

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

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

School of: Politics and International Studies	Subject(s): Development Studies
Programme(s) / Module(s):	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) BA
Programme: BA Development Studies	
Modules:	
PIED 2205 Development Practice	
PIED 2211 Development and Social Change	
PIED 3200 Rural Development	
PIED 3226 Approaches to HIV/AIDS	
PIED 3260 Violence and Reconciliation in East Africa	
PIED 2220 North-South Linkages	
PIED 2455 State and Politics in Africa	
PIED 3220 Gender and Development	
PIED 3750 Dissertations (a number of)	

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.

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?

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.

The Development Studies programme continues to have exemplary marking quality and feedback procedures, with invariably helpful and constructive comments. The feedback is generally extensive and well structured. The new rules for exit velocity are working well and the use of moderators' reports enhances the marking system. The students continue to perform at an achievement level comparable to

any Russell League University, while the best performing candidates match the performance of the very best students graduating in the UK in this subject. I continue to be impressed with the depth of analysis, the range of substantive content, and the writing proficiency of Leeds Development Studies graduates. The curriculum is well organised, and because of this a relatively small group of [very hard working] staff are covering material comparable to the depth and range of much larger Departments. School procedures continue to work at the highest level of administrative professionalism, such that students can be assured that equity and fairness is absolute.

The Leeds degree continues to rely heavily on the disciplines of political economy and politics, while making an excellent effort to cover, by necessity, because that is the nature of the development discipline, a multi-disciplinary curriculum. This is not a weakness of the programme – far from it – as these disciplines are the foundational core, arguably with pedagogic primacy in the discipline area over say close alternatives, such as anthropology, economics or sociology. The Leeds degree is also highly theoretical and employs an exemplary expectation of higher order cognitive skills, many of which will transfer well into a general Humanities job market. However, given the need to enhance employability of graduates, and in particular to give these graduates a better chance of employment directly in their discipline – international development - the core teaching team require investment, to buy in to the curriculum training and skills that would not financially warrant the establishment of a commensurate teaching post by themselves. These enhancements would be many, but relatively small in scope taken individually. Thus employability enhancements might include research in development mini-modules – to introduce students to a toolkit of research products used in the industry and field of employment. For example, skills in terms of how to design and implement poverty mapping exercises, participatory research and action, focus group protocols, household surveys and regression analysis, gender audits, electoral observation reports, water basin reports and so forth. These latter would increase employability, alongside the core staff whose work in teaching epistemology, area studies embedded course, and a wide range of substantive material must remain the unique selling point of the Leeds degree. There are a couple of courses at the moment which are partly performing a skills function, such as in project planning and gender, but adding flexibility to curriculum delivery can only help.

The standards at Leeds are exceptionally high and the teaching and learning is of an outstanding quality. Adding technical and professional skills must not be seen to dumb this down, which would be a severe marketing error, not least because other Universities already do this type of programme, but critically, largely without producing the ‘thinking brains’ and critical analytical skills of a Leeds graduate. However, the Leeds programme needs investment to maintain its position, and also to add resources that are not readily available in its home Department of POLIS: Development Studies has unique needs and a different pedagogic foundation to other POLIS programmes.

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 is well structured and organised and meets the learning outcomes at an expected level. This year, there were slightly more 'firsts' awarded, which is in line with advice given in previous years that the grades had been a touch parsimonious, given the high quality of student work. The teaching and learning team have rationalised some content in the foundational modules and the core modules, such that they now clearly show a progression between levels. The ILOs are appropriate, although with the 'environmental turn' in development studies more collaborative modules with the School of Geography would benefit students, especially if these could extend their technical and professional skill set - such as in GIS systems, remote sensing, environmental governance, and so forth.

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.*

In terms of ESRC and HEFCE benchmarking for Development Studies, the historical change aspect of the discipline is well covered (where the global South emerged from and in what ways); the professional aspect of the discipline is provided for in some modules covering project planning, gender, rural development and HIV/AIDS (but see above); and the theoretical core of the discipline is covered progressively at all levels. The multi- and inter-disciplinary aspect is covered well for an academic team of this size, although relationships outside POLIS with other social science departments and Geography should still be developed for possible team teaching opportunities. The fourth pillar of the ESRC benchmarks is that of the coverage of area studies, which is so important, that courses in say India or Africa should probably be maintained by bought-in temporary staff if the module leaders are on sabbatical. Again, an investment fund to develop the curriculum in range and stability is probably essential for a comparatively small teaching group with this level of curriculum responsibility. Over the last three years there has been an outstanding depth of analysis in papers on India and Africa. Nationally, HEFCE and ESRC also recommend that Development Studies students have the opportunity to study a language, arrangements for which I understand to be in place.

I understand a curriculum review exercise was begun this year and is continuing and the rewards from this process are already in evidence.

