

## 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:	Performance and Cultural Industries
Subject(s):	Performance Design
Programme(s) / Module(s):	PECI 2401 Image-based Performance PECI 2403 Design Presentation PECI 3401 Scenographic Scheme PECI 2102 Collaborative Project PECI 3106 Performance Project PECI 2613 Cultural Flashpoints in the Performing Arts
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](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*

None

##### **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 programme aims and ILOs appeared generally well matched to the content and structure of all courses I moderated. The structure and content of the programme is coherent, offering clear pathways for students' progression. It encourages and supports increasing complexity and independence in students' thinking and practice. Standards for the award and award elements that I moderated are set at appropriate levels, with clear descriptors.

In one module I moderated, PECE 2613 Cultural Flashpoints in the Performing Arts, grades awarded did appear higher than those awarded for a similar standard of work in other institutions of which I have experience and, in particular, at my home institution, the <>. Some very high grades were awarded for academic essays that appeared, to me, not to show appropriate evidence of a robust critical approach, especially in respect of one of the module ILOs: that students should be able to 'apply appropriate historical, critical and comparative methodologies to the articulation and development of arguments'.

**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.*

Aims and ILOs of the programmes compared favourably with similar programmes in other institutions and national subject 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 modules I moderated use a range of assessment methods, reflecting the diverse content and structure of modules. This is entirely appropriate and maps onto the spectrum of types of skill and knowledge that students are expected to demonstrate – including skills and knowledge in performance, oral presentation, digital and other technologies, collaborative practice management and writing. The range of assessment methods and the skills and knowledge these reflect are, I believe, one of the programme's significant strengths, allowing students with different aptitudes to flourish and to extend their expertise. It also has the potential to equip students with both subject-specific knowledge/expertise and an excellent range of transferrable skills.

Programme and Module Handbooks, together with information on the VLE, provide clear descriptions of what is entailed in the varied modes of assessment used in the programme-specific and shared modules that I moderated. This supports students in adapting to the range of different criteria the programme demands.

Assessment is clearly carried out rigorously, with widespread evidence of double-marking, moderation and team marking. Again, this is entirely appropriate given the challenges of marking practice and group work, and of achieving consistency in modules delivered by a range of tutors/lecturers. The staff team evidently devote considerable thought, time and energy to ensuring this consistency and continue to monitor and develop assessment strategies to maintain and improve standards.

In the work I sampled, written feedback was generally full, specific and constructive, giving students clear direction on their performance and advice on how to improve and develop in the future.

The one slight exception to this was in the assessment for the module PECE 2613 Cultural Flashpoints in the Performing Arts, which consists of one 5000 – 6000 word essay. This weighting on a single, long piece of written work might not, perhaps, allow students with less ability in 'traditional' academic writing to best demonstrate their knowledge and skills. In response to my 2011-13 report, it was stated that an interim task (an essay proposal), allowing students to receive formative feedback before embarking on and submitting their final essay would be introduced. While this did take place, as I was informed by the module tutor, it was not evident from the Module Handbook or any other material I received, how this developmental step had been implemented. Perhaps this process might be more clearly stated in module documentation to ensure that students make best use of it as supported stage in their learning.

**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.*

Generally, academic standards seemed commensurate with, and in some cases higher than, those of students on comparable courses.

In the modules I moderated, particular strengths lay in an ability to think and learn through praxis (PECE 3106 Performance Project, PECE 2401 Image-based Performance, PECE 2403 Design Presentation, PECE 3401 Scenographic Scheme), sophisticated visual and technical skills applied to enable reflection and analysis (PECE 2401 Image-based Performance, PECE 2403 Design Presentation, PECE 3401 Scenographic Scheme)

and skills in applied theatre practices, where students were supported to work effectively as part of team and to negotiate complex public insitutions/locations (PECI 2102 Collaborative Project).

I also saw evidence of some very good critical/reflective writing on practice (PECI 3106 Performance Project, PECI 2102 Collaborative Project).

Some of the weaker work I sampled was in academic essay writing, particularly in PECI 2613 Cultural Flashpoints in the Performing, as noted above and in last year's external examiner's report.

