

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:	Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA

**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 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*

***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.*

The individual modules, the programme aims and the ILOs create a coherent, challenging and relevant MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies. Combined with the group experience of curating a small exhibition, the individual museum and gallery placements and the dissertation research the students experience an appropriate, wide-ranging study that should equip them for further academic study or employment. The ILOs are also supported by extensive and up-to-date reading lists, interesting and challenging essay questions and the broad expertise of departmental and museum-based staff who lead the course.

**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. Among employers and academics this course is one of the most respected Museum and Gallery Studies MAs in the country. This is due in part to the high recruitment standards – with students being expected to demonstrate past museum or gallery professional experience, the levels of pastoral attention and the fact that the MA is now exceptional in offering a range of museum and other visits (fieldwork). It also ensures that the professional placement remains at the heart of the experience – something which some comparable courses have relinquished yet which employers consider invaluable. There is also an impressive and changing range of placement opportunities reflecting <> dedication and the overall reputation of the course and its students. This feature is at the heart of the MA's success and, with many external partnerships, it is critical that it is properly resourced and supported.

Within the University, the results of the Post Graduate Taught Programme Survey indicate the high level of the programme's Aims and ILOs as well as its teaching methods and interpersonal dynamics.

**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 courses includes an appropriate blend of historical, philosophical, practical and theoretical elements. This framework enables students to develop questions and test ideas and possibilities, while the placement gives them the opportunity to compare their theoretical and academic reading to professional practice. Teaching is by an appropriate range of methods including student presentations and seminars, fieldwork and lectures by guest speakers. Indeed, the Module Reviews acknowledge how approachable, enthusiastic and informed the teaching throughout this programme is. Assessments are also commensurate with the award, including research-based formative and summative written assignments such as a short reflection on a museum or gallery visit, critical extended essay questions set for each course, a placement report and a research-based dissertation on a topic of the student's choosing. Other more vocational aspects of the curriculum are also to key the teaching and assessment methods, e.g. curating and evaluating a display in the University Library gallery, the weekly contributions to the blog, and the PG symposium that feeds into dissertation writing. These all contribute to the development of transferable skills – such as confidence and team building, adaptable communication skills and vocational experience. Students are also offered considerable access to their teachers and to other subject specialists through a programme of guest lectures, the various museums, galleries and market visits and their placements. They also have a reasonable opportunity to define their placement and select the focus of their report and dissertation so that these experiences reflect their interests and equip them for the next stage of their careers.

Having met the 2014/15 students in the process of installing this year's display in the Library gallery I now understand the benefit of this early assignment for team building and skills' development. It is helpful that this aspect of the course remains ungraded, but it might be worth considering inviting students to keep a project diary which, like the blog, could be digital and shared. This would serve

the purpose of creating a record of the activity which can be later consulted by students and staff.

**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 numbers on Art Gallery and Museum studies continue to grow, despite the fact that the profession in Britain has been shrinking for the last few years. Recruitment for this MA is done by interview and students must demonstrate prior Museum or Gallery experience, if only voluntary. This ensures that students have high levels of commitment and are generally of a high calibre. This year nearly a third of the twenty five students were awarded distinctions and the rest of the marks were spread across the range. Also this year there has been an unusually high number of late submissions (due to mitigating circumstances) and one foreign student who failed after dropping out.

In addition to the examined course essays, a dissertation and a placement report, students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their development and achievement of the Aims and ILOs in various less traditional ways, from the weekly blog posts on their reading, that build a conversation between students and teachers, to the first semester exhibition and Post Graduate symposium that provide opportunities to perform and develop ILOs.

My only minor concern remains with the tendency to leniency for foreign students with mediocre levels of written English. While I appreciate that staff may have become used to students' idiomatic English and may have watched them improve dramatically over the year, I would expect issues with grammar and expression to have a distinct impact on the final mark (though see no. 6 for new measures for addressing this).

**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.*

The Art Gallery and Museum Studies blog, which was introduced several years ago, is now a core part of the module and is contributing significantly to the ILOs. It serves as a test bed of ideas, it helps build the pedagogic environment from an early stage, and increases self-led and peer to peer learning. In addition, drawing on alumni and professional networks, the team has developed a varied and impressive range of specialist speakers to talk about professional opportunities and career development. Similarly, all staff are involved in outreach and in fostering relationships with future potential students, through schemes such as 'Articulations' for example.

Following my comments last year, I am pleased that the consistency and clarity of markers' feedback has noticeably improved and there is a greater likelihood that staff will draw students' attention to issues with their writing, especially where this undermines their mark.

This year students for whom English is not the first language were obliged to go on an intensive five-week language course that has been designed specifically for this department. I wholeheartedly welcome this initiative as Art Gallery and Museum studies is a course that attracts a high number of foreign students, especially from Asia. In some cases, these students' written English at the end of the course is not commensurate employment in an English setting. As I fear that this may ultimately compromise the reputation of the course, I would encourage the department to explore options for extending this language tuition and monitoring students' engagement and progress as a requirement for submitting final papers.

**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 staff leading this MA are all research-active and it is clear that their academic research and their professional experience in museums, galleries and the art market ensures that the design and teaching of this MA is interesting, challenging and keeps abreast of the latest developments in the academic literature. This can be seen expressly in the modifications that have arisen due to <> contribution the course over the last two years. There is also some opportunity for students to interact with staff from local museums and galleries who contribute to the course and provide a bridge between research and practice. Staff research and networks also inform the placement opportunities on offer and these typically have an impact on the scholarly research questions that the students address in their final dissertations; one example is the student who was based at Chatsworth House (where <> is working on a project) and then tackled the question of contemporary art and the country house collection for <> dissertation.

