

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 Languages, Cultures and Societies

Subject(s):

German

Programme(s) / Module(s):

All BA Hons programmes with German

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

BA

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

None

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?

No

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 expectations for the students and the ILOs were commensurate with the award overall and were carefully matched with each expected level of attainment on modules throughout the programme.

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, the Aims and ILOs were comparable to those of my own institution and others where I have been an examiner, as well as to wider subject benchmarks and the framework for HE 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.*

I was impressed by the range of modules and the good variety of assessment methods used within them. The four key linguistic skills were thoroughly tested, as were the students' abilities to disseminate their research in essays, a dissertation and in presentations. In addition to this, they had the opportunity to write book and film reviews, lead group discussions, compile glossaries and deliver a business pitch in the target language. This variety is to be commended. However, colleagues should bear in mind that it is sufficient that variety of assessment is achieved across the programme as a whole and maybe reconsider practice where a number of different types of assessment are required within the same module, as this can be onerous for both staff and students.

All modules were marked rigorously and the moderation process worked well, with a solid sample (usually around one third) being checked; appropriate adjustments were suggested where relevant and implemented.

Detailed feedback was provided for the students. The provision of a 'feedback action plan' proforma is also to be commended.

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.*

There is strong demonstrable progression displayed by the students from one level to the next with some really confident performances in evidence by the final year across all the grade bands. Some impressive work was on display in the first-class band, especially in terms of oral and written performance in German. Overall, the oral performance of the students was very pleasing; the extra months spent abroad have an obvious and positive influence on the authenticity of the spoken language across all grade bands.

Furthermore, students had plenty of opportunity to engage with theory relevant to the subject matter of the various modules. Although not all students availed themselves of this opportunity, there was, nonetheless, clear evidence of enthusiasm for the topics / texts across all grade bands. At the top end, it was apparent that students were engaging with complex ideas and developing convincing arguments based on these. This opportunity is given to the students from an early stage of the degree programme. The dissertation module, in particular, gives students the opportunity to demonstrate their application of theoretical concepts.

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.

I am not able to comment on enhancements since the previous year. Areas of good practice include delivery of modules in the target language at all levels of the programme and the stimulating variety of assessment practices (see 3 and 4 above).

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.

Several of the modules are influenced by the research into contemporary German literature, political debates, gender history and translation theory currently being undertaken by members of staff in the department.

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. The information provided was sufficient.

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, I was sent this information at an early stage of the academic year, when I was looking at assessment questions and it was provided again when we reviewed the students' work in June.

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, I saw all the drafts and checked that they were appropriate to the level of study, unambiguously phrased and error-free. I was offered clarification where appropriate.

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 whole range of examined work across all levels of study was available to me. The papers were well organised and it was clear from the marking trail and the feedback comments how the internal examiners had arrived at their decisions.

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

Yes, the topics were appropriate and grew out of academic interests developed by students during their other modules. Dissertations were submitted by students across the whole ability range. The External Examiners looked carefully at some of the work at the lower end, since here we felt some of the marking had been too stringent. There is a case perhaps, for limiting the dissertation option to students who have demonstrated (with marks for assessed essays in other modules) that they can cope well with formulating and pursuing a piece of research fairly independently. A student who generally submits work of Lower Second standard, for example, would not be encouraged to take the dissertation module in my own institution.

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, everything was handled efficiently. I attended the module board and I was happy with the recommendations made there. It was clear that staff knew their groups of students well and had ensured that all the difficult cases had been examined in the mitigating circumstances board. Policies around incomplete assessment, re-sits, etc. were understood by all members of staff and applied fairly.

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

Yes. The External Examiners were updated by the School Assessment officer on the extensive mitigating circumstances meetings which had taken place before our visit. The measures put in place were appropriate and equitable.

Other comments

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

University of Leeds
School of Modern Languages
Department of German
GB-Leeds LS2 9JT



**Head of German, Russian,
and The Centre for World Cinemas**

Main switchboard 0113
Internal extension
Voice/direct line 0113
Fax 0113

July 24, 2015

Dear

Thank you so much for your examiner's report, and also, of course, for all your hard work and extremely helpful comments over the course of the year.

We were pleased to hear that our processes are robust and fair to students, and that our marking and moderation systems work well. We were also pleased to hear that you feel our programme and modules are innovative and that our assessment is challenging and varied. Your praise for our 'feedback action plan' is especially appreciated, since this is something we have only just introduced and we are pleased to see that it is having an impact on students' learning.

Most of all, of course, we are grateful for your comments on the high standards that our students achieve and on our teaching.

