

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010– 2011

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION*Subject area and awards being examined:*

School of: Performance and Cultural Industries	Subject(s):
Programme(s) / Module(s): Culture, Creativity and Entrepreneurship	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) MA/PGDip/PGCert

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than 6 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.

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.

As will be evident from what has been stated below and in previous reports, this MA programme has proven strategically well conceived. Its delivery has been carefully considered and evaluated by course staff, leading to a succession of refinements which have improved outcomes overall and eliminated impediments to achievement. Some real difficulties have been overcome along the way, for example in instituting and appropriating the results of internships and in making the course accessible to people of diverse backgrounds while honing rigour. The perceptively directed effort which has been applied from the outset to make this the best programme possible will identify and realise further improvements. That the course now occupies an enviable position, with significant numbers and very competitive entry, is also thanks to the School and University which, beyond a high quality of infrastructure support for teaching, learning and assessment, have made important commitments –and wise choices– in expanding the small course team.

It is interesting to note that the programme has become successful during a time in which there has been a major shift of student focus in its chosen field, which may be characterised as one from 'policy' to 'practice.' That it has proved robust through this shift is due in no small part to the way in which the programme has been sited in relation to the conjuncture of culture, creativity and enterprise. Had it simply been conceived and presented to the world as a course in 'cultural policy,' it might well be in eclipse by now, even if delivered to a high standard. There may be some implications to be drawn from this for the optimal siting of certain sorts of MA programmes.

Working with the School and course team as external examiner for CCE has been rewarding and, indeed, stimulating. It is a course that is making a difference in its area of work, and not only for those who undertake it.

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 programme addresses relations between culture, creativity and entrepreneurship. These are not freely interchangeable terms: the first designates a complexly structured domain, of which second and third treat modes of transformation and application. The structure of the programme turns on an interplay of perspectives and the learning objectives require the critical use of distinct literatures and proficiency in multiple methods of analysis, an appropriate articulation of which is then deployed in research developing the student's core interests. This is a challenging agenda for a one-year MA, requiring very careful attention to the selection and treatment of content in relation to the learning objectives, both within and between modules; through a succession of refinements, the course team have enabled a growing diversity of students to achieve the objectives and make effective contributions to their fields of endeavour.

- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

A programme of this character could only be carried out at postgraduate level. Standards set in relation to each award-element criterion have been reviewed by the course team in relation to the overall aims and outcomes and adjusted appropriately.

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.*

Where modules have parallels in other MA courses, objectives and standards are comparable, and the interdisciplinary focus of this programme brings additional opportunities and challenges for students.

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 programme of assessed work has been carefully designed and modified annually by comparing outcomes with learning objectives and programme aims. Although cohort sizes have increased, consistency of marking within and between modules is very good, (crucially) impressively so in the case of the culminating research project which carries more credits than other modules and involves individually designed research which is marked by a larger staff group. The treatment of the presentational strengths and weaknesses of students from different cultural/language backgrounds in terms of the assessment criteria was generally admirably consistent (a sensitive area which demands a clear policy and a high degree of course team mutual understanding) although minor differences in approach between staff sharing the marking in two modules were apparent.

- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

The overall level of performance was especially impressive given the disciplinary and cultural diversity of the intake and the high proportion of students for whom English is not the first language. In this as in several other respects, there is evidence that many (indeed, almost all) students have benefited significantly from written feedback which is both rigorous and supportive. Written feedback to students is given in a format which differentiates the evaluation of performance (by letter category) in relation to distinct criteria from the provision of overall comments and marks (in percentages). While these distinctions are generally clear and helpful, there were some discrepancies between the profile of achievement by criteria (letter) and the overall mark (number) obtained in individual cases, which could give rise to confusion or even appeals. This point was also made by other external examiners and discussed in the Examination Board.

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 programme of assessed work has been carefully chosen and criteria shaped so that students acquire the appropriate knowledge and experience to satisfy the learning objectives. There is attention to the specific issues to be addressed by each assessment task as well as to its place in the course as a whole; this has led to a succession of refinements. The attention to pertinence of learning objectives and to currency of content has been rewarded with good subsequent professional and/or academic opportunities.

- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

This cohort, significantly larger and more diverse in background than any previous year, displays to a remarkable degree a common profile of strengths: sharpness of intellectual focus and argument, ability to articulate multiple perspectives (and often, contexts) in analysis. When complemented by appropriate engagement these produce mature critical perspectives on practice suggesting that those who go into professional activity rather than academic research will do so imbued with an ethos of research into practice and policy as well as appropriate methods to deploy. Standards of presentation in academic English of students for whom this is not a native language continue to improve and are now preponderantly good or very good; some are impressively articulate. A satisfyingly high degree of focus and integration is consistently achieved in the culminating research project.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

6. 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.

Successive modifications to Cultural Work, both in the organisation of the internship in the cultural industries and in reflecting on that experience in the relation to pertinent literature, are bringing rewards. The maturity of judgment, depth and originality of insight displayed this year by many, indeed most, students in their second assignment in this unit was exciting and worth sharing with the types of organisations involved in such internships as well as those involved in work-related study. It is recognised that there is potential for further improvement by ensuring that so that the first piece of assessed work offers more opportunity to demonstrate mastery of participation-observation processes.

The reinforcement of choice and justification of evaluation models in assessed work for Cultural Policy have been very effective; previously identified weaknesses in performance have been eliminated and the profile of achievement improved. Further refinements are also evident in Theoretical Perspectives.

While refinements in the demanding Culture and Development module have been effective in increasing the profile of achievement, the proposal to move this module to the second semester make sense in terms of progression and will provide for dynamic interplay between individual and group work in the second semester. As mentioned above, the standard achieved in the major project has become more consistently impressive; this may be regarded as a culminating effect of improvements across the programme, and likely to be reinforced when Culture and Development runs in the second semester alongside project research.

7. 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 deployment of the results of a range of staff research activity is evident throughout the programme. Beyond the currency and engagement which this affords, it has also been important in honing learning objectives and delivery strategies according to the priorities and practices of research and its applications, producing models which students emulate to make their own contributions to the field.

The Examination Process

8. 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.*

The guidance has generally been very good and where questions have been arisen they have been addressed in a timely and thorough manner. However, as the on-line availability of assessed work to external examiners has greatly increased, it would be advisable to revisit this guidance to ensure that examiners are advised as to how they should best focus their attention, in order to increase that likelihood that the School's key objectives are satisfied within the amount of time examiners can make available. This observation was also made by examiners on other related MA programmes.

9. 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?

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

I have had access to ample up to date course documentation and good support in access to and use of the VLE. (which is important because its interface is neither intuitive nor designed primarily with external examiner use in mind. During the visit, examiners were provided with additional context about developments in the use of the VLE to convey information which it would have been useful to know at an earlier stage.

10. Was sufficient assessed/examination work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?

This year, due to the submission of assessed work on-line and its availability both by email and through the VLE, I have had access to all work submitted for assessment in addition to the sample of work selected by module leaders, and copies of most of the written feedback given to students. Focussing in the first instance on the feedback to students to identify questions, I have been able to examine patterns and relationships more extensively and rigorously than has previously been possible. This has been complemented by independent 'first reading' of selected major projects, which is also of importance especially in determining comparability of standards, in such a way that the overall time spent has been kept

manageable. The School may wish to guide externals as to the relative priority of the feedback which may be obtained by allocating their time in different ways.

11. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners?

In general administrative arrangements have been very good as in previous years. It is clear that co-ordinating the presentation of the greatly increased range of submitted work, marks and feedback available to externals will pose additional administrative demands.

Adequate time was allowed during my (two-day) visit to complete the viewing of work, exchange views with course staff and consider any implications arising, and meet with other externals to identify any common questions or observations before the Examination Board. As I have the role of Chief Examiner this year, these common observations are included below under 'other comments.'

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

In the conduct of the Board this year, these issues seem to have been thoroughly examined beforehand following the specified procedures.

For Examiners involved in Mentoring Arrangements

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 given clear terms of reference and was able to contact the person I was to mentor in good time. Our most productive exchanges to date were on the day of my last Examination Board so it was certainly important that she was invited to this as a guest.

