

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): TESOL
Programme(s) / Module(s): MA TESOL MA TESOL Young Learners MA TESOL Teacher Education MA TESOL Studies	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) MA
EDUC 5001	EDUC 5903
EDUC 5001M	EDUC 5912M
EDUC 5055M	EDUC 5912M
EDUC 5055M	ECUC 5922
EDUC 5301	EDUC 5922M
EDUC 5301M	ECUC 5927
EDUC 5690	EDUC 5927M
EDUC 5902	EDUC 5961M

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.

N/A

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 ILOs are appropriate for the structure, content, and award of the master's programmes.

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 ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. The programme compares well with others of a similar nature 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.*

In my first year as external examiner I have been impressed by a number of features of Leeds TESOL programmes, one of which concerns the imaginative assignment tasks. There is a wide variety of tasks which ensure students have a good grasp of a number of areas related to the modules they have taken, rather than the grasp of only a single area. Here I provide some examples of and commentary on what in my view were excellent tasks: EDUC 5301M featured a task involving a nice combination of lesson observations and reflection upon one's own teaching; EDUC 5922M required candidates to demonstrate understandings of both qualitative *and* quantitative research methods, as they commented on and critiqued a sample research proposal, a questionnaire, and a transcript of a semi-structured interview; EDUC 5912M again featured a task in a multiple-part format enabling markers to evaluate candidates' understanding of the module's concerns at both a theoretical and at a practical level; and EDUC 5902 enabled markers to judge candidates' abilities across a wide range of types of linguistic analysis.

I would ask colleagues to reflect on two modules and their tasks, namely 5001M and EDUC 5690. Regarding 5001M, the portfolio task certainly worked successfully in the case of very strong students, but appeared much less successful in the case of weaker ones. There were two main problems I saw in relation to weaker work: (i) only a vague understanding of what a portfolio was for; and (ii) with respect to research methodologies, inadequate explanation or justification of the preferred approach on a theoretical level. We discussed this in detail at the external examiners' meeting, and I was assured (and convinced) that students are provided with very detailed information about the concept of the portfolio itself, as well as guidance as to how to go about compiling their portfolio. Nonetheless, I wonder whether, in the case of at least some of the weaker students, a full-length dissertation by research would have been a better option? I am aware the portfolio issue will be discussed by colleagues when the curriculum is being re-shaped, and am sure all possibilities will be properly and carefully considered. Regarding EDUC 5690, the module featured a free assignment question that certainly worked very well for strong students to demonstrate their understanding, but perhaps worked less well for weaker students, who may have benefited from a question which was more guided as an alternative. I would stress I feel the free question is a good one and am not suggesting its removal; merely the provision of an alternative to sit alongside it.

Overall, then, I feel the assessment methods are exemplary.

Marking procedures are clearly developed and for the most part consistently applied, although I felt there was some inconsistency between (rather than within) modules, with some work in my view assessed on the generous side, and other work assessed a little too harshly.

Students are offered helpful feedback and the full marks range is used for the most part (although see my comment above regarding a degree of marking inconsistency between modules). A related point concerns the very welcome opportunity for students to submit assignment drafts and receive formative feedback. This is a practice that other institutions would do well to take up, and is another exemplary feature of the programmes.

A wide range of student performances on the coursework attests to the use of the full marking range and also to the diversity of student intake. The strongest candidates produced excellent work which showed evidence of a wide range of reading, and their writing included insightful, critical analysis; the weakest candidates did not appear to have done the required readings, using only a few sources of dubious quality from the Internet, and had not taken the opportunity to show their marker a draft of their work. This was not the fault of the lecturers, as can be seen from the helpful guidelines and the supporting material given to students which had not been taken advantage of.

The high-quality scripts I saw, then, provide indirect evidence of high-quality teaching and learning. I should also mention that this judgement is supported by the highly complimentary descriptions of lecturers, the support they provide, and their teaching by MA students I spoke to when I attended both external examiners' meetings this year.

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.*

Students were certainly provided with adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and ILOs. The range of student performances, as described above, is typical of other comparable programmes at other institutions. Students are provided with multiple opportunities to link theory and practice, another welcome feature of the programmes. However, in 5001M, the Critical Study portfolio, some weaker candidates displayed inadequate knowledge of research methodologies at both a practical and a theoretical level.

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.

This is my first year as external examiner and so I cannot comment on how the programmes have been enhanced by comparison with previous years in an informed manner. However, I saw many areas of good practice worthy of wider dissemination, some of which I have identified above. For instance, the opportunity provided to students for early feedback on their drafts. One of my research interests concerns the acquisition of academic literacy by second-language student writers, and the research tells us that students do not generally exploit markers' feedback on their writing if it is only delivered at the final stage (i.e. after the final draft has been submitted); students are much more likely to properly take advantage of feedback delivered while they are still drafting their work. The Department's policy of allowing students to submit drafts for formative feedback is therefore an excellent feature of the programmes. Related to this, students spoke highly of the personal tutoring they received during the programme.

The TESOL Forum was a very popular module, giving as it did students the opportunity to relate ideas and theories encountered during the programme to their own teaching context. So this emphasis on linking theory and practice which I saw in many parts of the programme is also something worthy of 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.

