

**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):

TESOL

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MA TESOL  
MA TESOL Young Learners  
MA TESOL Teacher Education  
MA TESOL Studies

EDUC 5001M  
EDUC 5301M  
EDUC 5308M  
EDUC 5903M  
EDUC 5912M  
EDUC 5922M  
EDUC 5927M  
EDUC 5961M  
EDUC5001M  
EDUC5301M  
EDUC5308M  
EDUC5912M

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

MA

**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*

N/A

**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.*

The ILOs are appropriate for the structure, content, and award of the master's programmes.

**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 meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. The programme compares well with others of a similar nature at other 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.*

I continue to believe the range of assessment methods used and assignment titles speak well of the programme. Although there was some feeling among the students I have spoken to over the last year that less emphasis could be put on essay writing as an assignment task, compared to some other programmes I am acquainted with, I feel the Leeds programme is strong in this area.

I like the fact that the assignments ask candidates to draw on a mix of theoretical and practical (i.e., pedagogic) knowledge, given the programme's focus on teaching and teacher education.

However, I found standards of grading continue to differ: one member of staff's idea of a 70 is not another's. Sometimes bare distinctions were awarded when, in my view at least, the work was worth much more than this. This is not a plea for grade inflation (indeed, I found other marks to err on the overly-generous side); but a plea to use the full scale of marks *where merited*.

Students are offered helpful feedback. As I have done in previous reports, I note and welcome the fact that lecturers offer the opportunity for students to submit assignment drafts and receive formative feedback. This is a practice that other institutions would do well to take up, and is another exemplary feature of the programmes.

**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.*

Students were certainly provided with adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and ILOs. The range of student performance is typical of other comparable programmes at other institutions, with work ranging from the outstanding to the poor.

In 5001M, the Critical Study portfolio, some weaker candidates displayed inadequate knowledge of research methodologies at both a practical and a theoretical level. Strong pieces of work displayed a very wide and competent use of the literature and sophisticated, in-depth argumentation. At times the markers signalled that these candidates' responses went well beyond what was covered during lectures. Weak work was frequently associated with language problems, a lack of understanding of key concepts, a failure to analyse language successfully, and overly brief answers which were often only supported by a meagre range of literature.

**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.*

**Research methods module:**

A new module, Beginning Research in Education, began last year, and it will be implemented systematically this year. This is very welcome news, and a good example of how the School of Education demonstrates that it takes external examiners' comments and suggestions seriously. I have raised issues connected to students' knowledge of research methods in previous years (and do so again this year), and anticipate that this module will help lessen the problems of this nature. A very good addition to the programme. I understand that the plan for 2014-15 is that this module becomes part of Critical Study and will become compulsory. Also definitely a good move.

**Ethical approval:**

A more formal system of requiring students to apply for ethical approval to conduct research with human participants was trialled and I understand will be implemented systematically in 2014-15. This was another issue about which I have expressed concerns, and I am very glad to see this addition to the programme.

**Plagiarism:**

The introduction of a one-hour session on plagiarism has apparently seen a big fall in plagiarism. Another welcome addition to the programme.

I also liked the fact that when student has been found to have plagiarised, they have to do an online plagiarism test and then send a screenshot to the departmental plagiarism officer to show they scored maximum marks on it.

**Minimum number of students on modules:**

In principle, the programme has introduced the stipulation that there must be a minimum of 6 students enrolled on a module for it to run. This seems reasonable.

**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 very clearly relates theory and practice, and is grounded in theory. There was evidence from assignment tasks that state-of-the-art theory is being drawn on in class and that students are required to understand it and put it into practice.

**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

**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: the support provided was helpful. I had appropriate access to relevant materials.

**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, I was provided with appropriate documentation. The administrative support is courteous, friendly, and professional.

**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?**

N/A

(I wasn't provided with draft exams because they do not feature on the programmes for which I am responsible)

**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, in my view samples of work are of the appropriate size and reflect the marks range properly.

Some scripts were annotated; others were not, but I was able to see end comments and grades for all scripts.

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

Yes, the choice of subjects was apt. The assessment was appropriate for the most part, but I did have concerns regarding weak method chapters/sections. I say more about this in the 'Other Comments' box below.

