

**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:	Languages, Cultures and Societies
Subject(s):	<i>Centre for World Cinemas</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	<i>World Cinemas (Film Studies)</i>
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](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?*

I was not sent actual copies, though I did discuss the last report, and responses to it, with the Programme Director in advance and during my visit.

**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 is well structured, having undergone some modifications (e.g. rebranding to Film Studies; creation of new first-year modules) that have clearly strengthened it. It seems also that it might have improved its attractiveness to prospective students. The Aims and ILOs are wholly appropriate for the content and the level of the award, and it is pleasing that these have obviously continued to remain under review as the programme evolves.

### 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 programme maps well onto comparable programmes elsewhere, whilst retaining a certain distinctiveness, which will make it an attractive proposition for students seeking a varied approach to the study of film.

### 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 think the methods of assessment are wholly appropriate to the ILOs, allowing the students to demonstrate a range of skills. The deployment of a detailed film analysis element, alongside the traditional essay, in the majority of modules is to be welcomed. One module uses a joint presentation as well, and to good effect. It might be something for the team to consider rolling out more widely. In terms of helping to support students' broader employability, the use of presentation as a means of assessment can be an asset.

The quality of the student performance, with a majority of the work in the First/Upper Second bracket, suggests that the assessment methods work well and that students are generally comfortable with them.

### 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.*

As indicated above, the assessment methods allowed a majority of students to perform to a high standard, with all modules average marks in the Upper Second bracket, and very few fails overall across the three years. The mark profile is what I would expect from a University of Leeds' standing, and is comparable with other universities I have examined in. The three cohorts all seem immensely strong and a credit to the programme, the Centre and the University.

Where performance was weaker, it tended to display a weak grasp of how to structure academic work, and how to reference correctly. Often the weaker work also betrayed some major grammatical and linguistic flaws, which I was surprised to find, to be honest. Be that as it may, such work was the exception and the markers generally indicated ways to improve the quality in these areas.

### 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.*

Based on my discussion with the Programme Director, the rebranding of the programme and the new modules in year one have laid good foundations upon which to build.

### 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 programme benefits greatly from the broad expertise of the teaching team, all of whom devote only a fraction of their time to it whilst maintaining their other roles across the Language school. The blend of different research specialisms feeds directly into the various modules, especially at levels two and three, with the students being taught by experts in their respective fields. The best demonstration of the benefits of this approach is the dissertation module. All the dissertations I saw were of very good quality, one of which was excellent. The students, whilst selecting their own topics, had specialist supervision in each case. At a time when many departments are discussing the virtue in maintaining the traditional dissertation, the CWC programme underlines the importance such a project retains, especially, but by no means exclusively, for those students who might be looking to pursue academic careers.

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**

**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.*

I was perfectly happy that I was able to carry out my duties without any problem. I had several discussions with the Programme Director before, and during, my visit, where any questions I had were addressed. I was unfamiliar with the 'base room' approach, but I found it very practical.

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.*

I was given the majority of the documentation I required in advance, whilst the material made available in the base room, including any module handbooks I'd not seen, made my job very easy. I was asked specifically to adjudicate in the case of one first-year essay, but otherwise I was simply required to look over the work, check the appropriateness of the marking to the classification as befits the traditional external examiner role.

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 all draft assessments and asked for my comments. In one or two cases, I made some recommendations or raised some queries in terms of clarifying the rubric, all of which were dealt with. I thought the questions/tasks set were appropriately challenging and wide-ranging enough to allow the students to demonstrate their ability, knowledge and to achieve the ILOs.

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 was presented with all work in all eight modules I am responsible for, and thus was able to have a complete overview of the marking, and moderation, procedures and assess the standard of work submitted.

There was evidence of generally good, full and formative marking and feedback in all modules, facilitated by a highly effective mark sheet, which is clearly practical and useful for both students and staff. The Programme Director is to be commended for creating the template. I did wonder if provision ought to be made for the second marker/moderator to add comments too, however, in cases of disagreement between the markers. In one of the modules, this discussion 'took place' on a separate sheet, but I did think there might have been scope for it to have been recorded on the mark sheet itself. The more general discussion between the markers, which is recorded on the module moderation sheet, was good in all cases, and that process clearly works well. The quantity of the samples moderated was appropriate, and in some cases marks for large numbers of students were altered accordingly, and appropriately, as a result of such dialogue.

