

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

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

<b>School of:</b>	Politics and International Studies	<b>Subject(s):</b>	Politics
<b>Programme(s) / Module(s):</b>	British Politics, Parliamentary Studies	<b>awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)</b>	MA

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](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

## 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.*

I am wholly satisfied that that the programme's aims and intended learning outcomes were commensurate with the level of the award, and that 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.

### 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.*

As this is a postgraduate programme, the key role of a research-based dissertation was wholly appropriate as a method of assessment for the award of a Masters. It also provided students with ample opportunity to utilise the methodological and research skills developed in the taught component of this programme.

Some other Externals wondered whether the Dissertation should be weighted more heavily (it currently constitutes 60 CR out of 180 CR on the Masters programmes overall), but I am not persuaded by this view. I believe that the Masters programmes currently offer the correct blend of taught Modules reflecting staff expertise and research interests, methodology and research skills Modules and the research Dissertation. Important though the Dissertation is, I do *not* believe that it should be weighted more heavily than other components of the Masters.

Moreover, the 60 Credit (out of 180) weighting currently ascribed to the Dissertation is, I believe, standard practice in other Russell Group universities.

The quality of many of the Dissertations I witnessed is testament to the high quality teaching and research supervision provided by academic 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.*

The dissertations I saw clearly illustrated the high standards being attained by the vast majority of the students on this programme, and their level of attainment was at least of the same level as that of students on similar programmes at other Russell Group universities.

### 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.*

As I made no suggestions last vis-à-vis enhancements, I do not feel able to comment.

In terms of good practice, I am extremely impressed by POLIS's system of double-marking, and the extensive Dissertation feedback which is provided both to the External Examiner and the student.

### 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.*

As these were dissertations on a Masters programme, it was evident that the students are being inculcated with excellent research skills, and that these are being further nurtured through the very high standard of dissertation supervision which POLIS staff are providing throughout the summer.

## **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, I was provided with very clear and comprehensive documentation, including the marking criteria used, which enabled me to feel confident in the performance of my role, and the advice I proffered when requested.

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 received a broad sample of dissertations, whose marks spanned 50-75%, and which was wholly sufficient to enable me to evaluate the standard of student work with full confidence.

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

Yes. The Exam Board was chaired with exemplary efficiency and professionalism.

The POLIS Examinations Secretary, <<<>>, was also superbly efficient, as always.

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

Yes, a pre-Exam Board was held to give careful consideration to students with mitigating circumstances, and the consequent action, if any, which ought to be recommended in plenary 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.*

We were informed towards the end of the Exam Board that a process of rationalisation is being conducted, which will entail the curtailment of some PGT programmes which are deemed non-viable or cost-effective due to low levels of recruitment. Part of the rationale is that it is not an effective utilisation of staff time to teach courses with only a very small number of students, this being rather labour intensive. While the logic is eminently reasonable, I do think that great care should be taken not to jeopardise the world-wide reputation which POLIS has deservedly acquired for the range of specialist Masters programmes it offers in Politics and International Relations.

I would hope that any rationalisation would focus on Modules which attract very few students, rather than actual Masters programmes. A Masters programme might only attract 2 or 3 students, but if these students then pursue Modules which are also taken by several other students enrolled on other programmes, I do not see a problem. I would be more concerned about the viability of a Module which regularly attracted only 2-3 students, rather than a degree programme attracting such a small number.

7 December 2011

Dear,

**MA 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 16 November 2011.

I note that you consider that standards in POLIS are appropriate for these awards, that our teaching is of high quality and that dissertation supervision is of a high standard. Thank you for your comments about what you describe as "extensive" feedback and our good practice in terms of double marking. Your praise for the chairing of the exam board and the efficiency of <<<>> is much appreciated.

You will be aware that some of our externals have wondered whether the dissertation should be weighted more heavily in the calculation of classifications. I note however that while you regard the dissertation as important you believe that its current weighting is correct. This is an important issue which we will keep under review.

Finally, you can be assured that in our process of programme and module rationalisation, we will want to preserve the many strengths of our provision that you have noted in your reports over the last two years.

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**