

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014– 2015

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Faculty / School of:</i> | Philosophy, Religion, and History of Science |
| <i>Subject(s):</i> | <i>Philosophy</i> |
| <i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i> | Ancient Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Advanced Topics in Value Theory, Schopenhauer & Nietzsche, Aesthetics & Philosophy of Art, Intro to History of Philosophy, Ethics of Life and Death, Metaethics, Feminist Philosophy, Political Philosophy, Philosophy & Literature, History of Modern Philosophy, and final year dissertations. |
| <i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i> | 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.

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

No matters require urgent attention.

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

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 Intended Learning Outcomes were entirely appropriate for the modules and commensurate with the level of the award. The structure and content of the modules were excellent, and the standards entirely appropriate.

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 met the expectations of the national subject benchmark, and the programme compares very favourably with undergraduate work I have examined at comparable 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.*

The materials provided were sufficient for me to make an external assessment. Course syllabi were clear, detailed, and in many cases offered (or repeated from the handbook) good advice on essay writing and assessment criteria. The comments from markers and monitors were excellent and in some cases impressively detailed. I was particularly impressed with the care and attention taken by monitors, across the range of modules, to focus on borderline scripts and failing scripts, and to ensure that the marking in all bands was consistent. This seems to me to be very good practice, and supports my confidence in the rigour and quality of assessment.

As a result, I regard the assessment system to be clear, rigorous, fair, equitable, and to accurately measure student achievement against the individual learning outcomes for the modules. Finally, the marking in these modules was entirely appropriate for the levels concerned. The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment methods as indicated by student performance was very high.

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.

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.

There were no notable enhancements to the programme and modules since the previous year; given how highly I think of the programmes and modules, this is not meant as a criticism. Instead, the range of modules given, the quality of the materials provided, and the detailed feedback are all excellent. And the very high standards in marking, monitoring, and administration have continued in 2014-15.

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 is well-informed by current research; this is very welcome, and not surprising. Philosophy at Leeds has an excellent reputation for research, and it is good to see that they use some of their excellent research materials in the courses they teach.

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

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

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.

The materials were available both in print form and online, and these were sufficient to enable me to act effectively. I was given opportunities to meet and discuss the modules with all module leaders in advance of the examiners' meeting, which is a welcome feature of how things are organized at Leeds. (I didn't take up the offer to meet with conveners, since I was very satisfied with all of the marking and monitoring I saw.) The online provision was very good and worked well, and staff were extremely efficient in answering queries I had about the process. In this and in other matters, the support and guidance offered by the department and the school were excellent.

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, all materials were made available either in print form or online; materials were in general very impressive.

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. The nature and levels of questions were entirely appropriate.

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 given sufficient access to a wide range of assessed and examined work to have confidence in my judgement of the standard of work and rigour of marking. The scripts were clearly marked, and in very many cases the standard of feedback on assessed work - and detailed comments on examined work – were exemplary.

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

Yes to both questions.

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 arrangements were excellent. I travelled to Leeds the day before the meeting, and that afternoon had a look at final assessed work and dissertations. I then attended the meeting of the Board of Examiners, and was satisfied with its operation and with the recommendations of the board. The meeting was conducted with efficiency, clarity, and fairness, and the process struck me as robust.

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

There was some discussion towards the end of the meeting, in response to issues raised by another external examiner, about whether the Board of Examiners' meeting was the optimal place to discuss mitigating circumstances and medical evidence, given that not all of the details can be publicized due to issues of confidentiality. This is an important point to raise.

Having said this, I thought that the new system of classification of medical conditions was helpful. And I also think that the discussion was rigorous, professional, and thorough. The students involved seemed to get a very fair hearing, and there is a case to be made that discussion of mitigating circumstances in a wider forum can help to ensure full consideration and a just outcome. As a result, I am confident that appropriate procedures are in place. The question of whether these issues continue to be discussed at the Board is, I think, an issue for others to determine in line with University policy.

Other comments

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

I have been very impressed by the range of modules on offer to the students, the helpfulness and thoroughness of written comments, the operation of the online system for submission of essays and for marking and monitoring, the procedures for marking and moderation, and the professionalism with which the modules are administered and the external examining process conducted.

