

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:

English

Subject(s):

English

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MA English Literature
 MA American Literature and Culture
 MA Critical and Cultural Theory (English Studies)
 MA English Renaissance Culture
 MA Modern and Contemporary Literature
 MA Postcolonial Literary and Cultural Studies
 MA Romantic Literature and Culture
 MA Victorian Literature

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

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

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 for the programmes and the modules were very appropriate for MA-level work and were on a par with ILOs at my own institution and at other universities where I have externalled. The structure and content of these MA programmes was imaginative and exciting, and allowed students to develop and refine their critical independence throughout the programme.

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 mentioned above, the aims and ILOs were on a par with the ILOs for the MA programmes at my own institution and at other institutions where I have externalled.

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 design and structure of the assessment methods encouraged students to be imaginative, independent but also rigorous in their approach to topics, and this was clearly evidenced in some of the topics and connections that students were drawing in their written work – for e.g. in the essay on mimesis in Plato and cinema for the Magic and Mimesis module and the essay on Marinetti and Joyce for the Enigmatic Body of Modernism.

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.*

Taken as a whole, the performance of the 2014/15 cohort for the MA programmes in English was impressive. There was some exemplary distinction-level work that showed signs of publishability, and even the less accomplished work in the merit and pass categories showed signs of critical intelligence, even if the essays were not always fully in control of their main insights and tended to be somewhat synthetic and/or descriptive. I didn't see any evidence of under or over-marking and felt that staff used the full range of marks. Academic staff clearly did much to support international students who had to negotiate the not insignificant challenges of producing work in a different academic culture and language – an approach which clearly paid dividends by raising the quality of international students' work over the course of the degree 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

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.

I thought that the documentation of the conversations that took place between the first and second markers to agree a final mark for some modules (especially where there is a significant difference between the suggested marks) a fine example of good practice. This is something we currently do for undergraduate dissertations at Southampton; we also plan to extend this practice to the marking of MA dissertations next year.

There was also some discussion at the exam board of further enhancements to the credit weighting for the core research skills module and for optional modules, which had recently been introduced for the 2015/16 cohort. I will review and comment on these enhancements in the final year of my tenure as external examiner next year.

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.

MA teaching in the School of English at the University of Leeds is clearly designed to instil a sense of what research means in terms of independent critical thinking and second-order reflection on the value and distinctiveness of textual analysis as part of a joined-up argument. Moreover, by designing MA modules around specialist subjects within the discipline that are close to the research interests of the individual module convenor, the programme clearly encourages students to approach the subject as emerging scholars/ researchers in an ongoing critical debate. This is a model of how to do research-led teaching.

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?

N/A

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 – dissertation topics were formulated carefully and precisely in many cases; dissertations often extended some of the readings and critical debates explored in earlier modules on the MA programmes. The standard of assessment and the detailed level of feedback were both rigorous and consistent.

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, the whole process was managed very efficiently and I would like to take this opportunity to commend the administrative staff (<> and <>) and the MA convenor (<>) for all their efforts in making the whole process run so perfectly.

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

Yes

Other comments

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



12 February 2016

Dear

Thank you for your very helpful report as External Examiner on our MA programmes for the 2014-15 session.

Your report has now been considered by the School's Taught Student Education Committee and I have incorporated the Committee's response into my comments here.

We are extremely pleased to receive your view of the quality of the work achieved by our MA cohort, most particularly your sense that this was, overall, 'impressive' and that, at the top end of the spectrum, Distinction-level work 'showed signs of publishability'. We are also grateful for your perception that international students were supported in a way which allowed you to see their significant development across their twelve months of study.

In terms of process, we note your sense that our double-marking conversations are an 'example of good practice'. I should inform that we have moved to check marking this session, but, given your comments, we will closely monitor this change.

With regard to the culture of research permeating the pedagogy of these programmes it is good to hear that you think our students are encouraged 'to approach the subject as emerging researchers in an ongoing critical debate'. That is exactly as we would wish.

On behalf of the School, I would like to thank you once again for all your excellent work for us over the last four years. We are very appreciative of the rigour and quality of attention which you have thoughtfully applied to our MA provision.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School