

**The University of Leeds**  
**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**  
**ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014**

**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.
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](mailto:exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk).

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Quality Assurance**  
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*

There are no areas which I think require urgent action. The programmes in POLIS are kept under consistent review, and issues addressed as and when they arise, in consultation with External Examiners.

**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*

I have been extremely impressed by my experiences of the programmes in POLIS during the last five years, in terms of the high standard of teaching, the intellectual calibre and motivation of the students overall, the assessment and marking regime, and the diligent conduct of the Exam Boards.

There is clearly a consistent process of annual review and enhancement, entailing the annual Examiners' Reports and recommendations within them, as well as consultations between External Examiners and programme directors or Module leaders immediately after the Exam Board.

I am highly impressed by the 'moderating' system which has been developed over the last few years, which involves a second member of staff evaluating a sample of student scripts to gauge the accuracy and consistency of the first marker's grades. Throughout my term as External Examiner, I have received a letter, in September, from the Head of POLIS, informing me the Department's response to my report for the previous academic year, and detailing how any issues raised by me have been addressed. As such, I have felt included and taken seriously throughout, and been enormously impressed by the responsiveness and courteous of staff in POLIS.

I have also been greatly impressed by the conduct of the Exam Boards; the Special Cases Exam Board to discuss extenuating circumstances, and the plenary Exam Board to confirm final marks and degree awards. The careful and equitable consideration given to each of 100s of students each year is beyond reproach. Every single student who has extenuating circumstances, mitigation of any kind or who falls within the 'discretionary boundary' is discussed carefully, to determine whether they warrant being awarded a higher degree classification than would otherwise be awarded on the basis of their weighted average mark alone. As such, I have never left a POLIS Exam Board feeling that any student has been treated unfairly or unsympathetically; every decision and award has been clear, consistent, equitable and wholly defensible on academic and regulatory grounds. There is still, perhaps, a tendency for First Class students to be awarded Module marks of 70 or 71, rather than in the mid to high 70s, but I understand from discussions with POLIS staff that most of these low 70s are a consequence of averages; a student perhaps achieving a 76 for an essay, for example, but then only achieving a 64 in their second essay or the exam

component of the Module, so that the overall mark ends up as 70. I confess that I am not sure how this issue can be resolved, but it might be something for the University to address.  
Finally, I would like to reiterate my appreciation of the administrative support provided to academic staff, Externals and students in POLIS. Throughout my tenure as External Examiner, I have found <> to be the very personification of cheerful efficiency, support and sage advice.

## 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 are commensurate with the level of the award, and the standards are appropriate for the award under consideration.  
They are certainly comparable to those of other Russell Group universities.

### 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 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 carefully balanced combination of essays, examinations and written reports, which provide different but equally effective, methods of evaluating the students' achievement of the ILOs.

All of these assessments are subject to a robust system of double marking and moderation, which thereby ensures that first marker is grading each script consistently and fairly, in accordance with the marking criteria. I am highly impressed both by the standard of marking, and the efficient system of peer review which is applied to the assignments on each Module.

POLIS continually attracts some exceptionally good students, who are then helped to reach their full academic potential by the excellent and enthusiastic research-led teaching being provided by conscientious and committed staff in POLIS.

The feedback provided on student essays also clearly conveys the high level of staff engagement with their students.

Meanwhile, the Dissertation Module provides students with an excellent opportunity to pursue a research-based project or topic, under the supervision of an academic with appropriate expertise, and in so doing, imbues students with a range of valuable research competences and other 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.*

The various forms of student work which I saw, namely essays, exam papers and research dissertations, all illustrated that students are afforded ample opportunities to achieve the relevant Aims, Objectives and ILOs. In so doing, the students are being enabled and encouraged to develop and display a range of cognitive, communication and research skills. These, in turn, provide further evidence of the extent to which they are benefitting from the inspiring and enthusiastic research-led teaching and assessment methods in POLIS.

### 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.*

The 'moderator' system is being deployed more widely in the Department, with a representative sample of assessments being checked and commented upon by a second member of staff, to ensure that the marks awarded are appropriate and consistent.

This is a quality assurance practice which also ensures equity in the treatment of students, and is therefore to be strongly

commended.

**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.

**8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD**

N/A

**For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements**

**9. 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

**The Examination/Assessment Process**

**10. 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. At the start of the academic year, I receive relevant documentation about the Department's marking criteria, ILOs for each Module, and Module Kits/Reading Lists for each of 'my' Modules. It is always made clear to me that I can request further information if necessary, but the clarity and comprehensiveness of the explanatory materials sent to me in October are such that this has not been necessary.

**11. 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 noted in previous answer). In this regard, special mention must be given to <>, the Examinations Office in POLIS, whose efficiency and reliability are beyond reproach.

**12. 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.

**13. 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, For each of 'my' Modules, I received several scripts (often Essays and Exam answers) spanning the full range of marks. The scripts were invariably accompanied by extensive feedback, which therefore enabled both the student and me to appreciate why a particular mark had been awarded, in accordance with the marking criteria. It is obvious 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.

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

Yes, I saw a good range of Dissertations, both in terms of the often imaginative and ambitious topics researched and the span of marks awarded.

**15. 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 POLIS Exam Board was chaired and conducted with absolute efficiency and professionalism. The marks and Final Degree classification for each and every student was projected onto the screen, thereby enabling all staff present to observe the student's individual Module marks, their aggregate performance in each academic year, their overall weighted average mark, and also whether they fell within the 'discretionary boundary' for each classification, in which case, consideration was given as to whether there were legitimate grounds (in accordance with university regulations) for raising the student to the higher classification.

The Exam Board also gave very careful consideration to students who had reported extenuating circumstances. with the chair of the Exam Board explaining the decisions reached by the Special Cases Board and its recommendations, and how these would impact upon the students concerned.

I thought that every single student received full and fair consideration, and that the final decisions were appropriate and wholly defensible on grounds of academic integrity, consistency and equity..

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

Yes, as alluded to in previous answer.

**Other comments**

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

N/A

29 October 2014

Dear

**External Examiner's Report 2013 – 2014**

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 8 October 2014.

Your report said positive things about POLIS policies and practice under the different headings and you can be sure that we will be working hard in the future to maintain our high standards and fairness to students. Your comments about the working of the exam board and the efficiency and commitment of the admin staff are much appreciated. You commented that first class module marks of 70 or 71 are still quite common but acknowledge that that may be a result of averaging over a number of pieces of work. As you know, we have been encouraging staff to use the full range of marks and reward the highest quality work and there are more marks in the upper 70s nowadays than when you first became one of our externals 4 years ago.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for 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. We have also had with you many fruitful exchanges about our teaching programmes and student matters, and your ideas and suggestions have always been extraordinarily helpful. It's a shame that we cannot keep you as external examiner for life, but it is probably best for you and for the integrity of our own system that we regularly change externals!

Yours sincerely

**Head of School**