

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010-11

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

<p>School of: Politics and International Studies</p> <p>Programme(s) / Module(s): <u>BA Semester 1</u> PIED 3335 EXTREME RIGHT PARTIES in Cont Wes Europe PIED 2305 GOVERNING the EU</p> <p><u>BA Semester 2</u> PIED 3750 UG Dissertations (part) PIED 3315 Cont Western Euro Socialist parties PIED 3323 Environmental Politics and Policy in the EU PIED 3410 Political Corruption PIED 2610 Nationalism in the Modern World PIED 2328 Making of the EU</p> <p>Summer resits for any of the above , plus the following first year modules: PIED 1300 European Politics PIED1330 Debating Europe</p>	<p>Subject(s): BA European Politics; MA in International Relations and MA in Global Development</p> <p>awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) <u>MA SEMESTER 1</u> PIED 5508 Environmental Politics</p> <p><u>MA SEMESTER 2</u> PIED 5383 The EU and Developing World POLI 5225 Democracy and Development</p>
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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.

There are no areas that need urgent attention before the programme is offered again.

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.

Over the last three years here have been some changes in modules offered to students. These changes have, in my opinion, improved the teaching provision. The material provided to students has improved even more from already a fairly high standard and the variety in modes of assessment has increased. Particularly, the feedback to students has been improving year by year and the School ought to be commended for its work they have done on the improvement of feedback and its marking and moderating procedures.

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 curriculum covers the core areas of discipline as well as innovative new areas of teaching (i.e. Environmental Politics, Political Corruption). The documents sent to me demonstrated that the ILOs were appropriate and that the structure and content matched onto those ILOs appropriately. The standards of all programmes and modules I reviewed were appropriate to the level 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 curriculum aims and ILOs are in line with the national benchmarking guidelines. The range and content of programmes compares very favourably to similar institutions – in fact, the number of modules offered is impressive and very varied. I am particularly impressed with the MA programmes offering very good range of pathways. The diversity of subject matter on offer across all programmes/modules makes POLIS a very attractive institution for students.

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.*

I was impressed by the variety of assessment methods which were all appropriate to intended learning outcomes. The assessment methods are well justified and well explained to students. The arrangement for marking is very thorough and the arrangements for second marking are effective and very thorough. The comments of the two markers were clear and the feedback form is very helpful to both - students and external examiners.

I was impressed by the academic standards achieved by the majority of students, but particularly at the top end of the scale. The students' performance is a reflection of the quality of teaching, the appropriateness of assessment methods and a positive learning experience which inspires students to realise their potential.

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 standard of students, when compared to similar institutions and similar courses, is very good to high. The current cohort demonstrated particular strengths in the presentation of their work and in the ability to distinguish between various forms of assessment, i.e. essays, reports and case studies and deliver work according to whatever form of assessment was required. This is a reflection of well-conveyed aims and ILOs by lecturers on individual modules. The average marks in the department correspond well with similar institutions.

I felt that a number of students in the category 'First', when compared to other institutions is at least as high as elsewhere. It is worth noting that the School has extended the range of first class marks over 70% and that the average of a First class mark is higher than in previous years and a number of Firsts is greater too. This is an improvement on previous years.

I have not noticed any particular weaknesses of the current cohort of students as a whole. Obviously, there is a range and spread of marks throughout the student cohort, but the spread of marks indicates a cohort with no obvious weaknesses.

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 third year as an external examiner. I can not draw any specific conclusion about the effectiveness of enhancements to programmes and modules since the previous year because there were a number of changes. I can however conclude that the range of modules on offer is impressive and that the current curriculum is interesting and very contemporary. It is also worth mentioning that a) there is a right balance between theory and practice in all modules I have reviewed and b) that students appear to be well coached in independent research. The majority of reading lists are up-to-date. The department is pioneering audio feedback through VLE which is being piloted as a way of improving student learning experience. It is much appreciated by students, even if I remain unconvinced by its learning-enhancement benefits.