**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.*

Enhancements made in 2011-13 regarding streamlining of assessed written work in the modules PECI 3106 Performance Project and PECI 2102 Collaborative Project continue to be of benefit in supporting students in producing work of a high standard. Judged by the work I sampled, students appear increasingly clear and confident in their reflective writing on practice in the Performance Project and in their writing of critical reports reflecting on the Collaborative Project, the best of which were excellent pieces of work. Continued attention might be paid, however, to ensure that the Collaborative Project written reports remain rooted in the practical projects. While the contextual material now included in the reports is commendable, students should be encouraged to achieve a balance between contextual material, commentary on the project itself and reflection on their own experience, to ensure that they maintain a high standard of writing-on-practice.

The use of practical scenographic experimentation in Performance Design modules PECI 2401 Image-based Performance, PECI 2403 Design Presentation and PECI 3401 Scenographic Scheme and continued exploration of appropriate digital technology to aid and enhance this enquiry is an ongoing example of good practice in practice-based learning.

**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 Performance Design modules I moderated show evidence of a deep engagement with current scenographic practice and with issues in contemporary performance/theatre and beyond. Aspects of the Performance Design curriculum are clearly led by staff research in site-based practice, object-based performance, practice-led research and the study of scenography from a phenomenological perspective. The curriculum appears to be engaging with approaches towards theatre/performance (studying theatre/performance from the perspective of its inanimate elements) that have profound implications with regard to de-centring the human and reflecting on ways that objects/things/sites/inanimate phenomena might be considered to 'perform'. It seems evident that, in conversations with some of the Performance Design tutors, this is an approach staff are keen to pursue and develop.

**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 on the roles, powers and responsibilities of the external examiner was clearly and comprehensively conveyed in the external examiners' handbook, which I received early in the moderating process. Any further clarification I required was communicated in a timely and efficient way. I felt more than adequately supported to act effectively as external examiner.

**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.*

I received appropriate programme and module handbooks, including marking criteria, via the VLE. This was readily available and assistance in locating specific items was prompt and efficient.

**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?**

Assessment descriptors are included in the programme and module handbooks and so were available for me to examine. I was not directed towards specific essay questions or project briefs or invited to give an opinion on the suitability of these. This was, generally, not necessary as the assessment criteria are generic for most modules that I moderate. However, it may be beneficial in the future to provide examples, where relevant, of specific essay questions and project briefs in sufficient time for me to comment on them.

**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?**

The majority of modules I am required to moderate provided full and appropriate samples of work, with clearly marked scripts and ranges of marks for the module provided, allowing me to feel confident in evaluating the standard of student work and very well supported in doing so. A considerable amount of this work is practice-based, however, meaning that I am required to view a fairly large quantity of work in situ. To allow me as much time as possible to do this, it would be very helpful to receive examples of work that can be viewed remotely before visiting the University of Leeds.

Work from one module, which could have been evaluated before attending the University of Leeds (PECI 2613 Cultural Flashpoints in the Performing Arts) was received very late. I received a large sample of work, but it was not accompanied by a mark sheet for the whole student cohort and was presented in a manner that made it difficult and time consuming to negotiate. In the future, it would be very helpful if

- 1/ I received this work as early as possible
- 2/ a reasonable, representative sample was selected for my consideration
- 3/ a mark sheet for the whole student cohort was included with the sample
- 4/ the work was clearly and consistently labelled and annotated
- 5/ relevant documentation, such as essay questions, were made easily accessible

A larger and more representative selection of practical project work (viewed on DVDs), particularly for PECI 2102 Collaborative Performance Project was provided this year, as previously requested. This was very helpful in allowing me to evaluate the standard of work and to make an informed assessment about this, excellent, module. This work was also much more clearly labelled than in previous years.

The manner in which material was presented for my review in the modules PECI 3106 Performance Project, PECI 2401 Image-based Performance, PECI 2403 Design Presentation, PECI 3401 Scenographic Scheme was exemplary.

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

N/a.

