

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):	Greek, Latin, Classical Civilisation, Classics
Programme(s) / Module(s):	All Single and Joint Honours BA programmes in Greek and in Latin, and the language part of the MA in Classical Studies
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA, MA

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**Completed report**

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Quality Assurance**
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards**Matters for Urgent Attention**

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box

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?

N/A (this is my final year as external examiner)

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

It was a pleasure to have helped the colleagues in Classics at Leeds throughout my four-year term of office as external examiner. During this period I witnessed the introduction and successful running of interesting "linguistic pathway" courses and of the imaginative course entitled "research project for linguists", which in my final year as external examiner proved to be extremely fruitful for students who took the initiative to break free from the "commentary format" that such projects tended to take in the past. These courses constitute major opportunities for independent research at undergraduate level and will hopefully remain in the syllabus of the subject-area in future, especially since they are the ideal stepping-stones to students preparing for postgraduate studies. Research-led teaching is an undeniable feature of Classics at Leeds in all shapes and forms, and I hope that the University will continue to give colleagues the opportunity to engage with this important aspect of the curriculum also as far as the ancient languages are concerned. From the perspective of procedures, my experience in Leeds has been mixed and it is undeniable that there were ups and downs in the way in which the examining system was administratively run. Now that the subject area of Classics is part of a

larger school that has established structures and strong administrative support I am hopeful that the integration of past practices into the new system will be done smoothly and effectively, and that there will a mutually beneficial process of exchanging ideas regarding how best to enhance the student experience. Making sure that students are not disadvantaged in any way should, in my view, be the ultimate criterion for the implementation or discontinuation of administrative procedures at all levels, including the consideration of mitigating circumstances and the return of feedback. I wish colleagues in Classics all the best in their new environment, which, I am sure, will profit from the experience of a dynamic and engaging subject area.

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 ILOs were appropriate for the awards given in the “linguistic pathway” papers, in the Dissertations, and in the Classical Civilisation papers I examined.

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, they did.

3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs

- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

The assessment methods (coursework essay and examinations) are entirely appropriate to the ILOs of the Classics courses I examined. It would be a good idea to introduce more variation in the assessment patterns for some courses (for example, formatively assessed and summatively assessed presentations, which would aim at enhancing students' confidence and communication skills, both of them important transferable skills, and crucial for employability purposes). Internal marking was done efficiently and internal moderation was excellent in all cases.

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 standards were (on the whole) comparable to the standards of last year. As far as individual courses were concerned, there were many solid II.1 performances and some First Class students, but they were not very high Firsts. The cohort of students doing the “Linguistic Project” this year included two cases of exemplary projects. The subject area currently faces a big problem with retention of students doing the Fast-Track Greek and Latin courses; I understand that colleagues will be implementing a new model of teaching the ancient languages next year that aims at addressing this problem. Colleagues are to be commended for this initiative.

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.

See my comments under question 3.

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.

Classics / Greek / Latin students in Leeds benefit from first-rate, research-led teaching conducted by colleagues of international reputation, whose books are included in undergraduate reading lists in HEIs in the UK and abroad. I was particularly impressed this year by the detail and the excellence of the feedback students were given by both internal markers in the Dissertation and the "research project for linguists" course, as well as in both the linguistic and the non-linguistic pathway courses I examined.

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, this was sent to me a couple of days before my visit to Leeds.

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, all this was supplied very efficiently.

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 to both questions.

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.

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?

This year the examiners' board of the subject area of Classics operated as part of the new School to which it now belongs. Owing to this I attended only the meeting during which marks for individual courses were confirmed. I was not invited to participate in the board where individual degrees of students would be classified and mitigating circumstances would be considered. This question, as well as question 16 of this form, therefore, need to change in light of the new structure to which the subject area belongs.

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

I have no idea. Please see question 15.

Other comments

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

Please see my comments under questions 15 and 16.

It would be preferable if colleagues could give feedback using the terminology of the grade descriptors, while at the same time avoiding any references that breach anonymity, and also suggesting ways in which the student's grade could have been higher. This would hopefully make it easier to students to understand why their coursework essay or dissertation is, for example, a low Upper Second or why it nearly misses a First or why it is a solid II.1, and so on.

30th October 2015

Dear

Thank you for your 2015 External Examiner's report on Leeds Classics, which you submitted so promptly last summer, and which we thought at the time would be your final report, ending your time as External Examiner at Leeds. I'm even more delighted that you have agreed to a one-year extension to your role in order to cover the one year of our Classics programmes being taught out.

The integration of Classics into the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies is progressing very well. Shared administrative responsibilities across subjects has allowed to free colleagues' time and to pool expertise. Further integration is always possible, and we will continue to explore possibilities. One way in which we are embracing new opportunities is the expansion of the Joint Honours provision within the School. This year we started our first year of JH Ancient History programmes, which recruited numbers above expectations, and the School is exploring ways to expand our JH portfolio based on Classics recruitment processes.

Thank you, too, for your positive comments on the linguistic pathways and especially the "research project for linguists". The latter is taught this year for the last time, but we hope to be able to keep the momentum of linguistic-type final year projects for the students who choose to study Greek or Latin as part of our continued language strands. Your concerns about the retention of students on the Fast Track Latin and Greek modules were well noted. We have now transformed these modules into long thin format modules (20 credits each), and they will run as Beginners and Intermediate Latin / Greek. This year saw the first recruitment onto the Beginners modules, and both Greek and Latin were oversubscribed. Retention is high, and it seems that the new format is more suitable to the student experience. At the moment we are drafting the module proposals for the Intermediate modules, and next year we hope to be able to assess how high retention rates are over a two year period. We are planning to teach students up to roughly GCSE standard in years 1 and 2, and allow them to explore the languages more freely in their third year. This should enable them to make the transition into postgraduate studies on both grounds of language competency and research ability.

We are delighted by your positive comments on the high quality of our students and the teaching they receive. Research-led teaching is an important element of the Leeds curriculum, and colleagues integrate research into teaching and the other way round, to the benefit of both aspects. Students are proud to be part of developing research, and

this is often reflected in their enthusiasm for their subject in general and their connectedness to Classics at Leeds in particular. As you know, we have discontinued our MA programme, but next year will see the first year of recruiting for our Master by Research, and we hope that the research-preparedness of our undergraduates will also show positively amongst those of our students who take the step from an Undergraduate to a Research degree.

As to your suggestion on exploring alternative assessment patterns to expand the students' skills base, we continue to explore ways to improve variations, also as part of our continued integration into the School. LCS is in the process of introducing a compulsory third year research module, and the input of Classics into the process has been requested based on our expertise and success with a module of this kind.

Thank you, too, for your positive remarks on the efficiency and thoroughness of internal marking. Colleagues in Classics take pride in giving the students effective feedback. We continue to consult the students on how they would like to receive feedback and what they are doing with it, in order to maximise the positive learning outcomes they should derive from feedback. Colleagues are encouraged to use the grade descriptors, and to include direct links on the module VLE pages to them, so that students can more easily assess how far they are from achieving higher marks.

Finally, thank you for your suggestions on the administrative side of the process and the need to change the external examiners' form to take account of the changed procedures, since externals are now no longer required to attend the classification boards.

Thank you once again for your assistance and helpful input over the 2014-15 session. We look forward to your visit for the 2016 Board.

All best wishes,

Lecturer in Latin Literature,
Programme Manager for Classics