

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012– 2013

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	Education
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Programmes: PGCE (Primary 5-9) QTS, PGCE (Primary 5-11) QTS, PGCE (Primary 7-11) QTS, PGCE Primary with QTS, 5-9 School Direct, PGCE Primary with QTS, 7-11 School Direct. Modules: EDUC3415: Foundation, EDUC5525M: EPS, EDUC5526M: English, EDUC5527M: Maths, EDUC5528M: Science, EDUC3420:TP
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	PGCE (QTS)

Completed report

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six 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?

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

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 can confirm that the programme Aims, Intended Learning Outcomes and the standards expected and attained are commensurate with the level of this 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.*

Based on the evidence made available to me I can corroborate that the Aims and LOs are broadly comparable to the outcomes and standards in PGCE programmes at similar ITT 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 following comments are based on my review of thirty assignments (students complete five, 3,000 word assignments in the programme period). It was particularly valuable to see a range of assignments as well as having access to all five assignments from a sample of six students. The accompanying data provided about number of grades and average marks was useful and I would have been interested in module leaders' evaluation of this and any subsequent action points for module development. A suitable proportion of assignments had been second marked and moderation had taken place. The generic mark sheet used across modules offered a very clear structure for markers to follow and the consistency of approach and overall quality of feedback was evident, and I am sure, very helpful to students.

I found the assignments were worthwhile with regards to supporting students' professional development and required students to be reflective. This was a common thread running through the core subject related modules where students were asked to reflect on children's misconceptions and progress.

Maths: very thorough marking and specific feedback about how to tackle misconceptions opposed to errors and mistakes. Eight students failed this assignment and I wondered how this compared to previous cohorts and whether the maths team had identified any particular reasons for this.

English: very supportive feedback provided for students in the general comments section. Again, a very useful assignment but difficult to do it justice in 3,000 words and many students seemed to miss out the next steps for the profile child and implications for future practice.

Science: positive feedback offered via the mark sheet and sensible use of the marking grid to help the moderation process (between first and second markers). Students in the focus group and students I met on placement reported that they found the science taught sessions, the school-based tasks and the assignment mutually supportive and could see the benefit of this integrated work.

EPS: very helpful assignment title linked to national priority area of behaviour management. Students in the sample gave comprehensive responses to this title and this was reflected in the high proportion of firsts awarded (27, firsts, no fails).

Feedback from students: the students I met spoke highly of the support tutors provide with assignment work and felt that, apart from the heavy workload around the Easter period, that the assessed assignments were manageable and useful.

Suggestions for consideration:

- I thought that the course team might also like to include any 'fail' or 'borderline' assignments in the batch sent to the External even though these did not belong to the sample of six students selected.
- Some of the assignments would lend themselves to a longer word count as 3,000 words does constrain students' ability to engage in critical appraisal of research as well as reflecting on school experience (particularly at level 7). Perhaps the team could consider altering the form of some assignments (e.g. presentations, portfolios, reports instead of essays) and reduce the number so that a 6,000 word independent research assignment could be introduced to increase critical thinking skills and greater awareness of the role of teacher as researcher at level 7).
- Many of the students in the sample I received submitted a 'Bibliography' rather than a 'References' list and there seemed to be some confusion about the requirements.
- Targets in the feedback section on most of the assignments I looked at tended to focus on advice about academic writing and presentation skills and limited targets were identified related to wider reading, recommended research, pedagogical issues and critical thinking. In my own institution we have been encouraged to set targets for all students - more able students as well as students attaining lower marks, based on academic writing and critical appraisal skills involved in synthesising theory and practice.
- It would be helpful to be provided with copies of the assignment guidance for each of the assignments included in the sample for the External Examiner.

