

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:

Education

Subject(s):

TESOL

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MA TESOL
MA TESOL Young Learners
MA TESOL Teacher Education
MA TESOL Studies
 EDUC 5001M
 EDUC 5053M
 EDUC 5301M
 EDUC 5308M
 EDUC 5902M
 EDUC 5903M
 EDUC 5912M
 EDUC 5927M
 EDUC 5960M
 EDUC 5961M

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.

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

This has been a good programme throughout. The department ensured I got the opportunity to talk to students on the programme and to see as much written work as I wanted. Things that stand out from my time as external examiner are:

- the dedication of the staff to look at students' first drafts of coursework—a practice which is understandably very popular with students;
- the willingness of staff to take on board external examiners' criticisms and suggestions for improvements to their programmes;
- the hospitality and professionalism the department has shown towards me, which reflects well upon them and upon the university.

Changes from year to year

Research methods module:

A new module, Beginning Research in Education, began last 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. I understand that the plan that this module becomes part of Critical Study and will become compulsory, which is also to be welcomed.

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.

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.*

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, in that the tasks vary and the theoretical-practical emphasis also varies.
- 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.
- Students are offered helpful feedback. I 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. 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.

Please see responses to Part (b) above. The programme is placing more of an emphasis on research methods and ethics. These are both positive developments.

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.

The spread of assessment tasks features the more and the less theoretical, the more and the less practical. This is a strength of the programme.

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

I would add that when I had doubts as to whether I was expected to recommend changing marks or not (this was in my 1st year of appointment), colleagues in the department were helpful and courteous in clarifying. So I got all the help and resources I needed.

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?

N/A

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

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, in my view samples of work were of the appropriate size.

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

I would also add that it was made very clear to all external examiners that should we wish to see more (or even all) scripts for the modules we were responsible for, we were free to do so.

14. 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—although I wish also to acknowledge that in response to comments such as this, the department has strengthened its offerings in research methods and hopefully there will be fewer problems related to a weak understanding of methods and methodologies in the future. I say more about this in the 'Other Comments' box below.

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, all of the administrative arrangements were very efficient.

I attended both Boards every year, and continue to be impressed by how well examiners' time is spent. The examiners' days compare very favourably to some other institutions I can think of!

I was satisfied with the Board's recommendations.

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

Yes.

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

Critical Studies methods chapters:

It was noticeable that some of the stronger candidates were able to write competently and lucidly about the methodologies they had chosen for their Critical Study projects, referring to an appropriate range of research methods literature and justifying their study design. However, even in some work marked at distinction level, in my view methods chapters were weak, with little if anything substantial about coding of qualitative data and nothing said about how and why the instruments were designed in the way they were—for instance, where items in questionnaires came from, or where the questions in interview schedules came from. I continue to be concerned about the brevity of method chapters in TESOL Critical Study samples I have seen. Here are some sample notes I made when looking at some Critical Study dissertations this past year. The common theme in the comments I reproduce here is a weakness in the methods section:

“Beautifully written, displaying a good knowledge of the literature. Coherent, with a clearly identifiable argument. The candidate shows an awareness of the research methods literature and argues appropriately for the selection of qualitative methodology. But no information about where the interview questions came from, or any details of piloting. The account of coding is sketchy, without exemplification.”

“Good work, but proper accounts of coding and the codebook are missing.”

“It appears that piloting of the questionnaires was done, but an account of what happened and what was changed as a result is lacking.”

“Good work, perhaps distinction level insofar as the results and conclusions are concerned, but brought down by what is in my view an inadequate method chapter. Nothing was said about where the questions in the instrument came from or why they were selected. No proper account of coding.”

“A poor method chapter. No information on how the questionnaire was designed or the origin of the questions. No details about how qualitative data (i.e., open question data) was analysed.”

I accept that the reflective portfolio the TESOL Studies students do is NOT a traditional dissertation, and there isn't the space in it for an extended methods chapter. However, colleagues may wish to reflect on my comments. I also acknowledge, as stated earlier, that colleagues have always taken on board comments by external examiners and have modified modules and programmes in response. We now have a research methods module which some examiners believe has improved the quality of students' work. I hope in the future weak methods sections such as I identify here will be rarer.

Imaginative and varied assessment tasks:

This was a signature and a strength of the programmes I saw. In EDUC 5902, for instance, students are asked to write two very different assignments which require a range of skills and abilities. I like the personalised nature of the second assignment (asking candidates to conduct an interview with a friend or relation, making the language analysis a particularly meaningful exercise for them).

