

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:

Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies

Subject(s):

Cultural Studies (BA)

Programme(s) / Module(s):

ARTF3003
 ARTF032
 CULT 2003
 CULT 2004
 CULT 2005
 CULT2006
 CULT 2007
 CULT 2008
 CULT 2009
 CULT3000
 CULT 3001
 CULT 3008
 CULT3013

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

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?

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

Since my appointment as external examiner for it, The Cultural Studies BA at The University of Leeds has been and continues to be a very high quality award. It combines highly informed teaching of Critical and Cultural Theory with study of significant and relevant cultural objects, movements and phenomena of all sorts. The programme benefits significantly from its links with Fine Art and Art History programmes at the University. Lecturers are highly qualified and research active and are also committed, responsive, communicative and effective teachers. Assessment as well as teaching standards are high. Marking is rigorous, sympathetic and accurate. Feedback is pointed, helpful and generous. It is clear to me that students greatly enjoy studying Cultural Studies at Leeds. The programme obviously and significantly broadens their knowledge, enhances their confidence and develops their critical faculties. They graduate as informed, intelligent and creative students who seem well prepared to participate in work and cultural life. I continue to have a very high regard for the work done by Cultural Studies lecturers at Leeds and I remain impressed by the curriculum and teaching they offer and carry out. The two Programme Directors that have been responsible for the programme during my tenure – <> and <> - have done excellent work. They have overseen the content, delivery and administration of the award in a highly informed, responsible and competent fashion. Liaison with me and administration of external examining has been very able carried out by <>.

Generally, then, my assessment of the BA Cultural Studies is very positive. However, there are a couple of minor suggestions I would like to make concerning how the award might be improved.

Some modules are admirable in their use of digital and audio-visual tools and media that provide students with exciting and current means to explore and examine contemporary and historical culture. However, some others rely a little too heavily on written assessed essays and exams. It might be a good idea to employ other assessment methods than strictly verbal textual ones. These might include portfolios, practical, audio-visual and ethnographic projects, presentations, group work and web designs. Use of audio visual as well as written media will bring students in touch with the tools of the culture that they are ideally examining and engaging with on a Cultural Studies BA. Presentations and projects will also fulfil an employability remit and help students entering culture related professions to become familiar with the practices and methods they will work with in cultural industries.

I have one other reservation about the BA that has to do with its content. Some areas of the award remain a little too purely theoretical. I am thinking particularly of those that deal with French philosophy, psychoanalysis and critical theory. These modes of analysis need to be brought more in contact with specifically *cultural* studies – indeed with culture generally – to fit appropriately into the degree. French, verbally and textually oriented analysis (like the sort practiced by Derrida and Lacan) isn't *directly* relevant to the general field of culture and there is no ultimate reason why students should think that it is (feedback seems to suggest that students are slightly puzzled by inclusion of such theory in its pure form). Such theory *can* be applied to culture (or thought about culturally) but this is currently not what is happening on the BA. If such theory is to be employed on this sort of degree then it would be best to focus on the areas of it that patently refer to relevant culture (for example painting in Derrida's 'Truth in Painting') or to *apply* such theories to appropriate cultural objects. 'Theory' modules, in the form that they currently appear on the Cultural Studies BA, would be more appropriate to a philosophy than a Cultural Studies BA.

Still, these as minor suggestions rather than criticisms. Overall, the BA Cultural Studies is an excellent, very high-value, extremely well-performing award.

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 programme aims and outcomes were commensurate with the level of the award and corresponded with good quality BA level study. The structure of the programme is appropriate and allows for comprehensive and logical study of the subject. For the most part, content is appropriate although certain areas of content might need revising and/or re-thinking.

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 award compared well with equivalent national qualifications and the FHEQ requirements.

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.*

Assessment methods are rigorous but could be a little more varied (see comments above).

The quality of teaching and learning is commendably high.

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.

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.

I comment on changes to and enhancement of the programme above.

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.

Research in the school is prolific and of very high quality. The course and the students clearly benefit from this. Research instructs teaching in a clear and impressive way.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yes

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

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

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9LJ



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

8th October 2013

Dear

Thank you very kindly for your generous and incisive report. We are very pleased that you continue to view the Cultural Studies programme at Leeds in generally high regard. After four years of being External Examiner your understanding and familiarity with our programme has led you to distil its main attributes, strengths and aims with an admirable degree of concision, making your comments eminently valuable from our perspective in terms of maintaining and sustaining the quality of our undergraduate provision and assessment into the future.

With regard to your constructive suggestions, these are also of significant value in enabling us assess how our provision might benefit from some rethinking in certain areas. As we move into a new era with regard to the future orientation of our provision – born of the financial, institutional and strategic changes currently afoot across the HE sector – all of your comments and suggestions will certainly provide us with some significant guideposts in terms of retaining and enhancing the successful aspects of our current programme.

Given the current uncertainty regarding what form this future provision will take we are not in a position to propose major changes to our assessment arrangements at the present time, which does not mean that your suggestions won't come in very useful for thinking about how our modules are assessed in the future. In the meantime your indications regarding varying the kinds of examples and materials that might be productively used in lectures and seminars has been duly noted and will be taken on board in the planning and preparation for teaching in the forthcoming academic year.

In the meantime it only remains for me to thank you for your ongoing commitment to externally examining our programme and we look forward to seeing you again and to receiving your feedback here in the forthcoming academic year.

Yours sincerely

Head of School