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

As mentioned above, the subjects chosen for the dissertations were clearly inspired to a degree by the research specialisms of the core CWC team. The supervision was therefore clearly of very high standard, borne out by the marks awarded. There was some excellent work in evidence, including some elements suggesting the students would be ideal candidates for MA research. The assessment was very well handled.

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?**

Everything worked smoothly in terms of administration from start to finish. The essays/assessments were sent to me in good time, the material in the base room was extensive, and the Board ran smoothly and efficiently. The logistical arrangements were also seamless.

**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**

I wondered whether the team might consider producing a programme handbook, outlining the overall structure of the Film Studies programme. In part, I realise that the programme sits alongside other programmes, many of whose students take cinema modules as electives, and the team devote only part of their time to it. I note too that it has undergone some changes over recent years. I did just think a programme handbook might nevertheless create a stronger impression of coherence, signalling who the team are, what their interests are and the overall pathways available to prospective students. If nothing else, it might improve recruitment to it, which is, after all, what we all want to see. Thinking practically, knowing that the team have had to manage maternity leave and sabbaticals, I feel that a programme handbook might also help staff orientate themselves too, especially those who might be new to teaching on it in the future, or only teach the odd lecture here and there.

Based on my own department, one other thing that Leeds might like to consider is the possibility of incorporating practice modules into the syllabus. The inclusion of such modules is very attractive in recruitment terms, can often enhance the quality of the theoretical work, as well as building and strengthening vocational and transferrable skills into the programme. I know this suggestion requires a bit more long-term planning, perhaps also in terms of resource. But I am aware that practice does exist at Leeds, and might not be too difficult to incorporate in the future. I think it would make an already vibrant programme even more so.

Finally, I wanted just to raise a more generic point about the marking scale and the use of hard 9s. I noted a lot of students were ending up with marks of 49/59/69. Is there not a virtue in, perhaps, adopting a pegged marking scheme, to clarify work which is, say, of high Iii quality from work that is clearly first class? Students would, for instance, be awarded either marks of 68 or 72, to underline a clear distinction between the classes. The number of 69s made me wonder whether this is truly first-class or not. A 68 or 72 would have made it abundantly clear. It is, in effect, adopting the system used abroad, especially in Germany, where similar work would be marked as A- or B+.

# School of Modern Languages and Cultures

FACULTY OF ARTS



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

25 April 2016

## Ref.: Reply to External Examiner's Report

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you very much indeed for your detailed and overall positive report on the 2014-15 performance of the JH World Cinemas and Film Studies programmes. We are pleased to hear that overall you are satisfied with our programme design, and that you have found evidence of excellent teaching and results in our students' assessment portfolios. Equally as rewarding is your identification of robust film scholarship behind our research-led provision, and our transparent and professional marking procedures.

We are also thankful for the various further comments and suggestions for improvement that you have made, which I would like to address here:

### Programme Handbook:

An undergraduate programme handbook is in existence, and is currently in the process of being updated to reflect the changes that have taken place over the last year. Our core modules are explained and advertised to elective students through our Discovery Themes programme but we certainly agree that a new, streamlined programme handbook could serve as a valuable additional recruitment tool at open days (working in conjunction with our existing advertising materials).

### Practice Modules:

We agree about the attractiveness of practice modules to prospective students. As you note, practice does exist at Leeds (offered by the School of Media and Communication) but due to the cost involved we have not been able to add such modules to our sharing agreement with SMC. That said, \_\_\_\_\_ will presently begin development of an in-house introductory practice module. We hope to be able to offer this to our

students by the start of the 2016-17 academic year. We would welcome your advice during the planning stages.

Marking Scale:

In your report you note the use of 'hard 9s' in our marking ('9' currently standing as the threshold mark for the subsequent degree class). We will discuss the possible adoption of an officially pegged marking system (and how this sits in relation to our Faculty marking guidelines) over the summer. In any case, we will make sure that we are clearer in our determination of marks in the coming academic sessions, adopting points on the scale that offer a clearer distinction between work that is truly deserving (or not) of the grade boundary that the 'hard 9' sometimes actually obfuscates.

Thank you again for your detailed and thoughtful appraisal of our programme, which is greatly appreciated. Should you need any further clarification or information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

World Cinemas Programme Manager