

**The University of Leeds****EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

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

Faculty / School of:	Politics and International Studies
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	PIED2463 US Politics 110 students  PIED2810 Career planning for POLIS Students 15  PIED3405 Israel Politics and Society 96  PIED3402 American Foreign Policy 60  PIED3750 UG dissertation 5 students
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 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?*

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

**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. One of the real strengths of POLIS is the very extensive feedback that is provided to students. The shift from double marking to moderation appears to be working well, *although there is some variation in the amount of comment that moderators are providing on the marking sheet.* Assessment sheets accompanying essays provide for extensive feedback, inviting tutors to comment on both the 'formative' and 'summative' aspects of the essay.

*As discussed in the Exam Board, moderators might be encouraged to play a more 'activist' role when reading scripts - especially in terms of policing the system to ensure the full range of marks is used (particularly at the top end of the first class scale). There does still seem to be reluctance on the part of some markers to use the full range of marks, although the number of first class degrees being awarded has increased markedly since I took up this role two years ago.* Overall the evidence is that the system of check 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.*

The shift to sending out a random sample of work rather than all firsts and fails has meant that I have seen less of the very best (and worst) work than in previous years. Nonetheless it is still evident that POLIS is producing outstanding students. The breadth and depth of the work in the dissertations was, again, impressive.

**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.*

n/a

**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.*

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.

**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.

**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. 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.

**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 was given the opportunity to comment on draft exam/essay questions. My comments on these were then feed into final versions. I invariable found POLIS to be very responsive in this regard, keeping me informed and up to date with how my comments have been addressed or incorporated into final versions of exam papers.

*One area of concern in relation to exam/essay questions that I have raised in the past is that of duplicating exam and essay questions. I understand that this is a standard practice within POLIS and safeguards are in place to prevent/detect self-plagiarism. However, just for the record, my preference would be for exams and essays, wherever possible, to be based on different questions, although obviously this is not always practical.*

**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. 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 again sent a random 20 per cent of scripts for each module rather than all firsts and fails. This probably offers the external a more representative, and certainly a more manageable, sample of work.

As ever, 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 again like to highlight the responsiveness and efficiency of the Exams Secretary, <<>>, who always responds to queries in good time. <<>> does a really great job and always shows flexibility in respect of turnaround deadlines allowing me to manage my other responsibilities and commitments.

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

Yes, as far as I can tell. Obviously I have only seen a sample of the dissertations so are not able to comment on whether this is true for the entire cohort. But, as far as the dissertations I read are concerned, I found the subjects covered both varied and interesting. This reflects well on the breadth of teaching and project supervision that POLIS is lucky enough to be able to offer.

**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.

**15. 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. I would again like to single out the Exams Officer, <<>> for the way in which <> 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. *The integrity of the pre-exam board is one of the real strengths of the POLIS system, and is a testament to the robustness of the procedures that are in place.*

#### Other comments

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

This is my penultimate 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. In my first 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. But since then 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) are paying off with a noticeable uptake in the amount of firsts being awarded. I still think there is a tendency in some cases not to award the very best work what it perhaps deserves (or, more accurately, what it might have achieved at competitor institutions). *But I would again commend the responsiveness of the School in relation to this issue since it was first raised in my last report (and by other externals as well).*

22 November 2012

Dear

**BA External Examiner's Report 2011 – 2012**

On behalf of the School, may I thank you for your Examiner's Report which was discussed by colleagues at the School Education Committee meeting on the 7 November 2012.

You describe the quality of teaching and student performance on the modules you reviewed as "first class". This is reassuring but you can be sure that we realise there is no room for complacency and that the challenge is constantly to maintain these high standards. You describe the feedback provided to students as extensive but note some variation in the amount of comment that moderators provide on the marking sheets. As you recommend, we will encourage moderators to play a more active role in policing the system, in terms of providing comments and also in encouraging use of the full range of marks. You note that the number of firsts awarded has increased but encourage us to go still further in using the full range of marks. You note how we have always been responsive to our externals and you can be sure that we will continue to welcome and take on board such comments and advice. You raised an issue about exam and essay questions, and this is something we will want to keep under review to guard against the possible problems you noted.

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

**Head of School**