

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	Modern Languages
<i>Subject(s):</i>	<i>Japanese Studies</i>
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	UG Japanese Studies
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	Various

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

I have read the previous examiner's comments re the 20-90 marking system and mitigating circumstances. On the former it seems little can be done, but it does seem rather odd that the university persists with this system as it is not well known to employers and postgraduate funding award committees who will not look carefully for these matters when viewing graduate transcripts. As with mathematics it is possible in languages for students to get 100 per cent, or thereabouts on a paper, for example with a straightforward kanji test. Why then mark down from there? Similarly there was a case this year where a student was awarded 20 for simply handing in a sheet of paper with the question header and his/her name on the sheet. Why is it not possible to award near zero for this type of behaviour? I understand there is little one can do, so I suppose everyone will have to continue to live with it.

Related to this, perhaps, I thought that outstanding dissertations should be given an outstanding mark. This is not a Leeds thing so much as something that is a perennial problem throughout British academia. Maybe there is nothing I can do here except to exhort markers not to be nervous about going beyond 73 with properly impressive work. The dissertation is a key marker of student potential for postgraduate success and for funding committees to assess students in this respect. Markers should be made more aware of the consequences for talented students from overly parsimonious marking of the dissertation. On the other side of this there seems to be clustering of dissertation marks around the 68-73 range. Maybe it was simply that the students produced work at this level in general. That is possible with a task like a dissertation, so I will not take too much from that.

On mitigating circumstances there was discussion at the exam board where it appears a student culture of gaming the system is becoming entrenched. This needs to change, for everyone's sakes. Perhaps the consideration of cases is being done at too great a distance from the student and staff member leading the module. There appears to be considerable staff dissatisfaction regarding the present system as it stands and I recommend that the school review and overhaul.

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?

Yes

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.*

I confirm that I think the level of student output was at the level commensurate with the level 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.*

I am not aware of any national subject benchmarks in Japanese studies. I'd be interested to see one if it exists. Nevertheless, the level of performance of students was equivalent to what I have seen in my own institution and elsewhere.

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.*

These were in general good but could be improved, in my opinion.

1. There is too much variability across modules in terms of the types of assessments used in similar subject areas. There needs, in my opinion, to be more thought put into making sure that student equity is maintained between modules in terms of their assessment requirements and structures.
2. There needs, in my opinion to be more input at an early stage into both the basic spelling and formatting of assessment papers prior to sending to the external for sending off. It isn't the external's job to edit lecturer's poor spelling and phrasing. This should be done by an examination committee.
3. In addition to this, the lecturers and exam paper checkers/advisors could do more at an early stage to make sure that questions within exams suit the level of students being assessed. So, for example, level 3 students should be being challenged with greater demands on their analytical skills, while level 1 with more descriptive work.

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.

I though the dissertations that I read were rather good, if somewhat under marked in places. If a dissertation really is outstanding, then a marker should feel confident in giving it an outstanding mark. The 20-90 marking system may be to some extent discouraging markers from going beyond the low-70s, but that is not the only issue, I believe, as it is an endemic and perennial problem across academia in the social sciences and humanities. For students who wish to go on to postgraduate study and have the capabilities to access funding and do really well this issue is particularly important.

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.

I can't really say, as this is my first 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.

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

N/A

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

N/A

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.

Yes

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

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. Please see above.

1. Too many simple spelling and grammar mistakes were present in exam papers sent to me. This should be cleared up prior to being seen by me.
2. There was too much variability in terms of the demands of each question and the level of appropriateness for each student. Again, an exam paper committee should be picking this up prior to sending on to being seen by the external.
3. There was some variability between modules in terms of what each exam was asking for. Possibly the department should review this in terms of ensuring student equity across degree programmes and between levels of examination.

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

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

Yes.

Perhaps some dissertations were slightly under marked in the sense that they could have deserved higher. I didn't change any this time because I wanted to ensure student equity across the range. However, markers should be advised that outstanding work should get an outstanding mark.

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?

Yes.

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

On reading the previous external's report this appears to be a recurring problem. The School/Department appear to be making a rod for their own backs in creating a system which some students can easily 'game' and a culture of gaming set in among students. This is a shame for those that do play by the spirit as well as the letter of the rules. The school needs to be much more robust in dealing with applications for mitigating circumstances and in making sure that work is submitted in as short a time as possible thereafter. Staff also need to be notified when extensions are given to students so that they can build in time for marking.

Other comments

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

School of Languages, Cultures and Societies

FACULTY OF ARTS



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

02 March 2015

Dear

Response to External Examiner's Report, 2013-2014

Many thanks for your Examiner's Report for the academic year 2013-2014.

In the 'Matters for Urgent Attention' section, I note in particular your concern with the mitigating circumstances procedures, the potential you describe for a culture of students 'gaming the system' becoming entrenched, and the need for a rehaul of this system. Our exams tutor is aware of your, and other colleagues', concerns about this and the procedures around the handling of cases of students claiming mitigating circumstances are currently under review. I understand it is anticipated that the outcomes of this review will be communicated in the autumn.

I further note your reservations about the University's 20-90 scale marking system, and specifically about the award of 20 for a paper which was almost blank. I am aware that the option to award 0 for 'no serious attempt' was removed recently. In light of your comments I have contacted the Exams Office to provide the rationale for this decision and either I, or they, will get back to you on this point.

I am delighted that you felt the dissertations you read were of a high standard. I welcome your comments on the need to encourage colleagues to ensure that outstanding dissertations receive outstanding marks, and note your concern that we may be under-marking dissertations in general. I have had a look at the marks in light of your report. Overall there were fourteen 1st class marks awarded this year for dissertations in this module, out of a total of 38 students, and the highest two dissertations each received 80%. Neither of these were on Japanese programmes however, as this module is for students from the whole of East Asian Studies. In future years we will ensure that the marksheet for the whole module is available to externals, rather than just the marks of students from their section. Moreover, we will of course also pass on your comments to all members of staff.

Finally, I also note your comments on the checking of exam papers to ensure that questions and assignments are appropriate to the level of the module, that there is parity across modules of different levels, and that all papers are properly proof-read before being sent to you. I will pass these comments on to all colleagues.

It only remains for me to thank you very much for your input to our programmes and for your very helpful contributions at the exam board. Our programmes will benefit enormously from your comments.

With very best wishes