

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

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

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| Faculty / School of: | School of Geography (Faculty of Environment) |
| Subject(s): | Geography |
| Programme(s) / Module(s): | MA Social and Cultural Geography MA Activism and Social Change |
| Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc): | MA |

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**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 Quality Assurance**
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. I also note that both of these programmes are being withdrawn for next academic year and being replaced with a new human geography MA degree programme.

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

Standards

- 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 Aims and ILOs are fully commensurate with the level of the award for both MA programmes. Many of the modules that I looked at in terms of documentation and students' work provided very clear details of the expected learning outcomes for students and some high quality work was produced in response in the assignments.

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, these are comparable to other institutions where I have been external examiner for Geography Masters programmes.

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 design and structure of the assessment methods used were entirely appropriate. A range of innovative assessment methods are used for both Masters' programmes, much of which is student-led. Markers provide students with excellent feedback which provides clarity on how the marks have been derived and suggestions for improvement where applicable. The modules are at an appropriate level for Masters students and the students produce some excellent work which demonstrates a clear grasp of the theoretical concepts involved and, where appropriate, illustrated by empirical research.

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 – there were some very good assignments produced by the students. The performance of the students is equivalent to other students on Geography Masters courses in other institutions where I have acted as external examiner. Both the MA Social and Cultural Geography and MA Activism and Social Change had small cohorts, but there were no really weak students and some examples of very strong student work.

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.

I didn't have any specific recommendations in last year's report for the MA Social and Cultural Geography, so the programme has continued as before – I simply note that the programme is well-organised and coherent, as well as challenging the students. This is the first time I have examined the MA Activism and Social Change programme, as the usual external examiner was unavailable this year. One issue arose with one student's dissertation topic, which did not seem centrally related to the programme, albeit this was an excellent dissertation. I would recommend that students are carefully monitored to ensure that they are registered for the most suitable programme in future.

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.

Yes – this seemed very clear for all the modules. Students are introduced to research work being conducted by staff working in both fields (social/cultural geography and activism) through internal and external seminars and are then asked to produce a portfolio of critical writing on these seminars as part of their assessment.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

One student was taking the MA as part of a 1+3 programme and the modules and dissertation are very appropriate training for a PhD.

9. 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

10. 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, detailed material was made available to me by the School through the VLE in advance of the meeting and this was sufficient to enable me to make the required judgements. Any clarification that I needed was readily forthcoming from the School's examinations officer or other teaching staff by email or during my visit to the School before the Board.

11. 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 the appropriate documentation and materials were received via access to the VLE and these are clear with regard to the expectations and role of the external examiner

12. 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.

13. 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. The majority of the assessed work was very clearly annotated with copious amounts of feedback to the students showing very clearly how the marks had been derived. Staff clearly work very well together and where there were initial discrepancies in marks these had been fully discussed and agreement reached on a final mark. These deliberations are very clear to see on the mark sheets and very clear for an external examiner to see how these decisions were reached.

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

For the most part yes. One student on the MA Activism and Social Change programme produced a dissertation where the topic was more suitable for the MA Social and Cultural Geography. The method and standard of assessment were appropriate for all the dissertations on both programmes.

15. 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. I attended the meeting and was satisfied with the Board's recommendations.

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

Yes, these are very clear and were taken into account fully.

Other comments

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



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From the School of Geography

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Response to the External Examiner's Report for the MA in Activism and Social Change

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