

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION

Subject area and awards being examined:

School of: Performance & Cultural Industries

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

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

MA in Writing for Performance and Publication

Modules examined:

Semester 1

- (1) Story Workshop
- (2) Writing for Stage & Screen
- (3) (*Monitoring only*) Research Perspectives

Semester 2

- (4) Individual Project
- (5) Research project

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 areas, which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box.
There are no areas requiring urgent attention, though – as discussed at the exam board and in subsequent correspondence with the board chair – maintenance of the existing double marking system with 2nd marker's written comments in the coming year would be appreciated by, and helpful to, me (and other examiners) in all modules I am responsible for – including Research Perspectives, which I monitor.

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

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.

In all modules examined, learning outcomes and standards required were commensurate with the Award being offered.

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.*

In both areas, the programme compared favourably with similar programmes in this field of which I have knowledge and which are offered by other institutions of Higher Education at the same 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.*

Assessment methods described in the handbook (i.e. their design and structure) and the way in which members of the course team put them into practice continued to be satisfactory this year. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment indicated by student performance was, in general, of a high level.

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.*

The range of work submitted to me as External Examiner (encompassing, as it did, high, mid and low level marks) indicates a comparable level of academic achievement and performance to those students on other similar courses known to me. At the top end, the students in this cohort demonstrated great strength in terms of creative, academic and professional outcomes (particularly in the screenplays) and indicated a strong mastery of subject matter and technique as writers – mirrored in the four distinctions awarded. Some students this year seemed to have hoped to get by with incomplete or lazily presented submissions, but they were either failed or given a suitably low mark and were very much in a minority. The general level of presentation (an area commented on in my report last year) seems to have improved considerably regardless of the creative quality of the work being presented.

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. 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.

On good practice, I would again like to commend the thorough and transparent system of dual internal marking, which became a topic of discussion and debate at the exam board meeting. This kind of moderation with written comments from the second marker works particularly well in the context of a creative field such as writing and allows subjectivity (in terms of taste) to be tempered by the balance of a second opinion. Where there is a disparity of two pints or more it would also be good to have a brief description of how the moderated mark was reached.

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.

One member of the core tutorial staff is an active member of the Screenwriting Research Network and both core members are active professionally in the fields of writing for film, TV and Theatre and this ongoing involvement in both academic and practice-based research fields is reflected in the curriculum design and research activities. We did discuss the area of prose writing as an area that staff members might need to keep a more pro-active eye on in terms of current research and practice given that is not a field in which either of them is directly involved.

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.*

Yes, on both counts. In particular, request for additional material was acted upon promptly.

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.*

Yes, I was given comprehensive information about the course as a whole, as well as the individual modules and briefed on current and proposed revisions to the syllabus and structure. Any queries I had were quickly and effectively answered. With regard to whether the stated policies and procedures matched the reality of my role, I would say they did.

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

Yes

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

Yes

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

To the best of my knowledge, yes

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.

N/A

Other Comments

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

Again this year I was impressed on my two visits by the obvious enthusiasm for – as well as dedication and commitment to – the programme shown by the Programme Leader and <> team member. I was also impressed by the improvement in presentation of student work that I had hoped for in my last report – much more professional and less lazy in execution than before, and a tougher approach taken by staff to those who did not meet standards.

Two other areas discussed with staff are worth noting. Firstly: supervision of theatre writing might benefit from occasional practical staging of work in progress to check feasibility, suitability and viability as a stage play. The area of theatre writing receives marginally less attention in the current course design (though this is to be adjusted in the academic year 2013/14) and this year stage writing was noticeably weaker than writing for screen or prose writing. This may have been due to capabilities of students concerned, but more hands on supervision could help.

Secondly, given that prose writing is not the primary professional field of either core staff member, I would repeat my plea of last year that resources be found to bring in relevant tutorial supervision for students opting to do their major research projects in this area. I am not questioning the competence of existing staff members to oversee this area, but feel that the involvement on occasions of a practicing professional in prose fiction would help the students concerned and, for staff, ensure that the bar for assessment is set at the same level as for film and theatre writing.

SCHOOL OF PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT

ACADEMIC SESSION 2011-12

PROGRAMME TITLE	MA WRITING FOR PERFORMANCE & PUBLICATION
NAME OF EXAMINER	<>

The School of Performance & Cultural Industries would like to thank <> once again for <> report, and for the diligent way in which <> has conducted <> duties. For the second year running, <> has made an early informal visit to the School to give feedback on Semester One work in advance of the formal examination board. This has allowed more leisurely and in-depth discussions with both the programme team and with students, and we are appreciative of the greater insights this has given to the external examination process and to <> understanding of the programme's philosophy and delivery.

We are very pleased that the report recognizes the quality of teaching, course design and assessment evident on the programme. We particularly note the comments about student presentation of work. The staff have made a priority of this in the light of last year's report, and it is heartening to see that clear improvements have been made. We also note the praise for the team's double marking system, and can assure <> that this will be maintained.

The report raises a question of perceived bias towards screenwriting as opposed to other forms and genres. We do not believe this is a reflection of programme design or delivery, but more a result of this particular cohort's collective strengths and interests. There was an unusually large cluster of talented film and television writers in this year's group. However, we share the Examiner's view that more opportunity could be offered to specialize in theatre writing. This will be provided in 2013-14 with the introduction of a new module in Writing for Theatre & Radio, allowing for a level of focus on playwriting not currently available along with more time for practical workshops and, depending on numbers, the staging of work. The opportunity for putting plays on their feet continues to exist outside the curriculum within the School's postgraduate festival, New Stages, and – as pointed out before - students are encouraged to submit their work to outside theatres and playwrights' groups. In terms of writing for live performance, members of this year's MA group had notable success in aria writing within a scheme operated by Opera North in conjunction with the Northern College of Music, and recent graduates had work staged at theatres such as the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Old Vic and Bolton Octagon. It would be fair to point out, however, that playwriting as a specialism is generally less popular with students than screen or prose writing, and that students with little or no experience of practical theatre find it hard to grasp the basic conventions. This is not a reason to avoid the problem, of course, but does go some way to explaining the preference for and greater achievement in other forms.

As far as prose writing is concerned, we acknowledge that this is a specialism not covered by the programme team's direct professional expertise, though we are confident the teaching is of a high standard. However, we agree that, when resources allow, it

would be desirable to bring in mentors and tutors to plug the gap. We have done this from time-to-time in the past, particularly on the Individual Project and Research Project modules, and we would wish to do so again when the academic need arose. Of course, we currently operating in financially straitened times, which makes this difficult as a regular policy. But we recognize <> observation, and will work towards it as a goal.

Signed: <>

Date: 5 January 2013