Other Comments

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

As Chief/Senior Examiner, I led a meeting of the MA examiners present which produced the following common observations:

1. As the on-line availability of assessed work to external examiners has greatly increased, it would be advisable to revisit guidance to examiners as to how they should best focus their attention, in order to increase that likelihood that the School's key objectives are satisfied within the amount of time examiners can make available.
2. The examiners endorse the policy of the School to give written feedback to students in a format which differentiates the evaluation of performance (by letter category) in relation to distinct criteria from the provision of overall comments and marks (in percentages). Some further attention needs to be given to avoid occasional apparent discrepancies between the profile of achievement by criteria (letter) and the overall mark (number) obtained.
3. The module Research Perspectives (taken in common by all the School's MA students in the first semester) is evidently of value in preparing students for subsequent research in their respective disciplines. The School may wish to explore further the extent to which it may be desirable -and possible- to enhance student awareness of the modes of research deployed in PCI disciplines other than their own.

SCHOOL OF PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT

ACADEMIC SESSION 2010-11

PROGRAMME TITLE	MA Culture, Creativity and Entrepreneurship
NAME OF EXAMINER	<<>>

We are grateful for <<>> valuable feedback during his tenure as CCE External Examiner. We have always welcomed and benefited from his generous and insightful comments about the strategic direction of the programme and his suggestions on how to best implement them.

This year we are particularly pleased with his positive and encouraging comments about the delivery of the programme, the intellectual development of our students, and the potential CCE has to make a distinctive contribution to our students and the field.

Overall Programme Comments

- **Student Profile:** We welcome comments about the high calibre of our students. We will continue to pursue a rigorous admissions and induction process to ensure that students fully enjoy and take advantage of the programme's learning outcomes. We are pleased to see recognized the explicit efforts we have made to strengthen further our students' intellectual development, their ability to articulate multiple disciplinary perspectives and to engage in interdisciplinary ways of thinking and research.
- **Assessment Methods:** The report highlights how assessment methods and criteria are generally well-matched. We welcome comments on the impact of our efforts to provide students with useful feedback about their assignments and progression in general. We note the comments on the need to ensure we remove any discrepancies between criteria (letter) and marks (numbers). This is an area that all 3 MA programme managers will be addressing before summer 2012 as they revise the existing set of marking criteria.
- **Research-led teaching:** We note the comments that the Programme evidences the impact of staff research interests upon the curriculum and its delivery. We aim to extend this feature by drawing on wider expertise from within the School, recruiting new staff, and as existing staff research interests develop in new directions.

Module-specific comments

- **Cultural Policy & Theoretical Perspectives:** We welcome the positive

comments on the effects of modifications to the teaching scheme for these two modules. We have continued further development of these modules for students to assimilate, apply and synthesize different theoretical frameworks.

- **Creative work:** We note the observations concerning this module, in particular efforts to resource it more adequately. As suggested in the External Examiner's report, we are currently working on further improvements to the assessment description to ensure that both pieces of assessed work offer more opportunities to demonstrate mastery of participant-observation processes and other ethnographic techniques.
- **Culture & Development:** We welcome the positive comments about this module. The External Examiner supports our plans to offer Culture & Development during Semester 2 as a way of providing for a dynamic interplay between individual (e.g., Dissertation) and group work.

Other Comments:

1) We note comments on the need to clarify guidance about how external examiners should best focus their attention now that there is full access to MA work via the VLE. We agree that this will increase the likelihood that the School's key objectives are satisfied within the amount of time examiners have available. It is worth pointing out that current practice is to provide External Examiners with a sample of work for their review (across a wide range of marks) as a way of helping them focus their efforts. VLE access has been granted to External Examiners as a way of making the process more transparent. With the School's Exam Officer, the PG Tutor will develop and provide consistent written guidance for all 3 MA programmes before the end of spring 2012.

2) MA Programme Managers will be working to exploit further the interdisciplinary potential of our Semester 1 Common Module, Research Perspectives. We will aim to enhance student's awareness of the modes of research and way of thinking used in different PCI disciplines other than their own.

Signed: <<>>

Date: 17th January 2012