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.*

A high quality of statistical information was provided to myself as an External and to the Exam Board on the marks distributions, standard deviations and ranges to allow an evaluation of the equity across programmes in POLIS. Overall fairness was secured. The outstanding students are increasingly being rewarded with distinction grades. My only concern this year is with very weak performers in terms of two considerations: 1) that they should be in evidence in the second and third years at all. This suggests that more support is required, particularly since such students require a lot of support from personal tutors which cuts in adversely to academic research time. One possible answer might be a graduate peer mentoring scheme, introduced once the weakest candidates are identified in the first year, which gives one-to-one tuition to the most vulnerable at low relative cost from PGR students. Related to this point, is that at the lowest end of the marking scale the weighting between different aspects – academic practise, ideas and originality, writing quality – is not always clear and differs marginally between

markers. For example, it seems that essays with exceptionally sparse or poor citation may be marked between 30 to 45, but some higher if the ideas are good.

The assessment methods were excellent overall, with some innovative forms of assessment being included.

Of particular note is the continued exceptional quality of directional feedback given to candidates, both formative and summative. The examiners spent considerable time and effort providing in depth and bespoke comments for each candidate, marking up papers, second marking papers and examinations, and providing detailed guidance for candidates on how they could improve their performance.

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 firsts awarded to Development Studies candidates have started to spread upwards from the 'just over 70' point, (see last years' concerns on this), and this should be consolidated, and the new rules on discretionary bands and exit velocity are helping. But the very best deserve upper 70s and lower 80s, and there were still only a few of these. The underselling of Leeds graduates in the national job market in comparison to their counterparts from other like Universities, caused by lower marking, is thus ameliorated somewhat, but the cultural habits of parsimony mustn't be allowed to creep back!

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.

There have been enhancements to the foundational modules.

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.

Research-led teaching is in evidence, but, as pointed out last year, this small group has a big curriculum to cover, and their own research interests can only ever be a small part of that wider whole. Given that the Leeds development studies programme is understaffed in comparison to other sites nationally, I would recommend that investment is made in contract staff or in new appointments, so that the current staff have time to design new teaching resources around their research, and to develop the curriculum to deliver cutting edge insights into the research work of the Department, while also delivering the core curriculum. Students undertaking primary research themselves is incredibly time and input intensive in terms of insurance, health and safety, ethics, logistics, resources, cost, such that a proxy problem based exercise in an enhanced e-learning platform is probably all that is realistic. That being said these students do mostly have the opportunity of field study abroad.

Staff would need investment to develop more active research opportunities for students, and/or showcases of their own research activities. Then such packages could usefully become part of a module, in which the core academic is the convenor, but is released from teaching the whole course and seminar teaching by teaching fellow support. In short, they would teach less, and more in the area of their core research, and this would lead to higher quality teaching and learning, and probably a higher volume of research publications too.

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 administration within POLIS is highly efficient and should be commended. I received all relevant paperwork including complete module outlines and handbooks in a timely fashion. All queries are answered on the same day.

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.

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. The Board of Examiners is run efficiently and effectively.

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

I was concerned about the treatment of one mitigating circumstances case, although this was not in my area of substantive jurisdiction, in that the process seemed to have a flaw, although I do not think that overall the candidate was biased by this or received adverse treatment overall. The issue concerns the status of advice on the extent to which an illness, disease or disability can be expected to affect a candidates performance. It seems the mitigating circumstances were discussed with only general evidence rather than a bespoke medical report, in the case of a complex disabling illness. In the main, I do not think that academics are suitably trained or qualified to judge by themselves how far particular mental and physical conditions affect intellectual work in the absence of advice from a medically knowledgeable person in the form of a bespoke report. A central administrative function in a University should be a Disability Support Unit which can provide timely advice penned by such qualified medical persons. I am not sure that this happened in the case discussed at the Exam Board.

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.

The teaching team for the BA *Development Studies* are doing a brilliant job and could do an even better one if the local management site for Development Studies were given more devolved decision-making powers, and an investment budget. There are still methods to be exploited for delivering the curriculum in more flexible ways, such as through an increased use of teaching fellows, e-learning and interactive exercises, differently structured contact hours and student mentoring. These can reduce teaching loads for research-active staff, while maintaining quality, as long as investments are made in teaching and learning support and staff so that student satisfaction is maintained.

Overall, this is an excellent degree of the highest quality nationally.

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 you make about the programme including "exemplary marking quality and feedback procedures", "well-organised" curriculum and "outstanding quality" teaching and learning. It is good that you, like our other externals, acknowledge what you describe as the "highly efficient" administration and exams staff in POLIS. I am glad also that you acknowledge that slightly more firsts were awarded, in line with externals' advice in previous years. We will aim to take on board your advice that the very best firsts deserve higher marks in that range (e.g. upper 70s etc.)

Your comments about student support are well-taken and we do put an emphasis on this through the personal tutor system and Leeds For Life. Peer-mentoring is provided in POLIS through the SLED programme on some first year modules and on the third year dissertation, and we will continue to review the effectiveness of our arrangements in this area. In relation to your point about marking at the lower end of the scale we will certainly look at our criteria and practices. I note your comments about the mitigating circumstances case, and of course these are always very difficult issues, but many of the other externals have actually commended the process here as fair and thorough.

Your comments about employability enhancements are very useful. POLIS already has a good track record in terms of graduate employability, ranking 4th nationally in the league tables on this measure. But I am sure – like you – that this is going to become even more important in the future and we will want to ensure that this is at the front of our minds as we plan revisions to our curriculum.

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