

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

**PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION***Subject area and awards being examined:***School of:****Programme(s) / Module(s):****BA Sociology****Sociology of Health and Illness****Dissertations****Sociology Classics****Citizenship, Identity and Social change****Central Problems****Sociology of the Environment****Education, Culture and society****Individual, Mind and society****Subject(s):****awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)**

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](mailto: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.*

***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.*

The degree programme is surely one of the best not only in the country but globally. It is very varied and intellectually rigorous. The current programme has maintained its excellent quality over the period and is a credit to the university.

## 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 and levels of marking are excellent.

**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.*

Comparable with similar institutions.

**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 standards of the degree are excellent and many of the students produce first rate work.

**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 student cohort are on the whole very strong with only a few weaker students. Quality has however been maintained during my period as external.

**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.*

The most challenging task undertaken this year was the remodelling of the second year core module Central Problems. I had pointed out in the past that this module seemed to be very hard and many of the students struggled to pass. These problems have been addressed without sacrificing the overall quality of the module.

**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 curriculum is very varied with appropriate kinds of assessment.

## **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 very good.

**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 and in good time.

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

Yes Leeds send a great deal of work.

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

An excellent and well run board. However an issue was raised during the board about the university regulations for determining degree classifications. This is going to be raised with the university by the exams officer and head of department,

**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.*

*In the past I have mentored a new examiner, and began the process of a new member this year. This is always done really well and appropriately.*

### ***Other Comments***

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

I am pleased to be able to report that the Sociology degree continues to be in excellent shape. It is very rigorous and intellectually coherent. In particular the strength of the theory teaching at Leeds is very impressive. This gives the degree as a whole a really strong intellectual grounding in classical and contemporary sociology. Also I remain impressed by the sheer range of the modules that are offered within substantive areas. There is a marked tendency for some Sociology programmes to become overly focused around niche interests of staff. This is certainly not the case at Leeds as courses are well structured and each cover an important area of sociology. This is very important for students whose interests and developing intellectual passions may not after all be the same as the staff who are doing the teaching.

The marking, general level of feedback, intellectual coherence of the programme, course handbooks and levels of marking are all excellent. I would like to congratulate staff for all their hard work this year. Many of the students are producing really high

quality work and they all deserve their hard won degree results.

I do however have a few critical comments. These are not to undermine my earlier comments, but simply to give the staff some issues to think about for next year.

1. The Central Problems course which has been problematic in the past has now been re-organised. This has mostly been done really well and I note that more of the students are now passing this course. This has all been done without sacrificing quality.
2. The comments still do not really mark the difference between a 70 and an 80. More work could be done here I feel.
3. The dissertation marking needs to do more to explicitly reward intellectual endeavour. Too many of the students are producing safe if not very exciting work. More need to be done to encourage students to take risks here. However this is difficult with many students understandably worried about getting bad grades.
4. The methods sections in the dissertations were not well done this year. This seemed to stand out from previous years. Further methods were often badly applied with many students running out of time to integrate interview material into their dissertations appropriately. This may indicate that students are doing interviews because they feel they have to rather than them being necessary for the coherence of their project. However the course team will be better placed than I to make judgements in this area.

These issues it should be said are mostly minor and should not be allowed to overshadow a superb degree it has been my pleasure to exam.

10<sup>th</sup> August 2011

Dear <<>>

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your External Examiner's report for the 2010/11 academic year and to thank you for your valuable contribution to the work of the School.

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 pleased that you noted the positive changes to the level 2 theory module. I will emphasise to all tutors the importance of differentiating between marks in the highest class and also take forward your suggestions relating to dissertations. The content of the research methods module at level 2 is being reviewed in order to better prepare students for their dissertations. While there were some issues raised at the Exam Board relating to the regulations I would like to reassure you that the Exam Board was conducted in accordance with both the School's Code of Practice and the University Rules for Award.

Once again may I thank you for your work on behalf of the School and for agreeing to act as our External Examiner for a further year. Your contribution is appreciated by the whole School and we look forward to working with you in the forthcoming year.