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: | Philosophy, Religion, and History of Science |
| Subject(s): | <i>Philosophy</i> |
| Programme(s) / Module(s): | Various modules in undergraduate programmes of study involving Philosophy |
| 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.

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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

N/A

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 learning outcomes for the award and the standards for the award are appropriate.
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 intended learning outcomes meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark.
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 assessment methods are effective and align with the intended learning outcomes. The assessments reflect excellent teaching and learning methods, and produce some excellent student performance.
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 students were given adequate opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and the intended learning outcomes. Many modules offered both an exam and an essay component allowing students to utilize a variety of assessment methods.
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.*
1. The third-year advanced modules allow students to engage with research at the leading edge.
 2. Some of the dissertations were excellent, allowing students to engage in high quality research themselves, that would naturally lead to MA work.
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.*
- See above.
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

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

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

Yes

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 arrangements were satisfactory, indeed more than satisfactory. It was run well according to the rules it was given. However, I would encourage the School to consider whether it is appropriate to have any 'discussable' cases that fall into 'academic discretion'. Such cases encourage inconsistency and non-transparency, which is detrimental to the reputation of the award to stakeholders, in particular, students and employers. This approach represents the principle that assessment and degree classification procedures should be transparent to all stakeholders, in particular, students and employers, and applied consistently in all cases.

I would also encourage the School to consider how cases of academic discretion interact with cases of mitigating circumstances. More on how, in my view, mitigating circumstances should be dealt with below.

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

While there has been very great progress in how the School deals with mitigating circumstances, in that the vast majority are dealt with at a meeting prior to the Board of Examiners meeting, there is still reform to be done. At the Board, some cases of mitigating circumstances were considered, which was not appropriate, since it is impossible to fairly reach a decision on mitigating circumstances while preserving anonymity.

More generally, in my view, and following the policies at the University of <>, only 'safe' marks should be considered at the Board of Examiners, where a 'safe' mark is a mark undamaged by mitigating circumstances. This allows for student achievement to be clearly and undistortedly reflected in the transcript, which then can be clearly and undistortedly reflected in the degree classification.

To consider some examples:

Say that a student has taken ill, applied for mitigating circumstances with respect to an assessment, which then have been accepted. The student then has the opportunity to sit that assessment (including both the sitting of an exam and the submission of an essay, and any other form of assessment) for as if for the first time at a later date. If the student then is taken ill again, applies for mitigating circumstances with respect to that assessment as if for the first time, and these circumstances have been accepted, the student then has another opportunity to sit the assessment as if for the first time at a later date. And so on. At the end of this process, the student should have a safe mark, that is, one not affected by mitigating circumstances that have been accepted.

Say that a student has suffered from severe depression throughout their second year. Following that year, they apply for mitigating circumstances which have been accepted. The student may apply either for re-taking the second year, or merely take the assessments from the second year as if for the first time. At the end of this process, the student should have safe marks, that is, marks not affected by mitigating circumstances that have been accepted.

Consequently, mitigating circumstances would not need to be considered at programme-level, as they have already been fully considered and accounted for, at module level. There would then be no need, even at a meeting prior to the Exam Board let alone at the Exam Board itself, for the consideration of mitigating circumstances.

As a point of detail concerning a case that came up at the Board, on evidence that may be presented in a student's case for mitigating circumstances, a letter from a relevant professional, e.g. counsellor or GP, which states merely that the student reports that she has suffered condition C over the past year, say, is *not* good evidence that the student has, in fact, suffered from condition C over the past year. It is good evidence only that the student reports suffering from this condition. Consequently, mitigating circumstances should *not* be granted solely on the basis of such a letter.

Other comments

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

<> has been an excellent examinations officer, and she has been well supported by the administrative team, in particular, <>. It has been more than a pleasure to serve as an external examiner this year. I am very impressed by the professionalism of Leeds staff, the care they put in all aspects of the teaching and learning on their programmes of study, and the achievements of their students. It is clear that this is a world-class programme led by world-class staff.

