

## 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:	School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	History of Art with Museum Studies
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](mailto: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

None.

**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

**Standards**

- 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.

On the basis of the materials that I was asked to review and that I looked at during the examining process I can confirm that the intended learning outcomes for the HAMS programme and modules and the structure and content of the programme were entirely appropriate.

I can also confirm that the standards were appropriate to the 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 can confirm that the aims and ILOS of the programme are in line with other comparable programmes at other institutions and with national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

**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 methods of assessment offered are generally well constructed and provide students with clear, transparent and effective tools with regard to their performance and results. The internal system for marking the modules is sound, efficient and well balanced and ensures fairness and rigour. The feedback offered is accurate, detailed and helpful and provides students with clear and constructive advice and with clear suggestions on how to improve the quality of their work and progress.

The outstanding quality of the teaching, learning and assessment is demonstrated by student performance. The highest level of student work fully reflects the intellectual vibrancy of the learning environment, the rich choice in the subjects taught, the considerable knowledge base provided and the productive exchanges offered within the programme and beyond. The solid system of pastoral care offered by the tutors ensures that all students, including those in the middling and lower ranks, are put in a position to perform at their best.

**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. The academic standards of the student work are generally high or very high, demonstrating an ability to engage critically and originally with rich bodies of literature and complex debates. This was especially noticeable in some of the dissertations, whose standards approach those of MA level with regard to the originality, significance of the contribution offered and confidence with which the overall intellectual framework is put together.

**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.*

The teaching provision is rich and varied and engages with some of the fundamental questions at the forefront of art history and museum studies. An increased focus on topical areas of teaching and research for which the School is particularly well placed – such as histories of materiality and making and global art histories – is likely to prove beneficial in supporting the School's engagement with the objectives outlined by the Leeds curriculum, as well as ensure a constant expansion of its recruitment base nationally and internationally. Worth of particular notice is also the constant development of active links with the creative and heritage industries.

**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.*

I continue to be very impressed by the extent to which the strong and diverse research culture of the School informs directly the teaching on a day-to-day basis. Many modules demonstrate a fresh and dynamic approach to teaching and an ability to take risks, involving students directly in the research process. The rich provision of seminar-based teaching, where an active engagement with research is actively pursued, deserves special commendation. This culture is allowing for the flourishing of projects embedded in the teaching that demand the development of students independent research and critical skills comparable to postgraduate work.

The students with whom I spoke fully recognise the benefits of the research-driven teaching offered, commenting very positively on the School's research culture: 'Tutors talk about their projects, and teaching and research feel like a unified experience', commented one student. Students are also appreciative of the 'highly critically aware' approach of the School.

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

With its attention to research training and to developing students into independent researchers, the programme provides excellent preparation to PhD level.

**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.*

The arrangements and support made to assist me in my role as external examiner were again very good this year. I was given full access to the VLE system and support on how to navigate it. In the week of the Exam Board meeting staff were extremely helpful in giving me access to other relevant materials – such as a larger sample of dissertations and exhibition project materials – fully supporting my role. This year I was also able to speak with a many tutors and with some students and this provided me with significant new insights into the programme and the student experience.

The only aspect of the process that could be slightly reviewed is the extent to which it tends to be compressed into the last weeks of the academic year. For next year I would like to be sent more sample materials (particularly essays) just after the end of the first semester. If possible I would also like to establish a contact with a group of students representing all levels early on in the year, so as to be able to follow their progress during the course of the year.

**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. The materials and guidelines provided were appropriate and allowed me to fulfil my role as external examiner.

**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. I was provided with all the relevant examination materials. As in previous years, I felt that the level of the questions was appropriate and the range of the questions formulated allowed for students operating at all levels of ability to perform at their best. The range of questions and briefs and the ways in which they are articulated is in line with the high didactic energy of the programme. Appropriate arrangements were made to take my comments into account.

**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 (see point 10 above for my suggestions for a more continuous engagement with students and their work for next year).

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

Yes. The choice of subjects reveals an open and ambitious approach, fully supporting students in the development of projects that demonstrate intellectual creativity and rigour. I was impressed by the current and often contentious topics chosen by some of the dissertations. The dissertation assessment process is clear, transparent and constructive, demonstrating a genuine engagement by tutors with all the stages of development of the project.

**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. I was able to attend the meeting and was fully satisfied with the recommendations of the Board.

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

Yes. As in previous years, the discussion during the meeting demonstrated the School's ability to take into account appropriately mitigating circumstances and medical conditions.

**Other comments**

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

This is my third year as external examiner for HAMS and I want to congratulate all staff for another highly successful year. I continue to be very impressed by the culture and the standards of the programme and the School more generally, showing real commitment to the students and an intellectually dynamic and ambitious approach to teaching and research.