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 are assessed throughout the programme in a number of ways (formal essays which help to strengthen academic writing skills and school-based tasks which encourage students to reflect on theory and practice) and this regular formative feedback clearly has an impact on students' confidence and success. Academic standards achieved are comparative with similar programmes; however, I do feel the team could encourage more depth, reference to original sources and journal articles and greater critical analysis (opposed to descriptive reports) in level 7 assignments. Students were well supported in preparation for assignment writing and workshops on academic writing skills had been strategically timetabled.

Students achieving higher grades were able to synthesis theory and practice and referred to established and contemporary research to help them reflect on own practice. Students awarded lower marks often described and reported personal experience at the expense of critical evaluation and tended to rely on core texts rather than expanding their literature search. The core teams were aware of this and intimated that further support on academic writing and critical thinking would be provided at an earlier stage in the course next year.

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. Please comment on 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 in the role of External Examiner.

I did notice that the role of partnership cluster schools has been expanded with very positive results and this is a strength of the partnership process.

7. Please comment on 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 undertake school-based tasks, which engage them in some reflective thinking, designed to unite theory and practice. Many of the tasks are related to national priority areas (EAL, SEND, behaviour management, phonics and early reading) and provided valuable experience for students in different key stages as well as encouraging students to talk about changes in pedagogy and practice based on recent research and government initiatives. Tutors are clearly aware of the need to engage students in discussion in taught sessions about recent and relevant research and many of the tutors use their own research interests to enhance the taught course (e.g. supporting EAL learners, language acquisition, pupils' motivation and resilience).

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

8. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

9. 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 – I had sufficient access to all the materials I needed and when I found it necessary to request additional information this was provided promptly.

10. 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, marking criteria?

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

Yes – appropriate documentation has been provided.

11. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

Modules are assessed by formative assignments rather than examinations on this programme.

12. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes – a sample of work was provided which presented a range of levels and allowed me to see the progress made across the year by six students. All scripts were marked using the agreed feedback proforma and marking criteria.

13. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

Students do not complete dissertations on this programme.

14. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

Yes. The arrangements in place were thorough and professional. I was accompanied to school visits and meetings and appreciated the courtesy, hospitality and support afforded throughout the examination process.

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

Yes.

Other comments

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

I found this experience both enjoyable and valuable as throughout my time spent in the External Examination process the School of Education tutors were very ready to engage in collegiate debate and to explain the rationale and aims of the programme.

I found the students I met were committed, hardworking, professional and very positive about the programme. The students felt supported both on campus and during school experience placements. The students I observed teaching were well prepared, competent and engaged their pupils in interesting, well-paced lessons. Students' files were, on the whole, well maintained and organised and reflected their personalised pathways which meant that students could target personal areas of improvement. This was particularly evident when observing and talking to students on placement in cluster partnership schools who were supported by school-based mentors and link tutors. The students in these settings spoke highly of the way that the cluster had met students' needs by providing training days based on expertise within the cluster schools.

School co-coordinators reported that the calibre of trainees on placement had been very good and support from link tutors was

always readily available, particularly when weaker students needed additional support.

Points for consideration:

- Some cluster co-ordinators and school-based tutors had not been able to attend mentor-training sessions and felt that this had an impact on consistency of approach when working with different schools and students (one cluster had initiated their own training based on previous paperwork and supporting documents received from the University). The course team could consider different ways to target whole clusters for mentor training and to follow-up lapsed attendance.
- The students and school based tutors found the weekly and mid-point review tutorials very useful. This is where tutors and students seemed to discuss and note down targets and progress (rather than on the observation feedback form). Perhaps the course team could discuss the value of providing an interim grade which prompts a discussion about how a student can move from e.g. grade 3 to grade 2 and above in the remaining time left on placement – and alerts the course team and mentors to required intervention or support necessary to help the student make that progress.
- The 'review of previous targets' section on the observation form was rarely completed (in the small sample I saw) as this seemed to be replaced by the effective weekly review process. Similarly, the students I visited had not completed the section where they are invited to comment on observation feedback. Perhaps the team could consider reviewing this form and encouraging tutors to note down subject specific targets and feedback as well as giving advice about behaviour management and classroom organisation.
- I noted that the planning proformas advocated by the University were more KS2 friendly and perhaps needed some adjustments to suit the common approach to continuous provision, free-flow play and focus groups implemented in most FS and KS1 settings.

