

**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:	Education
Subject(s):	<i>TESOL CHINA</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Approaches and contexts in TESOL Introduction to second language acquisition Oral and written skills for TESOL Critical Study
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA TESOL CHINA

**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*

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?*

**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*

**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.*

Learning outcomes are appropriate to the level of the award and the structure and content of the programme are appropriate to the type of 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 aims and ILOs are comparable to those of similar course at other universities and in line with benchmarks set by the HEQ framework.

**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.*

Students are assessed by assignment and these are generally suited to the subject. The standard of work produced is generally of a high standard and comparable to that of students on similar programmes. The critical studies are generally strong but students tend to undertake quantitative work over qualitative work. Sample sizes are not always large enough for this kind of research, however. Often students prepare questionnaires for their critical study but the quality of the questions is variable, often because ideas are poorly expressed in English.

I remain concerned about the cursory approach to ethics particularly in the critical studies. Many students do not discuss ethics at all although it is clearly an issue in any research involving humans. When control groups are involved in experimental research, the ethical dimension is particularly acute, but this is hardly if ever considered.

**I would like to see all resubmitted work from China marked by UK staff.** This would ensure that standards are maintained at both institutions

Although the value of learning to write in an academic style is invaluable for those wishing to pursue an academic career, this is not the case for all students, as students also pointed out at our latest meeting with them. Given this, different methods of assessment might be considered.

There is no doubt that the teaching on this programme is strong. The students are taught by highly qualified Chinese and UK academics. The relationship between the two institutions seems good and staff from both institutions must be congratulated on this.

The students in China noted some issues with time at the meeting I held with them in March 2013. First they felt that completing the programme within the year was too pressurized, particularly given how the programme is organized in 3-week blocks with the assignment due one week later. Second, although both the quality and speed of feedback was positively evaluated, the timing was not. Students would like to receive feedback on their first assignment before submitting the second. If this was possible, feedback would be formative as well as summative.

Work that is resubmitted and passes attracts a pass mark, which is in line with practices in other institutions. However, it would be useful for students to see what the mark would have been had the work been a first attempt.

**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 students are generally of a high standard. There are cases of plagiarism, but these are identified and dealt with effectively by tutors.

The cohort is generally of a good standard. They were engaged in the classes I observed in China.

**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.*

It was acknowledged that the course provides a sound and appropriate academic training in the subject area. Students also praised the input on methodology, in that the programme provides them with lots of useful ideas for classroom activities. This is to be commended.

**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.*

Many of the modules are led by tutors who research in the field they are teaching. This ensures that the content is research-led and current. The Chinese staff in particular have expertise in second language acquisition.

**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**

**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.*

Yes. We have recently been enrolled onto the VLE which is helpful.

**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 this is all done well. I am impressed with the way external examiners' days are organised. It is very useful to hear about developments in the programme and to share impressions with EEs of other programmes.

**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?**

The questions as far as I am aware have remained the same. I would like to see a greater range in the type of assessment as I have previously indicated.

**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. I was sent plenty of work and it represented work from all grade bands. Some of the work is annotated but not all. I would prefer to see work that is annotated.

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

There are some excellent critical studies but I wonder why you call them this. Dissertation is much more widely used. Critical studies are second marked but as far as I am aware, this isn't blind double marking. I think this would be a useful approach to ensure standards. I would expect that each CS would be marked by a member from each institution.

**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?**

Excellent –see above.

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

These issues have been dealt with before we attend the Board.

**Other comments**

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

It was a pleasure to go to China to see the course in situ. The Chinese staff particularly, <>, and <> were extremely hospitable and helpful. It was also useful to meet the other teaching staff and the students to elicit their opinions of the programme. I was less impressed, however, with the arrangements for going to China. The visa was particularly problematic and took up a good deal of my time. I would recommend that in future the University takes responsibility for arranging the visa.

14 April 2014

Dear

Thank you for your External Examiner's reports for the MA TESOL, TESOL China and TESOL YL programmes, 2012-13, and for the work you have carried out this year. We are very pleased to see that in general you are positive about the programmes, about the support offered to students, and about the work they produce. We would like to respond to some of the constructive comments that you have made in your reports, and explain how we are addressing them. These comments relate to the Critical Study, the range of assessment types, marking of resubmitted work, marking in general, and the TESOL Forum. Because there was a certain overlap in your reports, we are including comments on all three programmes in this response.

