

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2015– 2016

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	School of Modern Languages and Cultures
Subject(s):	Russian
Programme(s) / Module(s):	All modules with SLAV prefix at Level 2 and 3 of Joint Honour Programmes MODL 1150 Worlds of Literature MODL 5128
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?

Yes

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 Aims and ILOs are commensurate with the level of the 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.*

The programmes offered at Leeds are comparable with those at my own institution and other programmes I am familiar with.

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.*

Students' performance is assessed in an effective way. The department uses a variety of types of assessment which are productive, creatively designed and appropriate to evaluate individual ILOs. Creative assignments include literature reviews, reports of internet media, student presentations. The assessment allows students to demonstrate their attainment in a range of skills and abilities. Without exception all instructions for assignments are detailed, accurate and clear. The full range of marks is used effectively and all marking and moderating is consistent and fair.

I am slightly concerned about the assessment for the final-year language module SLAV3101 for which the median of all overall marks was 70 (10 first-class marks, including 81 and 85; 6 I.ii-class marks and 2 II.ii-class marks). Although the marks reflect the students' outstanding performance accurately, the specific assessment of this module runs the risk to produce a distorted picture of students' linguistic attainment. Both essay writing and translation skills are assessed by a take-home assignment, while a considerable part of the oral exam is a prepared presentation in Russian. It might be a good idea to introduce an unseen language exam with 50% weighting to attain a more accurate reflection of students' individual ability to produce and comprehend the language freely and spontaneously without the help of dictionaries and internet sources.

The high level of student performance (see below) seems to me closely linked to the excellent teaching practices within the department. There is a clear and logical development of skills in individual research over the four years of the course, which benefits students in their final-year dissertations. The high level of attainment in the dissertations suggests careful and helpful supervision of individual topics. The level of Russian is extremely high and clear evidence of exemplary and imaginative teaching practices.

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' performance is high to very high across the language and content modules. I was particularly impressed by students' skills in conceptualization and application of cultural and literary theory, which were evident throughout the coursework I saw (e.g. in SLAV2109). I also noted positively that students are generally able to use academic referencing systems accurately and consistently. The dissertations are further evidence of very high intellectual standards and excellent skills in independent research. Students displayed a very good grasp of technical terms as well as factual knowledge of specific areas in Russian literature, culture and history. Linguistic attainment is high in both spoken and written language. Translation skills in MODL5128 were impressive. Finalist performance in Russian language modules was exemplary but perhaps aided by the specific mode of assessment used in the final year (see above).

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.

This is my first year as external examiner at Leeds.

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 Russian department at Leeds is fortunate in having researchers who are eminent in their field of expertise. Research findings seem to be translated appropriately and imaginatively for students to provide a varied and relevant curriculum. The emphasis on twentieth-century and current developments in history and culture is part of a wider trend in the field which responds to students' expectations. The wide thematic range of modules offered by the department is especially impressive when one takes into account the difficult staffing situation within 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

I was early on provided with the details of my mentor, <<>>. <<>> contacted me and was friendly and welcoming. <<>> has been readily available to give advice when needed.

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, I received sufficient information to carry out my duties as External Examiner effectively.

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 provided with all relevant information to perform my role. Teaching staff was available to provide further details where needed.

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 examination papers and assessments. All questions/essay topic were appropriate. All comments and corrections I suggested were accepted.

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 had access to all assessed work. The scripts were clearly marked and comments were helpful and legible. I would like to point out, however, that the VLE is a time-consuming and user-unfriendly system for looking at assessed work.

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

Topics for the dissertations were varied and allowed students to draw on personal interests and experiences to formulate pertinent research questions and develop a small research project. It seems to me that the dissertation as a compulsory part of the degree at Leeds is a commendable practice which develops and evaluates student's ability to carry out independent research.

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 were smooth and efficient. The exam board was conducted in a professional manner and in line with established procedures. I am satisfied with the recommendations of the Board.

