

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:	Institute for Transport Studies
Subject(s):	Transport
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Selected modules from: MA Transport Economics; MSc Transport Planning; MSc Sustainability (Transport); ;MSc Transport Planning and the Environment; MSc (Eng) Transport Planning and Engineering (other modules being the responsibility of another external examiner)
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA/MSc (as above)

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

. There are no matters for 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

n/a

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.*

I consider the intended learning outcomes as specified in course handbooks to be appropriate.
I consider the standards to be appropriate for the awards under consideration.

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.*

I am not aware of any national subject benchmarks for the particular subjects being assessed in transport studies.
I regard the programmes as of a high standard and comparing well with others in the field.

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 modules which I reviewed were in some cases assessed solely through written coursework, and in others by a mixture of coursework and examination. The coursework subjects set are relevant to the syllabus, and generally involve an extensive piece of work with both written and calculation elements.
A generally high quality of teaching and assessment is evident from the student performance

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 generally high standard was demonstrated (obviously with variations that reflected abilities of individual students), with some notably strong dissertation 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

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.

No substantial changes on which to comment.

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.

ITS is well known for its research role in the transport studies field, and links with research are reflected in the curriculum, notably in topics selected for dissertation work.

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.*

Guidance provided was sufficient.

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, updated course handbook provided, also material related to specific modules, etc.

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?

I was provided with all draft examination papers in good time to make comments (but would not expect coursework specifications in advance, given the large range involved – specifications were provided with samples of coursework I reviewed later). The nature and level of questions is appropriate, but where numerical examples are set I feel it is sometimes useful to consider more fully the realism of values used (even if they are notional, rather than actual data), so that they broadly correspond to values that would be found in practice.

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 a sufficient sample, with marks awarded, and feedback comments on coursework. In one case, coursework for a semester two subject (TRAN5281M Stated Preference Analysis Methods) was not available before the June board, but was subsequently supplied and marks confirmed at the September board.

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

The choice of subjects was appropriate, and the method and standard of assessment.

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 attended both meetings (14 June and 14 September) and was also available by phone for the follow-up meeting on 7 November to consider deferred dissertations. I am satisfied with recommendations made.

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

Yes

Other comments

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

The scheduling of the September board meeting – mainly to consider dissertations – has been very tight. While I have been able to review a sample of dissertations prior to the meeting, this has made it necessary to postpone work related to commitments at my own University. I understand that it is planned to hold the meeting somewhat later next year, which I regard as a sensible change, both in terms of personal scheduling, and giving scope to review deferred dissertations without the need for a separate meeting.

Dear <>,

Thank you for your very positive comments on our Masters provision.

We are pleased that you find our standards appropriate and that we compare well with our peers elsewhere. We always aim to give our students a rich and varied learning experience, and are particularly appreciative of your comments on the nature of our coursework and examination specifications which enable us to test a range of skills. In setting numerical questions, we would, of course, prefer realism in relationships between variables but also wish to create problems which admit round number solutions, at least in the early stages. We continue to be grateful for your advice in this regard.

We are also grateful for your comments on the links between research and teaching. Especially with the dissertations, we have sought to be ambitious in their scope so that the best students conduct valuable original research. We have sought to increase links with external agencies for dissertations thus enhancing our provision.

Thank you also for your approval for our administrative processes. It is always difficult to squeeze enough time for external examiners to fulfil their role, so we will continue to ensure that you receive representative samples sufficient for you to form a judgment but without over-burdening you. You will know that we have moved the classification board from mid September to mid-October which should reduce the pressure on your own dissertation marking.

Finally, we look forward to working with you again this year to keep our standards high. Thank you once again for your significant role in this.

Yours sincerely

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

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

School of: Institute for Transport Studies	Subject(s): Transport
Programme(s) / Module(s): Transport Planning and Engineering Transport Planning	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) MSc MSc

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.

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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 areas which require 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.

N/A

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.*

All programmes were of the required level and the outcomes were comparable to other similar courses in UK

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 ILOs did meet the national benchmarks

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 were rigorous yet fair and the examinations board applied these standards most efficiently

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 students were given every opportunity to demonstrate their ability through coursework and examinations and especially in the dissertation. In discussion with the students they confirmed this fact

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.

N/A

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.

This is particularly evident in the dissertation were evidence of the “high standard” of research is disseminated into the subjects offered to students. This is very welcome as it demonstrates integration between research and teaching

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

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

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

YES

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

YES

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

YES

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.

The high standard of dissertations:

- **Relevance of topics – reflecting the research interests of staff**
- **Range of topics – some students fail to understand the difference between a Design Project and Dissertation**
- **Standard of presentation is commendable**
- **Range of marks - Weaker students appear to lack guidance on their “hypothesis” and some have failed to draw adequate “conclusions”**

The efficiency of the Programme Directorate (<<>> , <<>> (taught courses administrator) and <<>> (Programme Coordinator) should be acknowledged

The method of double marking of examination scripts (in most cases) has proved most effective, however it should be stressed that all scripts should be double – marked using different colours (Red & Green) and the total marks awarded should be agreed on the front cover of each script.

Finally I should like to suggest (again) that consideration might be given to the possibility of producing a “technical paper” with the dissertation as much of this work is worthy of publication

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Dear <>,

Thank you for your very positive comments on our Masters provision.

We are pleased that you find our standards appropriate and that we compare well with our peers elsewhere. We always aim to give our students a rich and varied learning experience, and are particularly appreciative of your comments on the way our assessments allow students to demonstrate their abilities.

Thank you also for your comments on our marking processes. This year, we are trialling a new pro forma for second markers which should provide good evidence of the second marking process. Markers have been reminded of the need for a clear audit trail.

We are also grateful for your comments on the links between research and teaching. Especially with the dissertations, we have sought to be ambitious in their scope so that the best students conduct valuable original research. We considered your suggestion that students should produce a 'technical' paper and see some advantages in that; but we have not yet found a way to work that into the whole dissertation process without substantially increasing student workload. You also commented that some students seemed not to appreciate the difference between a design project and a dissertation. Our 'dissertation' is designed to be flexible enough to allow students with the requisite skills to undertake a design project in fulfilment of the dissertation requirement, so we will ensure that supervisors of such will discuss the differences in style and approach with the students.

Thank you also for your approval for our administrative processes. It is always difficult to squeeze enough time for external examiners to fulfil their role, so we will continue to ensure that you receive representative samples sufficient for you to form a judgment but without over-burdening you. We trust that our new office team will continue to deliver the efficient and effective service which we all appreciate. You will know that our Autumn classification board has been moved back to mid-October, so that should make the process less pressured.

In your previous report, you wondered if the Safety of Road Transport module might equip people to become Road Safety Auditors. It does not, but we are now considering an additional Management of Road Safety module which would do just that, and would be grateful for your perspective.

Finally, we look forward to working with you again this year to keep our standards high. Thank you once again for your significant role in this.

Yours sincerely

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