

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 and International Studies
Programme(s) / Module(s):	
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA

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

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 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 a consistently outstanding feature of the programme. The quality of the teaching and student performance was, again, impressive.

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.*

There is some variation in modes of assessment between different modules and programmes. Nevertheless, 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. The system of double marking accompanied by a joint assessment report for the dissertations is an excellent innovation. 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.*

Although the new system of distributing sample work to externals (which I support) meant I didn't get to see as much student work (in terms of quantity and spread) as in previous years, I am confident that POLIS is still producing outstanding students. The breadth and depth of the work in the dissertations continues to impress and is certainly comparable with students at 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. 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.

The introduction of oral feedback seems to have gone down very well with students. The joint report for dissertations has also been welcome, serving to improve the quality of feedback and the traceability and accountability of assessment. The introduction of prizes at MA level (which is something I recommended in earlier reports) has also been another welcome addition.

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.

There is evidence that modules linked to the expertise of individual tutors. This was evident in the best dissertations (which of course reflects close and conscientious supervision), but also in new or updated modules in line with tutors' research interests.

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.

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 assessment papers were received.

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

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 an appropriate and representative sample of scripts for each module. The distribution of this sample work was, as I've come to expect, efficient and received in sufficient time for me to read and comment on the scripts. Advance warning of the examination period was also received similarly in good time. My thanks once again go out to <> and the rest of the POLIS team for this.

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

Yes, for sure. I read some really good work again this year. As above, I liked the idea of the joint report, which has enhanced even more the quality of feedback and the traceability and accountability of assessment.

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.

Other comments

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

This is my third year as an examiner and each year I continue to be impressed with the time, effort and energy that goes into the MA programme. Perhaps the most pleasing aspect of serving as an examiner for POLIS is just how responsive the School has been to my comments and reports. By taking the trouble to write and explain how recommendations have been dealt with and (in almost all cases) acted on, POLIS really is showing that it values the work done by external examiners – and, more importantly, that it is very committed to ensuring that its programmes are continually updated and improved.

22 November 2012

Dear

MA 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.

Your report is a very positive and encouraging one, as in previous years. I am reassured that you find our standards and procedures to be robust and particularly pleased by your comments about the quality of feedback. You note that your recommendations in earlier reports have been taken on board by the School and that this shows how POLIS values the work and views of its externals and is committed to ensuring that our programmes are continually updated and improved. You note also that POLIS is still producing "outstanding students" and this is what it is all really about. We will be working as hard as ever in future years to maintain these high standards.

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