

**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:	Faculty of Performance, Visual Arts and Communications School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies
Subject(s):	Cultural Studies
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA in Cultural Studies
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA

**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](mailto: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?*

Yes

**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.*

The programme's Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are entirely commensurate with the level of the award.

**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 meets the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) 2008 Framework for Higher Education Qualifications descriptor for Level 7 (Masters level) study (pp. 20-23), and is comparable with similar programmes at other institutions. (There is, at this time, no QAA subject benchmark statement for cultural studies at Masters level.)

**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 and arrangements for the marking of modules are entirely appropriate to the programme's ILOs, and, in so far as it is indicated by student performance, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is excellent.

**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.*

Students were given ample opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme's Aims and ILOs, and their strength as a cohort is evident from the very high and entirely deserved marks that they achieved.

**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.*

This is my first year as External Examiner for this programme, and so I am not in a position to comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme and modules since last year. With regard to good practice, however, I was particularly struck by the extent and quality of the written feedback that was consistently provided for all student work.

**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.*

It is clear that tutors' own research informs the curriculum of both the optional and core modules, which are the stronger for it.

## 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.*

I received sufficient guidance as to my roles, powers and responsibilities as External Examiner in the Academic Quality and Standards External Examiner Handbook.

**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, I received appropriate documentation relating to the programme and its modules, in the form of (a) the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies (FAHACS) Taught Postgraduate Handbook, (b) the FAHACS Code of Practice on Assessment, and (c) Module Handbooks.

**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?**

n/a

**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, sufficient assessed work was made available to me to evaluate the standard of student work. The scripts were very clearly marked and indeed provided exemplary feedback to the students. In almost all cases, the marks of the first and second markers were reassuringly close.

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

The choice of subject for dissertations was in all cases entirely appropriate, as was 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?**

The administrative arrangements for External Examining were exemplary. I was able to attend the board of Examiners meeting (23.10.2013), which was conducted with great efficiency in every regard. I was entirely satisfied with the recommendations of the Board.

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

Yes, procedures were clearly in place, and employed, to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence.

## Other comments

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

Comments on individual modules:

ARTF 5001M *Derrida and Deconstruction*. Wonderfully focused module; clear and concise module handbook; carefully chosen and excerpted readings; great use of Turnitin's GradeMark facility for providing sustained, detailed, constructive feedback on

student scripts; student work (on digital reproduction of art, deconstruction and art, and memory) demonstrates wide reading and is gratifyingly ambitious and adventurous, though it would often benefit from more sustained engagement with the theoretical texts (as highlighted in the marker's feedback).

ARTF 5003M *Reading Sexual Difference*. Clear and concise module handbook; strong selection of readings; thorough feedback on student work; student work (on snake symbolism) is a little formulaic, relies heavily on online resources, and has a lot of grammatical errors, but engages with the theories and images.

ARTF 5020M *Cultural Theory*. Clear handbook, informative of the module's organisation and objective; carefully structured, weighty selection of classic texts; substantial, constructive feedback on student scripts; student work (on internet cafes, *Twenty-nine Palms*, and *Camera Lucida*) is mostly well-written, very varied in its objects of analysis, and consistently engaged.

ARTF 5110M *Cultural History*. Carefully structured module, with great pairings of classic theoretical texts and films; clear, informative handbook; extensive, detailed, encouraging feedback on student assignments; of the student work (on the urban anarchist, Saartje Baartman, and Indonesian Pancasila), the strongest is imaginative and highly reflective, and all assignments engage with the course themes and material well.

ARTF 5230M *The Voice in Cultural Theory*. Great topic for a module; clear handbook with useful bibliography; the three 'open' sessions at the end of the module are great for student choice; substantial, constructive feedback on student scripts; student work (on Indonesian landscape, Godard's *Passion*, photography) is consistently thoughtful and theoretically engaged, and in the strongest work, inspired.

ARTF 5910M *Dissertation*. No module handbook; details on submission requirements and the related MA Symposium are included in the school's Taught Postgraduate Handbook; feedback on student work is extensive and constructive; student work (Indonesian soundscape, Kechiche's films, Rafman's *Kool-Aid Man*) is, once again, thoughtful and theoretically engaged, and, on the whole, assured and well-written.

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Recommendation:

That, where it is possible and advantageous, in future years all documentation, including module handbooks, student scripts and markers' feedback, be provided in electronic format, either via the VLE or as emailed Word attachments.

University of Leeds  
Leeds LS2 9LJ



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

29<sup>th</sup> January 2014

Dear

Thank you for your external examiner's report on the MA Cultural Studies, 2012/2013. As it is your first year in this post, I would like to offer you a particular welcome. One of the things you stress in your detailed remarks about the assessed coursework is the range of topics the students take up under the rubrics offered by the modules. At the same time, they share a theoretical engagement, a thoughtfulness and focus in relation to these varied topics. I think this is also a characteristic of your scholarship: the capacity for both ranging across a field of cultural artifacts and practices, as well as approaching the latter with very detailed and particular methodologies and commitments. For this reason I think we are especially fortunate to have the opportunity to work with you over the next several years.

I note the detailed attention you gave to checking the details of the course structure and operation against national benchmarks of level and quality. While the theoretical work in which we specialize has been dispersed across many disciplines, there are few programmes remaining that specialize in it theory in the way we do, and I think we continue to play a valuable role in offering a foundation and training in critical and cultural theory to students who go on to pursue research in various fields. Indeed, our record of success with scholarships and student destinations bears this out.

I am very pleased the VLE worked so well this past year, and that you found the administrative arrangements 'exemplary'. The VLE makes this process more efficient for all of us, and I will make sure that you have access to all of the materials through the VLE this year.

Thank you again for both the careful scrutiny and the commendation of the course. Next year the course will operate under the new title 'Critical and Cultural Theory'. Only the title is changing, to signal more distinctly its focus in a field of Cultural and Media Studies that can range from the theoretical/

philosophical to the sociological. Without abandoning the important legacy of Cultural Studies, we hope the new title will situate our work in a way that is more useful for potential students and graduates alike.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School