

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 Design
Subject(s):	<i>Fashion</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	B.A. Fashion Design
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	Bachelor of Arts

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

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?

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

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 module Learning Outcomes achieved across the B.A. Fashion programme of study at Leeds University, were appropriate to the level of the national award. Fashion, however by its' very nature, has the broadest learning base to be absorbed by an undergraduate within the Design disciplines. At Leeds University, research plays an integral role within the subject delivery, with a significant emphasis being placed upon the academic rigour within the programme's investigative studies, e.g. in the final year, the research aspect of the Portfolio has most of Semester One devoted to its' collation and presentation. By comparative national standards the Dissertation is also witness to a particularly heavy mark weighting, this is made, at the expense of the delivery of the more practical subject learning elements related to garment realisation.

The standards achieved by a few of the highest performing students, were both appropriate and at times worthy of excellence being flagged in relation to their learning outcomes, but the more average and weaker performing students would benefit from additional practical opportunities to investigate and explore the 'craft of Fashion' prior to entering the competitive fashion industry, which is their primary aspiration. This is aspiration is in preference, to the pursuit of further post-graduate study at the highest level which the programme does appear through the Dissertation format to be providing a more pertinent grounding .

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.*

In the final year of study, student research sketchbooks/journals, which belong to students performing at the highest level, exude evidence of excellent colour balance, aesthetic layout and novel design detail on which to direct their future design studies. However the more average and weaker performing students, would appear as a result of having limited garment realisation experience, to supplement their collated research by undertaking further secondary research in order to achieve engagement with challenging directional design silhouettes, in support of the final garment designs. All too frequently the student reverts to a 'design comfort zone' by utilizing tried and tested silhouettes that have limited fashion direction with simply the addition of the researched detail.

Dissertations are generally very well referenced, in particular those categorized within the more high levels of performance. However when one extracts the dissertation references, which can form a significant proportion of the submitted dissertation, the remaining document can be perceived to be quite bland with limited new informative value.

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 academic staff, at Leeds University's, School of Design, employ a variety of teaching and assessment techniques, some quite innovative, to deliver the programme and to determine the appropriate level of learning outcomes within the programme's modules and the levels of study. The assessment techniques employed, were appropriate to the respective modules of study and appeared to successfully deliver the desired learning outcomes. The mark range in levels 4 & 5 could I feel in future be further broadened in both directions, as generally the mark range tends to lie predominately within the range of 50's to 60's in the mark bandings, which does not always fully acknowledge in feedback either an outstanding nor an under performance for the level.

In the process of moderation the assessment paper trail was however very easy to follow and understand. It was additionally also appreciated having the student feedback forms in relation to the Dissertation.

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 in relation to the programme under examination were considered comparable to the achievements in similar national programmes of study.

An emphasis within the course structure is placed on the collation of design research, which in the final year of study is generally well presented. As reference manuals, they are suitable for use throughout the graduate's future career pathway. While the manuals are very pleasing to view in their entirety, it is evident that the average to below average performing students on the course, struggle to fully direct their fashion studies with the research information collated. The student requires to more actively question their reasoning, to ensure that they have either acquired the accurate themed information, or perhaps require to just further collate, secondary research. This would ensure the research undertaken becomes meaningful for the purpose of directing 'forward thinking fashion'. Staff might also wish to consider asking the students to either collate one research project with an emphasis exclusively on garment forms, or to perhaps incorporate moulage as an element of the topic of research investigation.

The garment silhouette, rather than the design detail and the garment cut is the aspect that the student's are still not paying sufficient attention too in their research.

At the uppermost levels of performance I was witness to some excellent examples of innovative garment cut and use of fabrication, but within the middle and lower bandings of academic performance, there was an evident weakness in the understanding of fabric handle and the relationship of fabrication and experimental garment finish in relation to the respective market levels identified.

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.

Industrial liaison on garment projects e.g. DESN 2661 'Damart' Level 5, was an excellent example of project liaison held between higher education and the commercial industry with a successful module outcome. Both the industrial mentors and the students rose to the collaborative challenge and both appeared to gain from the collaborative exercise. The project was not without its irksome delivery problems, e.g. the lack of industrial understanding, that a pattern of educational module delivery, cannot be modified at whim, unlike practice within the industry, where one just 'works to the wire'. The outcome was however both successful and a very good enhancement to the students' learning curve.

The academic staff have given earlier reports the appropriate levels of consideration and have endeavoured to successfully implement actions to address.

The issues raised in the previous report, the academic team have with time sanctioned modifications but I anticipate the modifications will take longer than one year to completely reap the benefits of the actions.

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.

The curriculum at Leeds University is driven by the university's approach to academic programme design, e.g. a significantly higher weighting is placed upon the level 6 Dissertation, in comparison to many of Leeds, School of Design's subject competitors to be found in the 'new universities' sector. The learning experience related to the acquisition of Fashion skills I believe are curtailed due to this emphasis at Leeds. While they may be better prepared to write and reference an investigative level study, more than some competitors, by placing this particular emphasis on their subject learning, it possibly jeopardises the attractiveness of the students to the commercial industries, by limiting their exposure to practise and the repeated exercise their fashion skills.

The Yorkshire Fashion Archive is a unique regional archive of not only clothing but related artefacts associated with the periods in which the clothing was worn. The archive curated by the fashion academic staff is a rewarding regional resource on which programme projects can and are successfully built.

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

I was appointed in the academic year 2012/13 as mentor to a new External Examiner, I am led to believe following the respective induction arrangements that he was sufficiently comfortable with the examination arrangements and the self explanatory documents supplied by Leeds University, that he did not feel he required to call upon my mentoring services.

