

# 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:	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 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
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#### 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?*

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#### 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 MA in Art Gallery and Museums Studies is a vibrant, intellectually rigorous and internationally recognised course that, over the last 3 years, has gone from strength to strength. Student numbers continue to rise as do the standards of students recruited. Staff teaching this MA are enthusiastic, dedicated and are unusually open towards reviewing the course, fine tuning the curriculum, adapting their teaching methods and supporting the partnerships that enable such rewarding placements to be offered. Their aim is to constantly review and enhance the student experience, via responding to user feedback, being responsive to technological developments (eg social media) and responding to changes in the Museums, Art Gallery and Heritage professions. Indeed, such is the success of this course over the last three years that the main criticism heard relates to class sizes. This has led the course convenors to develop a more flexible model that can ensure the quality of the student experience while accommodating growing numbers of students. They are hoping to institute this in the coming academic year. Given the successful trajectories of many graduates, I have suggested that they begin to collate data on the professional development of graduates so as better to represent the course's impact.

Concrete improvements have been particularly made in the consistency and quality of essay marking and feedback, the use of social media and the provision of bespoke English tuition for students whose first language is not English. That said, levels of written English achieved by foreign students does require constant monitoring as there is a risk that level of professional/academic expression may not always be commensurate with a British MA qualification. Additionally, staff need to

be vigilant that foreign student's language skills do not impede the progress of the class as a whole.

Now led by <>, staff on this course have adapted well to <> new focus as Head of School. Nevertheless, it is positive that <> is still able to supervise dissertations and contribute to modules led by other colleagues. But in order to manage growing student numbers, and <> lack of availability, it is important that the department is able to recruit more support for the programme, whether by backfill or University Academic Fellows or deploying staff with relevant areas of experience and research. Without adequate teaching resources, the success enjoyed by this course is at risk.

My experience as External Examiner has been entirely satisfactory and, on the whole, the course convenors and administrator have ensured that this process has been conducted in a timely and efficient manner.

## 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 course aims and ILOs are in keeping with the course level as a Masters degree. Although vocational, and professionally orientated, the course successfully combines the theory, practice and history in the teaching of Museums and Art Gallery studies. The course is underpinned by its various practical and critical elements especially the number of museum and gallery visits, the 12 week placement at a museum or equivalent heritage institution. This combination of practical experience and intellectual theory underpins the scholarly rigour of the dissertation and placement paper (Museum, Object, Practice).

### 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 University's Art Gallery and Museum studies MA is one of the most respected qualifications of its kind, especially within the sector. Annually increasing student numbers attest to this, as does the rising number of international students (and countries represented) among the student cohort. In my view, what is key to the course's success is the student exhibition in semester 1 and the 12 week placement which allows students to gain vital professional experience and to learn how to apply theory in practice. Given the increasing international make up of the students, it might serve the department well if they found ways to introduce more international examples (and speakers) into the course and to spend more time exploring global museum culture (which often differs markedly to the British experience) within the course structure in addition to permitting individual students to explore examples of their choosing in written papers.

### 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 structure, contents and teaching methods of this MA are well suited to achieving the ILOs of the course, particularly in the blend of theory, history and practical experience that includes the placement, guest lectures and visits. Richly beneficial here is the student exhibition in the first semester which encourages students to bond and develop team working skills which are critical to the success of their placement in semester 2. All modules on the MA are assessed by extended essay or dissertation and the questions set are challenging, stimulating and relevant. The dissertation is supported by appropriate supervision, drawn from across the faculty (and not just key personnel on the MA) and the PG symposium. All papers are dual marked and clear, structured and consistent feedback is provided to enable students develop their analytical and written skills.

### 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 given multiple opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and ILOs.

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 decade. Recruitment for this MA is done by face to face interview (sometimes via skype) and students must demonstrate prior museum or gallery experience, if only voluntary. This ensures that students are committed to pursuing a career in the profession and are generally of a high calibre. This year 25% of the twenty seven students were awarded distinctions and there were 16 pass with merits. (There were several extensions to study based upon mitigating circumstances and, unusually, there were two cases of malpractice (plagiarism) although I was advised that the circumstances of these instances were now understood and were being addressed).

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. These are largely focussed on peer-to-peer learning, with some contribution to the conversation by staff. Methods include: the student exhibition in the first semester, weekly blog posts on their reading, an on-line diary recording their placement experience. The placement and its written assessment, the Post Graduate symposium and the dissertation also provide students with opportunities to perform and develop ILOs in communication with staff and supervisors.

