

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

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

Faculty / School of:	Philosophy, Religion, and History of Science
Subject(s):	<i>Philosophy</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Ancient Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Advanced Topics in Value Theory, Aesthetics & Philosophy of Art, Ethics of Life and Death, Philosophy of Food, Hume, Metaethics, Feminist Philosophy, Political Philosophy, Philosophy & Literature, and final year dissertations.
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**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 Quality Assurance**
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 require 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?

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

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 Intended Learning Outcomes were entirely appropriate for the modules and commensurate with the level of the award. The structure and content of the modules were excellent, and the standards entirely appropriate.

- 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.*

Yes: the Aims and ILOs met the expectations of the national subject benchmark, and the programme compares very favourably with undergraduate work I have examined at comparable institutions.

- 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 materials provided were sufficient for me to make an external assessment. Course syllabi were clear, detailed, and in many cases offered (or repeated from the handbook) good advice on essay writing and assessment criteria. In general the comments from markers and monitors were excellent and in some cases impressively detailed. The assessment system is in general clear, rigorous, fair, equitable, and accurately measures student achievement against the individual learning outcomes for the modules. Finally, the marking in these modules was entirely appropriate for the levels concerned. The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment methods as indicated by student performance was very high.

- 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.*

Yes.

- 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. 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.

There were no notable enhancements, other than the provision of some new and excellent courses, reflecting the research interests of staff. But there were no recommendations for enhancements – at least not from me – last year, since the content, teaching, and administration of the courses all seemed first rate, and the very high standards have been maintained this year.

- 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 curriculum is well-informed by current research; this isn't surprising, since philosophers at Leeds are extremely research active and prominent in their respective philosophical areas.

- 8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD**

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. **If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements**

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. **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 materials were available both in print form and online, and these were sufficient to enable me to act effectively. In this and in other matters, the support and guidance offered by the department and the school were excellent.

11. **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, all materials were made available either in print form or online; materials were in general very impressive.

12. **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?**

Yes; my comments were considered and implemented.

13. **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?**

Sufficient assessed examined work was made available; the scripts were clearly marked/annotated. As a result I am confident in my evaluation of the standard of student work.

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

Yes for both questions.

15. **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 were excellent. I travelled to Leeds the day before the meeting, and that afternoon had a look at final assessed work and dissertations. I then attended the meeting of the Board of Examiners, and was satisfied with its operation and with the recommendations of the board. The meeting was conducted with efficiency, clarity, and fairness, and the process struck me as robust.

There is one point I would like to make with regard to the conduct of the meeting, and with regard to consideration of mitigating circumstances and medical evidence. (I'm raising the point here as it concerns the Examiners' Meeting as a whole.) At one point there was a long and detailed discussion about mitigating circumstances and medical evidence for a student who was joint with English. But there was no representative from English attending the meeting. This is unfortunate and I would strongly urge that a representative from English is present for the relevant parts of the Philosophy Exam Board in future. All other subjects managed to send someone along. (I understand that English organized their exam board for the same time as Philosophy, but that doesn't seem good enough reason not to send a representative who has all of the relevant information about the relevant students. I take it that English is a big department and there should be plenty of staff available who could, therefore, attend the Philosophy meeting.) As it was, I am entirely satisfied with the decision made by the Philosophy Board about this student's case. But as a general rule I don't think that departments should be allowed to pick and choose whether they attend meetings where their students are being discussed, especially students for whom there are mitigating circumstances and/or medical issues.

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

The appropriate procedures were in place (though see the above comment). Discussion was rigorous, professional, and thorough, and due consideration was given to all of the relevant evidence about circumstances and medical matters. I am happy to endorse the results of the discussion about all of these cases.

Other comments

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

I have been very impressed by the range of modules on offer to the students, the helpfulness and thoroughness of written comments, the operation of the online system for submission of essays and for marking and monitoring, the procedures for marking and moderation, and the professionalism with which the modules are administered and the external examining process conducted.

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

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

Faculty / School of:	Philosophy, Religion and the History of Science
Subject(s):	<i>Philosophy</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	PHIL3920 Independent Study; PHIL3020 Proctoring; PHIL3020 Realism and Representation in Science; PHIL2999 Philosophy Students into Schools; PHIL2121 Introduction to Philosophy of Language; PHIL2402 Topics in Epistemology, Theory and Evidence; PHIL3251 Metaphysics of the Sciences; PHIL3851 Introduction to Philosophy of Modern Physics; PHIL3311/3320 Philosophy of Biology; PHIL3855 Philosophical Issues In Technology; PHIL3320 Philosophy of Biology; PHIL3311 Introduction to Philosophy of Biology; PHIL3121 Advanced Topics in Philosophy of Language; PHIL 2422 Topics in Epistemology, Knowledge and Justification; PHIL3020 Dissertation.
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**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 Quality Assurance**
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

NA

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?

NA

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

NA

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.*

Standards in general are entirely appropriate for a BA level 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 standards of this programme compare suitably with other degree-level programmes with which I am familiar (e.g. Cambridge and UCL).

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.*

Methods of assessment are appropriate and varied. Marking is to a suitable standard, and monitoring of marks is careful and disciplined. (Monitoring practice now seems entirely uniform, unlike in previous years where sometimes monitors were tempted to alter just a few marks.) Student performance is mixed, but the quality of work at the top end is very high indeed. As usual, I have been impressed by course design and also by the quality of feedback offered to students.

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 best students on the Leeds course compared very favourably with the strongest students I have encountered in similar programmes at other Universities. The format of assessed work gives them ample opportunity to exhibit their strengths, and also enables suitable discrimination of students' ability.

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

NA

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.

My criticisms from last year seem to have been addressed. I have not had much concern about the precise content of teaching, but I was a little concerned about the handling of some issues at the exam board itself. These latter problems have been largely eliminated by restricting the number of people attending the examination board.

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 hard for me to comment on the balance of the curriculum as a whole, because I was involved in assessing only a subset of the department's offerings. In terms of coverage in philosophy of science and epistemology, the topics on offer seem entirely suitable. I cannot say whether (for example) ethics, political philosophy, and the history of philosophy received adequate coverage.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

NA

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

NA

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. 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.

Documentation was adequate

11. 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, information was all appropriate and adequate. It would be nice if more modules could be assessed online, in order to reduce workload immediately prior to the examination board.

12. 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 given examination papers in good time, and occasionally made minor recommendations regarding alterations. These were considered in a suitable manner. In future, if a significantly different format for an examination is to be used, I suggest a specimen paper is circulated to students in advance so they know better what sort of exam to expect.

13. 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 work was provided, and by and large annotations and marks were clear.

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

Choice of subjects was appropriate. In one case it seemed that one examiner had not applied the marking scheme properly. More specifically, I read the following comment: "The main reason why I'm inclined towards a 2:1 mark rather than a first is that the author does not seem to be adding too much to the extant literature." Addition to extant literature should not be necessary for a first class mark. Fortunately the dissertation in question was awarded a first, but examiners need to be aware of the dangers of expecting too much from undergraduate work.

15. 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?

I attended the meeting and I found it to be very well organised. Some further clarification would be useful about the role of performance on industry placements in affecting overall classification. This was a topic that was extensively discussed at the meeting.

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

Everything was done according to the University's policies. I have some concerns about whether the examination Board is the right place to consider mitigating circumstances. It seems to me that ideally there would be a strict separation between an initial classification based solely on academic performance, to be conducted in total anonymity, and a subsequent modulation of those marks, which would take into account all relevant personal circumstances, and which would therefore not be anonymous. It is difficult for the Board to do both jobs.

Other comments

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

NA