**New directions for the School and the HAMS programme**

This year it was especially stimulating to see how the School is responding to the new pressures to remain highly competitive nationally and internationally. The eight new degrees proposed for 2015 look very strong, enhancing in new ways the long-standing mission of the School to interweave effectively the historical with the heritage and the contemporary. Perhaps greater visibility could be given to the School's engagement with two areas that would further enhance its wide appeal: the histories of materiality and making and global art histories (this would also respond well to the Leeds curriculum with regard to Ethics and responsibility and Global insights).

In line with the challenges ahead, HAMS might want to capitalise further on the opportunities generated

by the 'material turn', which is bringing down barriers between arts, humanities and sciences and between academia, museums, the creative industries and the world of cultural policy. It might consider enhancing its cross-disciplinary base and explore the possibilities of a more overt object-based approach to teaching and research as a way to equip particularly level 3 students with a distinctive focus that would put them in a strong position for jobs in the cultural industries.

### **Student responses**

The responses emerging from the students consulted were extremely positive. Students commented on the 'amazing faculty' and praised the 'very stimulating teaching', particularly the many opportunities for seminar-based teaching. The students consulted commented very positively on the rich and stimulating intellectual environment offered by the School and fully acknowledged the advantages of the fertile crossover across the different programmes. Students appreciated the rich research-led teaching provision, offering a greater choice as the degree progresses. Students also demonstrate an awareness of the ambitious toolkit offered by the programme, which allows them to develop a range of different skills - for example in the way in which different forms and genres of academic and curatorial writing are developed and presentation skills nurtured. They feel empowered by how the programme 'opened many doors' and raised their employability profile. Students commented positively on the possibility for the programme to continue to develop links with the creative/heritage industries in Leeds and beyond – this is an area that might demand more resources (for example towards trips and travel).

Two areas of minor criticism emerged from the conversations with students:

- The library was described as not ideally equipped for research and occasionally unable to cope with some of the demands put on students by some of the most ambitious taught modules (for example lacking sufficient copies of key texts; the fee demanded for borrowing British Library books was also seen as problematic).

- The module enrolment system was seen as in need of some attention. According to one student a different model for selecting the modules should be explored, as it is sometimes difficult to get any of the modules for which students have opted.

An area of particular strength of the School and the programme is, according to the students consulted, the tutors' availability to meet students. Students also emphasised the many opportunities offered to meet with other students and to connect across the School and beyond. Students praised the excellent programme of lectures and artists talks.

All the students I spoke to said that they would strongly recommend the programme.

### **Balance teaching/research**

The School houses a thriving scholarly community and an outstanding research culture. As last year, I want to flag up an area of some possible concern for tutors in the balance between teaching and administration vis-à-vis research. While tutors demonstrate an exceptional level of dedication, their overall workload looks potentially challenging. It is of vital importance to continue to support the internal research leave system currently in operation, and to ensure that it continues to be sufficiently open to allow for a variety of research projects at different stages of development to prosper.

20<sup>th</sup> September 2014

<>

Dear <>,

We thank you for your report and welcome your very thoughtful observations and encouraging comments on our BA History of Art with Museums Studies programme. We are very pleased that experience as external examiner for the HAMS programme continues to be such a positive one and we thank you for your helpful, supportive and very complimentary comments. It was very gratifying to hear that you considered that you continue to be 'very impressed by the culture and the standards of the programme. It was also pleasing to hear that you considered that our programme has 'outstanding quality of the teaching, learning and assessment' and that you see this is clearly 'demonstrated by (our) student performance'. We are very pleased to note that you consider that the standard of the student work was 'high or very high' and that our students consistently demonstrate 'the ability to engage critically and originally with rich bodies of literature and complex debates.' We also note your comment that some of our student dissertations approach those of MA standard; this is particularly gratifying and something we will certainly pass on to the student body.

We were especially interested in your suggestion that there are significant opportunities available for increased distinctiveness for the HAMS programme through the 'material turn' and the re-focus on object-based study. This is precisely what we feel that the HAMS programme can offer and we very much welcome your suggestions here.

In terms of your comments on refinements to process we will, of course, make every effort to ensure that you are sent an essay sample earlier in the examination cycle and we will arrange for a group of students to be available to talk to you again as we did this year via Skype – we are very pleased to hear that you take such an interest in the HAMS programme.

Overall we found your comments very encouraging and we will gladly pass on your congratulations to the programme teams. We are sure that they will very much appreciate your comments and the acknowledgement that their hard work, dedication and commitment is providing a consistently high quality teaching and learning experience for the students.

We would like to thank you for your informative support and positive contribution in helping us to maintain a critically informed and fair assessment process and we very much look forward to meeting you again next year.

Kind Regards

<>

Head of School