### 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.*

- Following comments last year, I am pleased to see a wholesale improvement in the consistency, clarity and constructiveness of essay feedback. The benefit of this can be traced in the work of individual candidates, as it unfolds across the year.
- Staff conduct evaluation with students and constructive feedback is used to improve the course in the following year. Students are kept informed of this aspect of their contribution to the work of the department encouraging them to take a proactive approach to the learning environment and to be advocates for the department after their graduation. This year, for example, it was identified that a skills audit would be a useful activity prior to commencing the student exhibition project so that people could be grouped more effectively. A project management process has also been initiated, as has post-project evaluation, to give students an introduction to these increasingly common aspects of the museums and heritage profession.
- To support the teaching of the course, as it grows, the department is taking full opportunity to recruit visiting Fellows especially with a global research focus or institutional affiliation. The adequate resourcing of this important, successful yet demanding course is critical for its ongoing success.
- The intensive language tuition that is now expected for foreign students, without English as a native language, has helped with the levels of written English although more could be done in this area.

I understand that other feedback about class sizes is informing a rethink of the structure of the course which is due to be trialled in the coming year to ensure a greater flexibility, an improved student experience and greater capacity.

**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.*

All the departmental staff involved in this MA are research-active and it is clear that their academic research and their professional experience in museums, galleries and the art market ensures that the course is relevant, rigorous and abreast of the latest developments in the academic literature and the profession. 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 which are in turn supervised by a wider range of staff with the most relevant research interests.

**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.*

Overall, I have been very happy with the department's provision of materials. Although I think it would be useful to provide a full list of placements when supplying essays related to 'Museum, Object, Practice'.

**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, I was generally provided with a representative sample of work that included the highest and lowest marks. See positive comments about marking standards above.

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

The choice of subjects for dissertations appeared to be appropriate from the 20% I saw. Although generally diverse, there is an element of fashion that informs some student choices (eg two papers interested in the role of the Country House as film set/ film subject – which might be called the 'Downton Abbey effect'). Once again, the best students are also those who develop the most original and challenging topics. This was the case with the distinction student who critiqued the evaluation of the Museums and Art Gallery MA as her dissertation topic. The marking of this by a first marker who was external to the course, exemplifies the team's commitment to objectivity, clarity and transparency. This year they have achieved a level of thoroughness, consistency and feed back for first and second markers that was as impressive as it was instructive. There are also many opportunities for informal follow up once marks and comments are returned.

- 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

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

I was not party to the details of any mitigating circumstances, but on discussing this with Helen Graham I am confident that due process had been followed.

#### Other comments

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

**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:	2014-2015

Comment:	Response / Action:
<p><b>Q1.</b></p> <p>The course aims and ILOs are in keeping with the course level as a Masters degree. Although vocational, and professionally orientated, the course successfully combines the theory, practice and history in the teaching of Museums and Art Gallery studies. The course is underpinned by its various practical and critical elements especially the number of museum and gallery visits, the 12 week placement at a museum or equivalent heritage institution. This combination of practical experience and intellectual theory underpins the scholarly rigour of the dissertation and placement paper (Museum, Object, Practice).</p>	<p>The School welcomes emphasis on the value of the historical, theoretical and practical components of the MA.</p>
<p><b>Q. 2</b></p> <p>In my view, what is key to the course's success is the student exhibition in semester 1 and the 12 week placement which allows students to gain vital professional experience and to learn how to apply theory in practice.</p> <p>it might serve the department well if they found ways to introduce more international examples (and speakers) into the course and to spend more time exploring global museum culture (which often differs markedly to the British experience) within the course structure in addition to permitting individual students to explore examples of their choosing in written papers.</p>	<p>We thank for positive comments about the MA, the initial project work and the 12 week placement.</p> <p>We welcome this contribution about increasing the internationalisation of the examples and speakers on the MA. One way we've been addressing this informally is by involving one of our PhD students from China in running informal sessions focus on China and heritage. We will address this question more full in our rewrite of the module.</p>
<p><b>Q.3</b></p> <p>All modules on the MA are assessed by extended essay or dissertation and the questions set are challenging, stimulating and relevant.</p>	<p>The question of assessment is one which we will address during our module rewrite with smaller assessments which build up over the first semester.</p>

<p><b>Q.6</b> I understand that other feedback about class sizes is informing a rethink of the structure of the course which is due to be trialled in the coming year to ensure a greater flexibility, an improved student experience and greater capacity.</p>	<p>We are redesigning the MA's first semester in order to cope better with growing student numbers.</p>
<p><b>Q. 10</b> Overall, I have been very happy with the department's provision of materials. Although I think it would be useful to provide a full list of placements when supplying essays related to 'Museum, Object, Practice'.</p>	<p>Absolutely, thanks for this point. We will do this next year.</p>
	<p>We would like to formally thank _____ for all of her invaluable. Insightful and rigour comments offered throughout her three year tenure.</p>
<p><b>Head of School:</b></p>	
<p><b>Programme Manager:</b></p>	
<p><b>Date:</b></p>	<p>11<sup>th</sup> November 2015</p>