

**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 Design
Subject(s):	<i>Fashion</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	B.A. Hons Fashion
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	Bachelor of Arts

**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](mailto: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*

n/a

**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*

The academic staff address the role of annual review with the due care and attention it demands and have systematically over the past five years, addressed any aspects of concern raised within each annual report, while alongside, giving thoughtful reflection on the student experience in relation to the programme delivery. Fashion is possibly the broadest undergraduate field of learning within any university or HE Institute of Learning. At Leeds University, from my subject perspective the programme is slightly hampered in its delivery design, in comparison to its subject peers, by the university's rigid academic programme structure, within which they must adhere.

Given the subject delivery constraints the programme has placed successful emphasis on the design portfolio aspect of the student learning, with secondary emphasis being placed upon the realisation of the product,

Design Portfolios have risen in presentation strength from utilising a contemporary balance of both hand rendered and IT generated skills, alongside an in depth inquiry of visual research. The practical realisation element has in the past two years been greatly assisted by introducing at the start of the final year a more fun element of hands-on 'moulage', which has reduced the 'fear factor' on the part of the student and definitely assisted in the raising of practical standards, by encouraging the student to create/experiment more and realise garments more readily outwith their comfort zone. Similarly greater evidence has been seen related to experimental techniques in both garment finish and the use of contemporary fabrications.

This year the significant reduction on reliance of field questionnaires as a supportive research tool within the Dissertations was most welcome. While the technique is an established research methodology, it does require an appropriate breadth of response, which often due to the individual student's time constraints, had frequently in the past resulted in a weak research outcome, the result of feeding the questionnaires to either too narrow a band of the population, or an inappropriate sector of the public for the enquiry (often fellow students).

The programme team have a well documented and thorough assessment procedure in place, one that all the academic team adhere too. Throughout my period of tenure as External Examiner it has been a very useful and transparent guide to my duties and the role performed. The assessment procedures provide clear feedback and guidance to students seeking to understand how they are performing against their programme peers.

This year the Fashion Styling & Photography pathway, similarly raised it's level of merit by students not treating it as an easier option, but as a pathway option that had different aspects of enquiry to be addressed in order to direct their design imagery to as equally a high standard as Fashion Design.

I relinquish my External Examination duties in the year 2015 knowing that the programme's academic teaching team have a healthy review mechanism in place with appropriate protocols, that will ensure it continues the momentum to move forward in a positive manner.

**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 best manner in which I can confirm that the programme aims and intended learning outcomes were commensurate with the level of the award is to refer to an aside comment, made by a fellow qualitative judge, <<>> (considered an Icon by the British Fashion Industry) at Graduate Fashion Week, 2015. When any college work seen was considered questionable in standard, or inferior, <<>> response was, 'I suggest that you view the Leeds University stand portfolios, to see how it should be done.'

The programme design provides the student with the option of Industrial placement, when the placement proves to be a positive experience it brings enormous benefits to the individual students learning curve, as seen in their final year work outcomes, which in one or two instances evidenced exceptional work outcomes for the level of degree learning.

This year maintained the encouragement of experimentation in the garment finish with the experimental use of innovative High Tech. fabrications.

**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.*

The Fashion programme at Leeds University, as have also its national peer programmes of study, been subject to careful scrutiny for the membership of both the British Fashion Council Colleges Council and Graduate Fashion Week, and in both cases Leeds has been unanimously approved for membership. Both these bodies the BFC has Government's ear and GFW the International Fashion Industries ear.

The Leeds University Fashion programme has a quite short teaching year, adhering to the design of a theoretical teaching semester, when compared to many of its national peers, who by comparison may continue delivering for up to another additional eight weeks, per academic year. That said, benchmark standards at Leeds are being met, while aims and learning outcomes are also meeting the recruitment demands set by the fashion industries international employers.

