

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010– 2011

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

School of: Lifelong Learning Centre

Programme(s) :

LLLC1063 Arabic for Beginners
 LLLC1064 Arabic for Beginners 2
 LLLC1065 Essential Skills in Arabic
 LLLC1085 Introduction to Arabic Language
 LLLC1086 Intermediate Skills in Arabic
 LLLC1068 Women in Islam
 LLLC1066 Introducing and Interpreting the Qur'an
 and Hadith
 LLLC1067 Introduction to Islamic History and
 Civilisation
 LLLC1060 Introduction to Islamic Law
 LLLC1304 Islam in Western Societies
 LLLC1319 Islamic Legal theory and Interpretation
 LLLC1321 Women, Culture and Islam
 LLLC1324 Further Skills in Arabic
 LLLC1328 Introduction to Islamic Finance

Subject(s): Islamic studies and Arabic language
 awards: Certificate in
 Islamic studies and Arabic
 language.

*Name and home institution/affiliation of examiner:***PART B: COMMENTS FOR THE INSTITUTION ON THE EXAMINATION PROCESS AND STANDARDS*****Matters for Urgent Attention****Increase classification range for the certificates offered by the programme in line with the national trend.**Only applicable in first year of appointment*

N/A

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

My four year term as external examiner at the LLLC has been very positive on all levels. I can confidently say that I have seen unflinching efforts by all academic and administrative staff to raise the teaching and learning standards and deal with the varied challenges of adult education. The programme I examined, namely Islamic and Arabic studies, reflects the supportive and open culture of the LLLC in general. During the four years my role has been efficiently facilitated by the flow and transparency of all information and the constant cooperation on all arising matters. One of the key strengths is the genuine interest of LLLC and its Islamic and Arabic studies component in the external examining process. Comments, suggestions and criticisms - where applicable - have been consistently well-received and incorporated into the programme. Another key strength of the programme is the continuous and enthusiastic annual review of the programme in light of student needs and institutional changes. This has, undoubtedly, been a very fruitful external examining experience.

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 is robust and continues to grow. Its coverage, variety and structure are appropriate to the aims and learning outcomes which are highly commensurate with the level of the relevant award. The course work examined reflects successful fulfilment of these aims and the good standard of learning which facilitates the achievement of most of its intended outcomes. This is due to the evident commitment of staff and students.

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 has a rich range of language and Islamic studies courses, and offers an excellent choice of paths and modules that are often not available in other similar degree programmes. The range of Arabic Language courses reflects a well thought-out progression plan from beginners to proficiency levels, which builds upon the LLC's long and established experience in the provision of Arabic language courses. In this component, the programme successfully meets the expectations of the national subject benchmark. The design and implementation of Islam modules are of a good and appropriate standard. The tutors' efforts to help students acquire research and critical skills are successfully sustained. Some of the work produced by students reaches the highest standards as in the essay critically examining the concept of the Hereafter, as part assessment for LLC66 and the essay investigating women's rights in Islam as part assessment for LLC1321.

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.*

Modes of assessment continue to be appropriate to individual course aims and structure and, together with tutors' constructive feedback, are effective in enhancing learning and progress. The feedback on course work for LLC 1328 Introduction to Islamic Finance and LLC 1068 Women in Islam are examples of good practice.

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 all language and Islamic studies courses, students continue to achieve good subject specific knowledge as well as writing and research skills. In Islamic studies courses, in particular, there is evident improvement in the students' achievement of academic standards and in returning work that fulfils the aims and ILOs especially on LLC1328, LLC1068, and LLC1319.

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.*

Maintaining the quality of Arabic exam-writing and the development of marking schemes has become established practice due to internal formal and informal structures of coordination that sustain these practices despite staff turnover. This should be flagged up once again this year as an area of good practice. In addition, the application of the marking criteria across Islamic studies

courses shows improvement as no sharp discrepancies in the marking of different courses appear. This is, no doubt, due to the programme's concerted efforts to ensure understanding of these criteria by tutors.

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 programme continues to benefit from tutors drawn from a pool of postgraduate students working on specialised areas of Islamic studies, whose insights and in-depth knowledge enrich student learning.

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. The material was sufficient.

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 receive appropriate information on all modules and programmes examined. This includes exam papers, model answers, marking criteria, course outlines, student coursework, result sheets and any other relevant information as for example information on intended new schemes or courses. The communication and flow of information facilitated by the programme director <<<>> and the administrator <<<>> continue to be highly effective not only for the examination process but also for the programme's overall development. Their administration of the programme should be commended as good practice.

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 examining responsibilities are efficiently spread out during the year which enables the examiner to thoroughly scrutinise all the work sent.

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 have been involved in mentoring a new external examiner at LLLC and the arrangements were all appropriate.

Other Comments

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

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 not just for your final year with us as an External Examiner for our Arabic and Islamic Studies provision, but for the outstanding support that you have provided in this role throughout your period of appointment. We note your own, very positive, evaluation of your time as our External and the close collaboration that you have enjoyed with colleagues here. This is certainly something that we would warmly echo on our part and I know that <<>> has particularly valued your role as a critical friend of the programme. We have all seen the care and thoroughness with which you have approached the role and which have been the basis of your unfailingly helpful feedback, whether in affirming good practice or pointing to areas for development. We are confident that the programme has benefitted from changes that we have made in response to your observations.

We are pleased to find that the programme "is robust and continues to grow" and that strengths which you have observed in previous reports are sustained. These include the appropriateness of programme outcomes and assessment methods and the maintenance of standards commensurate with the level of the award. It is good to see your commendation of the "rich range of language and Islamic studies courses" and the way in which language provision provides "a well thought-out progression plan from beginners to proficiency levels". We also welcome your observation that students' work shows evidence that tutors are successfully encouraging development of "research and critical skills", especially since this is an area that we have sought to strengthen over the years in the light of your feedback. Your sense of the robustness of marking and moderation processes, tested out this year with changes in the programme team, is also good to see.

In your overview of the last four years you comment generously on the "open culture" of the LLC, our responsiveness to feedback and our practice of "continuous and enthusiastic annual review of the programme in the light of student needs and institutional changes." As you know, we shall be facing further changes in a year's time with re-configuration of provision in the light of the new funding environment for higher education. We shall certainly aim, in all of this, to sustain the trajectory of development and improvement that we have achieved, with your support, over the period of your appointment.

Moving on from our Arabic and Islamic Studies 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 outstanding work on our behalf as External Examiner. It has been invaluable to have such thorough and constructive feedback over the last four years and I hope that you feel your share of professional pride in the positive impact that this has had on our Arabic and Islamic Studies programme and its students.

Yours