Varied feedback on written work:

The quantity of the feedback and comments provided varied. I would have liked to have seen a few more comments in some cases; some were too brief and general for me, particularly in the case of weaker scripts, meaning it was hard to see how some candidates would get a full appreciation of how they could improve their work making use of the comments provided.

Students' feedback:

This year, as ever, the positive comments made by students on the programmes I was examining far outweighed the negative comments when I met them to discuss their experiences. (And indeed the department asked externals for their permission to pass on their email addresses to students who wished to write to us about the programme, which was admirable) Here are the main points made:

- Lecturers helpful, friendly, knowledgeable, and professional
- Lecturers good at teaching international students, ensuring they understood what was being said in lectures and being available to help and answer questions
- Lecturers' feedback on first drafts of essays was popular and most welcome
- Good, clear reading lists and access to reading materials in the library and online
- Popular modules such as the TESOL Forum
- Clear, helpful assignment instructions
- Some MA TESOL Studies students wanted more of an opportunity to try theories out for themselves in the classroom; and/or the opportunity to observe experienced teachers in classrooms. (I understand colleagues have acknowledged these wishes and are currently reviewing the curriculum)
- Opportunities to socialise with staff and peers were warmly received (such as the trip to the Lake District at the start of the programme)

I would like to close by expressing my gratitude to colleagues for the very friendly, constructive manner in which they have received my comments and suggestions during my four years as external. I have learned much from my time as external, and wish to extend my gratitude to lecturers and administrative staff alike.

17 March 2015

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Dear <>

Thank you for your External Examiner's report for the MA TESOL and TESOL Studies programmes, 2013-14, and for the work you have carried out this year. Thank you also for the excellent work you have carried out over your entire term as our External Examiner. The TESOL programmes have benefitted significantly from the care and attention to detail that you have brought to your work, and we are grateful.

With regard to your report, I am very pleased to see that in general you are positive about the programmes, about the support offered to students, about the work they produce, and about our willingness to respond to the concerns that you have raised. I am also pleased to see that you approve of the introduction of the online *Getting Started: Research Questions and Approaches in Education* module, and the new ethical review procedures, piloted last year and fully operational this year, both of which address issues you had raised as matters of concern in previous reports. I note also your reference to the drop in the incidence of plagiarism following the introduction of our first semester training and awareness session.

However, I also note that you do raise ongoing concerns about the quality of description and discussion in the Methods sections of both MA Critical Studies and Portfolios, concerns we are eager to address. We believe that the new ethical procedures will have a significant impact this year but in addition to existing measures, we are addressing your concerns in the following ways:

Firstly, for MA TESOL and related programmes, the TESOL Team has decided to complement the online *Getting Started module* with a face-to-face, unassessed module covering the practical, procedural aspects of empirical research, within the area of language education. Three sessions were run before Christmas 2014, and three after.

We see improved initial training in research methods as essential but not the whole picture: we also wish to address the supervision process and to ensure that all Critical Studies supervisors offer consistent attention to the research design elements of the Critical Study projects. To that end the TESOL Team are currently drawing up plans to support supervisors, probably through revised guidelines and a checklist to work through, as with TESOL Studies (below). In our view, if we can both focus our training input more effectively and scaffold the students' outputs more closely, we should significantly improve the quality of both research designs and the Methods sections of Critical Studies.

Secondly, with regard to MA TESOL Studies Portfolios, I note your acknowledgement that the 3-4000 word 'extension of learning' project, which may be either a pedagogical project or an empirical research project, cannot be a work of the same order as the Critical Study. The word-allocation actually means it is of the same order as a standard 15-credit module assignment. However, I note your concerns and we are determined that where students do attempt an empirical research project, that project must be of sound, if limited, design, fully meeting the university's ethical standards for research, and that these projects should be adequately described in the relevant section of the students' Portfolios.

To that end, firstly, this year, the TESOL Team have revised the unassessed Research Methods course taught in Semester 1 and 2 to ensure a fuller treatment of ethical issues; secondly, they have introduced a new set of proposal forms, streamlined versions of the current Critical Studies forms, which oblige the students to work through the practical and ethical implications of the proposed project at an early stage; and thirdly, as for MA TESOL, they are working to enhance the consistency and focus of their supervision, through the construction of a guidance pack and checklist.

You also raise a concern about the consistency of the feedback offered on assignments, noting that quantity of comments varied and that some comments were too brief and general, particularly in the case of weaker scripts, 'meaning it was hard to see how some candidates would get a full appreciation of how they could improve their work making use of the comments provided'.