**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.*

At Leeds University's fashion programme, the design and structure of the programme's assessment methods are created around the varied delivery demands set by the respective academic challenges e.g. team devised modules of study, modules with practical 3D work outcomes, or outcomes that require the utilisation of IT technologies, or traditional theoretical studies, plus industrial placement assessment. All require a modified form of empathetic assessment, all assessments are appropriately designed, set into place and result in appropriate national standards being attained, while alongside addressing the programme's Learning Outcomes.

At Levels Four & Five, it was also most welcome to see in 2014/15 a greater use of the possible breadth of marking, to encompass the mark band of 70 - 100 more frequently, than perhaps has happened in the past.

**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 work viewed during external moderation, provided convincing evidence that national standards were being upheld at Leeds University and that all registered students were being provided with the opportunity to demonstrate by the design of the curriculum, that their individual work aims and learning objectives were being met.

At Level Six, the Portfolio outcomes in DESN 3564, Portfolio Design & Content as stated earlier, are commendable for their balance of viewed content. If there was an aspect that required attention it was that for the more weak students, I refer to those those achieving a 2.2 classification or below, all require to further support their design studies with more meaningful garment related, design research, as a slick presentation emphasis alone, within the portfolio, is insufficient. The recording of texture is an aspect that could also be more fully explored as could a reduction in the outline of the illustrated figure with heavy black lines which detract from the sensitivity of design content.

DESN 3568, while more careful selection and greater experimentation has been witnessed in the choice of cloth for realised garments the finish of traditional wool cloth products does require greater underpinning and preparation than was evidently afforded. This may in part, be the result of the programme having limited access to human technical support, for the student numbers registered onto the programme of study.

DESN 3582 Fashion Styling & Photography, this year following review, one felt that the full student cohort undertaking this module of study had for the first time done so with not only design integrity but with seriousness of purpose.

Models were more carefully selected, placing greater empathy towards the respective thematic themes under review, as well as displaying a strong reasoned case for the choice of thematic detail related to the Brand identity they sought the campaign to appeal too.

DESN 3660 Independent Study (Dissertation) over the past two years there has been a welcome transience of thought as to the approach to undertake on this module of study. The module, without doubt still incurs abject fear, within a sector of the student cohort. In the past, it was seen as being slightly alien to their practical studies. Whereas the student is now more able to align the Dissertation investigation more closely to their principal Design investigation, to further support the limited time constraints that are available to the student for investigation into their main design study. While the Harvard referencing system is exemplary in it's use at Leeds University, I still find with some students the written content is overtaken by the volume of referencing and it can make for difficulty for the viewer to retain in one's memory the actual topic under discussion, when reading it.

**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.*

One enhancement in the academic year 2014/15 has been the upgrade of the physical facilities the programme is based within, in the competitive world of student recruitment, the enhancement of the working facility, does have a positive impact on the student welfare and was most welcome on completion.

While the academic staff, felt that the impact of the current year's final year experimental project, had been less impactful to when undertaken in 2013/14, I still genuinely believe that it had a positive psychological effect on the returning students to the world of academia, again I feel that a returning student who may not have had the opportunity to undertake any practical work during their year out, returning to the final year is daunted at the thought of the production of a collection, but following the introduction of this project, the collections are more challenging, in their garment cut and the type of cloths employed, than evidenced in the earlier years of my appointment.

In the academic year 2014/15 the general quality of outcome from the Fashion Styling and Photography sector of the programme definitely also rose in standard and I would like to commend all those who participated in the activity as in the past while there was always a few individual outcomes worthy of merit, the merit is now more evenly spread across the complete cohort involved in this activity.

**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.*

Fashion as a subject area is by nature whimsical and currently is driven at the more commercial end of the fashion industry by a design cycle of two to three weeks, unlike a subject area such as industrial design with an expected design cycle of up to three years. Research is the successful backbone of Fashion delivery, which has by it's nature to be sensitive to immediate change. The nature of the Fashion discipline at Leeds is that it has to evolve in a similarly speedy manner by 'research', however a form of research often not recorded, in the manner that one refers too in this column heading, but a form of on-going research, peculiar to the subject of Fashion that ensures that the programme at Leeds University is fit for purpose.

