

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:	Sociology and Social Policy
Subject(s):	<i>Disability Studies</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Disability 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 programme fully meets its intended learning aims and objectives and the structure and content of the assignments produced by the students on the programme are appropriate to the level.

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.

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 and enable the students to demonstrate that they fully meet the ILOs. However they are very traditional and whilst this is understandable the course organisers might want to look at the introduction of some variety in their assessment setting. At the moment most modules are assessed through essay and perhaps the introduction of some variety such as shorter commentary pieces or similar might help and give students a broader opportunity to express their learning.

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 students work is of a very high standard and is at least comparable to if not in many cases better than Masters students on similar courses elsewhere. This is as much a reflection of the calibre of the students as it is of the expertise and knowledge of the staff delivering the modules. The very wide and extensive literature drawn on by the students in their assignments and the variety of topics discussed demonstrates the extensive knowledge of those delivering the curriculum.

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.

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 influence of research is demonstrated throughout all of the students work. The assignments and the dissertations all draw on and make use of a range of theoretical and methodological elements and apply them either in the construction of their argument in the case of assignments and in a practical research context in their dissertations.

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 acted as mentor to an examiner this year. I initiated contact but did not receive any requests for help.

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, the department was excellent in this respect. All relevant documents and programme specs were included with the material.

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

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 was unfortunately not able to attend the Board due to family illness. This notwithstanding I feel that there are some issues with the way that the Board is operating and the way that the Board in general is administered that perhaps need to be addressed. Many of the decisions that would in the past have been taken during the board are now taken at prior meetings, particularly issues around mitigating circumstances and medical evidence. Whilst this is appropriate in terms of confidentiality and it has hastened the process and made it much smoother it has meant that the Board itself it has become irrelevant to the external examination process. If no decisions are to be taken then the need for an actual physically present examiner of external examiners becomes questionable.

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

Other comments

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

The papers and dissertations I reviewed this year have, as in previous years, been at high standard and in general have been well produced. Almost all of the papers demonstrate that the students are not just engaging but are generally doing so at a critical level and in some cases the students are producing work that is genuinely innovative and are taking disability studies in new and interesting directions. Reading across the courses and modules it is clear that students are pulling in literature from the different courses they are taking and are demonstrating development academically and intellectually.

All of the marking has been fair and consistent across the various courses and the feedback has generally been very good. The staff clearly take their job of marking very seriously and in their feedback to the students demonstrate a great deal of commitment to both the students and the subject area and a desire to genuinely engage both at an intellectual and a political level.

Some of the dissertations were again very good and a wide variety of interesting and important topics were covered. There was only one paper that I felt may have been slightly generously marked but on the whole I agreed with all of the comments. My one concern relates to the ambition of some of the students and I feel that at times the students are a little over optimistic in what they hope to achieve in what is a relatively short time and that this is affecting their final mark. The students who do best in their dissertation are generally those who pick relatively tight and well defined topics and set themselves clear and achievable goals. Conversely those who perform badly, or rather not as well as few if any performed badly, tend to not narrow down their research topic or refine their research questions quite as clearly or concisely at the outset. One student for example set themselves 6 research questions in their introduction and, not surprisingly through their research were only able to answer one fully and another partially. I accept that being able to define and refine research questions is something that can separate the very good students from the rest but feel that perhaps some of those who set out with very ambitious goals could be helped with a bit more supervision early on in the process. Again whilst I know it can be difficult to reign in some students and it might be that these students have been advised to narrow down their focus, I feel that some students would benefit from this sort of advice at the outset and to be reminded of it throughout the process.

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22 February 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 continues to be encouraged by your positive comments and greatly welcomes your feedback. We note with pleasure that you feel the calibre of the work submitted by our students is of a high standard exemplified by the wide range of literature consulted through their assignments. It is also gratifying to see you mention evidence of the influence of research in students' work, particularly in their dissertations which draw on a range of theoretical and methodological influences. Your comments on the kinds of research covered in the dissertation and particularly its scope are also useful and we will feed this back to the relevant module managers.

We note the issues you raise about resorting to tried and tested forms of assessment. We are currently in the process of redesigning all MA provision and the issue of assessment will be at the forefront of these discussions. We also note your concerns about the content of the meetings prior to the exam board and how these are replacing the discussion entailed therein. I will raise this with the Pro-Dean for Student Education.

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
School of Sociology and Social Policy