

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 & Social Policy	Subject(s): Social/public policy, sociology, social science
Programme(s) / Module(s): MA Social Research MA Social and Public Policy MA Racism and Ethnicity Studies MA Sociology	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) MA

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.

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 ^{SSP001}

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.*

As in previous years, the overall standards were consistent with the requirements of MA-level programmes and comparable to other MA programmes with which I have had experience. The aims, objectives and outcomes of the programmes were consistent with those articulated at the level of individual modules. These were further reflected in the academic content of modules and the structure of the teaching embodied the need to develop students' knowledge and ensure the delivery of the relevant learning outcomes. To this end, the quality of information provided for students in the form of programme and module handbooks was generally high and students were able to see how their learning was contextualised across the relevant programme and social sciences as a whole.

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.*

Confirmed. The aims, objectives and outcomes of the programmes were consistent with, appropriate to and reflective of national standards and requirements. The MA programmes I examined enabled students to achieve the requisite grounding in their respective disciplines.

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 were confined to coursework of various forms; this is consistent with practices at other institutions and reflects the need at this level to assess students' understanding of their disciplines in some depth. Assessments appeared to be consistent with the credit weighting of modules. Various types of coursework were set and I am confident that a reasonable balance of diversity and rigour was achieved. The assessment briefs were consistent with learning outcomes, etc. and transparent to the students themselves in this respect. Feedback, marks and the use of tick-boxes were generally consistent with one another.

Assignments are double marked, though the student only has access to the agreed mark and feedback. The level, quantity and quality of feedback was good and sometimes extremely good, taking the relevant aims/outcomes of the course into account. This fact is reflected in the improvements to the distribution of marks from semester 1 to semester 2 and from semester 2 to the dissertation module. Annotations on the coursework scripts themselves continue to be more variable.

Students are given guidance regarding the standards of work required to achieve a distinction, merit, etc. and I am confident that these standards are reflected in the degree classifications actually awarded.

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. The module content and assessments challenged students to improve their skills while providing ample opportunity to exploit their particular interests. Many students responded well to the challenges they were set with some work achieving an extremely high standard of professionalism, research and scholarship.

The degree classifications seemed appropriate to the quality of the student work that I saw with a distribution of pass, merit and distinction awards which is consistent with that of other institutions. Overall, the intake was good and, as the year progressed, there was demonstrable evidence of students improving their ability to analyse material and express complex ideas, especially in the quality of many of the dissertations. This was especially the case with the MA Social Research.

5. ^{SEP001} **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 course team continue to respond well to my recommendations. In particular, the use of new feedback forms was encouraging and there is now more evidence than before of useful communication between markers.

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 personnel teaching on the various programmes achieve high standards in their academic research, with many having international reputations. Their own contributions to the discipline were fed into module content, via reading lists, etc., and they were obviously also incorporating innovations in research and scholarship from others. Some of the student work was also excellent and demonstrative of considerable ability with some students surely capable of pursuing doctoral-level work.

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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 school continues to provide the required information and responds to my queries promptly.

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 seem to have received all relevant market sheets and handbooks, etc.

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, the meeting was conducted professionally and rigorously. Students' circumstances were considered fairly.

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

Yes. I am satisfied that appropriate procedures were followed and decisions taken.

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

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

Overall, the programmes continue to achieve high standards. Compared to two years ago, there is greater consistency in the content and presentation of handbooks and in the use of feedback forms. The new forms were being used in most cases, but not quite all.

The procedure for referral to a potential third marker may need clarifying. What generally would constitute the 'trigger' for this to occur? Second markers comments are sometimes quite perfunctory and I suggest the course team to circulate examples of good marking as a way of encouraging the best possible practice.

My main concern is that some dissertations are still being marked generously. Although social scientists are increasingly being encouraged to use the full range of marks it is necessary to ensure that we monitor the degree thresholds rigorously. One dissertation in particular was given an excessively high mark, though I did not request a change since it would not have made a difference to the degree class awarded and so I am happy that no injustice was done. However, to prevent the possibility of this happening the school is strongly encouraged to change its practice so that staff are, at best, second markers for the dissertations they have supervised. In my report last year I stated that I was not necessarily recommending that the existing practice be discontinued; however, I think I am

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beginning to swing against that view and so invite the school to give serious consideration to this point.

As stated above, feedback was generally good and sometimes excellent. However, as in previous years, at the upper end of the range it is important for written feedback to specify what the student needed might have done to reach an even higher mark.

The University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

08th November 2011

Dear

I am writing on behalf of the School to acknowledge receipt of your external examiners' report for 2010/11 and to thank you for your welcome contribution to the work of the School.

I would also like to thank you for your positive comments on our MA programmes and the quality of the work of our students. The programme teams are encouraged by your observations relating to the progress of students over the year. It is very reassuring that you have noted the improvements made in response to your suggestions in previous years. The content of your report will be shared with colleagues and we will be discussing your recommendation to change our allocation of first and second marking of dissertations.

As mentioned at the exam board we are hoping to hold a single board next year to cover all our taught postgraduate programmes and we hope this will improve our quality assurance process further.

May I once again thank you for your much valued contribution.

Yours sincerely