The programme's academic staff, all support the functioning of the 'The Yorkshire Fashion Archive', an on-going research resource which can be drawn upon by both students and staff as and when appropriate for the influence of directing design/manufacture

**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**

I was called upon to act as a mentor in the academic year 2104/15 to a new External Examiner, I was provided by the university with the contact details of the new Examiner, to whom I introduced myself over e-mail exchange, offering an open door via e-mail exchange for future contact and exchange, should it be required?

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.*

In relation to the B.A. Hons Fashion programme, the university provided an updated External Examiner Handbook 2014/15, as outline/guideline to the duties anticipated to be carried out for the university.

The university provided two opportunities to undertake the external moderation duties in the academic year 2014/15. The first, an interim visit held on the 02 March and to complete the activity a final visit was held on the 22 & 23 June, 2015. On both occasions the representative student work was prepared, displayed in exhibition format, accompanied by well documented, filed and recorded mark sheets with copies of the student feedback forms. At all times I was given 'carte blanche' to further investigate or call for additional work for inspection, if I felt it was necessary. At the time of the interim visit I was afforded the opportunity of speaking in person to the student body, all were supportive of both their programme of study and the accessed academic staff support.

Prior, to the final visit, a representative Dissertation sample was downloaded onto disc, forwarded for moderation purpose requesting feedback prior to my final visit date.

The provision of the above identified, met the examination requirements and I was able to satisfactorily confirm that I had upheld all the marks forwarded for external moderation in 2014/15.

**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.*

It is my considered opinion that I received all the supportive materials required to undertake my designated duties. This was additionally supplemented with the marking criteria for each and every module under review, enabling the task to be carried out with comparable ease.

**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?**

The subject of fashion is appropriately assessed by continuous assessment rather than by formal examination, in line with national policy one tends as an examiner to receive the module guidelines and briefs at the time of the respective examination visits.

On examination I found that the module guides and briefs were informative, outlined the module demands in a clear and generally succinct manner, in the manner that current national guidance demands and seeks within such materials of learning.

**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?**

i can confirm that there was sufficient work made available for the purpose of evaluation of the standards being set on the programme of study.

At the time of my final visit to Leeds University, all the final year work was exhibited and representative work was made available from levels 4 & 5, with more work available for view if required. While i did view above and possibly beyond the minimum moderated sample forwarded, I came across no evidence, to indicate, either insufficient evidence to be able to form a valid judgment, nor found any examples of evidence, that would bring into question the earlier decisions made at the internal level of marking and moderation.

All work evidenced was scrupulous in it's feedback recording, annotation etc., unlike essays where often points are recorded on the original manuscript, as one proceeds through the marking of the submitted document. In the examination of practical design and garment manufacture, the feedback commentary is recorded for posterity elsewhere rather than risk potential dispute over whether a noted mark or comment, might be subject to having defaced the said art work.

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

The topics of Fashion study selected for Dissertation titles this year were in some cases topical, a few were genuinely thought provoking in their arguments and in few further dissertation cases, there was possibly the insight to a very personal enquiry, based on how society may have reacted to them as an individual earlier in their life. I fully support the move this year to a more discursive style of dissertation, when reflecting on the earlier, more marketing style titles where an emphasis was placed on question devised findings?

The assessment methodologies employed by the team assessing the dissertations, provided transparency to the viewer during examination to assist in the understanding of how the marks were arrived. Once again from when I first took up my period of examination tenure, when only the final agreed mark was provided, the insight now as to how the mark has been formed and discussed is very much appreciated and makes the understanding of how the mark was arrived, much easier.