Yours sincerely,

School of Sociology and Social Policy  
University of Leeds  
Leeds  
LS2 9JT

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

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

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

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  
LEEDS  
LS2 9JT

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

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

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

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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.*

***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.

22<sup>nd</sup> 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  
School of Sociology & Social Policy  
University of Leeds  
LEEDS  
LS2 9JT



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

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

<b>School of:</b> <b>Sociology and Social Policy</b>  <b>Programme(s) / Module(s):</b> <i>Globalization of the Sex Trade</i> <i>Discipline and Punish</i> <i>Sociology of Gender</i> <i>Men and Masculinities</i> <i>Governing Cultures, Identities and Emotions</i> <i>Understanding Interpersonal Violence</i> <i>Crime, Law and Regulation</i> <i>Dissertations</i>	<b>Subject(s):</b> <b>BA Sociology, Social Policy, Combined Honours</b> <b>awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)</b>
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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.*

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?*

Not Applicable.

***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.*

My experience as an external examiner has been overwhelmingly positive. I would like to formally thank the Head of School, Examinations Officers, the Administrative support team and academic colleagues for making my period as external examiner both a valuable learning experience and a professional pleasure. I would also offer my congratulations to all in the School for the dedication, enthusiasm and rigor with which their duties are conducted and the first class quality of the student experience offered at Leeds.

The comments I have offered and the recommendations I have made have been treated seriously in all instances

and used to inform staff discussion around teaching and learning and, where possible, to enact positive changes.

In truth, I find the systems of assessment, moderation and feedback in place second to none in terms of the range of documentation, clarity of direction and the depth of feedback given to students on assessed work. I am thinking particularly here about the design of the first and second marking forms and the plagiarism declaration form. These provide the framework for the outstanding feedback given by academic tutors. The first marking is very detailed, the second marking the most thorough I have seen and clear evidence of dialogue is provided in cases of disagreement between markers.

The hospitality provided by the School to external examiners is also first class, both in terms of the comfort of venues chosen and the commitment of staff to attend the pre-exam meal. The exam boards themselves have been a model of efficiency and fairness and this is testament to the leadership in the School and the time and effort put in by staff to resolve borderline cases ahead of the board.

In terms of moving forward from here, it may be useful for the School to think about the role of technology in both teaching and learning and assessment. I am sure that staff are making use of VLE's and it would be good for externals to have access to the materials used to engage students. In broadening out the assessment mix and skill-set development therein, it may worth considering how forms of media making could compliment the assessments in modules on offer (e.g. video diaries, production of web materials).

Given that written examination work is becoming increasingly difficult to decipher (as students are rarely used to writing rapidly in freehand) now would seem to be the time to investigate the possibilities of sitting exams with computers.

Some staff are in the habit of providing the external with brief overviews of their modules (marks range, marking issues, student feedback). This is really helpful for the examiner and perhaps a space for comment on this could be added to the internal moderation form so consistency can emerge across the staff group.

## 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 were consistently pitched at the right level and appropriate to the content of specific modules.

The standards set and achieved are exceptionally high and, in my opinion, above the average for Universities in the Russell Group sector.

### 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.*

ILOs were consistent with guidance offered in national benchmarking. The diversity and range of the programme compares favourably with competitor institutions.

### 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.*

Although there was some reliance on traditional essay/exam assessments in the sample which I viewed I am aware that alternative methods of assessment are more prevalent in other areas of the programme and I would encourage giving students the broadest mix of assessments possible to enhance skills and employability.

I have to lodge my reservations about the new systems of degree classification put in place in the Faculty this year. In effect, these appear to penalize some students who appear in their final year to have first class profiles (exit velocity with 80 credits or more above 70), while promoting those that have high 2:1 profiles in the final year but fall into the automatic band of discretion. In my opinion, this resulted in the final board in at least two first class students being denied first awards and one exceptionally good but nonetheless 2:1 student (with just one mark above 70 in the final year) achieving a first. My reservations are shared by other examiners and the Head of School has resolved to follow up these particular cases of apparent unfairness.