Students in the focus group were very positive about the programme and felt that they had been well-supported throughout the PGCE year. In particular students complimented input given by core tutors and were unanimous in their praise for the interactive approach to taught sessions applied by the science tutors. In order to improve things for next year they suggested that:

- more of the core texts should be made available as 'e' books so that they could access these on placement;
- they would have appreciated more formal sessions on how to prepare for interviews;
- students in the cluster model would still like to have a personal tutor that they could meet occasionally to discuss any problems in confidence;
- more specific targets for improvement are given mid-way through placement;
- PDR tasks could be more clearly related to taught sessions and streamlined to ensure the most important tasks are prioritised.

31 October 2013

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Dear <>

Thank you for your helpful and supportive report. We are pleased that you recognise a number of positive aspects of our Primary PGCE programmes, for example, the positive developments in partnerships with schools, the students' attitudes and commitment and the good quality of support provided to the students, including feedback from the essay assignments.

In relation to the nature of the assignments we feel that having fewer but bigger assignments would limit the breadth of issues that the students would cover. We believe that the best students can achieve a good level of depth and critical analysis within the constraint of a 3,000 word limit. Diversifying the modes of assignment might not work in the students' interests. By using just one mode, that is, essays, students have the opportunity to draw on the feedback from one assignment to inform the next, for example, by improving their academic writing skills. Nevertheless, we will consider the suggestion that you have made. We have already updated our assignment reading lists to feature more current journal articles and will support the students in using these to inform their essay writing next year. The point you raise about the range of targets for improvement provided to students in their assignment feedback is well-made and we will aim to implement the advice that you have given, particular to provide more feedback in relation to pedagogical issues. We are very conscious of the need to make reading material available to all students, a challenge with such a large cohort. Consequently we are prioritising the e-books to facilitate this. We will see that you receive full details of the assignments with the sample of essays that are sent to you.

You raised a point about whether or not the maths tutors had identified a reason why eight students failed the maths assignment. Additional support was provided to those students who requested it, however, the standard at the lower end of the mark range was disappointingly low. All our Primary PGCE students have at least a 2:2 (degree) but some still struggled to write at the required academic standard. For 2013-14 two additional sessions (one and a half hours each) will be used to make the expectations of the maths assignment clear.

On the issue of mentor training we have already acted on the point you raise and have scheduled school-based training sessions for the clusters next year. We recognise the issue letting the students know how they are progressing with their teaching as an important one (your point about weekly and mid-point tutorials). Consequently we have introduced a much more extensive system of lesson grading and monitoring of students' progress. Students who are not achieving at least a Grade 2 will be required to produce improvement plans and will receive a follow-up observation. Appropriate support will be identified and provided to ensure that students can make progress. Linked to this

will be a change to our lesson observation form that will address the other issue that you raised, that is, there will be a section for subject specific comments.

We have already taken steps to produce a lesson planning form that matches the needs of trainees that are working in classes where there is continuous provision. We do provide support for on how to prepare for interviews, in a lecture session and group work. Given that most interviews take place when students are working in schools we aim to ask schools to play a bigger role in supporting students in this respect. Students in the cluster model of partnership do have Link Tutors but this role is more focussed on liaising with School Mentors that in the traditional model of partnership. We will look at ways of increasing student-Link Tutor contact. We have rationalised the number of PDR tasks for next year. Tasks have always been introduced in University-based sessions and this will continue to be the case. It is difficult to prioritise tasks as all address important aspects of the training agenda.

Thank you again for your very positive comments and the very helpful guidance and advice that you have provided in this report. We look forward to seeing you again later in the year.

Yours sincerely

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Head of School of Education