

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:	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.

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

None

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'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 a good blend of essays, project work, 'role-play' reports and examinations, which were then subject either double blind marking, or marking and moderation, by two internal markers. These 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, or making a parliamentary speech. This was particularly impressive and innovative form of assessment.

The Department clearly has some extremely good students who are benefitting from excellent and enthusiastic research-led teaching by conscientious and committed academic staff. The staff in POLIS clearly take their teaching responsibilities very seriously, and are fully committed to ensuring the highest quality of the student learning experience.

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 clearly 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. 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.

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

I am also extremely impressed with the effective operation of the Internal Moderator system now utilised in POLIS.

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.

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

The Examination/Assessment Process

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, certainly.

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, always.

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. The nature and level of the questions was certainly appropriate?

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 saw a wide variety of assessed and examined work. The scripts were extensively marked and annotated.

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

Yes, absolutely. The dissertations provide the students with excellent opportunities for developing research capabilities and other transferable skills.

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, 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 her professionalism and efficiency. Also, <<<>>> chaired both the Special Circumstances Board and then the full Exam Board with exemplary efficiency and professionalism.

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

Yes. A Special Circumstances Exam Board was held the evening before the main Exam Board, which carefully considered all relevant Extenuating Circumstances and student cases which might impact upon Module marks and/or Final Degree classifications.

Other comments

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

None.

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.

As in previous years, it is a very positive and encouraging report. Your comments about innovative assessment methods such as used on the Parliamentary Studies module are very welcome. You note also that a wider range of marks are being awarded in line with previous recommendations from our externals. Thank you for your praise for our Special Circumstances Board and for the hard work and professionalism of the Support Staff and the Exam Secretary in particular. The challenge to us is clearly to maintain our high standards in the future and we will be working hard to do so.

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 are pleased that you have agreed to continue working with us for a further two years and are in the process of completing the necessary paperwork.

Yours sincerely

Head of School