

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

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

School of: Sociology and Social Policy Programme(s) / Module(s): Race and Hollywood Gender Race and Culture Ethnicity and Popular Culture Racism and Ethnicity Studies Sexuality and Society Protest and Social Movements Dissertation Research Methods	Subject(s): BA awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)
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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.

No

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 I was provided with copies of the external examiners' report but not the response of the school, these were not included

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 learning outcomes for the modules are clearly specified and highly appropriate as well as the standards. ILOs, structure and content of the modules are carefully designed and thought through to enhance the student's learning experience and provide employability skills.

The modules that I examined are a lively range of contemporary topics at the intersection of Sociology and Social Policy designed to engage the student with cutting edge issues. Students are required to grapple with socio-political issues around race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender, social movements and research methods. The teaching is driven by the research interests of staff, which stretch student by engaging with theory combined with a practical approach to research methods.

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 aims, ILOs, curriculum design and instruction adhere to the QAA benchmarks set for Sociology and Social Policy. The programmes compare favourably with similar programmes in the Russell Group Universities.

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 range of assessment between modules and within modules is rigorous and a credit to the university. Students are given clear guidelines on how to complete an assessment and the marking arrangement is detailed highly appropriate to the ILOs. The quality of the feedback provided to students by staff is exemplary. The feedback process is an area of good practise, full comments of the second markers, dialogue between first and second marker and a system of direction to study support aids provide a detailed and robust framework of guidance and support.

Student performance was impressive with some excellent results a good proportion of firsts most getting 2.1 and a few 2.2 and thirds which is a testament to the quality of teaching and learning and commitment of academic staff. The best students produced analytically sophisticated, some even theoretically innovative, and for the dissertation it was pleasing to see students using primary data gathering techniques.

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 modules I saw produced excellent results of very high quality work comparable with students in other leading UK universities. Outstanding students are thriving in a positive learning environment and are encouraged by motivated and dedicated staff. Able students are engaging with cutting edge issues and debates in a theoretically informed manner. I was pleased to see that some students adopting primary data collection techniques for their dissertation demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the discipline.

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.

N/A

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.

Teaching at Leeds is research driven and this is visible from the module content. Contemporary topics are conceptually engaged with such as race and ethnicity, gender studies, and social movements and students are given hands on approach to research methods, which is linked to the dissertation.

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 this is fine.

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. I have asked that in future documentation illustrating the structure of the degree pathways should also be provided.

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?**

The process was fair, robust and the board of examination was transparent and impartial.

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

Regulations on degree classification may perhaps need to be revisited, As the board of examiners meeting produced anomalies where deserving candidates with exit velocity were denied higher classification while another student with less deserving trajectory was granted discretion.

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.

Discretion of the board to change classification produced anomalies. Would request that the school revisit the rules and consider if changes are required.

Some minor comments:

Documentation showing structure of the degree pathways would assist in evaluation of the program.

Some modules have more than one assessment but the mark sheet usually referred to only one of the assessment. Would be useful to see mark sheets include all the marks for an assessment.

While not insisting that all feedback should be typed some handwritten comments were difficult to read. Also some of the dialogue boxes were not ticked, which is not relevant for strong students but is much more important for weaker students.

22 July 2011

Dear

External Examiners Report 2010/11

I would like to acknowledge receipt of your External Examiners report for 2010/11 and also to thank you for your, much appreciated, contribution to our assessment process.

Your report is very thorough and I will make sure your commendations are passed to all staff in the School. I will also try to make sure that the School takes note of your suggestions for improvements, particularly in relation to the completion of feedback forms. I will also make sure that in future we provide an outline of the structure of our degree programmes. While I understand your concerns on the rules for discretion I would like to reassure you that our application of the rules was correct and that I have raised the issues with the Faculty and we will be looking at changes for the next session, hopefully to promote greater equity. It is really pleasing that you noted the quality of our research led teaching and I would like to assure you that we will continue to try to maintain our high standards.

May I once again thank you for all your hard work on our behalf. I hope that you have enjoyed your first year with us as an External Examiner and we all look forward to working with you in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School
School of Sociology & Social Policy
University of Leeds
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LS2 9JT

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

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

School of: Sociology and Social Policy	Subject(s): Social Policy
Programme(s) / Module(s): BA Social Policy BA Social Policy and Crime	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) BA

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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?

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.

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.*

ILOs, structure and content of programmes and modules are highly appropriate.
Standards are 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 fit absolutely with the 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 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. In the modules I saw, there seemed to be slightly more variation than 09/10 in the range of assessment methods used, and this is to be welcomed. There is, however, scope for further diversification within the assessment mix. Student performance is very high, with a high 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.

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 are very high with a high proportion of first class and 2:1 work, and few thirds and fails. 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. '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

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.

I saw a new module this year – Disability Rights and Policies in the International Policy Context – which had an innovative 6000-word student-led case-study which required students to undertake research on a country other than the UK. This is worthy of note in terms of contributing to the internationalisation of the curriculum, as well as in terms of the development of independent research skills.

The module Housing in Urban Society had a new module leader this year who introduced innovations in seminar delivery, using 'seminar teams' to prepare and lead discussions. This is an example of good practice in terms of encouraging greater preparation on the part of students for small group teaching sessions, and higher levels of student participation in such sessions. .

As with last year, the quality of written feedback given to students is of an extremely high standard: it is mainly very detailed and constructive, and is highly relevant to the question undertaken by the student, with little evidence of a tendency towards generic/'scripted' feedback. The module Drugs, Society, Politics and Policy used the device of 'Tip' to conclude the feedback, which I thought was an excellent tool and one worthy of wider dissemination.

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 was strong evidence in every module I looked at of staff's 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: feedback is just one example of this.

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.

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 received all the necessary documentation except documentation relating to the programmes themselves: e.g. programme specifications, programme structure and list of modules. It was suggested at the Exam Board that it would be helpful for external examiners to have access to modules' VLEs, since increasingly material and support are delivered to students through VLEs. I would endorse this suggestion.

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: everything was run in a very efficient and effective manner.

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.

Other Comments

While feedback given to students is of a very high standard, I was surprised to learn that it was not practice to return assessed work to students. Comments made on feedback sheets can usefully be developed through comments made within the essays.

Much of the feedback is typed but some is handwritten; I feel that there will be pressure from students for typed feedback to become the norm, so it might be useful to get ahead on this.

Classification of students was undertaken under a new set of Faculty regulations. I had some concerns during the exam board that the new regulations could be producing some instances of 'rough justice', and I would encourage the University / Faculty to undertake a general review of external examiners' feedback on the new regulations.

22nd July 2011

Dear

I am writing on behalf of the School formally to acknowledge your External Examiner Report for 2010/11. I would like to express the gratitude of the School for your comments on our examinations and examination procedures.

We note with pleasure your positive comments on the various aspects of the assessment and examining process. We take encouragement from your broad endorsement of the way this range of matters is handled by the School. We are particularly encouraged by your positive comments on the diversity of our modules, the standard of student's work and the quality of the feedback. Where you have commended aspects of modules I have passed your comments to module convenors and will ensure that the points you note are disseminated further.

We note your concerns and will try to address these. We shall look closely at the issue of returning hard copies of assessed work to students and consult with the university about the feasibility of doing this. We also note your concerns about the 'rough justice' of the classification process, but I would like to reassure you that the Board was conducted in full accordance with the University's Rules for Award. That said, we are in the process of reviewing our Code of Practice on Assessment.

We will strive throughout the present session to uphold the high standards for which you commend us and look forward to working with you in future years.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School
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