

**The University of Leeds**

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

**ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014– 2015**

**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*

See section 'Other comments' below.

## 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 can confirm that the intended learning outcomes for the HAMS programme and modules and the structure and content of the programme are entirely appropriate and that the standards are 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 are well structured and clearly defined and allow students to understand how their performance and results are evaluated. It is clear that the internal system for marking the modules is solid and carefully structured and that it ensures a fair and consistent process. It is noticeable how the feedback combines a detailed set of comments with concrete suggestions for improvement, offering students a forward-looking perspective.

The student performance demonstrates the excellent quality of the teaching, learning and assessment processes. Students are offered a rich intellectual experience and a sound knowledge base and both are reflected by the coursework. It is also clear that a strong system of pastoral care is in place, offering all students an excellent base to develop their 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. As in previous years, the academic standards of the student work are generally high or very high. A significant percentage of students are working on a level that is at least comparable to other BA students at other institutions nationally.

Many students show a willingness and ability to engage with a range of different and topical debates, often operating across different disciplines. This emerges in particular from the dissertations, whose standards are often close to those of MA level, combining a theoretical and critical outlook with sound empirical research and a coherent articulation. Even the weaker dissertations often demonstrate ambition and an ability to take on challenging topics.

**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 School is expanding significantly its provision of programmes and showing a dynamic approach to the recruitment challenges that the sector as a whole is experiencing nationally. The new set of modules offered within HAMS covers expanded geographies and continues to offer a long chronology. In addition, a significant range of different theoretical standpoints is provided throughout. This growth of offer is going hand-in-hand with a robust process of rethinking of the HAMS Programme as a whole, offering an approach that combines a further opening out with increased opportunities for developing the students professionally.

**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.*

Again, I have been very impressed by the ways in which the ambitious and open research culture of the School and the Programme inform all aspects of the teaching and are fully embraced by the students. Seminar-based teaching thrives and various modules show an experimental approach, allowing students to directly contribute with their own research. This research-led approach impacts significantly on the student work, particularly in the dissertations, where students demonstrate an exceptionally high level of accomplishment, showing excellent understanding of research methodologies, theoretical and interpretive frameworks, critical analysis and use of historical context.

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

The Programme offers an excellent basis for preparation to PhD level, thanks to the considerable attention given to research training and student independent research opportunities.

**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.*

I was again well supported in my role as external examiner this year. I was given full access to the VLE system and support on how to navigate it. I was sent, on request, a significant sample of dissertations to read in advance of the final Exam Board.

This is my last year as external examiner and as I reflect back on the experience there are a number of things that would have made my work more effective:

- It would be useful to provide an earlier opportunity in the year to meet staff and students to

gain some familiarity with the School and the Programme, especially in the first year of external examining.

- It would be good to receive a timetable at the start of the academic year outlining the Programme's milestones and flagging up the key moments in the year, for example when feedback is provided and when dissertations are marked, so that the external examiner could follow more closely the process.
- It would be excellent if the external examiner could be informed when new modules are introduced.
- It would be useful if a greater sample of assessed student course work was sent to the External examiner during the year, particularly essays.

**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 sent all the relevant examination materials. The level of the questions was appropriate and allowed students of all levels of ability to perform well. The different approaches reflected by the questions demonstrate the vibrancy and diversity of the teaching and research within the School and Programme.

**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 no.10 above for my suggestions for a more continuous engagement with students and their work).

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

Yes. As in previous years, I was impressed by the range of dissertation subjects, demonstrating an open and experimental outlook and the confidence to take on complex and controversial topics. The assessment process stands out for its clarity and fairness, the feedback is characteristically constructive and engaged, pushing the students to see the dissertation as a significant point in a longer intellectual process.

**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?**

Unfortunately this year I was unable to travel to Leeds and attend the final Board of Examiners meeting due to sudden illness. However I kept in close contact with different members of the Board before and after and was promptly informed about the recommendations of the Board, which I support.

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

See no.15 above.