**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?**

The administrative arrangements for the respective examination visits, the preparation of materials and even hotel arrangements were all undertaken with due care and sufficient notice in advance of being required to attend. I was able to attend the Board of Examiners Meeting. The Board was paperless, but ran smoothly without technical hitch, enabling all participants to follow the pattern of discussion and the confirmation of assessment findings. Where borderline circumstances raised the need for discussion to determine the academic outcome, discussions were based on healthy academic debate, adhering to appropriate levels of academic rigour in order to ensure that fairness was meted equally to all under examination.

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

At the time of the examination board sitting, any mitigating circumstances had already been agreed/determined, as to whether they could be allowed to stand in support of a claim from the respective student. In some cases the mitigating circumstance had been submitted as a fail-safe procedure, observing the mark outcome not been duly affected by the circumstance. Where a significant occurrence had taken place, which had adversely affected the individual student's pattern of academic performance, appropriate levels of conversation were entertained, to ensure that fairness was not only given to support the individual student, but in the decision making, to ensure that no unfair advantage was also gained.

**Other comments**

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

I have found my period of examination tenure at Leeds University an interesting period, observing subtle rather than great change over the years. The programme team are a tight working unit supportive of each other's strengths and knowledge parameters, on which individual modules are drawn for the purpose of teaching. I leave my period of tenure knowing that I depart leaving behind a healthy programme of study ready to face the Higher Educational challenges of the future.

I have just noted on the 'Worker Agreement' that the period of engagement appears to end in July 2016, have I mistakenly drawn a close to my period of tenure prematurely one year earlier than it is intended? Please advise if I am required to build windows of time into my 2015/16 work calendar for further examination duties at Leeds University.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

SCHOOL OF DESIGN

RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS REPORT 2014/15

<<>>

30<sup>TH</sup> November 2014

Dear <<>>,

Thank you for your fourth report as External Examiner for BA (Hons) Fashion Design programme for the academic year 2014/15. Thank you also for agreeing to extend the period of appointment for an extra year.

The external examiners final report requires an overview of the past four years and you have been most helpful and extensive in your observation.

What should have been your final report, requested a commentary on the progressive development and enhancement of learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and of the school procedures over the last four year period. We are pleased that once again you have acknowledged in your report that the programme standards have remained appropriate and that the aims are comparable against national benchmarking.

You commented that *“the programme has placed successful emphasis on the design portfolio aspect of the student learning”* and your referral to an outside comment was particularly pleasing to the fashion staff team as they all have great respect for Sylvia Ayton MBE.

*“The best manner in which I can confirm that the programme aims and intended learning outcomes were commensurate with the level of the award is to refer to an aside comment, made by a fellow qualitative judge, <<>> (considered an Icon by the British Fashion Industry) at Graduate Fashion Week, 2015. When any college work seen was considered questionable in standard, or inferior, her response was; “I suggest that you view the Leeds University stand portfolios, to see how it should be done”*

You also remarked that the variety of teaching methods and the variety of assessment techniques required a modified form of empathetic assessment. You stated that all assessments are appropriately designed, set into place and result in appropriate national standards being attained. You were also pleased that the mark band of 70 to 100 was used more frequently, than perhaps has happened in the past.

Your acknowledgment of the year in industry was again pleasing to the staff team as they place enormous value on the time and effort this module demands.

*“The programme design provides the student with the option of Industrial placement, when the placement proves to be a positive experience it brings enormous benefits to the individual students learning curve as seen in their final year work outcomes”*

The statement regarding the ‘human’ technical support in relation to student numbers and the finish of some garments, on the module DESN 3568 has been noted. We endeavour to get this balance right and the review of technical support is ongoing.

In recognition to student feedback, the fashion team have introduced some small but strategic changes of staff delivery and the progressional structure of the current programme.

We are pleased to have you on board for a further year and hope that you will positively evaluate the changes made.

Once again thank you for your continued and constructive support, we look forward to welcoming you back for the academic year 2015/16 visits.

Yours Sincerely,

<<>>

Head of School of Design