

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):**

Foundation Degree in Professional Studies in Family Support, CEC Child Welfare, Certificate of Core Competencies in Children's Workforce

Subject(s):

awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)

Also BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies (Level 3)

Name and home institution/affiliation of examiner:

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.

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.

Throughout my work with the programmes, it is very apparent that students on these programmes are often mature students, returning to education, studying part-time, and holding down complex jobs; they are to be congratulated on their achievements. Also the teaching team are to be congratulated on the sterling support, tutoring and guidance that they provide; they manage a fine balance between being fair, sensitive and student-focussed whilst maintaining academic standards and integrity.

I have seen the programme develop in response not only to changes in academia, but more importantly in response to changes in the complex world of professional practice with children and families. I have seen how through all of these changes, and some changes in key staff, the programme and those who lead and manage it, have always kept the student experience and the standards of teaching and learning at the heart of how they have adapted and developed.

The teaching team have always been enthusiastic and very communicative, being proactive in dialogue with me, and being very willing to consider and discuss different approaches and options wherever that has been

appropriate; a very open, constructive, reflective approach to ensuring standards are met and practice is enhanced.

Processes for marking, moderation, feedback, clarification of standards through examination boards, have developed over the period, but have always been explicit, clear and appropriate in my view. Administrative processes have also always been well managed. I have above all appreciated the pleasant, efficient and helpful manner in which support staff have supported me in my role.

I wish the programme, the programme team, the new external examiner and importantly your students all the very best as you go forward.

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 intended learning outcomes are appropriate, commensurate with the level of the award and highly relevant to practice in this area. The programme design is shaped by national competencies in working with children and their families and as such, the programme offers learning that is directly related to professional requirements for supporting children, young people and their families.

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.*

As stated above, this programme is designed and delivered to meet national requirements; it achieves this well. The programme is comparable with similar programmes at other institutions and meets the 'common core' of skills and knowledge for the children's workforce, which sets out the basic skills and knowledge needed by people who work with children, young people and families. The work that I have seen across the programme demonstrates that this programme is contemporary and relevant to this practice area.

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.*

It is clear that throughout the processes of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the modules there is a high quality of support for, and attention to, individual student learning and performance. As the programme has developed the teaching team have, in discussion with myself, incorporated some innovative developments in the assessment methods for the programme. The programme now incorporates a range of assessment methods that enable students to draw upon and incorporate their practice experience. Arrangements for the marking and moderation of module assessed work are thorough and explicit, with moderation meetings that involve the whole teaching team and therefore also offer professional develop. Further to this, following discussions with myself, I am aware that the teaching team are reflecting on some of the modules where there are two elements of assessment to ensure that there is no risk of high performance in one element of the assessment compensating for poor performance in the other, where this is deemed core to meeting the learning outcomes of the module.

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.*

Students were given appropriate and adequate opportunities to demonstrate their achievements of the module/programme aims and learning outcomes. The range of assessment methods provide alignment of assessment to learning outcomes. The teaching team have also given much thought to ways in which they can support and guide students in relation to the core skills of academic writing. In particular, for example, there is acknowledgement of students continuing to be inconsistent in their use of Harvard referencing, and a need to encourage increased use of peer-reviewed journals. Furthermore, staff are aware of the continuing need to reinforce the importance of ensuring that any reference to service-users and practice settings are appropriately anonymised in students' work. Alongside additional tutorial support where appropriate, the team provide clear information about assessment requirements and have enabled students to self-assess their work against these expectations prior to submission. With these processes in place, the team are able to continually reflect upon further developing these guidelines as student needs and/or assessments develop and change. The team use a centre generic assessment feedback sheet which encourages comment against the generic assessment criteria. This offers a good deal of consistency for students, but it is less clear for staff to know how/where to give more specific feedback on learning evidenced against the learning outcomes of the particular module. I think it is important to reflect progress against the learning outcomes in some way – some staff use the 'coverage' heading of the generic form, which seems to work, but the team may want to consider how to make this consistent.

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

Whilst the students are all work-based and therefore their practice is highly significant to the teaching, learning and assessment on the modules, there is no formal assessed practice component in 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.

There is clear evidence over the year, in my view, that the team is always willing to continually enhance practice for the benefits of the students on the programme. This year has from my perspective been largely a consolidation year, in terms of teaching and assessment, following a year of significant change and development two years ago and the appointment of new staff leading the teaching team last year. I am also aware that the team have taken the opportunity this year not only to consolidate, but to reflect on the current programme and consider its future development in the context of continuing changes in professional practice.