Turning first to the Critical Study, you feel that students on the MA TESOL tend to deal more effectively with the literature review than with the research methods, where you identify an over-reliance on questionnaires. Thank you for this observation. We do try to encourage students to draw upon research strategies that are appropriate to the question they are asking. Up to 2012/13 students on the MA TESOL programme followed a dedicated research methods module, EDUC5922M Research Methods for TESOL. On that module they were introduced to a range of research strategies commonly encountered in our field, with particular attention given to questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation. From 2013/14 students follow a generic research methods module (EDUC5060M Research Methods in Education), common to all taught postgraduate programmes across the School. The focus of this module is less on specific research strategies and more on the foundations and traditions of research. Hence the weight of responsibility to ensure that appropriate research strategies are chosen now rests more on the shoulders of the individual supervisor. The team will discuss your point about the range of appropriate strategies at a forthcoming team meeting.

You also make some pertinent points about the MA TESOL (China) Critical Studies, relating to the propensity to rely on questionnaires, and the need to address research ethics. Ethics is indeed a concept for serious consideration, but on the MA TESOL (China) this is taking a long time to be absorbed, since norms for research in China are different from those in the UK. Most research in our field in China remains quantitative (with a predilection for anonymous closed questionnaires) and often the sampling can be somewhat arbitrary. We have, though, introduced the principle that it is necessary to think about any effect that the research may have on participants. Students who carry out qualitative/mixed method studies do now make an attempt to tell the reader what they did to ensure confidentiality and consent. Students on the MA TESOL (China) programme are now also following EDUC5060M Research Methods in Education, which highlights the ethical dimension. There is no guarantee however that this will lead to increased sensitivity immediately.

Also on this topic you ask why we call the research project a Critical Study rather than a Dissertation. At the School of Education at Leeds we feel that the term Critical Study reflects the nature of what we ask our students to do, and it also encourages them to foreground the notion of criticality in their research.

Regarding assessment, you had some concerns about the range of assessment types and strategies that we employ, on the MA TESOL, MA TESOL YL and MA TESOL (China) programmes. Specifically you make the point that while learning to write in an academic style is invaluable for those wishing to pursue an academic career, not all students will be aspiring to such a career, and that given this, different methods of assessment might be considered. We do make it clear in our publicity that our degrees are 'academic'. The assessment types we offer are varied but are still appropriate to academic study and moreover are designed to reflect the specific module content and process. We also maintain that the knowledge and skills developed whilst learning how to write academic texts are transferable to professional practice. As a School, we are considering alternatives to our more established assessment methods: there is currently a School-level working party addressing this issue. Module coordinators will incorporate suggestions made during this exercise, where they find it appropriate. On the MA TESOL (China) modes of assessment follow those on the Leeds-based MA TESOL.

Turning now to marking, you note that some assessed and marked work is annotated but not all. The School-level procedure which tutors are encouraged to follow involves not writing on scripts but referring to page numbers in the detailed feedback. You also suggest that feedback on resubmitted work should include a note about the mark the work would have received, had it been a first submission. Markers are given advice about responding to resubmitted work that is of a higher quality than that which would attract a bare pass mark. They should include a note in their feedback to the effect that 'in other circumstances this would have attracted a higher mark.' Some tutors also indicate the band which the work would have received had it been a first submission. This is not School policy though.

Again on the topic of marking, you say all resubmitted work from China should be marked by UK staff, helping to ensure that standards are maintained at both institutions. Thank you for this suggestion. This is a procedure that has now been agreed.

Finally, we turn to your comments about the TESOL Forum. You suggest that the team could consider how to ensure that students with and without experience get the most out of this seminar. We believe that both experienced and less experienced students learn much from each other in the TESOL Forum. More experienced teachers have the opportunity to work with novice teachers attending the MA TESOL Studies programme, an experience of benefit for those who intend to move into teacher training in the future.

Thank you very much indeed again for your reports. We can assure you that your external examiner comments continue to be valued very highly by the TESOL team and the School as a whole.

Yours sincerely

Head of School of Education