The documentation guiding students is excellent. The 'Study Skills Handbook' is worthy of a special mention and so are feedback sheets and instructions on different forms of assessment. Overall, the balance between expectations of students and obligations of staff is very well communicated to students. I find that the School is ahead of other comparable institutions in advancing the transparency of assessment procedures.

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.

The quality of teaching is reflected in a number of high 2:1. It is apparent that much thought has gone into crafting modules and that these have been designed by staff committed to their own research specialisms and able to convey the enthusiasm for their own research to students.

This is particularly obvious in the variety and originality of dissertation topics and case studies which demonstrates that there is a research- teaching synergy at POLIS.

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.*

The documents explaining the University policies and procedures, and the role of external examiner, are very clear and helped me to act effectively as an external examiner. I have received all necessary material needed to make the required judgments. At all times I was reminded that additional information is readily available should I require it. The administration of exams in POLIS is excellent.

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 have received appropriate documentation relating to programmes and modules for which I am responsible, i.e. module handbooks, and any additional instructions and information given to students. I have also received emails/ accompanying letters from the relevant lecturers qualifying issues which they felt needed more explanation.

I was provided with sufficient documentary material to perform my tasks. I was sent sufficient number and range of scripts to read, so that I was able to form an informed judgment about the appropriateness of marks and assessment and marking procedures.

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?

YES.

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

YES – *very much so.*

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 wish to stress that the external examining process was this year very smooth and that I received materials in good time. Also, I wish to commend the support staff for their efficiency.

10 November 2011

Dear

BA External Examiner's Report 2010 – 2011

On behalf of the School, may I thank you for your Examiner's Report which was discussed by colleagues at the School Education Committee on the 19 October 2011

Thank you for the many positive comments that you make about learning and teaching in POLIS and about our programmes. I am glad to see that you think there have been improvements over your three years as an external examiner in teaching provision, the material provided to students, modes of assessment and feedback. You also praise the transparency of our assessment procedures, the quality of teaching and the range and content of our programmes. We will be working hard to maintain these high standards in the years ahead in the demanding post 2012 context.

I note that you commend the greater number of firsts and the extension of the range of first class marks over 70%. Like you, I think it important that excellent student work is recognised and properly rewarded.

You praise the administration of exams in POLIS as "excellent" and commend the efficiency of the support staff. It is good to have their hard work and professionalism recognised in this manner. I am glad also that you consider that appropriate procedures are in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence.

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.

Yours sincerely

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010– 2011

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

School of: POLIS Programme(s) / Module(s):	Subject(s): Politics/International Studies awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) BA
Programmes: BA Political Studies BA European Studies BA International Relations BA International Development	
Modules: PIED 2463 United States Politics PIED 3750 Dissertations PIED2520 Foreign Policy Analysis PIED3405 Israel: Politics and Society PIED3535 Terrorism (Semester Two) PIED1511/12 International Politics PIED1541/2 Globalisation	

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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.

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?

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 aims and ILOs are appropriate for the level of study: the curriculum is well designed, intellectually robust and covers all the main pillars of the discipline; there is an excellent choice of modules, including both compulsory and optional units, and the content is invariably stimulating and interesting; module outlines contain all relevant information for students relating to programme aims, ILOs, modes of assessment and so on.

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 curriculum is consistent with national benchmarking guidelines and comparable with other leading institutions in the UK. The breadth and depth of module choice is outstanding. The quality of the teaching and student performance also seems to be first class.

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.*

Although there is some variation in modes of assessment between different modules and programmes (in terms of the balance of assessment, weighting of essays, role of seminar presentations and so on), overall the structure and design of assessment methods are excellent. The range of essay and exam questions is in line with programme aims and ILOs as set out in module outlines. Assessment sheets accompanying essays provide for extensive feedback, inviting tutors to comment on both the 'formative' and 'summative' aspects of the essay. There is also plenty of evidence that the system of double marking and internal moderation is both robust and effective.

