

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010– 2011

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION*Subject area and awards being examined:*

School of: Geography	Subject(s): Activism and Social Change
Programme(s) / Module(s): MA Activism & Social Change PgD Activism & Social Change PgC Activism & Social Change	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) MA

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.

There are no issues requiring urgent attention.

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?

N/A

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.

I have thoroughly enjoyed engaging with and watching this programme develop. It is bold and innovative and it reflects and benefits from the passion and knowledge of those who have worked to help establish and sustain it. As would be expected from a programme of this type, the core modules have been developed with a keen awareness of the need to utilise the skills and expertise of the diverse student cohort and this is evident in the style of pedagogy that is employed. It continues to blend high level theoretical and analytical perspectives on social change with practical skills development and cooperative learning, and this is appreciated and valued by the student cohorts that I have seen progress through the programme. The standards achieved have on occasion been outstanding, and are consistently on a par with those on comparable MA programmes, with the added value of encouraging intellectual autonomy and a willingness to challenge the received norms of academia, which is much in evidence in the students' work, something that makes this programme particularly refreshing.

Assessment methods have developed through iterations based upon student experience, marking, moderation and external input. The Action Research Dissertation improved significantly following the introduction of a portfolio

approach and now uses a combination of personal reflection, prose article and substantive academic research dissertation which has produced some high quality outcomes including a mixture of richly theoretical and empirically based pieces of social research. Similarly the requirement to write a 'zine' article instead of keeping a log was a specific improvement to the Campaigning for Social Change Module, an aspect that has developed again this year to become a student led collaborative element that could now be developed as a form of collective assessment.

The teaching and learning in evidence is consistently high, feedback is excellent and the programme's engagement with its locality and practitioners outside the University is to be commended. The School structures are professional and the staff I have dealt with have been thoroughly engaged and highly competent, all in all it has been an absolute pleasure to have been involved with this programme and I wish it every success in the future.

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 ILOs for the core and optional aspects of the MA programme are appropriate and demonstrably achieved and the standards throughout are commensurate with an MA degree.

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 compares favourably with other MA programmes of similar type and meets the qualification descriptor (level seven) of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ). I have looked at the module outlines for each of the compulsory and optional modules and these demonstrate that the aims of the ILOs meet national benchmarks and are being achieved through ILO appropriate teaching and assessment strategies.

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.*
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Marking is consistent, in line with expectations and moderated effectively where differences between first and second markers occur. This process continues to be well documented and transparent. Grading and classification seem appropriate and in keeping with good practise elsewhere. The mix of assessment methods utilised is appropriate to the programme and retains an interesting mix of reflective, evaluative, and critical/theoretical work from the students.

I reviewed in detail GEOG5380M *Campaigning for Social Change* as this module has evolved considerably over the duration of the programme's existence and the structure of the assessment methods has varied between years. This year the reflective element is comprised of a co-produced 'zine', an innovation that has emerged from the students' desire to pool their personal requirement to produce individual 2000 word 'zine' articles. This seems a logical development given the nature of the assessment and the emphasis within the module on co-producing knowledge, it is also interesting to note that the students felt sufficiently empowered to pursue this route and the considered response taken by the module leader to their request. In my view the quality of the work merits the collective mark of 70% and this seems appropriate given the undertaking of the students to the zine as a collective project. In my experience, such collective marks are not unusual for assessed work of this type. It is evident from the moderation process and the minutes of the meeting of the Taught PG Examinations: Module Mark Agreement Meeting (10th June, 2011) that this has been the subject of some discussion and I am happy to support a change to the assessment which would make this task a collective project (pass to progress) leading to a generic mark.

Overall, the quality of the Action Research Dissertations was not as high this year, although there were some accomplished and challenging dissertations. I continue to be impressed and congratulate staff on their willingness to provide helpful and constructive feedback, including annotated comments on these dissertations and on other assessed pieces.

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.*

The academic standards demonstrated by the students continue to be in line with what might be expected for a Masters programme and their performance is typical of a mixed cohort of students coming from a variety of non-traditional backgrounds, or access routes. There were no significant weaknesses amongst the student cohort over and above the normal range of difference in academic performance.

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. 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 have been no major changes or enhancements to the programme since the previous year and changes that were made previously have now been established and are proving successful. The field trip elective module - 'Climate Crisis: Exploring Ideas, Solutions and Action', is evidently a successful innovation to the programme overall, with students raising its close group setting and location in Wales as a factor in their learning. Areas of good practice remain the programme's sustained and thoughtful engagement with a range of outside participants including <<<>> and other practitioners, journalists and activists.

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 School has a strong and vibrant research culture, and this is evident amongst those staff contributing to this programme. The promotion of primary research through participatory action research with local campaign groups, NGOs and other civil society actors is a significant part of the course and this is one of its primary strengths.

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, I was provided with copies of the relevant ordinances and regulations including the Universities EOP policy, its Policy on Data Protection and a copy of the procedures relating to External Examiners.

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, I received all the required documentation pertaining to core and optional modules.

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

Yes, I reviewed the entirety of assessed materials for the module 'Campaigning for Social Change' and I read and reviewed all the submitted dissertations.

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

Yes, I was contacted and kept informed throughout. Particular mention and thanks to <<<>> and <<<>> who as always were both extremely helpful during the entire process.

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

Yes, these were explained and were considered in relation to relevant students during reviews of each programme. Discussions on these issues are transparent and well documented with support being directed towards students designated as special cases either because of medical or other difficulties.

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.

N/A

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



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

13 February 2012

Dear

On behalf of the School of Geography at Leeds I would like to thank you wholeheartedly for your very interested, supportive and conscientious work as the first external examiner for our MA in Activism and Social Change. Through your help and advice, we have been able to build up this programme and give it a strong platform for survival and growth despite the difficult circumstances that surround Masters teaching at the moment.

We note, and are very encouraged, by your comments in your final external examiner's report on the overall quality of the programme, and its comparability with similar programmes. We also note your comments on the quality of the teaching, assessment feedback and engagement with local issues and outside practitioners.

More specifically, we note your comments on the Action Research Dissertation and particularly the Campaigning for Social Change module and your endorsement of the collaborative zine assessment and the collective assessment that we have introduced for this latter module.

We would like to thank you once again, and wish you every success in your own work, with the hope that we will be able to work with you again at some point in the future.

Yours sincerely

Head of School

Head of School
Director, LIVEDIFFERENCE Research Programme