

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): Modules pertaining to British Politics.	Subject(s): Politics awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) BA
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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.

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'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 an appropriate combination of essays and examinations, which were then subject to detailed marking by two internal markers, who both provided clear written feedback and justifications for the mark or grade awarded. The grades/marks were appropriate to the ILOs and benchmarking criteria, and the feedback provided was extensive, and would enable the students to understand fully why they had been awarded a particular grade/mark. Some of the assessment exercises were particularly innovative, such as those on the 'Parliamentary Studies' Module, which entails students adopting the role of an MP, and then writing letters in response to issues or grievances from their constituents. This was particularly commendable and noteworthy.

The Department clearly has some very high calibre and academically strong students, who are benefitting from excellent and enthusiastic research-led teaching by conscientious and committed academic staff. I am extremely impressed by the quality of many of the students, and of the teaching delivered by staff in POLIS.

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, research dissertations, and role-play exercises which entailed students writing press releases on behalf of a pressure group or Government Department, and letters from an MP to their constituents.

These assessed assignments entailed students developing and displaying a range of cognitive, communication and research skills, and thereby illustrated the extent to which they are clearly benefitting from the imaginative and innovative teaching and assessment methods in POLIS.

POLIS students are evidently being provided with ample scope and opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of Module/programme aims and ILOs.

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.

I am pleased to note that a wider range of marks are now being awarded at the higher and lower ends of the scale; in the 70s and 40s. Last year, I saw some marks of 70 or 71 which could justifiably have been 74 or 75. This year, the very best students are being rewarded accordingly, as they should be.

I am also delighted with the new 'Improvement Principle', whereby if a borderline Final Year student attains a specified number of Credits in a higher degree category than their numerical average mark, they are eligible for a degree at the higher level (i.e., a 2.1 rather than a 2.2). This rightly rewards students who have excelled in their Final Year.

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.

Please see response to 3, above.

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. All relevant guidance was sent to me, along with contact details of appropriate members of staff in case I required further information or clarification.

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, I was sent all appropriate documentation, including marking criteria and Module Handbooks.

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

Yes. For each Module I was responsible for, I was sent a representative sample of assessments and Examination scripts, which included First, Fails, and several examples of 2.1s, 2.2s and 3rds.

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

Yes, I was extremely impressed with the administrative process throughout, which was conducted with faultless efficiency. In particular, <<<>>>, the POLIS Exam Secretary, is a credit to the University, such is <<>> professionalism and efficiency.

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

Yes. The Special Circumstances Board, which met on the evening preceding the Exam Board itself, was scrupulous and thorough in its deliberations over students with serious special circumstances. Each such student was considered with great care and equity.

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 am concerned at what I understand is a University policy regarding a 20-90 marking range, whereas a 0-100 is the norm elsewhere. I marked one exam script where the student had completely failed to answer the third question. yet was awarded a 'statutory' 20, the lowest mark that could be awarded. This 20 was sufficient, when added to their other two marks, to raise them to a bare Pass, whereas the award of a '0' would have meant that they failed.

To award someone a minimum mark of '20' for a completely failed or wrong answer has serious implications for quality assurance.

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 our modules and programmes, and about the high quality of the students and the teaching in POLIS. I note in particular your commendation of our "extensive" feedback to students and the "innovative" assessment exercises on modules like Parliamentary Studies.

I am glad that you acknowledge that a wider range of marks are now being awarded at the higher and lower ends of the scale; I agree that the very best students should be rewarded accordingly.

It is good to see the professionalism and efficiency of Sue Humphries, the POLIS Exams Secretary, and other admin staff recognised by externals such as yourself. Your comments about the Special Circumstances Board and its "scrupulous and thorough deliberations" are appreciated; it is very important that student cases are considered with care and equity and I am glad that you consider that we did so.

I understand what you are saying about the 20-90 marking range but this is a University policy and there will always be some odd cases of the sort you mention which I do not think fundamentally threaten quality standards in the University.

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