

**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> Continuing Education	<b>Subject(s):</b> Creative Writing
<b>Programme(s) / Module(s):</b> Creative Writing	<b>Awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)</b> BA (Hons)

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**

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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?*

N/A.

***For Examiners completing their term of appointment***

*Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School.*

N/A.

## Standards

### 1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme aims and intended learning outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award?

- *The appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

The programme aims and learning outcomes are entirely appropriate and seem to me to demand from students all an undergraduate Creative Writing programme should. The documentation is academically sound, detailed, clearly articulated and indicates a robust and effective programme.

The methods of assessment are well designed to ensure students achieve the stated learning outcomes, and to allow students to develop their writing, and their thinking about writing, during the course of the programme.

### 2. Did the aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

The programme at the Lifelong Learning Centre is compatible with Benchmarks statements for Creative Writing and with the other programmes I have either taught on – at universities – or externally examined – at universities – over the past 16 years.

### 3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs?

- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

The assessment methods are thorough and imaginatively designed. The balance between the assessment of creative work, critical reading of published work and reflection gives the programme a strong underpinning. I believe the methods of assessment are appropriate to the intended learning outcomes.

The existing assessment criteria are exemplary, as I have suggested in previous years. However, I would still recommend that specific assessment criteria for each of the forms taught (fiction, poetry, memoir) would be a positive development. I understand this is underway.

The sample indicates high levels of teaching and support, which have resulted in some exemplary work. I would say that the standard of tutor feedback at Leeds is impressively strong. Even the weakest work received positive feedback. The quality of the best work in every kind of assignment indicates how well students at the Lifelong Learning Centre are being taught.

In a sample of 60-odd assignments, I disagreed with 9 marks. In all cases, I thought the marks were a little too generous – although there was one assignment I thought more than a little over-marked. I have had a positive discussion about this with the Programme Leader. (In our discussion, incidentally, we agreed I think that student work ought to contain evidence of the craft they have been studying.)

I would like to raise the question of where and when students are penalised. This affects the whole area of spelling, grammar and punctuation; bibliographies, which some include and others do not; industry standard layout, which many students failed to comply with; and submitting single-spaced work. I wonder if it is possible to gain a first class mark for work that is improperly presented or poorly punctuated? I would suggest that penalties in these areas might well lead to improved standards.

### 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.*

Across the forms, the best students demonstrate how well they have acquired a range of skills and techniques. Reading the best pieces of coursework work was a joy. The best creative and critical work is as good as I have seen in other universities. Clearly, students are being well versed in the forms they are required to work in and have acquired sufficient skills and techniques to produce work that stands well beside the published work they have been studying. Their work shows a well-developed capacity for self evaluation and a mature ability to respond positively to feedback from staff and peers. In their reflective writing, students consider problems encountered in the production of the work and the strategies used to overcome them and express an evolving writer's aesthetic. All of this indicates how well students are being taught at Leeds.

I would echo last year's suggestion that more work could be presented according to industry conventions. Not nearly enough work is correctly laid out.

Last year, I suggested developing the commentaries by asking students to include an annotated bibliography of texts that have shaped and informed their writing. I am pleased that there are moves afoot to require this next year.

**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.*

Since last year, the programme has been enhanced by the addition of two new modules: LLLC 2239 Writing Sci-Fi, Fantasy and Horror and LLLC 1331 Stories That Form Us, Stories We Write. It is good to see genre fiction being taught alongside literary fiction. In LLLC 1331, I liked the structure of the assessed presentations. (I think the filmed record of the presentations would benefit from the use of a table microphone, though; it was sometimes difficult to hear what the students were saying.)

I understand that a scriptwriting unit will be introduced next year. This will be a very valuable addition to the provision.

As examples of good practice, I would again mention the Lifelong Learning Centre's programme design and in particular the balance between creative, reflective and critical writing. Coursework items seem to me to be very well designed. I would also like to highlight again the documentation, which is clear and informative, and the structure of the excellent coursework cover sheets. These may well facilitate the other area of good practice: the superb feedback from tutors. All tutors are constructive, diagnostic, detailed and very helpful. And speaking of feedback, I did think that given to prose work was especially strong. I also thought the accuracy of the assessment in poetry assignments was striking.

**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.*

I would just repeat what I said in this section last year: that it is clear throughout the curriculum design, the teaching and learning and the assessment that this programme is being delivered by tutors who are actively engaged with writing themselves.

