

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:	Geography
Subject(s):	<i>Geography</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Global Urban Justice
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	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

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, as this was the inaugural cohort and inaugural examination board for this particular programme.

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 ILOs are exactly what I would expect to see for a programme of this nature – an excellent blend of theoretical, methodological, policy, and activist approaches to questions of urban justice. It is very clear that the teaching on the programme is appropriate for an MA 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.*

Yes – although I should state that this programme is the first of its kind in the UK. Although there are plenty of Masters programmes with an urban focus, I am not aware of any others that are so strongly rooted in activist and participatory approaches like this one.

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.*

This programme has a stunning range of assessment methods. Students are assessed via essays, summary pieces (like extended abstracts), detailed research reports, blogs, book reviews, and presentations. There is also a module (“Action Research in Urban Contexts”) where the students are assessed (in the form of a report) as a group – one of the outstanding features of the programme, judging by the performance of the students.

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.*

Without question, there were ample opportunities for students to demonstrate the knowledge gained from their enrolment on the programme. Arguably a collective weakness was that the theoretical knowledge gained from the modules did not extend fully into their dissertation work, but as the cohort (n=3) was so small, it is hard to draw robust conclusions.

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.

There was no previous year.

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.

One of the outstanding aspects of this programme is the way in which the current research of members of the School of Geography feeds into the modules offered to the students, and indeed some of their placements with institutions outside academia. For example, one student was placed with a Housing Allocation Policy team at Bradford Met District Council, and, through being informed by research on housing issues taking place in the School of Geography, clearly did a fantastic job in this placement role.

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.

Yes, I received all materials, and I did not have to request anything extra.

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 received all relevant documentation.

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 received everything I needed to see.

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, it was made available online, and all but 1 essay was clearly marked/annotated.

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

Two out of three dissertations were appropriate, but I would question whether a dissertation focusing on "Dementia, population ageing and the geography of residential care in Cornwall" was appropriate for this Masters programme (it was effectively a piece of policy-relevant health geography, without a single reference to any literature in urban studies).

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?

I dislike using Turnitin and online marking/assessment, and found it took me far too long to download everything I was asked to read. But I realise this is the future and I am swimming against the tide! The Board of Examiners was a very smooth process, undertaken with rigour and care, and chaired in an exemplary manner by <<>>. I was satisfied with the recommendations of the board.

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 was delighted to be asked to act as EE for this programme. It is a fascinating programme clearly taught with great enthusiasm and passion. The range of courses is excellent, and it encourages students to make a grand and difficult leap from reading and writing about urban injustices to practice and ultimately action, organising, and resistance. I was delighted to see a very high standard of detailed feedback on everything I read. A duty of care to the students shone through all the feedback. I was also very pleased to see students asked to reflect on the neoliberalisation of UK higher education, and the module entitled Action Research in Urban Contexts, judging by the magnificent piece of group work the students produced, is innovative, inspiring, and pedagogically outstanding. My suggestions for improvement are 1) try to use the full range of marks available. Very few distinctions were given for any pieces of work, and when they were, they were low 70s scores when I found many extra marks. 2) encourage students to use the knowledge they gain from the module "Thinking Through Global Urban Justice" in their Dissertations, which were often lacking in theoretical depth. Nonetheless, this is a wonderful MA programme and it confirms my view that Leeds is the most exciting place in the UK to be a critical urban geographer!

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Dear

On behalf of the School of Geography, we'd like to thank you for your recent work as the external examiner for the MA in Global Urban Justice. Both your formal report and your participation at our recent Exam Board was extremely helpful to the maintenance of the course. We appreciate the professionalism with which you approached the task, your thoroughness in reviewing materials, and your kind words for both the teaching and the student performance.

We will keep your guidance about using the full range of marks at the forefront of our minds this coming year, and be sure to identify opportunities to reward students who are doing work which merits a distinction with just such a mark. We will also pay particular attention to helping student build from their theoretical base gained in Thinking through GUJ into their Dissertation projects.

The School also owes you a particular note of gratitude for your assistance in reading one dissertation from another programme and offering us your view as we resolved the situation.

Thank you again, and we look forward to working with you again in the coming year.

Head of School