

The University of Leeds**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	Performance and Cultural Industries
<i>Subject(s):</i>	Performance Design
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	Image-based Performance (PECI 2401) Design Presentation (PECI 2403) Theatre, Technology and Performance (PECI 2405) - did not run 2011-12 Collaborative Performance Project (PECI 2102) Scenographic Scheme (PECI 3401) Performance Project (PECI 3106) Cultural Flashpoints in the Performing Arts (PECI 2613)
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	BA

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

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

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.*

In my judgement, the aims and ILOs are entirely appropriate for the programme and for the modules that 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.

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 Aims and ILOs of the programme and individual modules that I moderated are comparable to similar programmes and match 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.*

A considerable strength of the Performance Design programme is the range of assessment methods used. This seems to me entirely appropriate to the subject area, equipping students with skills that have both specific vocational, and additional wider, applications. For instance, highly transferrable skills in digital visualisation technologies are acquired by students in developing and documenting design work for assessment while oral presentation, another highly transferable skill, forms the basis of several assessments. Strategies for further supporting the development of students' presentation skills were discussed with staff.

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.

Since last year, some work has been done by staff to streamline and focus the written assessment components of two modules (Collaborative Performance Project PECEI 2102 and Performance Project PECEI 3106) in response to my comments. This appears to have resulted in more focussed and coherent reflective writing from students on these modules.

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. Continued attention should be paid to ensuring that written feedback matches grades awarded and grade descriptors.

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.*

In the range of work I sampled, students appeared to be performing at a standard that I would consider comparable to that seen in similar institutions, with a significant proportion of work at a high level. Some of the strongest work in the sample I moderated this year, as was the case last year, appeared in the modules Image-based Performance (PECEI 2401), Design Presentation (PECEI 2403) and Scenographic Scheme (PECEI 3401). The strongest students on these modules showed evidence of critical, reflective practice and made intelligent and appropriate use of new technologies (for example, digital imaging and projection). In these modules I saw examples of experimentation and learning through practice and of the acquisition of both technical/craft and conceptual skills applicable within the theatre/performance sector and in a range of other contexts.

The strongest practical work I saw on the Performance Project (PECEI3601) module, while I was unable to witness it live and so viewed only recordings, was inventive and demonstrated an understanding of its context within contemporary theatre/performance.

Some of the written work I read was less strong, notably in the module Cultural Flashpoints in Performing Arts (PECEI2613). This seemed slightly lacking in the criticality I would expect in a second year essay from a student at a Russell Group university. While the range of material covered by the course is rich and pertinent, and the course is evidently very popular, the essays I read had a tendency to consist of unsubstantiated statements and lacked coherent structure. There appeared to be limited understanding of how to build an argument and of how to use critical literature or examples of practice to evidence assertions. There seemed little awareness that historical narratives might be subjective, multiple and contradictory. Strategies for providing further training and additional formative feedback for students to improve their

abilities in structuring essays, using critical literature and evidencing arguments was discussed with relevant staff. One proposal was to split the assessment between an oral presentation and a shorter essay, providing an opportunity for formative feedback at an earlier stage and thus feeding into the essay.

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.

In my last year's report and in discussions with staff, I suggested that the varied functions of the written elements in different modules might be clarified and given a tighter focus.

In response to these comments the written element in the Collaborative Performance Project (PECI 2102) now takes the form of a report, reflecting on the project in the context of the collaborating institution, rather than a more traditional academic essay. This appears to have resulted in written work that is a better match for the aims of the module and is much more focused and relevant, in terms of allowing students to reflect critically on the practice-based component.

In response to my own and the previous External Examiner's suggestions, the logbook and essay elements for the Performance Project (PECI 3106) have now been combined. This has resulted, judging by the work I sampled this year, in reflective writing that is considerably better focused, critical and concise, with the strongest students demonstrating an ability for rigorous reflection on practice and an understanding of the context of their work within contemporary theatre/performance.

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.

There is clear evidence that research interests lead elements of the programme, which embraces aspects of contemporary scenographic practices and research. For example, scenography as a collaborative practice, phenomenological approaches towards scenography, the critical application of new technologies (in both the design process and live theatre/performance) and contemporary practices in immersive theatre/performance.

There is also evidence of students undertaking practice-led research - or reflective, critical practice. This is particularly evident in the modules cited above: Image-based Performance (PECI 2401), and Scenographic Scheme (PECI 3401).

In this respect the programme continues to demonstrate a distinctive character and make a valuable contribution to the discipline through its application of scenographic approaches towards the study of theatre and performance,

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

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 was given a full range of material from the modules for which I have responsibility. This was made available on-line (through the VLE), sent to me or was made available when I visited the School. This included supporting documentation (Programme and Module Handbooks), a wide range of samples of work, marking criteria and a full spread of marks. I was unable to attend any of the live performances this year but video documentation was made available to me. Work (particularly on CD/DVD) was clearly labelled and presented in a format, and of a size, that was easy to access. I was invited to request any additional information I required.

While I understand that it is not possible to obtain documentation of all practical work on the Collaborative Performance Module (PCI2102), such as the project taking place with the Prison Service, it would be helpful to see a slightly wider range of samples from this module's practical component.

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 - see above. The Examiner's pack, External Examiners' Handbook and other supplementary material provided further useful information regarding my role.

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 copies of the assessments for all modules I moderated.
The questions (where relevant) and other assessment tasks were appropriate. The explanations of these tasks and questions provided for students was clear and detailed.

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 - see above.
Scripts were clearly annotated and additional written feedback sheets for students were attached.

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 highly satisfactory.
I attended the Meeting of the Board of Examiners. I was provided with full sets of papers and offered any guidance I required in interpreting these.
I was entirely satisfied with the recommendations of the Board.
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?

Yes. In all cases due consideration was given and, in my estimation, a decision which fairly advantaged the student was reached.

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

I understand that the imbalance in student numbers between the four PCI Programmes (soon to be three, since the discontinuation of the Dance Programme) may require consideration and a review of the curriculum and structure of the PCI Degree Programmes. I would welcome the opportunity to contribute to debates about future developments.

SCHOOL OF PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT

ACADEMIC SESSION 2011-12

PROGRAMME TITLE	Performance Design
NAME OF EXAMINER	<>

We thank the External Examiner for her detailed comments.

Good practice identified:

The External Examiner's report identifies the following areas of good practice: the structure of the programme enabling progression; the balance of subject-specific and transferable skills; rigorous assessment processes; helpful feedback.

The School prides itself on the quality of its research-led teaching and so we are pleased to note the following comment:

There is clear evidence that research interests lead elements of the programme, which embraces aspects of contemporary scenographic practices and research.

Response/action required:

In section 4, the report questions the quality of the written work in PECI 2613. The module leader has taken steps to give a more coherent focus to the content of the module and has put in place an interim task (an essay proposal) to give additional support to developing final essay submissions of a high standard.

In section 9, the report asks that more evidence of practical work for PECI 2102 be made available. It is planned that the projects running in museums and galleries will be documented in 2012-13, but we may have limited scope to document schools-based projects and it will remain the case that the prison-based projects cannot be documented

Finally, we note the External Examiner's interest in curriculum development and we will look for ways to keep her informed and included.

Signed: <>

Date: 8th November 2012