**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?**

Administrative arrangements were very good. I was provided with all necessary details regarding examination boards and other meetings in good time. I was able to meet with module managers as appropriate during a visit to the University of Leeds to attend the June examination board. I was supplied with a full set of papers for the examination board. Recommendations appeared fair and consistent. The board was conducted with efficiency, transparency and integrity.

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

Procedures for considering mitigating circumstances and medical evidence appeared very thorough and robust. I am confident that due consideration was given to all cases and, in my estimation, a decision reached which fairly advantaged the student.

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

I recognise that the PCI programme is currently undergoing significant curricular re-structuring and welcome the opportunities that staff, particularly those involved in the Performance Design programme, have given me to contribute to discussions about programme development. I believe that the School of PCI has some extremely strong areas, offering unique opportunities to students. For example, modules that approach the study of theatre/performance from the perspective of non-animate elements, modules that demonstrate good practice in learning through practical experimentation, and modules which make innovative and appropriate use of digital technologies (PECI 2401 Image-based Performance, Peci 2403 Design Presentation, Peci 3401 Scenographic Scheme) appear to offer a distinctive and vital approach towards theatre/performance studies and provide students with a diverse range of subject-specific yet transferable skills. The applied theatre module (PECI 2102 Collaborative Performance Project) also appears to provide a model of good practice in its engagement with a wide range of organisations/institutions. I would hope that on-going curriculum development allows these areas of strength and distinctiveness to grow and develop within a new programme structure.

**SCHOOL OF PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES**

**RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT**

**ACADEMIC SESSION 2012-13**

<b>PROGRAMME TITLE</b>	<b>Performance Design</b>
<b>NAME OF EXAMINER</b>	<>

*Response to External Examiner reports should be discussed with all staff responsible for the delivery of modules on the programme (this includes staff on common modules to which the report refers).*

*Please identify all substantive points raised by the report and address each one clearly stating, where necessary, what action will be taken, by whom and in what time-frame.*

*The draft response will need to be approved at SLTC before it is returned to the External Examiner in the form of a letter from the Head of School.*

The Performance Design programme team are pleased to note the overwhelmingly positive comments on the design and delivery of the Performance Design curriculum. In particular, the external examiner recognises 'significant strengths' in the range of assessment methods and the opportunities for students to 'think and learn through praxis'. <> also identifies that the curriculum is enriched by research-led approaches and notes that there is 'evidence of a deep engagement with current scenographic practice and with issues in contemporary performance/theatre and beyond'.

Taking into account Performance Design modules and PCI common modules, the report identifies that 'assessment is clearly carried out rigorously, with widespread evidence of double-marking, moderation and team marking' and that the written feedback provided is clear and helpful

In a development from previous years there is now 'evidence of some very good critical/reflective writing on practice (PECI 3106 Performance Project, PECI 2102 Collaborative Project).

Regarding PECI 2613 Cultural Flashpoints in the Performing Arts, the report questions the appropriateness of some of the high grades. This has been discussed at the School's Teaching and Student Education Committee where it was agreed that the marking process will continue to be rigorous in this module as in all others. It was also noted that the essay marks for this module were moderated by two experienced colleagues, one of whom is the Director of Student Education, and both of whom thought the work to be of high quality. The module leader will bear in mind the external examiner's comments, however, and push for the best work possible from the students.

The external examiner welcomed the introduction of an interim assessment task on this module but also suggested that the developmental potential of this task be made clear in the handbook.

The external examiner has also asked that the sample for this module be sent earlier and with more contextual information.

With regard to future developments for the Performance Design programme, we are grateful for the external examiner's suggestions as to how a single degree in Theatre and Performance might benefit from approaches that have been developed on Performance Design. In particular, she identifies:

'modules that approach the study of theatre/performance from the perspective of non-animate elements, modules that demonstrate good practice in learning through practical experimentation, and modules which make innovative and appropriate use of digital technologies (PECI 2401 Image-based Performance, Peci 2403 Design Presentation, Peci 3401 Scenographic Scheme) appear to offer a distinctive and vital approach towards theatre/performance studies and provide students with a diverse range of subject-specific yet transferable skills'

We intend that, as far as possible, these examples of distinctive and innovative provision be carried forward in to the new undergraduate programme.

**Signed:** <>

**Date:** 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013