

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:	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.

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

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 programme is well structured, having undergone some modifications in the recent past that have clearly strengthened it. As anticipated last year, recruitment seems to have been buoyed by these changes to make the programme seem much more vibrant. The Aims and ILOs remain wholly appropriate for the content and the level of the award, and it is pleasing that these 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.*

As highlighted last year, the programme maps well onto comparable programmes elsewhere, whilst retaining its distinctiveness, which will make it an attractive proposition for students seeking the varied approach to the study of film it provides.

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.*

As last year, 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 and does seem to foster the development of greater sophistication in textual analysis through the course of the degree. One module (European Cinema) continues to use a joint presentation as well, and to good effect. As I mentioned last year, 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.

Again, as noted last year, the quality of the student performance, with the majority of the work in the First/Upper Second bracket, underlines that the assessment methods work well and allow the students opportunities to demonstrate their ability.

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. The mark profile is what I would expect from an HEI of Leeds' standing, and is comparable with other universities I have examined in.

As noted last year, the weaknesses do tend to manifest themselves in terms of formatting or structure. There were many essays plagued by the omission of details about director and/or date of production when referencing films, for example. Similarly, a large number of students failed to italicise film and book titles. Indeed, it was striking how often the 'better next time' box drew attention to matters of formatting and presentation, which clearly held some students back from slipping into the higher class band. There seemed to be more evidence of these issues compared to last year.

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.

There have been no enhancements that I am aware of this year, as it seems to have been a year of consolidation on the whole with the programme leader on study leave. That said, the rebranding and new-look first-year modules do seem to have been successful modifications.

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.

As highlighted last year, the programme benefits from the blended expertise of the teaching team over many disciplines, who devote only a small part 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 in most cases, as befits a portmanteau programme of this type. There were no dissertations this year, where the direct influence of research was most evident. Be that as it may, the module design at levels two and three is carefully informed by the specialisms that the team bring together, which surely enhances the student learning experience and doubtless plays a part in the strong performance of the majority. It is to be hoped that this characteristic of the programme may lead to a strong progression for the best students into the Centre's new Masters opportunities.

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

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.

As last year, I found communication to be very clear, despite the inevitable disruption that a sabbatical of a programme leader might unleash. Indeed, there were no problems, and any questions I had were dealt with very efficiently by the School Exams Officer and acting Programme Director.

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. This year 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. Never having experienced the 'base room' approach prior to last year, I knew what to expect this year and for a programme of this modest size, it works well.

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 within a reasonable time frame. 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 for the 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 very good, and consistent, marking across the modules, and careful moderation of samples, with adjustments made if necessary. As noted last year, I think the mark sheet itself is highly innovative and effective, and allows for good, constructive and formative feedback to the students. As noted last year, I did wonder if provision ought to be made on the feedback sheet for the second marker/moderator to add comments too, especially in cases of disagreement between the markers.

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 a few cases cases student marks 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?

There were no dissertations this year.

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?

As last year, everything worked smoothly in terms of administration from start to finish, but then it is a small programme by comparison to the other ones in the School. Logistically, everything was handled smoothly for me as well, and I was grateful for the assistance of a parking permit this year.

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 would highlight again my suggestion last year about whether the team might consider producing a programme handbook, outlining the overall structure of the Film Studies programme. I am aware 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 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 further strengthen recruitment to it. As last year, 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.

I did also just want to query the philosophy behind giving a mark of 20% to students who do not submit work. It seems rather bizarre to me to reward students in this way, in that it completely distorts their academic profile. It took me a while to work out why a student who did not appear to have submitted any work had been given a mark on the marksheet. It also cropped up in the Board on several occasions and caused some confusion in one case. I would strongly advocate abandoning this policy.



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

**From the Centre for World Cinemas
School of Languages, Cultures, and Societies**

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT

Telephone 0113

6th September 2016

Ref.: Reply to External Examiner's Report

Dear

Thank you very much indeed for your detailed review of our teaching and assessment practices, our administrative procedures, and your overall positive report on the 2015-16 performance of the Centre for World Cinemas undergraduate JH Film Studies cohort.

We are pleased to hear that you are generally satisfied with our programme design, and that you have found evidence of excellent teaching in our students' coursework. Equally rewarding is your identification of robust film scholarship behind our research-led provision.

You have made various helpful suggestions for improvement of our programme, which we would like to address individually:

- 1) **Formatting of student essays.** I will bring the deficiencies in the formatting of student essays (director details, date of production, etc) to the attention of all module tutors, especially those involved in the delivery of the Level 1 modules. In some cases, the problems you identify may be exacerbated by the

unfamiliarity with the specificity of writing about film amongst students who come from other disciplines and take the modules as electives. Nonetheless, we will make sure we address the issue

- 2) **The lack of a programme handbook.** Thank you for calling our attention to this. We agree that a programme handbook should be reinstated now that staffing and curriculum changes have settled down. I will ensure that a handbook is produced during the 2016-17 academic year.
- 3) **The marking scale.** We fully understand your concern regarding the Leeds marking scale, in particular the decision to award a recorded mark of 20 even when work is not submitted. This policy is set at university rather than School or Faculty level but I will raise your concerns with our School Director of Student Education, who will raise the issue with the relevant parties.

Thank you once again for your detailed review of our programme, and should you need any further clarification or information, please do not hesitate to contact me as per the details above.

Yours sincerely,