.

Not applicable

Other Comments

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

This is my first report as External Examiner for the MA Special Educational Needs programme. I have found the experience very positive and academic and administrative staff are exceptional in their commitment to making the student experience a success. This is certainly working in my discussions with students and in reading all the programme documentation and assignments. I would like to congratulate <<<>>> on her leadership of the programme and look forward to a positive dialogue in driving the course forward over the next few years.

1st February 2012

Dear

I would like to start by thanking you for taking on the role of External Examiner for the MA (SEN). This is a major programme within the School of Education which each year attracts a wide range of students from the UK, Europe and internationally. I know that [redacted] appreciates the support you have offered.

I am pleased that the formal and informal arrangements put in place for your induction were 'exemplary'. These were planned to ensure that you felt secure and that your time with us is as productive as possible.

I note that you had opportunities to meet the staff and students on the programme. The sample of students was as representative as we could make it. It was perhaps noteworthy that you met someone who completed her PGCE with us, then studied for the PG Certificate in SEN Coordination and has now registered on the MA (SEN).

Your comments are extremely positive and reflect the commitment of all the staff involved in this programme. They bring to it complementary sets of expertise, knowledge and skills.

There have been discussions about reviewing the programme which have included questioning its name. As we are all aware, the terminology in this area is contested with international variations. We have noted your comments about the value of retaining the term 'special educational needs' and its significance for the international market. You also know that although the terminology of the current title can be associated with a medical model of diversity this is not the approach adopted by the team. I have no doubt [redacted] will keep in touch with you about the discussions and developments.

I look forward to your contribution in the next academic year as we strive to maintain and enhance the programme.

Yours sincerely

Head, School of Education