### 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.*

In terms of student work in the sample, the first class work was structurally robust, conceptually sophisticated and firmly rooted in appropriate literature. Upper second essays were in the preponderance in all units and this work was generally studious, demonstrated engagement with key literature and was typically well presented. Further down the scale, the work of weaker students typically featured poor essay structure, a tendency toward description rather than analysis and a lack of detailed wider reading.

Three areas of improvement for students across the piece are essay planning, essay presentation and referencing. On essay planning, students should be encouraged to devote sufficient time to constructing essay outlines, particularly in examinations, during which most students are presently beginning to write without first detailing a plan to follow. On presentation, there were lots of styles of spacing, font, and justification in evidence. On referencing, there is a tendency to make a discrete argument and simply to reference book or article dates rather than alluding to page numbers. The need to reference fully in essays and to include specific page numbers where appropriate should be reinforced.

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

Not applicable.

### 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.*

See departing comments above.

## 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.*

Research led teaching is a visible strength, with lecturers exposing students to both their own leading edge research and other key landmarks in the field.

The dissertation remains a vital and valuable opportunity for students to conduct their own research and to be guided by experts. Work in the dissertation sample indicated that the dissertation component was providing students with the chance to specialize in a particular area of interest and to benefit from partnering with experienced researchers. A range of prescient contemporary problems and issues were tackled in dissertations, including child poverty, the role of PFIs in the NHS and the value of social housing schemes.

## 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 clear direction of the examinations officer <<<>> and the efficient administration of the process by <<<>> ensured that I received all the material required to assess student work in good time and with clear direction. I am pleased to report that the sample sizes have been consistently reduced across modules and this makes the task more manageable for the external examiner. The samples arrived in an organized and tidy fashion and lecturing staff had taken care to enclose all appropriate feedback and dialogue with second markers in cases of marking variations. The removal by the School of the rule that external examiner's must view all first class work is enabling far greater scrutiny of work in other grade bands and continuation of this policy is to be encouraged.

### 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.*

The module guides for all of the modules surveyed were exceptionally detailed and instructive, outlining specific learning outcomes, providing students with clear guidance on processes of assessment and including generous suggested reading for students to follow up. The essay questions and exam questions which I viewed were lucidly phrased, non-jargonistic and appropriate for the level of study. Lecturers are posing some very thoughtful and provocative essay and examination questions which invite students to get to grips with prescient social issues in a theoretically informed fashion.

### 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.

### 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 think that the mentoring system is a useful initiative. I acted as a mentor this year and was able to assist an incoming external with queries and questions about the process. As it turned out, contact was relatively limited as the incoming external was highly experienced. Nevertheless, this kind of support being offered is valuable I would say.

**Other Comments**

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

The feedback and moderation sheets used by staff are functioning effectively and enabling students to pinpoint particular areas of improvement for future submissions. The detailed nature of feedback offered by staff is evidently beneficial for students. I would also applaud the clear presentation of feedback with most first markers taking the time to type up student feedback. I would endorse the marks awarded by lecturers across the modules overseen and would note that staff are consistently justifying the grades awarded to students in feedback comments.

07<sup>th</sup> July 2011

Dear

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your External Examiner's report for the 2010/11 academic year and to thank you for your valuable contribution to the work of the School.

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. I have taken forward the issues you raised regarding the rule for discretion with the Faculty. I fully understand your concerns but the view is that in calculating the final classification, exit velocity is taken into account in the 2:1 ratio, where level 3 marks are doubly weighted and again where the Level 3 average is 0.25 above the classification threshold. The Faculty will be reviewing the Code of Practice for next session and I will pursue the issues raised further – particularly the issues of whether or not the University should take into account a 'preponderance' of modules at the higher level. The School will also continue to stress to all internal markers how important it is to use the full range of marks. I would also like to reassure you that the Exam Board was conducted in accordance with both the School's Code of Practice and the University Rules for Award.

It has been a real pleasure to work with you over the last four years. Your genuine concern to support the School in achieving a quality experience for our students has made you a much valued and respected colleague. Your contribution to our quality assurance process has been second to none. I hope that you have enjoyed your time with us at Leeds and I would like to extend to you the best wishes of the whole School for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School

School of Sociology & Social Policy