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: | Philosophy, Religion and History of Science |
| Subject(s): | <i>Philosophy</i> |
| Programme(s) / Module(s): | 2422 Topics in Epistemology: Knowledge & Justification,; 3121 Adv Topics in Phil Lang; 3311 Intro to Phil Bio; 3320 Phil Bio; 3851 Intro to Phil Modern Physics; 3852 Philosophical Issues in Technology; HPSC 3910 Independent Study; 2121 Intro to Phil Lang; 2402 Topics in Epistemology: Theory and Evidence; 3201 Realism and Representation; 2999 Phil Stud into Schools; 3010 Proctoring; also Dissertation. |
| Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc): | BA |

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner

Completed report

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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

In general I have found the programme to be consistently well marked and evaluated throughout my 4 years. One of the most striking things is the high quality of feedback given to students, and the efficient running of the examination process itself. I have also noted that, in general, Leeds staff have responded well to suggestions from external examiners. The most obvious positive change is in the way that the exam board itself is run. It is now the case that only people with well defined roles in the examination process attend the exam board. The means the meeting has a more professional character, and an early tendency to share personal information about students in a rather ad-hoc way has been eliminated. Some courses have also shown good development over time, although I note that a handful of courses do not seem to have changed in any obvious way over the 4 years. The risk here is that, without some form of refreshment, teaching can become tired. I would like to see more consistent use of the top end of the marking scheme by examiners: it has consistently been the case that a minority of examiners expect too much in terms of originality and insight from students if they are to be given marks in the 70s. The system of using several different external examiners has the result that no one examiner has a sense of the full range of courses on offer. It would be useful to introduce some mechanism whereby the overall balance of the syllabus could be assessed.

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.*

In general the level of difficulty of material offered to students is suitable for a degree-level course. Progression in difficulty of material is evident across different course levels. Standards in these respects are generally well aligned with other degree programmes I am familiar with.

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.*

As indicated above, the courses taught at Leeds aim at similar levels to courses I am familiar with at other universities (e.g. <> 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.*

In general assessment methods are all appropriate to the courses taught. In some cases (for example the modules that look at the teaching of philosophy in schools, or the proctoring module) more inventive assessment methods are used. In just one case an inexperienced examiner had used a non-standard scale of marking. This was spotted by a very astute member of staff, and the module monitor devised a very sensible way of making these marks commensurate with the standard scale of marks. I was alerted to this, and satisfied that the situation was resolved in a fair way.

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 distribution of marks showed a few excellent performances at the top end, and a much larger group of solid performances in the 2i bracket. A few students were awarded 2iis, but rather few were given marks in the 3rd class bracket. I had some concerns that, for a few examiners dealing with very difficult technical material, the high chances of making a small slip in the presentation of this material could make it very hard indeed for students to be awarded marks in the 1st class bracket. In one course, for example, only 1 of 34 students was given a mark of 70 or above. I suggest that examiners use the language of 'regurgitation' rather less in their comments on work: a very surefooted presentation of difficult material covered in lectures may well be described as 'regurgitation', but this understates what the student has achieved. Often this sort of performance should receive a mark in the first-class bracket. More generally the examiners may need to reconsider the level of 'independence' they require in first-class students, especially when difficult technical material is concerned.

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 exam board is now far more efficient in its handling of students with mitigating circumstances. The consideration of these students at a pre-exam board meeting means that the right people are able to formulate a well-considered recommendation for how mitigation should be taken into account.

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.

My comment above explains how difficult it is for any one examiner to have an overview of the full curriculum. There is good evidence that in the areas where Leeds is very strong, and where I was assigned modules – for example, in philosophy of language, or philosophy of science – that research is influencing teaching in a positive way.

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.

Guidance was all adequate

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.

I was given all documentation in a timely way. In a very small number of cases the way in which moderator report forms were filled in made it difficult to understand what action, if any, moderators had recommended. It was possible to resolve these confusions prior to the exam board with a few phone calls to examiners and moderators.

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?

I was provided with exam papers, and I commented on them. In general I felt the questions were appropriate, and made only a few minor suggestions for rewording or clarification.

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?

As indicated above, some of the moderator review forms were not written in a very clear way. Otherwise I was given ample work to enable an evaluation of standards.

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

I was very impressed by some of the dissertation work I was given. In general the choice of subjects was appropriate. Marking was fair and extremely thorough.

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?

I attended the meeting, and in general it was very well run. As indicated above, the Board now handles mitigating circumstances in a much better way.

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

See above.

Other comments

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

N/A