**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?**

Yes, all of the administrative arrangements were fine. Better than fine, in fact—very efficient.

I attended both Boards, and continue to be impressed by how well examiners' time is spent.

I was satisfied with the Board's recommendations.

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

Yes.

**Other comments**

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

Overall I hope my comments make it clear I continue to believe this is a very good programme characterised by some exemplary practices, such as providing students with feedback on the first drafts of their writing.

In what follows I raise concerns associated with candidates' grasp and reporting of methods/methodologies in their critical studies projects. However, hopefully the introduction of the new research methods module and the ethical approval applications will address both of these concerns over the next year.

Specifically, my concerns relate to (weaker) candidates' lack of methodological knowledge; to their reporting of methods; to their reporting of coding of qualitative data; and to reporting of ethical procedures.

I continue to have serious concerns about weaker candidates' lack of methodological knowledge in connection with the Critical Study component of the programmes, and about the importance (or rather the lack of importance) candidates attach to the methodology chapter of their dissertations. I saw more than one Critical Study project which was graded at mid-merit level whose method chapters were two to three pages long, with nothing said to justify or explain the choice of methods/methodology, about the formation and shaping/development of the instruments, nor about the procedures used to analyse the results. This for me is not acceptable when one is reporting on an extended empirical piece of research. Here is a set of comments from my notes on a script which was unfortunately not at all untypical:

"No method section in the 'Extension of Learning' section at all. No explanation of why the questionnaire looks the way it does, and whether/to what extent it draws on previous researchers' questionnaires. No justification of choice of method or methodology. No details of how the data was analysed. No piloting. Apparently no attempt to sample the population in a principled way. Once again, when it comes to the interview data, apparently there was no coding—the candidate just proceeds question by question reporting the findings. This is poor."

Another weakness I noticed in many, perhaps most, of the Critical Study texts was that there was no mention of coding of interview data; and from the way the interview data was then written up, where candidates simply proceeded on the basis of informant by informant, rather than theme by theme, it seemed in fact no systematic coding had taken place at all. It would be easy to remedy this by introducing a session/strengthening an existing session on coding during the research methods modules.

There continues to be problems with the ethics sections of some Critical Study projects.

Despite these concerns, I note how the School are addressing these, and trust such issues will diminish by next year.

27 February 2014

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Dear <>

Thank you for your External Examiner's report for the MA TESOL and TESOL Studies 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.

You noted that you found variations in the standards of grading, pointing out that in your view 'one member of staff's idea of a 70 is not another's'. Any adverse comment about inconsistency in marking and grading causes us concern, and we continue to address this issue. At the beginning of the marking process we carry out a moderation activity as a matter of course, where more than one first marker is involved. From 2013-2014 every MA Critical Study will be second-marked, which should contribute towards strengthening our practices in this area. However, given that we have some new staff members in the TESOL team, and also given your comments, we feel that the time is right to carry out a standardization exercise for marking and grading the Critical Studies and the Portfolios. The current programme coordinators for the MA TESOL and MA TESOL Studies will put this process in place.

You also noted the poor methodology sections of some Critical Studies. We are continuing to find ways of improving students' research skills and are working this semester on a Teaching Enhancement Scheme to integrate the new online research methods module 'EDUC 5060M: Getting started: Research questions and approaches in education' into our programme, so that students receive both generic and specialized language education research training. However most of your comments appear to relate to the performance of students' in their Portfolios on the MA TESOL Studies programme. The ability to do a 'small-scale research project' is one of the objectives of this programme, it is true, but this aspect of students' skills development is less prioritized than on the MA TESOL or other Master's level programmes in the School. In practice, MA TESOL Studies students take their own custom-designed (non-assessed) research methods module and then conduct a small-scale investigation on a chosen theme and write it up within an advisory limit of 4000 words, integrated within the Portfolio. The scope of the research, and space for discussion of methodological issues, is necessarily limited. For example we would not expect students to conduct pilot studies, the sampling of the population is inevitably restricted, and the limited amount of data generated means that coding is sometimes not necessary in analysing interviews. We do accept the need to optimize the quality of student research and will consider being more specific in what methodological information is required in that section of the Portfolio.

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 the School of Education