As I have commented above, the curriculum very clearly relates theory and practice, and is grounded in theory. There was evidence from assignment tasks that state-of-the-art theory is being drawn on in class and that students are required to understand it and put it into practice.

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 support provided was helpful. I had appropriate access to relevant materials.

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 was provided with appropriate documentation. I was also provided with very courteous, professional support when I requested that some changes to marks should be considered.

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

Yes, in my view samples of work are of the appropriate size and reflect the marks range properly.

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

Yes. Both the external examiners' days made very good use of our time, including helpful meetings with students and with other externals.

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.

I would like to express my gratitude to colleagues for the very friendly, constructive manner in which they have received my comments and suggestions this year. I suggested changing several marks and these suggestions were taken in a highly professional manner. I have learned much in this my first year as external, and wish to extend my gratitude to lecturers and administrative staff alike.



15 February 2012

Dear

Thank you very much for your report on the MA TESOL and TESOL Studies programmes in the School of Education, and for the work you have carried out as the External Examiner.

We are glad that you recognise the variety of assessment types on the MA programmes as one of their strengths. This is a feature that the previous External Examiners urged us to consider and which we have been striving to achieve across all programmes in the School.

You also comment favourably on the reading of student draft assignments and we were interested to learn of your conclusions from your own empirical research. Although time consuming, our anecdotal evidence is that giving comments on drafts does improve the final product, and students themselves indicate this in their feedback.

We note your concern about the assessments for the modules EDUC 5960 (not 5690) and 5001 (or EDUC 5308, as the MA TESOL Studies portfolio is numbered). The tutor for the research methods module on the MA TESOL Studies is aware of your concern and will make a special point of checking students' understanding of the notion of portfolio. It is true that, as the empirical study makes up only a one-third proportion of the whole work, there will inevitably be slightly less attention given to research methods and their rationale than on the MA TESOL programme, for instance. As for EDUC 5960, the module tutor has noted your remarks concerning the open nature of the assignment task and will consider introducing an alternative task for next academic year (the module is not running this semester due to low numbers choosing it as an option).

Regarding possible inconsistency in marking between modules, we have partially addressed this by holding standardization meetings for markers of the first semester module EDUC 5901, which helped staff to reaffirm common understandings of the assessment criteria. We are aware that more such meetings are desirable, particularly to standardize *across* modules, and will continue to look for opportunities to hold them.

Yours sincerely

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Head, School of Education

The University of Leeds
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ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010– 2011

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

School of: Education Programme(s) / Module(s): MA TESOL	Subject(s): awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)
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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.

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.*

Learning outcomes are appropriate to the level of the award and the structure and content of the programme are appropriate to the type of 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 ILOs are comparable to those of similar course at other universities and in line with benchmarks set by the HEQ framework.

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.*

Students are assessed by assignment and these are generally suited to the subject. The standard of work produced is generally of a high standard and comparable to that of students on similar programmes. The best work is where students contextualise their research and draw on local constraints in their discussions.

However, it might be useful to consider providing alternative methods of assessment for some modules. This would be in line with current thinking on equal opportunities in assessment and would give a greater number of students the opportunity to perform to their strengths.

The quality of teaching seems strong. Students indicated in discussions that they gained a good deal from attending lectures and seminars and were given plenty of opportunity to discuss and to develop their ideas.

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 students are generally of a high standard. However, on the module, Teaching and Learning for TESOL, there was a very high number of fails at first attempt. This pattern was not mirrored on other modules. It might be worth considering why this was the case.

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

NA

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.

This is my first year as external examiner of this programme. However, there are two areas of good practice for which the team should be particularly commended. First, the support given to students on a one-to-one basis is excellent: students are able to submit drafts of work and to discuss drafts with tutors. Second, students are encouraged to draw on their own experiences in the assignments, which helps them to make clear links between theory and practice.

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.

Many of the modules are led by tutors who research in the field they are teaching. This ensures that the content is research-led and current. The Critical Study module encourages students to carry out their own research project and so develop practical skills in this area.

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. This is good.

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?**

The administrative arrangements have been excellent.

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.

1st February 2012

Dear

Thank you very much for your report on the MA TESOL programmes in the School of Education, and for the work you have carried out as the external examiner.

We are particularly pleased that you have singled out the support we give to students on the Leeds MA TESOL programme. We strive to provide a high level of academic and pastoral support for our students, and feel this is reflected in their positive attitude towards the TESOL programmes.

We are also very happy that you have found the administrative procedures associated with external examining to be efficient. Our administration team works very hard to ensure that things work well, and your comment helps serve to validate the efforts they make.

We note your point about the possibility of alternative methods of assessment for some modules. The TESOL team is glad you have raised this issue and will discuss it at meetings through the coming year.

You also draw attention to the high number of fails on the module EDUC5901M Teaching and Learning in TESOL, a pattern not seen in other modules. The TESOL team discussed this issue at a recent awayday. They identified the challenging content at an early stage in the programme as contributing to the disappointing set of marks, and will monitor this carefully.

Ethical issues surrounding the MA TESOL (China) are addressed in the critical study preparation session in March. Students are aware of ethical issues and this has impacted on their research design. We will highlight the need to report on their considerations of ethical issues in the hand book and in the critical study preparation sessions.

Yours sincerely

Head, School of Education