Thank you for pointing this out. The TESOL Team propose to address this by drawing up a feedback policy covering quantity and quality, supported by examples of high-calibre feedback for reference.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to our MA TESOL programmes.

Yours sincerely

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Head of School of Education

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION*Subject area and awards being examined:*

School of: Education	Subject(s):
Programme(s) / Module(s):	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)
MA TESOL	

Name and home institution/affiliation of examiner:

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than 6 weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to 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.

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?

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.

The external examining process at Leeds is extremely good in my opinion. I have been particularly impressed with how external examiner days are organised. Meeting examiners of other programmes is a very positive way to identify overarching concerns and to highlight to programmes teams examples of good practice across the school.

Each year I have been able to meet students from the programmes to discuss their impressions of the programmes. This has also be extremely useful, as student concerns do not always mirror those of staff, or those of external examiners! These meeting days have also allowed frank discussion between

examiners and tutors, which have been beneficial.

The exams boards themselves are efficient. However, apart from ratifying the tutors' decisions, it is not clear why externals are required. There is very little discussion (as decisions have been made prior to the board) and externals contribute very little (most of our work goes on in 'back stage' regions). I am not sure there is anything to be done about this, but these meetings as well as being efficient are extremely dull!

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.*

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 best work is where students contextualise their research and draw on local constraints in their discussions.

I have said consistently over the years of examining that the team might consider alternative methods of assessment in the interests of allowing students with different skills sets from academic writing to shine.

There is no doubt that the teaching on this programme is strong. Students consistently speak extremely highly of tutors. They are impressed by the amount of time tutors spend with them in and out of class, the fact that they are willing to provide formative assessment by commenting on drafts and that they engage in genuine discussion about current issues in learning and teaching English.

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.*

Leeds is able to attract students from a different countries and contexts and so the programme is not dominated by one language group. This is a strength as students share their experiences and learn from each other. The work submitted by this cohort was generally of a high standard and compares well with work produced on other programme

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. 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.

As I have indicated in past reports, the support given to students on a one-to-one basis is to be commended. This is particularly apparent in the processes in place to provide formative assessment on first drafts or sections of first drafts. Students very much appreciate this effort. Furthermore, given that most students are either international or have been outside academia for a number of years, feedback of this nature helps to ensure that students are on track and can produce the kind of work they are capable of.

The tutors make great efforts to value the experiences of all the students on the programme and to provide support in developing them both as researchers and effective practitioners.

7. 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 Examination Process

8. **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. This is good.

9. **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?**

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

Yes.

10. **Was sufficient assessed/examination work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?**

Yes.

11. **Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners?**

The administrative arrangements have been excellent.

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

Yes.

For Examiners involved in Mentoring Arrangements

If you have acted as a mentor to a new external examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements.

Other Comments

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

Detailed comments on all the assignments I was sent have been passed on to the team.

17 June 2015

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Dear <>

Thank you for your report on the MA TESOL programme during the academic year 2013-14. We are very pleased with the positive overall tenor of your report, and that you feel the Examination process has enabled you again to make a valid judgement on the quality of our standards and assessment procedures.

To address your points of concern, we are aware of the somewhat tedious nature of the formal board meetings, particularly when you have to sit through the reading of results for other programmes. Till now the large number of different PGT programmes (with a few External Examiners covering several programmes) has meant it has made sense to combine all of them into a single meeting. However the School is currently rationalizing its PGT offer and this may make it more practical to have separate exam boards in the future, which would at least reduce the length of the tedium. We hope that the usefulness of the day's other activities makes the EE's visit seem worthwhile.

As you know our MA TESOL programmes are currently under review, and we plan to introduce alternative forms of assessment into certain modules following your and <> advice. These will start to appear from academic year 2016-17.

Regarding resubmissions, we are not sure that it is helpful to give students a mark "had the work been a first attempt". Such students have had more time and more support than usual (in the form of feedback on the first assignment and the opportunity to see other students' attempts at the same assignment) so marking the assignment as if it were a first submission would give the student a false impression of their actual level of competence.

As this is your final report, we would like to thank you sincerely for your conscientious and professional service as External Examiner on the MA TESOL; the programme has benefitted greatly from your input over the last four years. We wish you success in your new position at Stirling and hope our departments might find new ways to collaborate in the future.

Yours sincerely

Professor Mark Pike
Head of School of Education