

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:	Social Science
Subject(s):	<i>Sociology</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA Gender 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

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 are commensurate with the award, and the structure of the programme is appropriate. The content is excellent and the modules look fascinating and seem to be very well taught. The marking standards are appropriate for MA level and the standard of the student work is very high.

- 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.

- 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 appropriate to the learning outcomes and the award, and it was nice to see some variation in the modes of assessment used. The quality of the teaching, learning and assessment methods, as indicated by the student performance, is 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.*

The academic standards were high, and at the top of the range were higher than on many comparable courses at my own and other institutions (as a result I might have used marks in the 80s and even into the 90s more often). Even the weaker students showed an ability to develop interesting thoughts and arguments, which indicated the quality of the teaching (the exception to that was the dissertation module where I felt that weaker students could perhaps be supported more with undertaking theoretical work, or encouraged to do empirical research instead).

- 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.

I am not able to comment on any enhancements as this is my first year. There appears to be some very good practice going on in terms of helping students to formulate their own perspectives and arguments. I also very much like the process of non-anonymous marking (especially since on many MA programmes with modules where students write their own essay titles and receive individual supervision, tutors know who students are even if they are not indicated by name), which allows for feedback on progression and development throughout the programme.

- 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.

Academic staff at Leeds are leaders in their fields of research, and this is reflected in the choice of topics and the vibrancy of student work on the programme. I think the students are very lucky to be taught by this team of scholars.

- 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

I was contacted by <> in November 2014 to say <> had been assigned to me as a mentor and to offer support if I needed it. I have not felt the need to call on <> so far, but very much appreciate the fact that this has been put in place.

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 this material was sufficient and I was encouraged to request additional information (and given additional guidance by <> initially).

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 – although I found it difficult to provide quality assurance across a set of dissertations that included very different theoretical, empirical and methodological projects (and indeed question the separation of these, as much research combines all these elements).

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. Unfortunately I was not able to attend the exam board due to a parents' evening at my daughter's school, which I apologise for.

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

This did not come up so I am unable to comment on this.

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 quality and content of the work on this programme and have thoroughly enjoyed reading it. I was particularly struck by the fact that even weaker students seem to have generally been encouraged to explore their own perspectives and voices. My main critical comment is that I think markers could use the full range – there were some exceptional pieces submitted which could have been more generously rewarded. There was a little variation in the amount of feedback given between modules, but overall it was detailed and helpful. I think this MA programme is a real exemplar and will certainly be recommending it to my own undergraduates.

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7 January 2016

Dear <<>>

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your External Examiner's report for the 2014/15 academic year and to thank you for your valuable contribution to the work of the School.

The School is encouraged by your positive comments, particularly in relation to the quality of the work produced by the majority of the students, including the weaker ones who showed signs of original thinking I will pass on your remarks to the Programme Leader about how their work could be supported more effectively and through the encouragement to engage in empirical work or sophisticated theoretical investigation.

I also take on board your comments about the consistency of marking and the encouragement to use the full scale of marks available (Leeds uses a 20-90 scale), making sure we award outstanding work with the appropriate outstanding mark. As a School we revisit the guidelines here.

Your concerns about the variation in feedback across the modules is duly noted. We will work harder to ensure more consistency with this in the future and it is something that the School discusses frequently. It is, however, tremendously reassuring that you consider the quality of the supervision and teaching on the programme as a decisive factor in the quality of the work produced.

I hope you continue to find your experience with us as an external examiner useful and rewarding and on behalf of my colleagues and myself I thank you, once again, for your hard work. Your contribution is appreciated by the whole School of Sociology and Social Policy here at Leeds and we look forward to working with you in the forthcoming year.

Yours sincerely

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Head of School