

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 Politics and International Studies

Subject(s):

Global Development

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MA Global Devt
 MA Global Devt & Africa
 MA Global Devt & Education
 MA Global Devt & Gender
 MA Global Devt & International Political Economy
 MA Global Devt & Political Economy of International Resources

PIED5201M Global Politics of Health
 PIED5210M Africa in the Contemporary World
 PIED5235M Education In Development
 PIED5255M Gender, Globalisation & Development
 PIED5256M Global Inequalities and Development
 PIED5275M Political Economy of Resources & Development
 PIED5523M International Political Economy
 PIED5562M International Relations and the Environment
 PIED5764M Development Management Techniques
 PIED5766M Research Methodology for Development
 PIED5777M POLIS MA Dissertation

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

. N/a

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

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 programme aims and ILOs are commensurate with the level of an MA award.

The standards of assessment are appropriate. The subject matter covers appropriate and sufficient core areas, builds on staff expertise, and is assessed rigorously.

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. They compare well to Masters programmes in Development Studies I have taught, and for which I have been external examiner, in <>, <>, <> and <>.

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.*

- As in previous years, assessment on this programme is impressively diverse, teaching and testing the students across a range of skill sets. The system of marking, second marking and moderation appears robust and appropriate.
- As in previous years, I noted the sometimes parsimonious marks at the top end of the scale. In one case, for example, the marker described an essay as "excellent" and "not much that could be done better". I agreed - it was worth 85/90% perhaps? But it got 76%. In the largest paper I look at (just as an example, not to single it out) out of 156 marks given in total, only two were 80% or above (and these were 80% and 82%). The criteria may be a part of the issue here. On the mark sheet grid, 70-80 is described as excellent, and 80-90 as exceptional. I am not sure something should be 'exceptional' to get above 80%.
- The process of award classification appears robust, and conduct of the Exam Board was excellent.

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.*

Certainly. The students evidently take on an appropriate assessment load, which is diverse in its forms, but which retains a strong focus on core academic skills. The students are performing at a level comparable with strong peers in this field, allowing for the inevitable spectrum of ability and application.

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.

Good practice continues to include extremely detailed feedback/feed forward comments, and the range of assessment types.

This year for the first time I came across audio file feedback (International Relations and the Environment). This appeared to offer full and considered comments, and is an interesting and innovative approach. I'd be interested to hear whether students have been able to comment on it, and whether or not they find it helpful.

This year there was an improvement in the alignment between the marks, comments and the helpful tick box at the top of the assessment sheet. I am sure this is a positive improvement in terms of helping students understand their strengths and weaknesses, and how to improve.

Another positive improvement was that students seem to paraphrase questions less frequently than they have in the past. In some cases this is made clear in module instructions, and where it is still done, it is often picked up by the markers, so this is a definite improvement on the last two years

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 teaching appears to reflect a strong research culture and capacity, with evidence of current materials and debates, and expertise in particular contexts and issues.

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.

I had sufficient material to carry out my role as External Examiner.

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

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. As noted above and in previous years, the level of feedback is exceptionally high, and almost universally so. This is very commendable practice.

One area where comments were sometimes more terse were those of moderators. It would be very useful to have slightly more demonstration of why a decision was reached, not least as this was often inevitably at a boundary, including Pass/Fail. It was not always clear how the final decision was reached. Reference to the criteria would be particularly helpful.

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

Yes. The dissertations I read were in appropriate areas for the programme, and showed the range of standards I would hope for/expect, including very good ones indeed at the top end.

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?

The administrative support was excellent as always, and my thanks to the team.

However, I wondered whether it would be possible to deal with external examination in one go, rather than two cycles (and then often in dribs and drabs as modules come through). At other places at which I have been the External, the timetable is generally to check over questions/assessment earlier in the year, and then the day/morning before the Board, to come up in person, and work through all of the material. I would find this far easier to handle than the present process. As external I am not asked to change marks, but just to assess procedures. I can do this as well (if not better) if given the chance to look at all the material together one day prior to the Board, than here and there over the year.

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

Yes, this certainly seemed to be the case. From what I could see the procedures were appropriate.

Other comments

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

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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

18 December 2015

Dear

MA External Examiner's Report 2014 – 2015

On behalf of the School, may I thank you for your Examiner's Report which was shared with colleagues in the School.

Thank you for the many positive comments in your report. To respond to some specific points you have made, let me say first of all that we will look into the comment you made about the wording of the criteria at the top end of the scale (70-80 as compared to 80-90). You described marking at the top end as "sometimes parsimonious" and all I can say here is that we will repeat our encouragement to colleagues to reward excellent work with the highest appropriate marks.

You described feedback as extremely detailed and commended the example of audio feedback that was sent to you. This has been tried out on some other modules also in recent years and we have been interested to see colleagues innovating in this way. Students have responded favourably to audio feedback (as this presentation by another member of staff shows: <http://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/business-and-law-documents/research/its-good-to-talk/nrobinsonaudiofeedback.pdf>). However, you said that in relation to moderation, it would be useful to have slightly fuller comments to give evidence of why final decisions were reached and we will be reminding staff to do this. Your final comment was about the arrangements for the exam board and you said you might find it easier to handle all the material in a full one-day visit here rather than receiving it piecemeal. As an external myself, I have encountered both ways of doing this and clearly practice varies around the sector. We will certainly give some thought to this idea but will be carrying on this year in the normal manner.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for the time and effort that you have invested as our external examiner in ensuring that the programmes and modules offered by POLIS are commensurate with the standards offered in comparable institutions.

Yours sincerely

Head of School

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