

## The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012– 2013

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

Faculty / School of:

Lifelong Learning

Subject(s):

Creative Writing

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Elective modules:  
 LLC1040 (CRN20217) Creative Writing Workshop  
 LLC1040 (CRN 20042) Creative Writing Workshop  
 LLC2239 (CRN 27573) Writing Science Fiction  
 LLC2248 Script Writing  
 Global Conversations  
 Writing Myths Workshops  
 Advanced Creative Writing Projects

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

Elective modules on BA programmes

**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](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

**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

N/A

**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?

No

**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

**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 structure and the content on the courses were solid. Though there would arguably be no expectation here that students would reach the same levels as students on a dedicated Creative Writing programme, the standard expected here was high.

This standard was met largely because of the excellent design of the course with some taught elements, some research elements and some creative writing work shopping including peer review.

No student on any of these courses could simply work hard in the week the assignment was due. The assignments are designed in such a way that they show a complete process. Students could not supply the final product if they had not engaged with this complete process. Two modules for instance required students to keep a blog and then create a reflective essay based on their blog. All modules include some form of commentary which students cannot supply effectively without have engaged throughout with a reflective process.

**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 National Association of Writers in Education, NAWE, provide benchmarks for creative writing and in fact these have been drawn up by NAWE itself, also referring to the AWP (American) and the AAWP (Australian) and also borrowing from Art and design. Dance, Drama and Performance and English.

Although these benchmarks are primarily for degree programmes, the modules here meet them also, in particular the use of the workshop / peer-reviewing and they develop as recommended by NAWE:

- Robust artistic practices
- The capacity to be creative
- An aesthetic sensibility
- Intellectual enquiry
- The ability to apply the above to the production of the student's own textual material
- Skills in team working
- An appreciation of diversity
- The ability to conduct research in a variety of modes
- The ability to reflect on one's own learning and development
- The capacity to work independently, determining one's own future learning needs.

**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 assessments are clear and logical. They offer the students the opportunity to demonstrate specific skills appropriate to the individual modules and more general writing skills. Each module includes a reflective task, for example, a, commentary, an essay based on blog entries and / or an annotated bibliography. Thus students are able to demonstrate process as well as production.

Useful grids were provided demonstrating all levels in five areas of competence. It was clear that these had been interpreted similarly by marker and moderator and I actually found it useful to ignore the initial marking and work with this grid to ascertain the grade range for each student. My marks were always in the same range.

Presumably students also have access to these grids, and that, along with the very detailed and helpful comments provided by the markers should mean that they thoroughly understand the marks they receive.

**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.*

A good range of marks was achieved with marks mainly in the 2:1 and 1<sup>st</sup> category though there were some 2:2 and 3<sup>rd</sup> marks. The range was normal and represented work comparable to that at other institutions where students obtain similar marks.

Strong candidates produced well-crafted, effective creative work, well-argued and illustrated critical work, and reflective work with evidence of good engagement. These candidates also obviously read widely. Weaker students were less well read, had poorer language skills, relied too much on cliché and exposition and formatted work poorly. This is all within an expected range, though if the latter are proactively addressed some "value-added" may be achieved over and above what are already some very good outcomes.

**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.*

N/A

**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 from the nature of the taught elements, the design of the assessments and conversations with staff, including about plans for the future, that the staff are up-to-date with current debates and research within the discipline of creative writing. Reading-lists are impressive.

A particularly effective example of Technology Enhanced Learning is the use of blog posts, available only to the student and the tutor, to inform reflective essays.

Each module requires students to do their own "writerly" research and thus they are invited to and indeed do participate in the debate.

**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

**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.*

The material provided was informative, useful and sympathetically provided. Hopefully my response to the work I looked at is what is required – I am doing as prompted by the material provided.

**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.*

The module handbooks and mark descriptors, all provided well in advance, were comprehensive and easy to follow. The module handbooks also seem useful tools for students. The aims of the modules are clearly set out, as are the assessments. The week by week summary of what is taught was very useful to me as an examiner and would no doubt also be very helpful to students. Some changes on the mark sheet already indicated for next year – where the markers outline the areas tested on the feedback sheet – will make what is already very good even better.

