

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:	Design
Subject(s):	<i>Design</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA/MSc Design
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA/MSc

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

Students complained during my visit about the Vis Com space provided not being suitable for studio work and having no WiFi connection. I believe the students have now even lost this space. Please can I have some reassurance that the students have suitable accommodation in which to conduct their studies e.g. a dedicated MA/MSc space which is fit for purpose.
The introduction of a robust system for obtaining and acting upon student feedback e.g. a termly staff -student consultancy committee. At the moment the external examiner seems to be partially fulfilling this role.

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.*
- Aims and ILOs are commensurate with the level of 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.*
- Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark
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 for the ILOs.
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.*
- Students were given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of aims and ILO's subject to any limitations placed on them by their current accommodation. See my earlier comment.
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.*
- The second marking of work is now much more consistent across all modules.
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.*
- There is no explicit evidence of research being undertaken by teaching staff influencing the curriculum in terms of the subject. However, staffs' knowledge of research is implicit in the high quality of the research methodologies employed by many of the students. I would cite this as an example of best practice.
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
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 to both questions
14. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?
- Yes to both questions and commensurate with master's level nationally. It was pleasing that the final marks this year followed a more normal distribution. Last year it was noted that they were tended to be on the high side.
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?
- Again yes to all these questions
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

Here are my detailed comments and observations:

Term 1

General Examiner Comments

The students work, handbooks, assignments and mark sheets were all clearly laid out for each module. It would however be useful in future to clearly indicate the name of the second marker. On the whole marking was commensurate with M level standards nationally. Most students seem to have made a solid start to the course.

General Student Feedback

I saw 12 students. Overall the student group were happy with the course. They felt the range of assessments were varied with assessments submissions spread out so there were not any conflicting deadlines. They also felt the staff were approachable and friendly with always someone available to talk to. They particularly enjoyed the "Design Jam" during Induction. They did feel however that there was some confusion on the Digital Design Practice Module. See below. They also felt it would be useful in future to see examples of previous student work.

Design Issues DESN5102M (20 credits)

There seemed to be a good spread of marks. Good evidence of second marking but the name of the second marker needs to be indicated. Good use of student peer marking was demonstrated to reflect on individual contributions. In addition each student was given an individual mark for their contribution to the final report as recommended last year. This ensured the final mark reflected the individual contributions to the overall team work. One student failed this particular component due to a poor individual report about his research. This fail accurately reflected the quality of this student's work. Generally, the best projects exhibited some innovative examples of packaging which were well executed in terms of design prototypes.

Student Feedback

Students felt that the requirements for this module were clearly explained and the lectures were well organised. They enjoyed working to a live brief and felt it was a valuable experience.

Research Methods DESN5100M (30credits)

This module runs over the 2 semesters and includes the development of a project proposal. The work was second marked but there was agreement with the Programme Leader that on this module the marks were still too high particularly in terms of the number of distinction level marks. It was therefore decided that the marks of the work submitted in term 1 should all be moderated downwards by 3%. It is recommended that next year care is taken over the awarding of distinction level marks in terms of the requirements of the programme marking scheme and the overall spread/distribution of marks.

Student Feedback

The students felt this module was the clearest in terms of its requirements but also felt that the two assignments in

term one were too similar. They students felt examples of critical writing would have been useful as well as possibly more seminar time.

Sustainable Design DESN5107M (20 credits)

Good evidence and use of second marking. I saw examples of distinction level work, intermediate level work and one module failiure. In all cases the level of marking was appropriate. The weaker work lacked sufficient research and/or a full understanding of the how the design concpets would actually work and be implemented.

Student Feedback

Students felt there was not enough time for their individual projetcs. They appreciated having a replacement/additional staff member who actually works in this area and felt he should be involved in the module next year.

Digital Design Practice DESN5108M (20 credits)

Again clear evidence of second marking. There were two fails; in both cases the design outcomes were basic and did not merit a pass. I also looked at two distinction level pieces of work which both exhibited a high quality designed outcome and associated design development work. It was however not clear that one of the outcomes was actually "digital". I think therefore in future that it should be made clear to students that the outcome needs to be digital or have digital components or alternatively, the module title should be reconsidered. I think it would help if students are encouraged to develop a personal brief which makes the design aim and proposed outcome clear as well as the target audience or user.

