

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:	POLIS
Subject(s):	Politics
Programme(s) / Module(s):	All Modules pertaining to British Politics, and some on political concepts.
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

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

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?

N/A

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 programme's aims and intended learning outcomes were commensurate with the level of the award, and the standards were appropriate for the award under consideration.

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.*

Yes, the aims and ILOs are entirely comparable and commensurate with similar programmes at other Russell Group universities, national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

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 entailed a judicious and well-balanced blend of essays, examinations and written reports, which provide different but equally effective, means of gauging the intended learning outcomes.

The various assignments are subject to a robust system of double marking and moderation to ensure that the first marker is grading each script consistently and fairly, in accordance with the marking criteria. I am totally satisfied both by the standard of marking, and the robust system of peer review which is applied to the assignments on each Module.

POLIS undoubtedly attracts some exceptionally good students, who are academically strong and highly-motivated. They are evidently being helped to reach their full academic potential by the excellent and enthusiastic research-led teaching being provided by conscientious and enthusiastic staff in POLIS.

The compulsory Dissertation Module provides students with an excellent opportunity to undertake research, under the supervision of an academic with appropriate expertise, and imbues students with a range of transferable skills.

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.*

I saw a range of assessed student work, namely essays, exam papers and research dissertations, all of which entailed students developing and displaying a range of cognitive, communication and research skills. These clearly convincingly illustrated the extent to which they are benefitting from the inspiring and enthusiastic research-led teaching and assessment methods in POLIS.

POLIS students are clearly being provided with ample scope and opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of Module/programme aims and ILOs, and most students are doing so admirably.

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.

I am pleased to note that a wider range of marks continue to be awarded at the higher and lower ends of the scale; in the 70s and 40s. Previously, I had seen some marks of 70 or 71 which could readily have been 74 or 75.

However, a few marks could be even higher (circa 80); although there is a healthy number of students graduating with deserved Firsts, there overall degree result is often 'only' @ 70-72. Awarding higher Firsts for individual Module marks might help raise Final degree results in the First category.

I am also extremely impressed with the effective operation of the Internal Moderator system now utilised in POLIS.

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.

Please see response to 3, above.

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

N/A

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, certainly.

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. As always, I received a generic Departmental Handbook at the start of the academic year, details of the Modules for which I am responsible as EE and the marking criteria. I subsequently received the relevant Module handbooks with each batch of Exam scripts and/or Essays sent to me for Autumn and Spring semester Modules.

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?

Yes, I received the relevant draft for approval. I was always satisfied that the nature and the level of the Questions were appropriate.

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, definitely. For each of 'my' Modules, I received several scripts (often Essays and Exam answers) spanning the full range of marks and attainments. The scripts were always clearly marked and annotated, and extensive feedback was provided for each one. This clearly outlined the strengths and any weaknesses in the student's work, and therefore made it clear why the particular mark had been awarded in each case, and how these corresponded to the marking criteria. It is evident that academic staff in POLIS are devoting considerable time to ensuring that students receive detailed and constructive feedback, a topic which often features strongly in NNS responses across the HE sector.

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

Yes, absolutely. The dissertations provide the students with excellent opportunities for developing research capabilities and other transferable skills.

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 Administrative staff in POLIS are superbly efficient, especially the Department's Examinations Officer. The Examination Board itself was conducted with the utmost diligence and efficiency, as was the previous evening's Extenuating Circumstances Board. I was wholly satisfied with the recommendations of both Boards.

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

The Extenuating Circumstances Board examined students' mitigating circumstances with great care, and made recommendations which I was happy with, both in terms of adherence to regulations, and fairness to the students concerned.

Other comments

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

I remain perplexed that the University continues to deploy a 20-90 marking range, rather than the conventional 0-100 deployed in other Russell Group Universities. Not for the first time, I saw a student awarded a 20 when they had completely failed to answer an assessed question. I simply cannot understand how a blank page, devoid of even a sentence by way of attempting an answer, can still be awarded a mark of 20.

18 November 2013

Dear

External Examiner's Report 2012 – 2013

On behalf of the School, may I thank you for your Examiner's Report which was discussed by colleagues at the POLIS Taught Student Education Committee meeting on the 9 October 2013.

Thank you for your reassurance that our standards are appropriate, marking and moderation are robust and procedures fair and efficient. As you note, all this depends greatly on our "conscientious and enthusiastic" staff and "superbly efficient" administrative staff; your praise for _____, the Exams Officer, is much appreciated. You describe feedback given to students as extensive, detailed and constructive. As ever, we will be working hard to maintain high standards here in the future. Assessment methods, you say, are a well-balanced blend and this is something we keep under review as our modules and programmes develop. You noted that we have been stretching the range of marks given. You say that some first class marks could have been even higher and we will be encouraging staff to reward work of exceptional quality in an appropriate way. Finally, you made some very good points about the University's 20-90 marking range. The Pro-Dean for Student Education's attention has been drawn to this. However, this is a University rather than a POLIS policy and we have to operate the system we are in.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for staying on an additional year, and the time and effort that you have invested as our external examiner in ensuring that the programmes and modules offered by POLIS are commensurate with the standards offered in comparable institutions.

Yours sincerely

Head of School

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