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.*

Leeds University and its School of Design, provide complimentary examination materials, the rules, guideline information, etc., All were received within appropriate time frames, These supportive activities permit the Examiner to digest the respective requirements and to be fully informed of what they are required to undertake in order to fulfil their appointed examination role.

Two opportunities were provided to review the student work in the academic year 2012/13, the first an interim visit in January 2013, following completion of the Semester One studies and the second visit on the completion of the academic year. On both occasions the academic team provided an introductory briefing to the respective modules of study and had prepared in advance of my arrival the module work for moderation, all the modules of study were accompanied by detailed student feedback forms. The combined materials provided, ensured I was able to fully understand the academic reasoning behind the marks awarded and enabled swift agreement to the un-moderated marks.

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 supply, of the Programme specifications, module handbooks, project briefs and the respective marking criteria, provided clear policy guidance, to work within the role of External Examiner.

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?

In keeping with national practice, traditional style examination papers are rarely set, while continuous assessment is the preferred choice. The module project briefs, were written with clarity, outlining clear aims and objectives, in order to direct the students to achieve the programme's desired learning outcomes.

All project briefs were appropriately aligned to the respective levels 4 - 6, the learning outcomes utilised appropriate linguistic terminology for the respective teaching levels, which sought to challenge/address established design boundaries.

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?

At the conclusion of the academic year 2012/13, the final year work, level 6, was exhibited and clearly labelled with the module reference, all were accompanied by the respective detailed module student feedback and the module report forms. They were presented in a manner that displayed complete transparency in the marking of all project/scripts. The selection of module projects/scripts for moderation was open to choice, but undertaken in the normal moderation procedure of sampling from the respective levels of performance identified as top, middle, low and any classified as having underperformed. In addition a selection of 08 Dissertations, were sample read from a cross section of levels of performance, these were forwarded in advance of the final visit in order to spread the workload in moderation.

All scripts within the subject area displayed a clear breakdown of how the marks had been arrived, set against the proscribed module learning outcomes.

At levels 4 & 5, a cross section of work was again sample moderated from within each of the programme's modules, but pre-determined by the academic staff. Again the feedback scripts were clearly referenced and the reasoning for the award of marks clear.

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

The choice of dissertation topics could be described as topical and definitely worthy of investigation, the methodologies undertaken to determine the mark outcomes from my perspective were weighted towards an ideal referenced format being employed by the student(s) noting that some students at the upper levels of the marking scale, the dissertation format was exemplary, but aside from the referenced format, the discovery of new factual information or just perhaps less easily accessed information, appeared during moderation to have less emphasis within the mark outcomes.

The on-going internal discussions, noted at the time of my final visit for the academic year 2012/13 as to whether the dissertation topic could become more integral within the development of the main subject area under investigation, 'Fashion', would for the reasons raised earlier in the report, 'provide additional time' to explore and investigate the many divisions within Fashion that one is required to master within a very short time frame as a student.

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?

The administrative arrangements undertaken for both moderation visits in the academic year 2012/13 and including the Board of Examiners, were supportive to the examination/moderation process being undertaken. Academic rigour was observed at all times to be equally applied, to all students presented at the Examination Board held on the Tuesday 18 of June, 2013. The Board were observed to exercise an even handed manner of judgement to all students presented on every level of course performance.

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

In keeping with current academic practice, a pre-determined decision had been taken on all students who had submitted a case of personal and extenuating circumstance. At the Examination Board all PEC submissions were flagged and the members of the Examination Board were informed of the outcome of the PEC deliberations, noting whether it had been acknowledged to have negatively affected performance and if compensation should be applied.

Other comments

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

I am a little concerned that in responding to the questions set I may appear negative. I would like to note here that I have seen some excellent examples of portfolio work and innovative cut and use of contemporary fabrication, but there is a greater need for those scoring in the average and lower marks bands to research more carefully their fabrications in relation to the market and the silhouettes chosen. Innovative construction techniques also need to be explored more fully by those same students.

Fashion styling is an exciting area of design enhancement within the programme of study. When given the required attention by the student, the outcomes are excellent. However more weak students, often challenged in the area of garment construction must realise it is an equally taxing topic of study, to that of garment production and not just 'an easy option of alternative study that only requires superficial attention. The careless selection of a model for example can seriously affect the project outcome.

I would like to also take this opportunity to thank the academic staff team for their preparatory work prior to both examination visits, also being in Higher Education, I know how much time it can involve to ensure external examination visits proceed smoothly.

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18th December 2013

Dear <>,

Thank you for your second report as External Examiner for BA (Hons) Fashion Design programme for the academic year 2012/13.

I am pleased that once again you were satisfied that there were no matters for urgent attention in the examination process and standards. You have acknowledged in your report that the programme standards are appropriate and that the aims are comparable against national benchmarking. You also commended that the variety of teaching methods and the variety of assessment techniques were appropriate and successfully delivered the desired learning outcomes.

The staff team were delighted that you identified the live project at level two with 'Damart' as being an excellent example of project liaison between higher education and commercial industry. Also that you recognised that the Yorkshire Fashion Archive, curated by fashion staff, is a rewarding regional resource on which programme projects can continue to be successfully built.

The programme team have taken on board your constructive comments for improvement, and in particular the dissertation topics, where you thought that they "could become more integral within the development of the main subject area under investigation". Once again you have highlighted that the Fashion Styling and Photography module seems to be perceived by finalists as an easy option. The programme leader consequently highlighted the complexity of this module during the final year induction for 2012/13.

You continued to comment on the rigours and transparent system of marks, recording feedback and clear reflective direction for students on all fashion design modules. You also thought that the administration and Board of Examiners were supportive, paying particular attention to mitigating circumstances.

Once again thank you for your constructive support. We look forward to welcoming you back at the beginning of 2014 for your interim visit.

Yours sincerely,

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Head of School of Design