

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:	Education
Subject(s):	English (though also aspects of Maths and MFL)
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Secondary PGCE
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	PGCE/PgCE/Postgraduate Certificate in Education Studies

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

I have been very impressed by the PGCE programme at Leeds. It continues to be a well-designed, exceptionally well managed programme that provides trainees with a thorough and thoughtful induction into the professional world of teaching. It is a programme that takes the intellectual and ethical complexity of teaching seriously. Those who work on the programme, in both academic and administrative capacities, ensure that trainees are properly supported in their development as teachers. Consistently high standards are achieved on the programme, in both practical teaching and in the work that is accomplished to arrive at a theorised understanding of pedagogy.

In my previous reports, I have drawn attention to some of the tensions and challenges that are attendant on the design and operation of any programme the orientation of which is towards the formation of teachers. These comments and suggestions have been received with courtesy and consideration. Indeed, throughout my tenure as an external examiner at Leeds, what I have valued most is the quality of professional dialogue that I have enjoyed with colleagues. There is an open collegiality and reflexivity about those who work on the programme that is, in itself, a very precious resource.

Standards

- 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 are all appropriate for a PGCE course, as are the standards required for awards at Postgraduate and Professional Graduate levels.

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 programme is comparable with other programmes at these levels (6 and 7) and more specifically with other secondary PGCE programmes.

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.*

Assessment methods are appropriate to the course and to the ILOs.

All the evidence at my disposal, from the observation of trainees teaching and of the professional dialogue between trainees and mentors after lessons, to the scrutiny of their files and e-profiles and their assessed assignments, assured me that this is a well-run course, rigorously assessed. The judgements made of trainees' progress and performance were in line with analogous judgements of trainees on other ITE courses with which I am familiar.

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.*

In their academic writing and in their professional practice, students on the course represent the range of attainment that is to be found on other PGCE courses: the best are genuinely outstanding and all showed a real commitment to the sustained development of their practice.

I observed four of the trainees teaching (two English, one MFL and one Maths). I concur with the judgements made by school-based colleagues and by their university tutors in relation to each of these beginning teachers. I would also want to emphasise, very strongly, that school-based colleagues and university tutors alike showed in their assessment of the trainees a mature (and commendable) understanding of the fact that trainees – like qualified teachers – develop over time, and in ways that are not neatly linear. Underpinning the course, in other words, was an approach that recognises that the education of teachers is a process of *formation* rather than *training*, at least as the latter term might be more generally understood.

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'm not at all sure that this is what the designer of this pro forma had in mind when asking about 'enhancements', but it would nonetheless seem an apt place to make a comment about partnership arrangements on the Secondary PGCE programme. The development of effective professional partnerships between universities and schools is, in the current climate, a challenge for all PGCE programmes. The University of Leeds is to be commended for its success in this respect, in particularly difficult circumstances. It is clear that a great deal of careful, patient work has gone into the maintenance and enhancement of partnerships with schools, into enabling the full involvement of school-based colleagues in all aspects of the programme and into ensuring that all parties have a common understanding of their own roles and responsibilities and of what is involved in the whole operation.

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 three M-level assignments require students to investigate local policy and practice, including their own practice as classroom teachers, and to consider such practice in the light of their reading of theory and published research.

One of the challenges for any M-level PGCE course is to induct students into research methodologies and frameworks within the context of what, necessarily, must remain a course of practice-based professional training. During my time as an external examiner at Leeds, I consider that there has been marked improvement in meeting this challenge. The sample of EPS2 assignments that I read this year coped particularly well with the demands of action research: the inquiries into practice on which these assignments reported were all tightly-focused and meaningful – and it was easy to see that the work undertaken would indeed enable the trainees to become better practitioners.

It was also pleasing to see, in the Method assignments, a sophisticated, nuanced and critical attitude towards 'Afl': trainees showed a willingness to explore the potential gains of approaches to pedagogy that might be included within the umbrella of 'assessment for learning' while also being ready to question the value of particular routines. As was the case last year, the trainees' focus was principally on 'advanced lesson planning' – and AfL techniques were conceptualised as means to this practice-oriented end.

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.

It was, indeed.

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.

Appropriate documentation was received.

It was also helpful, this year as in the last two years, to have access to the students' e-portfolios.
The schedule of visits was clear and helpful.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the quality of the administrative support that is provided on the PGCE course at Leeds. In my considerable experience of PGCE courses across the country, I have not encountered so ably administered a programme. This strength may, to some extent, be a product of particularly robust systems; but it is, without doubt, largely attributable to the quality and commitment of the individuals who work so tirelessly to ensure that things run smoothly. Given the complexity of partnership arrangements involved, it would be a mistake to underestimate the achievement of the course administrators.

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.

As was the case last year, tutors' responses to students' work were admirably detailed.