## ***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.*

Communication with the Programme Leader and the Learning & Teaching Clerk at the Lifelong Learning Centre has again been exemplary and I have been provided with all the materials I needed to fulfil my role.

**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.

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

Yes. I received an appropriate sample in good time and from the sample I saw, I can be confident that I was able to make the necessary evaluation of student work and staff assessment procedures.

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

I was impressed by the operation of the assessment board and its academic rigour.

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

As in previous years, the attentiveness of the board to balancing academic rigour with the needs of individual students was impressive.

***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.*

Not applicable.

***Other Comments***

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

As in previous years, I received a thorough and representative sample of all modules taught - and I received the work in plenty of time to examine it before the board.

I would like to thank \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ for their warm welcome, and \_\_\_\_\_ for administrative support and her prompt communication on all matters related to external examining the programme.

Dear

### **External Examiner's Report for 2010-11**

Over the last few months we have been reviewing reports from our External Examiners along with feedback from students, including the results of the National Student Survey of finalists and the University's own Programme Survey which covers those in other years of study. I am now writing to each Examiner both to respond to reports individually and to give an overview of the outcomes of this annual review.

Before turning to this, I would like to thank you for another year in which you have served us so well as our External Examiner for Creative Writing. We appreciate the thoughtfulness and breadth of experience that you bring to this role and I know that <<>> has very much valued the conversations that <<>> has had with you over development of the programme.

We are pleased to find that the programme continues to be characterised by strengths which you observed in previous reports. You note that outcomes remain appropriate and compatible with benchmark statements and see evidence of "high levels of teaching and support" coupled with sound processes for assessment and the maintenance of standards. It is especially encouraging to see your commendation of "exemplary" assessment criteria and the "superb feedback from tutors" as well as your support for the "balance between creative, reflective and critical writing" in the curriculum design. You note, too, the welcome addition of two new modules to the creative writing portfolio.

We have sought to respond to the recommendations and questions raised in your report as follows:

#### **Assessment Criteria**

Your recommendation that specific assessment criteria be developed for each of the forms taught on the programme has been carefully considered by <<>> and <<>> tutor team. They have concluded that separate criteria for each form may not be the most appropriate step, especially given the range of writing in individual modules, and have sought to address your observations through revision of the existing criteria and addition of specific considerations for assessment of poetry. I understand that <<>> has discussed <<>> proposals with you and we shall be interested to see how these work out as they are used for the first time in 2011/12.

#### **Penalty Marks for Unsatisfactory Use of English**

It is not currently policy of the LLC to allocate specific marks for English usage from which penalties are deducted. Our view is that this can distort a student's engagement with the full range of qualities required in academic work by attaching penalties to just one aspect. We agree, however, that accurate use of English is a vital component of assessed work which must be considered by assessors in their grading judgements and the feedback that they give to students. In the assessment criteria for Creative Writing this element is expressed in terms of the professional standards for manuscript submission. Students are introduced to these standards during their module and reminded, where necessary, in formative feedback.

### **Marking Standards**

We note that, whilst you agree with the marks allocated to the great majority of assignments that you have reviewed, there are 9 instances where you judge the marking to be too generous. This is helpful feedback which assessors and moderators will take account of in the next round of marking.

### **Annotated Bibliographies**

<<>> and <<>> team welcome your suggestion that students be asked to provide an annotated bibliography of texts that have informed their work. This practice is being adopted for modules in 2011/12.

Moving beyond Creative Writing provision to the LLC as a whole, I enclose a copy of our action plan in response to feedback on 2010-11 which summarises the key points raised by students and External Examiners and sets out our main areas for further work in the current year. You will see that student feedback through the University's Programme Survey gives a positive picture that is consistent with all previous surveys. The low NSS scores for this year are a direct result of the way in which the national formulae for selecting students has skewed the sampling of part-time programmes. The result is that the data reflect the views of just twelve students, at least two of whom are misplaced with the LLC since their qualitative feedback raises issues linked with subjects that do not feature in any of our programmes.

I also enclose for your information a summary of feedback from our other External Examiners. As you will see, your positive evaluation of the quality of our learning and teaching, feedback and student support is shared across the range of Examiners. Where points have been raised for further development, these are not only being addressed within the relevant programme but will also be taken account of, wherever appropriate, across the Centre's provision as a whole.

I would like, once again, to thank you for your work on our behalf as External Examiner. It is invaluable to have such thorough and constructive feedback.

Yours