

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
 ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:

Continuing Education

Subject(s):

Creative Writing

Programme(s) /

Continuing Education

Module(s):

Awards (e.g.

BA/BSc/MSc etc):

BA (Hons)

Completed report

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six 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?

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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

It has been pleasing to see the development of the programme over the past four years. A Script Writing module has been added, so that the main forms of Creative Writing (Fiction, Poetry and Scriptwriting) are all now offered. The Writing Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror module, which has been added to the provision, means that genre fiction is now offered, too. The introduction of the Stories That Form Us, Stories We Write unit is another example of beneficial programme development. Filming the assessed presentations was a helpful means of sharing them with the external, but I would think that these DVDs would also be a useful teaching tool for this piece of assessment.

The Advanced Creative Writing Project module could be said to cover it, but I would still have liked to have seen the

introduction of incremental development in the forms taught – single-form modules which would follow on from Writing Fiction, Writing Poetry and Script Writing Workshop.

I suggested developing the commentaries by asking students to include an annotated bibliography of texts that have shaped and informed their writing. This, a key way in which reflective writers may be nurtured, has been successfully implemented.

I think there has been an initiative to ensure that students present their work according to industry conventions, and it has been good to see more script and prose work laid out the way it should be.

In the past, I have mentioned the marks spread in modules at the LLC and I note an improvement in that respect. In my report for 2009-10, I noted that students are asked to work to certain lengths as part of the discipline of learning to write like a professional and I raised the question of whether or not going over the given word count resulted in a penalty. It has since become clear that such work is penalised – as one piece of coursework in this year's sample was.

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 2 universities – or externally examined – at 3 universities – over the past 17 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 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 broad sample of assignments, I disagreed with 7 marks – less than in last year's sample. The only trend in these disagreements was that I thought some of the first class marks perhaps too high and there were some examples of what I saw as low second-class work being given third class marks.

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. 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 reiterate previous years' suggestionz that more work could be presented according to industry conventions. This year still not enough work as correctly laid out.

In 2010, I suggested developing the commentaries by asking students to include an annotated bibliography of texts that have shaped and informed their writing. This has taken place this year and it was pleasing to see how well the best students had embraced the initiative, which emphasises the old wisdom that there is no writing without reading.

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. Please comment on 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.

Please see my comments in the 'For Examiners completing their term of appointment' section, above.

Examples of good practice:

- 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.
- The documentation, which is clear and informative, and the structure of the excellent coursework cover sheets.
- The superb feedback from tutors. All tutors are constructive, diagnostic, detailed and very helpful. I know of no other university which gives students such detailed written feedback.
- The modules are clearly taught to a high standard.
- The accuracy of the assessment in poetry assignments is, again, striking.
- Communication with the team at the Lifelong Learning Centre has been exemplary and I have been provided with all the materials I needed to fulfil my role.

7. Please comment on 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.

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.

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

8. 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.

The Examination/Assessment Process

9. 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.*

It was.

10. 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, marking criteria?

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

Yes.

11. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

N/A.

12. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes. I received an appropriate sample in good time and from the sample I saw, I happy to confirm the marks and affirm staff assessment procedures.

13. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

Yes.

14. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

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

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

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

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 ample time to examine it before the board.

It has been a pleasure to be external examiner for Creative Writing at the Leeds LLC and I would like to thank the Programme Leader the tutor team and the administrative staff for their warm hospitality over the past five years. I have enjoyed our discussions down the years and wish you and my successor all the best for the future.

Academic Quality and Standards Team

Received by e-mail 25.06.2012

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28th November 2012

Dear <>

External Examiner's Report for 2011-12

Over the last few months we have been reflecting on the feedback that we have received on 2011-12 from our students, teaching staff and External Examiners. I am now writing to each Examiner to respond to reports individually and to give an overview of the outcomes of this annual review process.

We are very pleased to find that, looking back over your four years as External Examiner for Creative Writing, you can trace a range of positive developments, including the introduction of new modules, and see progress in areas where you have made recommendations. Your report suggests that you finish your term of office with the programme in good health. You judge the learning outcomes to be appropriate, compatible with benchmark statements and expressed in documentation that is "academically sound, detailed, clearly articulated" and indicative of a "robust and effective programme". You also commend "thoroughly and imaginatively designed" assessment methods, the "superb feedback from tutors", "high levels of teaching and support" and "exemplary" communication with you in your role as External Examiner.

We have valued your recommendations in previous reports and recognise the benefits that these have brought to the programme. <> notes, for example, the way in which the introduction of annotated bibliographies has extended the range of resources used by students and deepened their reflective engagement with this material. In the same spirit we note the following observations in your 2012 report:

Development of further modules: You suggest that the programme would benefit from the development of level 3 "single-form modules which would follow on from Writing Fiction, Writing Poetry and Script Writing Workshop." We, too, would welcome this although your suggestion that such development might be "incremental" is certainly apposite. The University is engaged in a wider process of renewal of its elective provision that will extend for several years to come and further thinking on our Creative Writing offer will take place as part of this larger development.

Writing to industry conventions: You note that this is a matter that still needs further attention and we shall continue our work to promote the use of correct layout in students' assignments.

Moving beyond Creative Writing, please find enclosed 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 Externals for all of our programmes. 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.

Feedback from our students through the NSS and the University's own Programme Survey, which covers those in other years of study, continues to give a positive picture. NSS scores for 2010-11 were an exception to this but were based on a very small and flawed sample of respondents. We are pleased to see that rectifying this technical problem for 2011-12 has elicited feedback that is consistent with previous years for the NSS and all years of the Programme Survey. Please find enclosed a copy of our Action Plan which summarises feedback from students, along with some of the key points from External Examiners, and identifies our main areas for further work in the current year.

I should like to close by thanking you for all that you have done during your period of office as our External Examiner for Creative Writing. It has been a time of change in this provision, not least in management of the programme, and I know that <> has greatly appreciated your encouragement and the wisdom and breadth of experience that you have brought to the Examiner's role. Our Creative Writing provision has certainly been strengthened by your work with us and we hope that you leave office feeling a due share of satisfaction in what is being achieved.

Yours sincerely,

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Director for Lifelong Learning/Head of Centre