**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 No exams and coursework was already set up before I was appointed as an external examiner.

**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?**

Scripts were extremely well annotated and an appropriate sample, often about the 20% recommended, was provided. I had no significant disagreement with any of the marks. It was absolutely clear how markers had arrived at a grade.

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

There were no dissertations as such though the Advanced Creative Writing Project is very similar to a dissertation. The method and standard of assessment were absolutely appropriate to this task and again the marks were within normal range, even comparable with those obtained by students on a Creative Writing degree programme.

**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 able to attend the Exam Board which was conducted efficiently and professionally.

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

Yes, such procedures were evident.

**Other comments**

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

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25<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Dear <>,

### **External Examiner's Report for 2012-13**

As usual at this time of year, we have been reflecting carefully on the feedback that we receive from our External Examiners and from student surveys. In the light of this, I am now writing to each of our examiners to respond to the observations that you make in your report and to give you a broader sense of our plans for 2013-14.

Before turning to this, I would like to thank you for your first year of work as our External Examiner for Creative Writing. We very much appreciate the care that you have taken over this role and your willingness to engage so thoughtfully and constructively with <> and our course team.

The positive tone of your report is very welcome, especially since this is your first review of the programme. We are glad that you find the content and structure of our creative writing provision to be "solid" and appreciate the trouble that you have taken to evaluate outcomes in relation to benchmarks. Although, as you recognise, we are not setting out to offer a dedicated degree programme it is very encouraging to find that our modules align with honours benchmarks and that standards are commensurate with those on creative writing degrees. It is good to note your affirmation of the "excellent" pedagogic design that underpins this achievement "with some taught elements, some research elements and some creative writing work-shopping including peer review" and to see your commendation of the use of blogs and other mechanisms that ensure that students are engaged appropriately in reflective, creative processes

Your report also comments positively on our use of "clear and logical" assessments and the way in which these require students to "demonstrate process as well as production". You see this as eliciting work of a high standard from the strongest students and resulting in a range of achievement overall that is comparable to that of other institutions. We note your observation that further attention to formatting might achieve some "value added" for the weaker students and will continue to promote this in our teaching and student support. We note, too, your positive comments about the assessment grids although this is an approach that is changing for 2013-14 when we introduce new assessment criteria and feedback forms across the LLC. These have developed in careful consultation with staff and students and following a short trial that involved blind re-marking of a sample of assignments that had already been processed through our exam boards. <> has been closely involved in this and,

helpfully, generated a variant of the standard forms for assessment of creative work. We hope that the new approach will be more accessible for students and provide them with a clearer sense of what is being sought from them and how they are being graded. Please find details of the scheme enclosed along with the explanatory notes that have been published to students and staff. Naturally, we shall be reflecting carefully on how this works out in practice and would welcome any feedback that you can offer as an External Examiner. If you have observations during the course of the year ahead of your annual report do please raise them with <> or contact our Director of Student Education, <>, via [e-mail](#) or <>.

Looking more broadly, I enclose for your information a summary of feedback from our other External Examiners. As you will see, your positive evaluation of our learning and teaching, feedback and support for students 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 are also implemented, wherever appropriate, across our provision as a whole.

Feedback from students through the NSS and the University's Programme Survey continues to show a very positive picture. We are particularly pleased to note steady improvement in satisfaction scores in virtually all areas for both surveys and, with it, the suggestion that high overall satisfaction is well grounded in students' experience across all aspects of their learning. Please find enclosed a copy of our action plan for 2013-14 which summarises this feedback and sets out the key developments that we are looking to take forward in the current year.

Thank you, once again, for your work on our behalf as External Examiner. It is invaluable to have such thorough and constructive feedback and we look forward to your continuing association with the LLC in the year ahead.

Yours sincerely,

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Director for Lifelong Learning,  
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