Student Feedback

Students felt there was not enough time to learn the software that was demonstrated (they claimed only 2 hours per software package had been made available) I suggest the team need to review this in terms of whether the module is simply introducing the software or teaching it. The addition of supplementary software workshops or online resources might be a solution. Students also felt an interim assessment would be useful so that they could gauge their individual progress. They also wondered if student numbers on this module could be capped so that they had more contact time. They did feel however that this module had great potential.

Additional comment following feedback from term 2 student meeting

Concerns with the Digital Design Practice module were reiterated with students feeling it could be better organised with the possibility of group rather than individual projects which would enable the students to learn from each other.

Term 2

Negotiated Project Presentations

During my visit I sat in 6 presentations but also had the chance to look at all the projects from their displays. The students demonstated a very wide variety of design work and pleasingly some students had worked on live projects with real clients. Generally the quality of the presentations was good. The physical work was well presented and the project posters provided a good overview of the work undertaken. The pottery project and refugee project which I saw were particularly impressive in terms of scope, subject matter and implementaion. There was evidence of good use of second marking sheets. The design and research work had been pre marked but there was also a robust discussion between the tutors to agree the final marks for both this work and the presentation marks. This involed at least 2 and sometimes 3 tutors which is to be commended. It is important at this level that all students are encouraged to evaluate their work and use this information to reflect on the extent to which their original aims have been achieved. Students also need to clearly explain the rationale for their design decisions and recognize where they are being innovative. The better students did demonstrate all of these features in the presentation of their work.

Student Feedback

I met with 5 students who were all overseas. Generally they all seemed to be enjoying the course but made the following comments:

Some students felt the tutor groups could be more cohesive in terms of project subject matter. They felt this would give them more oppotunities to learn from each other; they highlighted the product design group as being the most effective. Some felt that in the bi-weekly group sessions they did not get sufficient individual tutorial time. They also felt that there could be more seminars or lectures involving the whole MA group.

Some students felt they had not been adaquately prepared to use of some of the technologies e.g. laser cutting, 3D printing and UV printing or had access diificulties e.g large scale printing and photography studios.

Some students also raised concerns about the lack of printing credit (60p) compared to other courses and the high material costs to produce their final designs. This was compounded they said by the high cost of printing in the University print shop. They claimed it was cheaper in town.

Some students complained about the viscom space in terms of lack of printing and wifi. They said a proper studio space would be preferable.

Some students thought that it would be nice to have an Exhibition of their work open to the public based on the work they were presenting today.

Some (not all) felt that more time was needed for the design work so that they could produce better quality work. Two student claimed they had only 2 weeks (though this may have been down to their poor time management) in which to do the final design after the Easter break. Some students felt a June or July deadline would be better and that 3 months was too much time for the dissertation.

Finally there was some discussion about how students communicate issues to staff. They claimed that the student rep was not very accessible. Perhaps a termly staff student meeting would be useful involving the whole student body.

Term 3

Dissertations

The standard of distinction level work was commensurate with Masters nationality. The marking was fair and made good use of second markers.

Specific comments are as follows:

Students need to demonstrate greater consistency in providing conclusions related to the project at end of their literature review chapter and primary research chapters. Even some of the better students did not do this effectively.

Generally the students research methodology was well thought out and constructed

In any evaluation chapter, students need to ensure they clearly indicate the number of participants.

There were some good examples of user centred research and its application through an iterative design process

There were some examples of poor use of English, poor citation as well as a lack of numbers and labels for illustrations

Some students seemed confused between research or project conclusions and research and project review. They seem to mix them up. A project review/reflection chapter separate to the conclusions chapter might be better.

One student (<<>>) claimed to have recruited a "young boy" for <<>> evaluation. It may be <<>> English but if the "boy" is under 18 then proper Ethical and Risk assessments should have been conducted along with written permission of the parent/guardian and possibly teacher. Any contact should also have been supervised by a DBS checked adult or parent/guardian. Please can you confirm this took place.