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

Yes. Cases of mitigating circumstances were discussed and there are clear procedures in place how to take mitigating circumstances into account.

Other comments

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

1. I would recommend introducing an informal exam scrutiny board in the department which looks at exams before they are sent to the External Examiner. In this way, typos, grammatical inaccuracies and convoluted questions could be picked up at an earlier stage.
2. I was informed in advance of a case of student complaint about the assessment of SLAV3113. The case was investigated internally, the assessment was second-marked and the correct decision was taken not to uphold the complaint. I was, however, surprised to find that the module coordinator had at no point been informed or consulted about the complaint. While I appreciate that the module coordinator should not be directly involved in the investigation, it seems to me of utmost importance that in cases like this the module coordinator should be given the opportunity to explain the pedagogical rationale behind the marking and scheduling of a particular assessment element of a module (which, judging from the documentation provided, was in this case sound throughout), before a decision is taken about any student complaint. While I would not want to comment on any of the School's policies in regard to student complaints, it seemed to me that there were no clear procedures in place for handling a complaint of this kind.

School of Languages, Cultures and Societies

FACULTY OF ARTS



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

26 September 2016

Dear

[Re.: External Examiner Report (2015/2016)]

Many thanks for your External Examiner Report and your comments on our programme, modules and methods of assessment. I am very pleased to hear that you were impressed by the achievements of our students and that you thought that the standard of our students' work on both the language and content modules was high. Your comments about our teaching practices and methods of assessment are very positive, and it is particularly encouraging for us that you could see the "clear and logical development" of students' linguistic and research skills over the course of the Leeds Russian programmes. I am also pleased to hear that things have run smoothly this year from an administrative perspective in your first year as external examiner for Russian at Leeds and that you are happy with arrangements for checking exam papers and essay questions as well as with arrangements for the base room and exam board.

Thank you also for raising concerns and making suggestions about (1) assessment on our Level 3 Core Russian Language module, (2) our system for checking exam papers and essay questions before they are sent to you and (3) the way in which we handle students' complaints.

We agree with you that assessment on the Level 3 Core Russian Language module needs revising in that 70% of the assessment (essay + translation) is currently made up of take-home assignments, and we have decided that as of next year the essay (40%) will be written under exam conditions. In response to your suggestions, we shall also revise the final-year oral exam to ensure that students are tested not only on their presentation skills and ability to answer questions for which they can prepare in advance, but also on their ability to converse spontaneously on a range of topics covered throughout the year.

We do check all exam papers and essay questions before we send them to you. We do not meet formally as a unit to discuss the papers because it is hard to find a time in the semester when we are all free to do this; the usual practice is for the GRASS Exams Rep to assign us a batch of papers to check and we then suggest changes/leave comments using the Word "Track Changes" function. In addition, we discuss the assignments, where applicable, within teaching teams. Unfortunately, there were problems this year in that some assignments were set very late, some after the internal deadline, and the moderator had very little time to review them; therefore, I apologise that several typos, grammatical errors and problems with formatting had not been addressed before you received the papers. I agree that we can improve the way in which we review our assignments within the department and we shall discuss this at our next Russian team meeting. I shall also raise this issue with the School's Examinations Officer.

With regard to your concerns about the School's handling of the complaint relating to SLAV3113, I am sure that you will understand that it would not be appropriate to discuss a matter relating to an individual colleague in this letter. However, the issue has been brought to the attention of the Head of School, who has asked me to say to you that the School is committed to following the University's student complaints procedure (http://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/student_complaints.html) and its Policy on Dignity and Mutual Respect (<http://www.equality.leeds.ac.uk/DMR/DMR-policy.htm>), and that I am confident that those policies have been followed in this case. I do, however, appreciate your concern for proper process.

On behalf of all colleagues in Russian and GRASS, I would like to thank you for your hard work this year and for your helpful comments and suggestions that will allow us to make improvements to individual modules and assignments in 2016/2017.

Best wishes,

Director of Russian
School of Languages, Cultures and Societies
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT

Email