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.*

Yes. POLIS is clearly producing some outstanding students. Some of the work I came across was almost of a publishable standard. The breadth and depth of the work in the dissertations was particularly impressive – and certainly comparable with students at my own and, I suspect, other leading universities in the UK.

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.

n/a

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.

Yes. There is clear evidence that modules linked to the expertise of individual tutors are informed by cutting-edge research. This was especially evident in the best dissertations – presumably the product of close and conscientious supervision of leading experts in the field.

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.

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. All programme specifications, a copy of the External Examiner's Handbook, module outlines and exam papers were received. I have received regular updates from the HoD and Exams Officer informing me of changes to regulations/guidelines alongside general responses to my comments. Overall I have found the responsiveness of the School to be exemplary.

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

Yes. I was given a sample of scripts for each module sufficient to judge the overall stand of work, consistency of marking, quality of feedback and so on. This year, I was sent a random 20 per cent of scripts for each module rather than all firsts and fails; there has also been a shift away from sending complete samples of individual students' work in favour of a cross section of the cohort. I have welcomed both of these changes, which in my view offer the external a more representative, not to mention a more manageable, sample of work. The distribution of this sample work was efficient and received in good time to read and comment on the scripts. Advance warning of the examination period was also received in good time. I would like to make particular note of the responsiveness and efficiency of the Exams Secretary, <<>>, who invariably responded to my numerous queries in good time. I would especially like to thank <<>> for showing a great deal of flexibility in respect of turnaround deadlines - which cannot have made <<>> job any easier - allowing me to manage my other responsibilities and commitments.

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

Yes.

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

Yes. A pre-exam board was held, at which external examiners were present, where all cases involving mitigating circumstance/medical evidence were discussed at length. The process was thorough and transparent. All cases were subsequently reported by the Exams Officer to the full board. The confidentiality of the mitigating circumstance/medical evidence of individual students was maintained throughout the process. There was one case in particular - whose complications necessitated over 30 minutes of heated deliberation - that showed the robustness of the pre-board. I would like to single out the Exams Officer, <<>>, for the way in which he handled both the pre- and main examine board, taking great care to ensure that due process was followed at all times while allowing ample time and space for deliberation. <<>> did a first rate job of maintaining the autonomy of the pre-board throughout.

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.

This is now my second year as an external examiner for POLIS. POLIS has an excellent set of programmes, with an impressive range of modules for students to choose from. The quality of the student work is, in many cases, outstanding and comparable with the best teaching outlets for Politics and International Studies in the UK. Last year I commented on the comparatively low amount of firsts for graduating students and, on occasion, the reluctance of markers to use the full range of marks. This year, however, changes to School policy (including more reward for exit velocity and the encouragement of staff to use the full range of marks and promotion of greater awareness among students of the changes - all of which was brought to my attention in a letter from the HoD) seem to be paying off with a noticeable uptake in the amount of firsts being awarded. It will be interesting to note the performance of next year's cohort after these changes have had further time to bed in. But at this stage I would like to register how impressed I have been with the responsiveness of the School to this issue since it was raised in my last report.

10 November 2011

Dear

BA External Examiner's Report 2010 – 2011

On behalf of the School, may I thank you for your Examiner's Report which was discussed by colleagues at the School Education Committee on the 19 October 2011

Thank you for your many positive comments about our programmes, the quality of teaching and student performance in POLIS. I note your praise for the "extensive feedback" provided to students and the way in which staff expertise and research feeds into dissertations. You note the greater number of firsts being awarded and pick this out as an example of the responsiveness of the School to externals; I think that we have taken on board externals' advice to use the full range of marks.

Your praise for the efficiency of the exams administration and for _____ has been echoed by the other externals and is much appreciated. I am glad also that you considered the pre-exam board to be thorough and transparent in its operation and that mitigating circumstances and medical evidence were properly and correctly considered. The externals played an important role in that process.

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.

Yours sincerely