<<>>

RE: MA/MSc Design

January, 2016

Dear <<>>,

Thank you for providing your final examiner's report on our MA/MSc *Design* programme covering the academic year 2014-15. I am very glad that you felt that students demonstrated a very wide variety of design work, that the presentations were good, the physical work was well presented and the project posters provided a good overview of the work undertaken. As you also positively noted, students have undertaken live projects, which is something we will continue to include in our MA/MSc curriculum and also extend to live research projects.

You raised a few concerns about the programme, some of which have been dealt with since your visit, others we have future plans to resolve. In fact, the new programme leader, <<>>, is currently in the process of re-structuring the programme to tackle some of these issues, as well as to strengthen it in terms of research-led teaching and curriculum (as <<>> will have the opportunity to discuss with you in your next meeting).

First let me start with the matters for **urgent attention** that you highlighted.

1. Visual Communication room

I can assure you that the Visual Communication room will continue to be an MA/MSc dedicated space, to which MA/MSc Design students will have exclusive access. Moreover, WiFi is now being installed and a flat table will also be included, making this a suitable place for both digital and studio work. I am also very pleased to inform you that the School has also been recently awarded £4.4m, which will improve the School's facilities further and, consequently, benefit our MA/MSc Design students.

2. Staff-student meetings

This academic year <<>> has already successfully implemented an MA/MSc Design staff-student forum, which takes place twice a semester (a week after the School staff-student forum meetings). This is an excellent opportunity for students to voice their concerns, raise questions, etc.

Other issues raised are listed next, and these are being resolved through the programme's re-structure currently being proposed and implemented in two phases: first phase 2016-17 (minor amendments); second phase 2017-18 (major amendments).

1. Research-led teaching

In the Research Methodology module, where students are asked to read and reflect on research papers, <<>> has now increased the number of papers published by staff in the School, including research active staff teaching in the MA/MSc Design programme.

We are also very pleased to announce that <<>> is starting <<>> PhD, which will strengthen even more our research-led teaching.

Research active staff are also being involved in the MA/MSc by bringing live research projects that the students can choose to take on. This is something that will be part of the new curriculum so that students are exposed, not only to design live briefs from industry, but also to research live briefs. The MA/MSc Design is also going to increase its focus on human centred design, as well as make our new cutting-edge eye-tracking technology available to MA/MSc Design students.

2. Second-marker

The name of the second marker will be indicated on the mark sheets.

3. Research Methodology Module Assignments

Although it will not be possible to change the number and nature of the research Methodology assignments for the next academic year 2016-17 (as the application deadline has passed), this will be reviewed for 2017-18. Instead of three assignments, where two are very similar in nature, there will only be two assignments, the number of credits will be reduced and the module will run for one semester only (instead of the current two semesters).

4. Design Software

It will be proposed that for the academic year 2017-18, the module Digital Design Practice becomes a compulsory module in Semester 1, which will introduce all students to the necessary design software. Then, a new optional module will exist in semester 2 for those students wanting to pursue a Digital Design stream and develop digital design projects at a more advanced level.

5. Negotiated Project Module

Next year the Negotiated Project module will run from January to September in order to allow enough time for students to develop their design project thoroughly and to a high standard. This will be conducive to a final year exhibition, since students will be working on the projects for 8 months (the double of the time).

6. Printing Credit

This year students were given £20 printing credit and a £60 book voucher.

7. Technologies/facilities available

This year students were shown the various facilities available during the induction week, and after that the Student Representative booked specific sessions for all students to learn how to use each individual technology. <<>> also gave students the information and contacts necessary for students to book individual sessions with the technicians directly if they need throughout the development of their individual projects. I am also very pleased to inform you that the School has just spent £830k on equipment, including the world's most sophisticated wireless eye-tracking technology that will be directly relevant to the new MA/MSc Design curriculum and structure, since at the heart of the Masters Programme will be human-centred design.

The School of Design is working hard to improve facilities and will continue to do so.

I hope this covers all the matters you raised in your report, and I look forward to your next visit. Thank you once again for all of your hard work this year.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Chris Carr
Head of School