We note too your comments on the burden of assessment. As we discussed in Leeds, your comments chime very much with my own impression that we over-assess. My concern especially is that the burden of assessment falls disproportionately on more junior colleagues, and that it may be impacting negatively on their research careers. We will continue to work to reduce the amount we assess within modules, while maintaining the variety of assessment across the whole programme, as you recommend. My aim is that you should see a noticeable difference next year!

Thanks again for all your work, and for your support.

Professor of Contemporary German Literature, Culture and Society
University of Leeds

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 Languages, Cultures and Societies
Subject(s):	German
Programme(s) / Module(s):	All BA programmes involving German
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

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

None.

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?

No – copies of these reports would have been helpful. See also my response to question B.6 below.

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

N/a.

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, both in the core language and content-based modules on the German programmes, were of a standard that was consistent with similar programmes at other UK HEIs. There has obviously been a great deal of thought on the part of colleagues on how to engage and enthuse contemporary students of German, whilst maintaining high standards. In optional modules for finalists, there was clear scope for independent research and scholarly activity, which built upon the ILOs laid out in modules lower down the programme and the skills inculcated there. By the end of their degrees, Leeds students of German generally write and speak excellent German across a number of registers, also.

The standards required for the award of the various degrees involving German were appropriate and in line with national standards, based on experiences at several other HEIs and my own university. Internal to the programme, the standards required for assessed work at each level, first year, intermediate and in finals, were appropriate and planned for and ensured meaningful progression on a year-by-year basis.

Colleagues teaching German in the School are to be commended in particular for their good practice in keeping assessment fresh and relevant to contemporary students and for the rich feedback they give throughout. This is reflected in the fact that many students, especially those demonstrating lower and middling competency in language and cultural work, show marked progression in their achievement. The use of target-language teaching and the dissertation option later on the programme allow the more able students to excel. When engaging in the usual internal reviews of the programme and its constituent modules, however, I would urge Leeds colleagues to keep alive these elements of the programme, as they offer students the chance to engage in the most challenging intellectual exercises.

I would also venture that colleagues might think how to extend, however modestly, modules dedicated to more traditional literary material, including pre-20th century material. If taught with vigour, contemporary insight and organized around engaging thematic strands rather than tired period based models, such material does, in my experience, attract student interest if pitched well. Vigour and contemporary working methods are strongly in evidence amongst Leeds teaching staff and, whilst the academic profile of the Leeds cohort I engaged with is slightly different to that of my home institution, the best Leeds students compare admirably to the best achievers I teach at home. The upper ability levels of Leeds cohorts might well be stretched further by continued engagement with material described above.

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 aims and objectives of individual modules and the programmes as a whole compare well to national benchmarks, and to the aims and practice at my home institution and other HEIs familiar to me. I have no concerns about the programme's aims and standards meeting FHEQ standards: the programme clearly meets all standards in this respect.

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.*

One particular strength of the Leeds German programme is the attention given to diverse forms of assessment. Many modules make good use of interim and formative assessment in building towards summative assessments in the form of examinations and coursework. With an eye to vocational skills, many modules use innovative assessment types, such as a mock sales pitch in German that proves popular with students and elicits strong performances. This is commendable and makes other programmes, including that offered by my own institution, look conservative by comparison.

In the drive to engage in and share good practice, however, I would urge colleagues not to over assess. Whilst students are not being asked to over-produce in strictly quantitative terms, the use of several layers of formative work in a module that already requires students to write (and staff to grade) a formal essay, might be seen to be a step too far. Early and mid career staff, shouldering full teaching loads, should be wary of burning themselves out with excessive marking, especially as students can often profit as much from oral feedback or one piece of formative assessment as they can from two, or from two rather than three. I would encourage a general audit and spring clean of assessment levels across the programme.

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. I refer readers to my comments above. The wide range of assessment types, together with the frequency of assessment, ensure this.

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.

In my first year, and with no previous reports were provided by way of comparison, it is difficult to comment here. I have, in my responses elsewhere, highlighted areas of good practice.

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.

Leeds has obvious research strengths in the areas of contemporary German literature, film and translation studies. Colleagues are nationally recognized not only as researchers, but as specialists in taking this material beyond the academy through outreach and public engagement work. This is reflected internally, with up-to-date approaches to the latest cultural outputs from Germany figuring prominently in the curriculum and being delivered in a way that appeals to and engages with student interests. This is clearly Leeds playing to its strengths.