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 is, in my view, influenced by research across each of these aspects. The curriculum content is informed by contemporary subject-related knowledge, from research, policy, legislation and practice. Pedagogical practices are clearly influenced by the scholarship of teaching and learning as is clearly evident in the range and innovation in assessment methods. Finally, the students are continually engaged in 'discovery' learning, through reflection, through secondary research, and towards the latter part of their studies, through a primary research project. Learning is facilitated through collaborative, challenging, but supported problem solving, which sets the culture for an environment in which learning is enabled through a process of student enquiry informed by practice experience and reflection.

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 has been sufficient and helpful.

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. Furthermore, the teaching team and administrative support are always willing to send through additional materials that I may request at any stage.

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

Yes. The team have been very efficient in sending samples through and if when necessary have always sent different or more work through at my request. The administrative support arrangements are extremely efficient and responsive.

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

Yes, totally.

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 was asked in November 2010 to take on the role of mentor to a new external examiner, which I accepted. I contacted the new external examiner by email immediately to offer support and guidance as required/appropriate and followed this up with a further email within a few weeks. I did not receive a response at all from the new external examiner, so presume that they were confident in their role and did not need the support offered.

Other Comments

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

This is the end of my period as an external examiner with Leeds University. I would like to thank all of those that I have worked with and met through the course of this activity for their professionalism, hospitality and genuine collegiate approach to our work. This has been a good experience and one through which I have also learned a great deal myself.

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 Family Support programmes, but for the outstanding support that you have provided in this role throughout your period of appointment. We would echo wholeheartedly your own assessment of your time in post as a "good experience" in which we have worked together constructively to the benefit of the programmes and students. We have certainly valued the meticulous attention to detail that has underpinned all of your observations, especially in relation to student assignments, and your alertness to the changing environment both academically and professionally in your field. You have been the best of critical friends in combining attentiveness and rigour with careful appreciation of the challenges that our students face as mature learners and practitioners. It has been especially valuable to have you in post over a period of significant, and sometimes difficult, staffing changes and I know that <<>> and <<>> team have been greatly encouraged by your honest, constructive feedback and thoughtful observations.

We are pleased to see in your overview that you have found our provision to be appropriately responsive to academic and professional developments relating to work with children and families and that we have achieved a proper balance "between being fair, sensitive and student-focussed whilst maintaining academic standards and integrity". We also appreciate your commendation of the "open, constructive and reflective" approach that staff have taken to curriculum development, the maintenance of standards and enhancement of assessment methods and processes.

As always, it is good to find that review of your final year confirms that the curriculum remains "highly relevant", that standards are comparable with those elsewhere and that assessments are appropriately diverse, well aligned with learning outcomes and subject to "thorough and explicit" marking and moderation processes. We also note that you find the curriculum to be well grounded in research, both in terms of its underpinning in contemporary scholarship and professional practice and through our development of students as active researchers in their field.

You note that the last year has primarily been one of consolidation and, from that, identify areas for continuing work that we shall be careful to sustain as the programme continues to develop with the support of your successor.

- **Modules with more than one assessment element**
We shall monitor these to ensure that high performance in one assignment is not over-compensating for weakness in another and that we can be confident that a student can only pass the module if they have evidenced satisfactory achievement of all learning outcomes.
- **Feedback to students on achievement of learning outcomes**
As you have noted, tutors are seeking to provide such feedback through the “coverage” section of the standard feedback form. We shall work with the staff team to ensure that this is approached consistently across modules.
- **Continuing development of the curriculum**
We are well aware of the changes that are taking place in professional practice in the field and will be looking to revise the curriculum accordingly in the coming year.
- **Continuing development of students’ academic practice**
We shall keep alert to the perennial challenges of ensuring that students make greater use of peer-reviewed journals, maintain rigour in Harvard referencing and avoid the pitfalls of inadvertent identification of research subjects. This latter point has also been observed by another of our Examiners and we shall, in future, be returning work to students for correction where this fails to maintain strict anonymity.

Moving on from our Child and Family Welfare 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 exceptional work on our behalf as External Examiner. It has been invaluable to have such thorough and constructive feedback over your period of appointment and I hope that you feel your share of professional pride in the positive impact that this has had on our Family Support programmes and their students.

Yours