

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	POLIS
Subject(s):	<i>Politics and International Studies</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	PIED1601, PIED2601, PIED2602, PIED3601, PIED3610, PIED3750, PIED5225M, PIED5601M, PIED5626M, PIED5777M
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA and MA

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**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 Quality Assurance**
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

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 standards were appropriate for the awards and elements under consideration. I examined assessment in political theory modules. These modules are imaginative and engaging, and members of staff in this area deserve praise for the care with which they have developed the curriculum. Students taking the modules are to be congratulated for their achievements in producing high-quality work.

- 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 programme compares well with similar programmes at other institutions. It also meets the expectations of the national subject benchmark.

- 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 are especially praiseworthy. The School is unusual in the wide variety of assessment methods it uses. These appropriately test achievement of the ILOs and they are suited to a variety of learning styles. They seem to me to be an attractive and valuable feature of the programme.

- 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. I was impressed with the work produced by the students. They are clearly a strong cohort and have been well-taught. They produced work that was imaginative, scholarly, and showed high levels of engagement with the material. They have also been exposed to different approaches to political theory, and well-taught in these different approaches. The work at the very top end was outstanding, and a credit to the School and University.

- 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.

It seemed to me that there had been greater uniformity in following best practice in internal moderation procedures this year. I was supplied with very helpful information on the views of internal moderators and any action that had been taken. I commend the School on this and encourage it to continue with this very valuable work.

- 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.

Much of the teaching at higher levels is clearly research-led, and this contributes greatly to the value of the programme.

- 8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD**

n/a

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. 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

10. 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 was provided with extensive written material explaining the role of External Examiners at Leeds.

11. 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. These were provided efficiently and comprehensively.

12. 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. I examined the draft papers and in some cases suggested amendments. My comments were taken into consideration appropriately.

13. 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 provided with a suitable selection of the assessed work. The markers' comments were also provided, as were the moderators' comments.

I would encourage the School to provide, in addition, aggregate statistics for each module (at least: mean mark, proportion of marks in each class). Though such information does not speak for itself, it has a useful role to play in enabling sensible judgements about assessment across modules. Note that this does not need to be calculated manually for each module: all it requires is that someone set up the spreadsheets in the right way in the first place.

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

The dissertations were on appropriate subjects, and were appropriately assessed. Students on the module produced some very impressive work.

However, when I (manually) calculated the percentage of first class marks awarded in the dissertation module, and compared it with the data from other final year modules that I saw for the same cohort, there was a striking difference. In the dissertation, 33% of marks were first class; in the other modules, the figure was 6-9%. There could be many possible explanations of this, and I did not think that the dissertations that I read were awarded inappropriate marks. Nevertheless, the disparity is striking, and even if it reflects merely differential effort on the part of the students, it may be some cause for concern. I would encourage the School to (a) reflect on this general issue, and (b) consider whether it might be appropriate to adopt the rule that supervisors do not mark undergraduate dissertations.

Note: I wish to emphasise that I am not recommending that the School *adopt* the rule mentioned in (b) above, only that they *consider* it as part of the broader consideration mentioned in (a).

15. 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 very satisfactory. I attended the Board of Examiners meeting, which was conducted in an extremely efficient and rigorous way. The Exams team are to be congratulated on the care, thoroughness, and efficiency with which they undertook proceedings. I was satisfied with the Board's recommendations.

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

Yes. These were evidently being applied with great care and diligence.

Other comments

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

It was a pleasure to return to Leeds for a second year as External Examiner. I was very impressed with the work produced by the students, with the care and expertise of the members of academic staff, and with the efficiency of the administrative staff.

29 October 2014

Dear

External Examiner's Report 2013 – 2014

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 8 October 2014.

Your report overall is a positive one. We particularly appreciate your praise for the care and diligence shown when considering mitigating circumstances and your comments about the efficiency of the administrative staff. I note also your praise for our assessment methods where you say the School is unusual in the wide variety of assessment methods we use.

You did raise a number of points for us to consider. First of all, you asked for aggregate statistics for each module to help you as an external evaluate our marking. The University does provide us each year through the student information management system, module statistics showing the minimum, maximum and average marks for different modules and the standard deviation of marks. The issue for us is the timescale on which this information can be prepared: it may be that a report could be generated in time for the exam board each summer, but perhaps not before that. We are looking into this issue. The second issue you raised related to dissertation marking where we have seriously discussed your comments. We do not propose to adopt the rule that supervisors do not mark dissertations. Dissertation marks are agreed by two markers, one of whom is not the supervisor. You commented on the high marks awarded for dissertations but in fact, the average mark for the dissertation was 62.33%, which was slightly lower than the average mark on the majority of the level 3 modules this year. Where students do well on the dissertation, it could be related to the fact that they receive a lot of formative feedback and advice on how to develop and improve their work.

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