**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

**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, although next year it would be helpful to receive the full slate of student marks in order to clarify where the sample were situated against their cohort.

**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?**

No, I was provided with a representative sample for each course I moderated.

**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.

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

Yes on both counts.

**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?**

This year, Due to <> need to take compassionate leave at short notice, markers did not manage a moderating meeting for assessing the dissertations. However, the alternative process whereby marks and observations were discussed by email was an efficient solution that may be considered as a viable and time-saving option for future years.

Compared to last year, the consistency, clarity and extent of markers' feed back to students is much improved.

**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**

This is an exciting and, in some areas, challenging time for this MA. After 15 years as the clear driving force behind the development and success of this course, <> has handed over its leadership to <>. It will be important for <> to make sure that <> is mindful of the competing demands on her time and the importance of other staff taking on the load of teaching, advocacy and outreach. Given that the rest of the team remains unchanged, and that they too are unusually dedicated and hardworking, I do not foresee any problems with these new arrangements.

It is also an exciting time for students in the coming years, as <> is heading a project to repurpose and refurbish a grade-II listed building on campus for the relocation of the School. The heritage and build aspects of this work will be directly relevant to students of Gallery and Museum Studies and the project promises fascinating opportunities for placements and research particularly around heritage, fundraising and special collections. The new building is just part of the School's strategy to strengthen its competitiveness in a challenging marketplace; within this mix the MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies continues to outperform other courses in the School, especially in terms of its steadily growing student numbers and high international recruitment. This is undoubtedly due to this MA's good national and international reputation, its high recruitment and teaching standards and its rich and diverse programme which is centred around a placement and the impact of that on the employment success of its alumni.

The placement continues to be one of the most attractive and important aspects of the course and Mark and <> continue to develop new partnerships. However, as these partnerships require considerable administrative support it is hoped that the increased fees for the programme will go towards funding a support post in the coming year.

I would also like to note how positive the Masters programme survey results were for this MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies – this reflects the hard work, knowledge and enthusiasm of the staff and the ambition of the course.

**SFACULTY OF PERFORMANCE, VISUAL ARTS and COMMUNICATIONS****EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT: SCHOOL RESPONSE**

School:	Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies
Programme(s):	MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies
External Examiner:	
Academic Session:	2012-2013

Comment:	Response / Action:
<p>Q1. The individual modules, the programme aims and the ILOs create a coherent, challenging and relevant MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies. Combined with the group experience of curating a small exhibition, the individual museum and gallery placements and the dissertation research the students experience an appropriate, wide-ranging study that should equip them for further academic study or employment. The ILOs are also supported by extensive and up-to-date reading lists, interesting and challenging essay questions and the broad expertise of departmental and museum-based staff who lead the course.</p>	<p>The School welcomes emphasis on the value of the various components of the MA and how they fit together to create a challenging and rewarding student experience.</p>
<p>Q. 2 Yes. Among employers and academics this course is one of the most respected Museum and Gallery Studies MAs in the country. This is due in part to the high recruitment standards – with students being expected to demonstrate past museum or gallery professional experience, the levels of pastoral attention and the fact that the MA is now exceptional in offering a range of museum and other visits (fieldwork).</p>	<p>The School is very grateful for positive comments about the MA, its organisation and the success of the students on the programme.</p>
<p>Q.3 Having met the 2014/15 students in</p>	<p>We were very pleased in to be able to introduce to our MA students this year – and to do so</p>

<p>the process of installing this year's display in the Library gallery I now understand the benefit of this early assignment for team building and skills' development. It is helpful that this aspect of the course remains ungraded, but it might be worth considering inviting students to keep a project diary which, like the blog, could be digital and shared. This would serve the purpose of creating a record of the activity which can be later consulted by students and staff.</p>	<p>while they were installing their exhibition in the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery. We welcome the suggestion of asking students to keep a project diary to aid with their reflective learning.</p>
<p>Q.4 and 6 My only minor concern remains with the tendency to leniency for foreign students with mediocre levels of written English. While I appreciate that staff may have become used to students' idiomatic English and may have watched them improve dramatically over the year, I would expect issues with grammar and expression to have a distinct impact on the final mark (though see no. 6 for new measures for addressing this).</p>	<p>Following comment last year about overseas students, the School has set up (in addition to pre-sessional courses) 'in year' english language support with a focus on content relevant for the MA Art Gallery and Museum Studies (as noted in comments under Q 6). Clarity of expression in english, of course, remains an aspect of our marking criteria and something we will continue to approach with rigour and care.</p>
<p>Q. 14 and additional comments</p> <p>Compared to last year, the consistency, clarity and extent of markers' feed back to students is much improved.</p> <p>The placement continues to be one of the most attractive and important aspects of the course and Mark and Helen continue to develop new partnerships. However, as these partnerships require considerable administrative support it is hoped that the increased fees for the programme will go towards funding a support post in the coming year.</p>	<p>We welcome observation and the quality and consistency of marking has improved.</p> <p>We recognise concern about workload within the team and do aim to bring in additional administrative support to aid our extensive placement programme.</p> <p>We would like to thank for insightful and useful comments and contribution in supporting the MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies at Leeds. We look forward to working together in final year as external examiner and know that we will benefit from support and advice.</p>
<p>Head of School:</p>	

Programme Manager:	
Date:	2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2014