

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 Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies
Subject(s):	Art History
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA in Art History
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

No I don't think that there are any matters that 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?

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

This is my fourth year as external examiner for the MA Art History. I saw my job in various ways: as a critical friend pointing out where a practice could be improved; as an outside pair of eyes that could see across the provision and look at in relation to other courses at equivalent institutions; as someone who would be able to reflect back best practice and offer encouragement to faculty engaged in these practices. It has been this last feature that has characterised my tenure. Over the years I have made some suggestions that have been warmly received and enacted. The first year was primarily engaged in getting a feel both for the course and for its delivery. In the end though I think my job has mainly consisted of pointing to aspects of the programme (such as the use of feedback in assessments, and innovative course design) and congratulating the team on the great job they are doing in picking excellent cohorts of students and taking them on what is an extraordinary intellectual journey where they develop rigorous research skills and finely tuned analytic sensitivities. The course continues to develop as it continually responds to the latest intellectual challenges. It should be noted that its greatest achievements haven't been its ability to change but the resilient way it has been able to maintain the highest standards of taught postgraduate provision.

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.*

Yes the ILOs were totally commensurate with a Masters level award. The programme establishes critical foundations and then takes the students through various modules that allow them to develop into independent researchers with great critical skills. This year no student got less than a merit pass. This is testimony to the effectiveness of 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.*

Yes. I can say that all of the work but particularly the dissertations demonstrated level 7 benchmarks because they could:

- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level

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 majority of modules are assessed via a long essay of 7K words. This is roughly the length of a professional academic essay and allows the students to have a strong sense of professional identity throughout the programme. These essays are assessed in a rigorous manner and over the four years of my examining I have been impressed at the extent of feedback that students receive for their essays. This year was no different. This is also where an extraordinary amount of teaching and learning is made visible and I have a very strong sense that each and every student is both stretched and supported across the MA. This is most notable in the leap that they make in the final capstone project of the dissertation which receives (rightly) very high marks and allows students to really excel.

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.*

Leeds students on the MA in Art History compare very favourably with cohorts at other universities in the UK. They were given ample opportunities to demonstrate their achievements and all of them availed themselves of this opportunity.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

NA

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 programme continues to develop and in particular to develop excellent teaching through assessment via the VLE and the Turnitin tools for feedback. The programme continues to innovate in ways that always seem to be aimed at enlarging the student's experience of the field.

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 teaching and learning is research led. This makes it neither obscure nor fragmented but an impassioned engagement with the central concerns of the discipline at the moment.

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

NA (though it would make an excellent training programme 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

NA

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 it was, mostly. Nearly everything is available in the VLE – course documents, course work, marks, tutor commentary and so on. A couple of the modules didn't seem to use the turnitin system for marking the essays and presenting commentary and this had to be requested. I would suggest that everybody uses the VLE/Turnitin as this seems to be the standard and is very well used by the majority of the tutors.

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 this was all on the VLE

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?

NA – this degree is conducted via coursework.

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?

All the work was made available to me and I could look across modules comparing assessment practices, course handbooks, assessment information and so on. I could also follow a student across the two terms and into the dissertation and see development across the MA (following the 'whole' student is a particularly useful way of seeing the impact of a course rather than a set of discrete modules). The scripts were clearly marked and I always had a real sense of exactly why the student had received a particular mark and how they might get a better mark.

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

Yes they were. This is really the standout part of the course and really demonstrates the research skills and writing/analytic abilities that they have gained over the course. The dissertations were assessed to a highly appropriate standard and in a way that was expressive of the standard that they had attained (which was often exceptionally high).

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 I was able to attend the meeting and it was enacted with fairness and care.

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

NA

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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Tuesday, 09 February 2016

Dear

On behalf of the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, and all of my colleagues directly involved with the MA in History of Art, I would like to thank you for the very detailed and constructive examiner's report that you have again provided for us to consider.

As ever, we have been greatly encouraged by your feedback, by your suggestions, and by the very constructive support you have given to the programme in this your final year as External Examiner.

Most importantly, we are very pleased to acknowledge your very positive assessment of the work produced by this cohort of students, signalling the high standard of their work throughout, of the strides forward made in their final dissertation project, and of the level of research evidenced across the cohort.

The relation between the students' work and our own research is of course vital, and I am very happy to echo your comment that our approach to research-led teaching constitutes an 'impassioned engagement with the central concerns of the discipline at the moment'.

As has been the case over the past years, I am particularly grateful for your views on the scope and thoroughness of the feedback provided by those teaching on the programme. We remain very conscious of the increasing demands placed on us alongside our teaching, so it is heartening to be able to pass on your endorsement, and your view that 'every student is both stretched and supported across the MA'.

At a practical level, I am very pleased to hear that the materials needed were again made available in an effective manner by colleagues in the School

Office. Your suggestion that we look at the couple of instances where the VLE is not being used for the assessment process is certainly something we will take on board.

Finally, and in terms of the broader ethos of the programme, I am gratified to hear your view that our provision continues to develop as it responds to new intellectual challenges in the areas we work in, and that – nonetheless – one of the programme's strengths is its commitment to resist any arbitrary changes that might compromise what you describe as its ability to maintain 'the highest standards of taught postgraduate provision'.

Many thanks again for all your input over the four years you have been with us, and for the extremely valuable contribution you have made to the MA History of Art programme and to our wider postgraduate community.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School