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

This is my fourth and last year as HAMS examiner and, as in previous years, my overall impression is very positive. I want to congratulate all staff for another productive year that demonstrates high standards throughout, openness and experimentation in teaching and research and real dedication to the students.

The good health of the programme is demonstrated by many factors, but two that stand out are the level of ambition of many dissertations, which combine intellectual confidence and ambition with beautiful articulation and which are clearly the result of close and excellent supervision; and the ability of the programme to constantly renew itself through teaching, learning and research. It is this second aspect that I would like to comment on briefly here.

I have been especially impressed by the way in which the new directions for the School and the HAMS programme discussed last year have started to bear fruit, building on an existing framework which already excels for its inter-disciplinarity and wealth of offer. The new modules taught or about to be activated show a significant broadening of the intellectual scope of the programme – for example in terms of its expanded geographies – and a new awareness of the need to equip students with mixed-economy skills that will place them in a stronger position to develop academically and professionally for an increasingly volatile job market. This is an area that has great potential for further development, particularly in the light of the new undergraduate programme proposals, for example the BA ART Gallery and Museum Studies about to be launched, which already demonstrates the drive to equip students with skills allowing them to combine academic excellence with a wider professional portfolio. As the museum and cultural sector nationally and internationally are becoming increasingly public facing and developing new partnerships with the academic world, the Programme may also want to consider adding new components currently underrepresented within UG (and PG) education nationally that would make the HAMS students stand out. This would include developing skillsets that would enable students to respond effectively to some of the big challenges of the museum and cultural sectors – increased public access, wider audiences, a more effective digital presence and the need to operate in the growing partnerships between museums and academia. One area of focus might be augmented digital training, including a 'budding system' with digitally competent students (cross-School or across different faculties?). This would lead to different kinds of digital outputs – for example digital humanities research projects, digital exhibitions, which could all feed into the School website. In addition, a student-led academically driven social media presence might be developed, where relevant aspects of the academic and professional activities that students embark on could be made publically available.

School of Fine Art, History of Art &amp; Cultural Studies

University of Leeds  
Old Mining Building, Leeds LS2 9JT**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**18<sup>th</sup> August 2015

Dear

We thank you again for your external examiner report on our BA History of Art with Museums Studies programme and for your very encouraging and thoughtful comments on the quality of the programme. We would of course like to take this opportunity to thank you so much for all the hard work and your very supportive input into the HAMS programme over the last 4 years; it has been a real pleasure to work with you in refining and improving the programme and your input and insightful observations have made a significant contribution to the development of HAMS. We are also very pleased to hear that your experience as external examiner for the HAMS programme over the last 4 years has been such a positive one.

It was very gratifying to hear that you considered that our recent refinements to the programme continue to demonstrate 'a dynamic approach to the recruitment challenges that the sector as a whole is experiencing nationally' and that we have a 'robust process of rethinking' the programme – this is especially gratifying in the light of the continued pressures in the recruitment cycle. It was also pleasing to hear your positive comments that our assessment processes were 'well-structured and clearly defined', and that the standard of the student work continues to be '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 again note that you considered that some of our student dissertations approach those of MA standard; this is particularly gratifying and something we will again pass on to the student body.

We especially appreciate your positive comments on the refinements and developments of the HAMS programme and that our programme demonstrates an 'ability to constantly renew itself.' We are also very pleased to note that you consider that our future developments in the

new BA AGMS programme 'demonstrates a drive to equip students with skills allowing them to combine academic excellence with a wider professional portfolio' – this is precisely what we hope to achieve in the revised programme. Your further comments on the possible refinements to our programme content are especially useful, and we will of course seek to incorporate aspects such as digital literacy and increased collaboration in the new programme. Indeed, our new complementary programmes (Cultural & Media Studies) will allow increased interdisciplinary teaching along the lines you have already suggested.

Your final year review comments were 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.

Once again we would like to thank you for your informative support and your positive contribution in helping us to maintain a critically informed and fair assessment process and we would like to thank you for all of your hard work and dedication during your 4 years as external examiner for the HAMS programme. Your input has been an invaluable asset to the positive development of HAMS.

Kind Regards

Head of School