

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010– 2011

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

School of: Politics and International Studies Programme(s) / Module(s): MA in European Union and Development Studies	Subject(s): awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) <u>MA SEMESTER 1</u> PIED 5508 Environmental Politics <u>MA SEMESTER 2</u> PIED 5383 The EU and Developing World POLI 5225 Democracy and Development MA Dissertations
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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.

There are no areas that need urgent attention before the programme is offered again.

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?

I was the External Examiner last year.

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.

The internal procedures for marking and feedback have improved year by year. The procedures are now exemplary and very rigorous. The Department is trying to enhance teaching provision and assessment continuously and I have always been very impressed with their efforts and responsiveness to external comments.

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 curriculum covers the core areas of discipline as well as some very interesting modules (well beyond expectations) and innovative new methods and areas of teaching (i.e. intense use of VLE and varied forms of assessment). The documents sent to me demonstrated that the ILOs were appropriate and that the structure and content matched onto those ILOs appropriately. The standards of all programmes and modules I reviewed were appropriate to the level of MA award.

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.*

The curriculum aims and ILOs are in line with the national benchmarking guidelines.

The range and content of programmes compares very favourably to similar institutions. The diversity of subject matter on offer across all programmes/modules makes these MA programmes very attractive for students.

I understand that given the current economic climate and the insecurity of postgraduate enrolment, the department is seeking to streamline further and focus on delivering high quality programmes and modules which may be team taught. The discussion with externals confirmed that this is a trend in all institutions and that it will not harm the current provision, but may enhance it even more.

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 variety of assessment methods which were all appropriate to intended learning outcomes is impressive. The assessment methods are well justified and well explained to students. The arrangement for marking is very thorough and the arrangements for second marking are effective. The comments of the two markers were clear and the feedback form is very helpful to both - students and external examiners. It must be stressed that this department is exceptional in the fullness of second marker's comments and the seriousness of the process of agreeing marks between the first and second marker. The marking is overall consistent (some cases of arguable generosity were detected, but very few).

The academic standards achieved by the majority of students is good, and I believe that all students have realised their potential.

The noteworthy is also the rigorousness with which plagiarism cases are dealt with and penalties resulting from it.

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 academic standard of MA students, when compared to similar institutions and similar courses, is good. The current cohort demonstrated particular strengths in the presentation of their work and in the ability to produce well focused larger pieces of work. This is a reflection of well-conveyed aims and ILOs by lecturers on individual modules.

I have not noticed any particular weaknesses of the current cohort of students as a whole. Obviously, there is a range and spread of marks throughout the student cohort, but the spread of marks indicates a cohort with no obvious weaknesses. The weaknesses I have detected in the current cohort are similar to weaknesses of MA students everywhere: the formulation of hypotheses could be improved; more attention could be paid to

methodology and I would particularly like to see the literature reviews more embedded in theories particular to a discipline within which students are working.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

NA

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.

It seems to me that the effectiveness of teaching remains on the same high level as in the previous years. The majority of reading lists were up-to-date. The documentation guiding students is excellent and worth emphasizing. Equally, the assessment sheets are very well designed and the feedback commentary is excellent.

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.

The particular strength of POLIS is the range of modules on offer. This is clearly a result of much thought and staff committed to their own research specialisms and able to convey the enthusiasm for their own research to students. There is clearly a research- teaching synergy at POLIS.

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.*

The documents explaining the University policies and procedures, and the role of external examiner, are very clear and helped me to act effectively as an external examiner. I have received all necessary material needed to make the required judgments. At all times I was reminded that additional information is readily available should I require it.

It is important to stress the excellent management of exams and communication with external examiners.

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.*

I have received appropriate documentation relating to modules for which I am responsible, i.e handbooks, exam papers and any additional instructions and information given to students.

I was provided with sufficient documentary material to perform my tasks. I was sent sufficient number and range of scripts to read, so that I was able to form an informed judgment about the appropriateness of marks and assessment and marking procedures.

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

YES.

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

Yes, very much so.

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

YES.

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.

I was not required to provide any mentoring support to a new external examiner.

Other Comments

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

This was my last (third) year as an external examiner for POLIS. My other commitments do not allow me to continue to act as external examiner which I regret. It has been a very good experience and I would like to firstly commend the support staff for their efficiency and commitment to make the external examining process as smooth as possible. Secondly, I would like to praise the teaching staff for their responsiveness to externals examiners' comments and the seriousness with which they approach their work.

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.

We are grateful for your assessment of our marking and feedback procedures as "exemplary and very rigorous". Your description of standards on our programmes as appropriate and good for the level of award is reassuring. I am glad that you have found us responsive to externals' comments over the years. Your comments about the "excellent management of exams and communication with external examiners" reflects favourably, as you recognise, on the efficiency and commitment of the support staff. Your praise for the "research-teaching synergy" in POLIS is appreciated and this is something we will be working hard to maintain as we revise our programmes and modules.

I am glad that you found that our administrative processes worked well and that the procedures of the exam board were transparent and consistent; you particularly praised as robust and effective the way in which the institution deals with plagiarism cases.

As this is your final year, may I take this opportunity to thank you for the time and effort that you have invested over several years as our external examiner at both BA and MA level, ensuring that the programmes and modules offered by POLIS are commensurate with the standards offered in comparable institutions.

Yours sincerely

Head of School

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	Subject(s):
Programme(s) / Module(s): International Relations; Security, Terrorism and Insurgency; Strategic Studies; Terrorism and Security	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) MA

Name and home institution/affiliation of examiner:

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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.

There were not matters requiring urgent attention.

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.*

Aims and ILOs were wholly commensurate with MA-level standards, as were the structure and the content of the programmes themselves. The standards were likewise appropriate.

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.*

Aims and ILOs were comparable with similar programmes running at other institutions in the UK

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.*

Assessment methods were traditional and appropriate for measuring ILOs. Marking and classification arrangements were appropriate and effective. Student performance indicated that TLA methods were likewise appropriate 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.*

The academic standards demonstrated by the students were easily as good as those on comparable programmes elsewhere in the UK. The student cohort exhibited a range of capabilities that is entirely consistent with comparable MA 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. 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 modules continue to be their usual high standard.

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.

There is good evidence of recent research influencing curriculum design. This is clearly evident in reading lists and course materials, along with questions that students are expected to engage with.

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: I always have all the information I require.

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: this is always forthcoming and very helpful.

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

Yes: the sampling system works well.

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

Yes – administrative arrangements were fine.

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

Yes.

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.

N/A

20 March 2012

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 22 February 2012.

We note with satisfaction your positive comments about the structure, content and standards on these programmes. You were satisfied also with the level of student performance. And you praised also the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching. Thank you also for your praise for our administrative arrangements. It is good to have such a reassuring external examiner's report. You can be assured that we are working very hard 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