

The University of Leeds**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

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

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	School of Sociology and Social Policy
<i>Subject(s):</i>	Social Policy
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	BA Social Policy BA Social Policy and Sociology BA Social Policy and Crime
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	BA

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

There are no such matters.

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

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.*

ILOs, structure and content of programmes and modules are highly appropriate, as are standards.

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 fit with national subject benchmarks and with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. The programmes are comparable in aims and ILOs with similar programmes in institutions of a similar standing in the UK HE system, as well as exhibiting distinctive features which emerge from the particular themes of the social policy and sociology research conducted in the School.

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.*

Arrangements for the marking of modules and classification of awards are of a high standard: processes are sound and fair; marking is appropriate and consistent; and second marking and moderation are transparent. The design and structure of assessment methods are highly appropriate to the ILOs. There is increasing diversification year on year within the assessment mix. This includes longer pieces of assessment at Level 3, as well as independent research-led assessments; such opportunities for students to stretch themselves are to be welcomed. Student performance is very high, with a good proportion of first class and 2:1 work, and few thirds and fails. I have a strong level of confidence that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods is high.

Recommendation: allocation of marking on the dissertations is changed so that the dissertation supervisor is the second marker and not the first marker.

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 of the majority of students and in the majority of modules are very high with a high proportion of first class and 2:1 work, and few thirds and fails. There were a couple of modules this year though in which performance appeared to be below par – few firsts and/or a preponderance of 2.2s over 2.1s. One of those was the Social Policy dissertation – 1 first, 8 2.1s, 7 2.2s, 1 3rd and 2 fails. This is a considerably lower performance than last year, and considerably lower than for the Sociology dissertation this year. There are no obvious structural reasons, however, for this apparent under-performance. Thus, the centrally organised support provided by the Dissertation Co-ordinator is excellent, and arrangements for dissertation supervision seem appropriate. The pattern of performance may, therefore, be a cohort effect.

I was impressed that students frequently worked within an interdisciplinary framework, undertook policy analysis in a conceptually informed way, and demonstrated an awareness of current policy issues, as well as leading research in the field. There is also a strengthening international dimension to students' work. 'Weak students' were not reading sufficiently. Exam techniques, in terms of timing and legibility of writing, were also quite poor among 'weak students'.

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.

Overall, the programme curriculum is becoming more international year on year. This is the result of new modules with a distinctly international / global focus, as well as the inclusion of such perspectives within existing modules.

One of the challenges for social policy teaching relates to the shifting political and policy context. After so many years of a New Labour government, we now have the Conservative / Liberal coalition and 'new' policy debates and agendas... - and new material to teach to our students. In the main, I felt that module content had responded to this political/policy shift, but

there were one or two exceptions where I felt that content and reading could be a little more 'current'.

I saw the dissertation module booklet for the first time this year, and found it excellent. I note the lecture series that runs as part of the module too; this looks very useful indeed, and is an example of good practice.

Feedback was, as throughout my time as external, impressive for both essays and exams. I think that the School has feedback spot on in terms of the level of detail, its relevance and constructiveness. I think that the policy of giving individual feedback on exam papers is an excellent one. In times of increasing student expectations for quick turn-around of work, the School is doing an excellent job in aspiring to and achieving such high standards in student feedback.

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 was strong evidence in every module I looked at of lecturers' own research in the field of social policy informing curriculum design and learning and teaching, and this is an excellent feature of the programmes / modules I examined at Leeds. It is also apparent in the module content that staff is informed of relevant current research being undertaken elsewhere in the UK and internationally. I also saw some excellent final year dissertations, containing original research and collectively drawing on a range of research methods, as well as other modules in which students undertook independent research as part of an assessment. Module co-ordinators and programme leaders are clearly informed about relevant pedagogical research, and take account of this in their practices: assessment methods and feedback are some examples of this.

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.*

Access to relevant materials was sufficient.

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.*

I received all necessary documentation.

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 was provided with all draft examination papers and assessments. The nature and level of questions was appropriate, and in the few cases where I had minor comments and/or requests for clarification, the module convenor responded promptly and appropriately.

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?

I received a sufficient quantity and range of student work.

As noted above, the quality of written feedback to students on both assessed and examined work was excellent.

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

There was a wide range of topics undertaken for the dissertations. Subjects chosen were highly appropriate to the degree programmes. In particular, many of them were very topical and relevant to contemporary debates in social theory and policy.

The method and standard of assessment in dissertations were appropriate, although I would make the following specific recommendation: allocation of marking on the dissertations is changed so that the dissertation supervisor is the second marker and not the first marker.

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 high efficient for the whole process. I attended the Board of Examiners meeting, which was run in a satisfactory manner, and I was satisfied with the recommendations of the Board.

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

No further comments.

School of Sociology and Social Policy

The University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

11th September 2012

Dear

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your External Examiner's report for the 2011/12 academic year and to thank you for your valuable contribution to the work of the School. Your enthusiasm and commitment to the School and our students has been greatly appreciated.

The School is encouraged by your positive comments, particularly in relation to the high standard of the student's work and the quality of our feedback to students. We are also very pleased that you have noted the integration of research into our modules and that students' frequently worked within an interdisciplinary framework. The School will take forward your suggestion that dissertations are not first marked by the dissertation supervisor. We will also monitor the quality of the social policy dissertations.

Once again may I thank you for your work on behalf of the School. We look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Yours sincerely,

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