The marking of these assignments is careful, rigorous and responsive to the achievements of the writers. There was also a welcome warmth in the tone adopted by the markers – a readiness to recognise what the writers had achieved, and to place these achievements firmly in the wider context of their ongoing development as teachers.

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

n/a

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 deeply regret that, because of commitments at my home institution, I was not able to attend the exam board. My regret is all the more keenly felt as this was my last year as an external examiner at Leeds.

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

n/a

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

The trainees whom I met were appreciative of the contribution that university-based colleagues had made to their development as teachers – and indeed to their successful completion of the course. They recognised that the discussions they had had with their tutors following lesson observations had been important moments of professional learning. Trainees were equally appreciative of the opportunities provided by Method sessions at the university for them to participate in a wider community of practice, to learn from each other and to enhance their practice as English teachers.

Included in the schedule for one of the schools that I visited was the opportunity to observe and then talk with a newly-qualified teacher who had completed her PGCE at the University of Leeds in 2014. I would like to say a little about this part of my visit, for two reasons.

First, this was one of the most impressive, inspiring lessons I have been privileged to observe for a very long time. Part of what made it so wonderful was that it was entirely mundane: a lesson on the conjugation of Spanish verbs taught to a very mixed, and not immediately impressive, Year 8 class. What made the lesson remarkable was the teacher's skill in drawing all of <> students into active intellectual engagement with the subject-matter. <> did this by presenting the content of the lesson as a series of problems, and by positioning the class not as empty vessels to be filled but as interested, agentive collaborators with <> in investigating the problems. The regularities of grammar thus became patterns to be identified and explored. The teacher's manner with the students was warm, encouraging and founded on her absolute confidence that this was a lesson in which all could make progress, learn, and enjoy themselves. And they did. In and of itself, the lesson was an indication of the strength of the PGCE course of which the NQT was, in some sense at least, a product. It was a lesson that was founded in a well-developed and properly theorised understanding of pedagogic practice – and also founded in the teacher's lively intellectual enthusiasm for her subject and for *teaching* her subject.

My second reason for highlighting this moment on my visit was the story that the NQT had to tell about <> experiences as a PGCE student. <> had not had an easy PGCE year, because of difficulties <> had experienced in one of <> placements. <> remained, however, eternally grateful to the University for the support that had been provided <> during these difficulties, and for the role that <> university tutor had played in ensuring that <> was able to complete the PGCE. Without this support, an immensely talented and totally committed teacher would have been lost to the profession.

Such anecdotes matter. The very existence of our schools as places of learning and development depends on them.

I concluded my report last year with a judgement that this was a PGCE course of high quality that continued to prepare trainees very well for their work as teachers. Everything that I have seen this year has confirmed the soundness of that judgement.

30 June 2015

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Dear <<>>

We are very grateful to you for your extremely helpful and supportive report. Your insightful comments will be considered and discussed by colleagues in detail and will inform any changes to our English course and more widely across our provision.

Firstly please let me thank you for the understanding and flexibility you showed during the school visits in May, when you were willing to observe not only English lessons but also Modern Foreign Languages and Mathematics. This is symptomatic of the knowledge, collegiality and sensitivity you have shown not only this year but throughout your four years as our external examiner.

We were delighted with your very encouraging observations on a number of dimensions of the Secondary PGCE: the design and management of the course; the rigour of assessment and the detail of tutors' feedback; the outstanding quality of our best students in relation to both their teaching and written work; the accuracy and consistency of judgements made by mentors and tutors on students' teaching. Your comments relating to the professional dialogue you have enjoyed with colleagues and how we have responded to your advice (especially in relation to the EPS2 assignments) are highly valued. This applies too to your thoughts on the development of our partnership with school-based colleagues, an aspect of your work in which we have invested heavily in terms of time and effort over the last three years.

Your views on the administrative support provided for the Secondary PGCE programme and of the external examining process are widely shared across the Partnership. It is extremely heartening for the Student Support Officer who holds this responsibility to receive these plaudits, not least given the complex challenges which she faces on a regular basis and with which she deals so very competently. We are privileged to have her as part of our team.

We are very pleased that your conversations with students were positive. That they value highly the quality of teaching they experience as well as the support University-based colleagues provide is testimony to colleagues' commitment and industry.

Thank you for including your thoughts on your observation of the NQT teaching Spanish. Whilst moving, motivating and so very encouraging in themselves, they also reflect the thoughtful, informed and 'caringly critical' friend you have been in your role as external examiner since joining us in 2011-12. The part you have played in the enhancement of our course cannot be overstated. Your place will be very hard to fill.

We appreciate enormously the time, effort and consideration you have given not only to this and earlier extremely helpful reports but also to your very positive contribution during the course of your annual visit in May each year. We are indebted to you.

With sincere thanks and best wishes,

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Head of School of Education