

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:	Faculty of Performance, Visual Arts and Communications School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies
Subject(s):	Cultural Studies
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA in Cultural 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.

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

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?

Yes

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 ILOs and the structure and content of the programme are fully appropriate for the level of the award.

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.*

There is, at this time, no QAA subject benchmark statement for cultural studies at Masters level. However the standard of the awards and the attainment of students is comparable with similar awards at equivalent institutions nationally.

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 assessments is clear, entirely rationale and facilitates an impressive range of work from students. Arrangements for marking are entirely satisfactory and awards are classified appropriately. As evidenced by the feedback, and the work produced by students, the teaching learning and assessment is very good indeed.

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, students were given ample opportunity to demonstrate achievement, and did so. I have provided extensive commentary to the department under separate cover, but the students are producing very strong work. I was particularly impressed by their ability to develop independent research inquiries which moved on from the set curriculum into related areas.

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.

None were identified to me (this is my first year of appointment).

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 clearly shaped by research, both at the level of design and in terms of the tasks set for students (i.e. their assessed work is almost entirely research-led). I think the programme does an admirable job of balancing absolutely core, more general material which all students must know, with more individual research-led material which allows staff and students to develop knowledge in new areas of inquiry.

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. Generally the expectations are equivalent.

I note that Leeds does retain a possibility for External Examiners to adjudicate where there are disagreements with a mark (although this was not asked of me this year). As I understand it other institutions (including my own and another where I external examine) have removed this from the role. I would encourage Leeds to do the same: differences between markers should be adjudicated by someone else involved with the programme, such as programme leader.

In future years I look forward to somewhat more easy access of the VLE, which was held up this year owing to technical difficulties.

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 (owing to late appointment because the previous examiner moved to a job at Leeds)

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. The scripts were given exceptionally extensive feedback in many cases, and enough in all.

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?

Yes.

I was not able to attend the meeting (again because I already had a commitment booked that clashed with the board before taking up the post). Good alternative arrangements were put in place.

I am satisfied with the recommendations of the board.

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

I wasn't in a position to observe this, but have no reason to assume things have changed from last year, where the EE comments that all is on order.

Other comments

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

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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

18 February 2016

Dear

Thank you for your report for the MA Critical and Cultural Theory, 2014/2015. We are grateful for your willingness to step into the role at very late notice, when our former examiner, _____, became our colleague here at Leeds in the School of Media.

Thank you for your strong endorsement of our programme and of the quality and vitality of its teaching, learning and assessment. It is particularly gratifying to hear that our ambitions to offer a programme that enables and stimulates the development of new research inquiries for both students and staff are being realised. Our cohort comes to us from across the disciplines comprising the critical humanities, and students bring a wide variety of interests and ambitions to the programme. A solid yet flexible grounding in critical theory is what they seek, and it is clear from both your formal report and the extensive commentary that you provided separately, that we are succeeding in our efforts to not only provide this grounding, but also to incite the formation of new research projects. Your commentary was remarkably thoughtful and generous, and immensely helpful in its perspective and detail.

I note that our policy is consonant with other institutions including your own: we do not ask external examiners to adjudicate marks. When there are significant discrepancies between markers, we appeal to a third party for adjudication within the programme. This year the School has moved from a 20-90 marking scale to a 0-100 scale. While marking within the pass and merit range remains comparable to what it has been, we are having some difficulty in determining how to handle the range of thirty marks that comprise the category of first-class work. Former examiners have urged us to use the full range of higher marks in order to express the originality of strength of the best work, but there is a long-standing reluctance to use those highest marks, and there remains some confusion over how to accommodate the 30 point range of first class in relation to the 10 point ranges of pass and merit. We will look forward to consulting you on these matters in the assessment of the coming year's work.

I have consulted with our support team about the problems we experienced with your induction and use of the VLE, and I can assure you that we will make sure things proceed more smoothly this year.

Thank you again for all of your work and the generosity of your thinking and feedback. It has been a pleasure to meet you, albeit as yet only virtually, and I look forward to seeing you on 26 October at this year's Exam Board.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School