

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012– 2013

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:

School of Politics and International Studies

Subject(s):

POLIS

Programme(s) / Module(s):

PIED5235M Education in Development
PIED5255M Gender, Globalisation and Development
PIED5256M Global Inequalities and Development
PIED5275M Political Economy of Resources and Development
PIED5764M Development Management Techniques
PIED5210M Africa in the Contemporary World
PIED 5523M International Political Economy
PIED5766M Research Methodology for Development
PIED5777M MA Dissertation

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?

Yes

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 aims and ILOs all appear to be appropriate for the modules and programmes I assessed.

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. They compare well to Masters programmes in Development Studies I have taught, and for which I have been external examiner, in Durham, Birkbeck, Sheffield and Cambridge.

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 (which include shorter and longer essays, reports, analyses of techniques and methodologies and a dissertation) are both diverse and appropriate to these ILOs. They engage with both intellectual and professional/policy elements of international development, which is very desirable. They are double marked with a final mark agreed. All of this is good practice, and appropriate to the aims and ILOs.

I did have one question regarding multiple markers for not especially large papers (c. 40 students). The October essay for Global Inequalities and Development had five markers, and the January one had four markers (I did not see how many there were for the June essay). The few I looked at, while well marked and moderated, did hint at differences in marking levels. As there are only forty students, more than two markers seems excessive. Is there a rationale for this? Would it be possible to distribute marking loads differently, so even if they fall heavily on someone in one part of the year, they are light at other times? To examine this one would need to look at mean scores for each marker and their standard deviation calculations.

A second query concerns the marking indicators. The criteria for a higher level Distinction (80-90) seem the same as or even lower than the marking indicators for the lower level Distinction (70-80). Also, should the higher level be 80-100? Otherwise it suggests that one cannot mark to scale. Also, the marking indicators for the Pass and the two Fails (40-49 and 20-39: again, should this be 0-39?) are constructed positively. Would it help both markers and students to include more 'negative' explanations/ indicators?

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. They have undertaken a sufficient number and range of assessed elements in relation to individual courses and the programme overall.

From the sample I have seen (in my first year) the spectrum ranges from excellent at the top to some struggling at the bottom. This is entirely in line with expectations and with comparable programmes.

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.

N/a: first time external examiner

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.

As this is my first year I can only offer preliminary views, but from what I saw there is evidence of research active and thoroughly engaged and up to date teaching.

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

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. I would like to thank <> in particular for very efficiently ensuring I had access to all of the necessary guidelines and written material, as well as answering small queries very quickly. I felt that I had all of the information on University and School protocols, as well as specific course guidance.

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: the programme specifications, the MA handbook, and specific course handbooks and outlines.

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?

I received all of the draft assessments. In some cases I made suggestions as to how some elements/questions might be re-worded here and there. The level of questions was fine in all cases, and my only interventions were to seek to tighten up a few questions to avoid any ambiguity. These were sent in good time, and allowed me to make comments in time for consideration by the course convenors.

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. The number of assessed pieces of work and dissertations were appropriate to the numbers on the various courses and programmes, and were sufficient to give me a sense of the spectrum of the quality of student work. These were always accompanied by a clear letter/email explaining where they sat in the programme, and by first and second marker comments. These were invariably excellent - something has not always been my experience in other institutions, where it tends to vary somewhat by person. The markers on these modules showed exemplary standards in providing detailed and constructive feedback on individual pieces of assessment.

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

Yes. In subjects such as these there are inherent difficulties in managing secondary information, but the students I saw had done so well. Where there were shortcomings (I am only thinking of one dissertation here) it was not because of the choice of dissertation, but because of student approaches to the topic.

Yes, the standard of assessment was appropriate to those I saw. I had one query about grade criteria.

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?

The administrative arrangements were excellent. Dates were set well in advance, emails were sent to advise of the arrival of material to assess, and the logistics of the meeting were clear. The Board of Examiners itself was conducted robustly and to appropriate standards.

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

I am not involved directly for obvious reasons, but it was explained to the Externals that the mitigating circumstances meeting was held in the morning, prior to the Exam Board. As individual anonymised candidates were discussed, mitigating circumstances were raised (without identifying their nature). This looks like a robust and appropriate system from the Examining end of things.

Other comments

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

12 December 2013

Dear

External Examiner's Report 2012 – 2013

On behalf of the School, may I thank you for your Examiner's Report which was discussed by colleagues at the POLIS Taught Student Education Committee meeting on the 20 November 2013.

Your report is generally positive and encouraging. You raised a question about multiple markers on one particular module. We do have robust moderation procedures – and indeed you say the essays you looked at were well marked and moderated – and the Global Development staff do work as a close team. Your comment has been flagged up to the relevant staff and we will try to take it on board for the future and will look out for any possible impact on marking standards. You also raised a question about the wording of our marking indicators and we will be looking at these.

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