A number of modules reach back to pre-twentieth century material. Again, I would urge colleagues who have pre-twentieth research interests to consider keeping alive, introducing, or, in some cases, refreshing older modules that deal with this material. If planned carefully, this material can be integrated into trans-epochal thematic modules and even, possibly, mobilized around the notion of 'modernity' in German culture (this is already in evidence in a number of modules). The interdisciplinary and trans-epochal nature of research at Leeds could, in this way, be more closely reflected in teaching at Leeds.

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 a mentoring external examiner, but received no communications or assistance from him other than an initial introduction.

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.

The materials were extensive and helpful.

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.

There was some delay in getting appropriate module descriptions and handbooks to me, with some assessments arriving with me with little warning and no context. After some chasing this was remedied. It is especially important for externals in their first year to be given these materials promptly, if not in advance, and for them to be provided with a timeline for their expected workload.

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?**

I was sent and asked to proof assessments and exam papers at two intervals throughout the year, and I read them for typography, content and for the rigour and pitching of assessment. Generally I felt the nature and level of questions were appropriate to the degree course and the year groups. The questions showed a remarkably innovative approach and generated diverse outcome types, both in written and oral contexts. These were appropriate to the subject matter, showed an eye for vocational relevance as well as pedagogical concerns.

I had one general observation concerning the paper GERM2310: here, some of the questions set in German seemed ambitious for a second year module given the simultaneous challenge of writing in the target language and dealing critically with intellectual content. Indeed some of the questions in GERM2310 called upon second students to answer in German on topic that was not that far off that dealt with in the first question on GE3250, a finalist module. I was told my comments would be passed on to the module tutors.

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 complete corpus of scripts from all modules for all year groups, including first year, was presented to me. The scripts were clearly marked and feedback was consistent and extensive across all modules. In some cases, oral presentations figured in the generation of module grades – sometimes for up to 20% of a final mark. These presentations had not been recorded in audio or visual formats across all modules. From a quality assurance perspective, and in line with policy at my own and other institutions known to me, I would urge colleagues either to give less weighting to such assessment components, or, if they are to figure so highly, record them in order that externals may view or listen to a sample.

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

I inspected a number of undergraduate dissertations. Here the topics of dissertations were appropriate, and also diverse and reflected the research interests of staff and students. The methods and standards of assessment were robust throughout.

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?

With the exception of slight delays in supporting materials, mentioned above, the communication with support and academic staff were excellent. The rubric, procedure and outcomes of the board I attended were effective, robust and fair. I look forward to being invited to classifications board later in my tenure as external.

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

Yes, the School has a robust procedure in place for dealing with mitigating circumstances. In a School of this size, there are a large number of such cases. These are dealt with in a large sub board prior to examination boards over several days. I did not attend that sub board, but the outcomes from it fed through onto examination grids displayed and discussed in the examination boards I did attend. Staff showed great knowledge of the individual cases and were able to outline their impact on performance without breaching the confidentiality of student disclosures. The classification of mitigating circumstances was clear and the decisions were judiciously applied. The whole procedure compares to that at my own institution, indeed it has been in place for longer and is, if anything, more efficient.

Other comments

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

--

University of Leeds
School of Modern Languages
Department of German
GB-Leeds LS2 9JT



**Head of German, Russian,
and The Centre for World Cinemas**

Main switchboard 0113
Internal extension
Voice/direct line 0113
Fax 0113

July 24, 2015

Dear

Thank you so much for your examiner's report, and also, of course, for all your hard work and extremely helpful comments over the course of the year.

We were pleased to hear that our processes are robust and fair to students, and that our marking and moderation systems work well. We were also pleased to hear that you feel our programme and modules are innovative and that our assessment is challenging and varied. Your comments on the progression achieved by our less gifted students is especially welcome, since this is something that we have been focusing on in recent years, with additional opportunities, and pathways, for feedback. We are also grateful for your comments on the close tie-in between our research interests and the modules we teach.

Most of all, of course, we are grateful for your comments on the high standards that our students achieve and on our teaching.

We note too your comments on the burden of assessment. As we discussed in Leeds, your comments chime very much with my own impression that we over-assess. My concern especially is that the burden of assessment falls disproportionately on more junior colleagues, and that it may be impacting negatively on their research careers. We will continue to work to reduce the amount we assess within modules, while maintaining the variety of assessment across the whole programme, as you recommend. My aim is that you should see a noticeable difference next year!

Further to this, you comment on the range of our modules and note that we offer modules almost exclusively in the contemporary period. This is true, of course, since all of our research is in the twentieth- and twenty-first century. However, you are right – we should look for every opportunity to introduce older material into our level one and level two 'coverage' modules. I will certainly urge colleagues to do this.

Thanks again for all your work, and for your support.

| Professor of Contemporary German Literature, Culture and Society
University of Leeds