

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:	School of Geography
Subject(s):	Human Geography
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BA Geography, BA Geography with Transport Planning
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

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

Last year I queried whether different marking criteria are needed for different types of assessment, rather than one set of marking criteria for a variety of different assessment types. The response from the then Head of School was that the School was in the "process of creating marking criteria for various forms of assessment", ready for implementation in January 2013. This does not appear to have been introduced and I recommend that it should be as soon as possible. In a meeting with students, they raised the issue that they did not feel that they always had clear guidelines on the marking criteria being used for some forms of assessment so this is also an issue that concerns them.

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

Not applicable

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 Intended Learning Outcomes are appropriate for the programmes of study and with the levels of the award. The human geography components of the degree programmes provide a stimulating and challenging range of modules for the students. These clearly provide students with subject-specific skills, but also with broader transferable skills. The learning outcomes encourage students to engage with employability skills, specifically in those modules targeted at these outcomes, but they are also present in more academically-focused modules.

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.*

Yes, the aims and ILOs are comparable with similar programmes at other institutions that I have knowledge of, and compatible with subject benchmarks. The programme provides a number of high quality modules that cover the majority of disciplinary and sub-disciplinary debates within Human Geography.

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 appropriate for the ILOs. A variety of assessment methods are used within the School in order to test different types of knowledge, students' ability to research into a topic, as well as analytical and interpretative skills. Arrangements for marking of the modules and the classification of awards are also appropriate and well thought out. Module feedback forms were very good.

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.*

Yes this came through in student performance in individual modules and for the programme as a whole where students' academic standards were clearly demonstrated. The module evaluation forms were particularly helpful in taking note of student feedback and the actions that had been taken to respond to this. The external examiners met with a small group of students and these were full of praise for both the programme and for the commitment and enthusiasm of staff.

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. 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.

Last year I commented on the need for reflection on the first year module 'Leeds: Local to Global' concerning the range and type of assignments being used and the amount of group work. I also suggested that the module instructions for students could be clearer. I am pleased to note that changes along these lines have been introduced and that the module feedback from students was very positive towards both staff and teaching on this module. I looked at the survey and mid-point feedback for the module – this showed some continued minor concerns about group work, but also a number of positive comments about the value of group work.

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.

There is evidence that staff research feeds into individual module delivery and also through student field work. Students appear to appreciate the enthusiasm for the subject material and for teaching that arises from staff engagement with research.

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

Not applicable

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.*

Yes, clear guidance is provided in the External Examiner Handbook and also from information sent out in advance by the School.

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. I had copies of the School's Code of Practice on Assessment and the Undergraduate Student Handbook, as well as dissertation guidelines and the module and programme catalogue. Minutes of the Student-Staff Forum and full details of mitigating circumstances and medical evidence were also made available during my visit to the School.

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?

Yes, I saw draft examination papers and assessments at an early stage of the year. For the most part the nature and level of the questions were appropriate. For a few of these I suggested some minor changes and these were incorporated into the final versions.

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 saw a range of assessed and examined work. This included the complete work of some students at all levels of degree classification and this was helpful in allowing a consideration of the standards being applied to students' work. In addition, assessed/examined work was made available for a range of modules and I sampled these to ensure that the evaluation of student work was appropriate. The exam scripts and assessed work were clearly marked, with some excellent feedback provided. I was asked to consider a number of students in the discretionary band and with mitigating circumstances and made recommendations to the Board of Examiners which were adopted by the Board.

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

Yes, these were entirely appropriate. I spent some time looking at dissertations in human geography this year given concerns raised by the external examiner for physical geography during our visit to the School concerning disagreement between first and second markers leading to lower marks. I found no evidence of this in the case of human geography dissertations and, in cases where there had been an initial disagreement, this had been resolved through extensive debate between the two markers. This had either led to an agreed mark (with a clear rationale documented) or referred to a third marker, who again provided copious feedback and a rationale for their decision. In human geography dissertations, the third marker tended towards the upper end of the mark range, to the advantage of the students.

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?

Yes, the administrative arrangements for the whole process are entirely satisfactory. I attended the Board of Examiners and this was conducted in a fair and rigorous manner. The recommendations of the Board were also entirely satisfactory.

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

Yes, it was clear the due consideration had been given to both mitigating circumstances and medical evidence. I was able to see full details of the relevant material where appropriate.

Other comments

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

School of Geography
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT



28 August 2013

Response by the Head of School to the BA External Examiner's Report

Dear

I am writing to thank you for your detailed and thorough evaluation of our BA programme this year. The School very much welcomes your informed perspective on the quality and philosophy of our courses, and we are very grateful for your support.

We were pleased to see that you consider our programme has Intended Learning outcomes in line with national benchmarks, the marking of modules and classification of awards to be appropriate, and module feedback forms to be very good. It is particularly pleasing to hear that a self-selecting group of students praised both the programme and the commitment and enthusiasm of staff. The module team responsible for Leeds Local to Global were also very pleased to hear your positive feedback on the changes made over the last year.

Your report mentions one matter that the School should work to improve as a matter of urgency, namely that of different marking criteria being needed for different types of assessment. My predecessor had suggested that these would be introduced during the 2012-13 academic year; whilst we have made some progress towards this aim we had not managed to achieve it by January 2013 as promised, for which I apologise. One of the main issues was that we did not have the different criteria ready for the beginning of semester 1, and thereafter felt that it could be problematic to introduce such major changes during the middle of an academic year. However, one initiative that was undertaken was that many of our module leaders started to provide marking criteria specific to the individual piece of work being examined. We intend to continue in this vein but we have now a set of 'core' marking criteria for different assessments that colleagues can refer to and modify accordingly. I will ensure that our examinations team forward these to you in advance of the start of the 2013-14 academic year so that you can feedback on them before they are rolled out to students.

I very much hope that this response both acknowledges your very positive overall assessment of our degree processes, clarifies our processes where required and responds in a constructive way to the weaknesses that you have identified. Thank you once more for the time that you have spent this year editing exam questions, reading students' work, attending our Examination Board meetings and writing your detailed and helpful report. Your work is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Head of School