

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2015– 2016

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	POLIS
<i>Subject(s):</i>	British Politics
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	BA Politics BA Politics and Parliamentary Studies BA Economics/Politics BA Geography/Politics
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	BA (Hons)

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

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 and the academic standards applied are commensurate for the award of BA (Hons). The programmes I examined are well designed and the standards are appropriate.
- 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 Aims and ILOs are in line with sector norms and met the expectations of the national subject benchmark.
- 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 for the modules on the degree programmes are appropriate. The marking is consistent across the board and much care has been taken with second marking. A majority of students on the modules I examined attained 2:1s.
- 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.*

I think the broad suite of modules offered by POLIS is creditable. I was surprised at the very small numbers of 1st class marks on the five modules I examined in Semester 2. This was not my observation in the academic session 2014/15.
- 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.

N/A
- 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.

A number of the British Politics modules clearly emanate from colleagues' research interests and these are very good modules.
- 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

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

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 read and authorised drafts examinations and assessments for the modules I was given. The nature and level of the questions was appropriate. Where there were typographical errors (or such like) I flagged this and amendments were made.

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. Scripts were clearly marked and annotated.

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

Yes.

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?

Yes. The Office led by <<>> and supported by <<>> team were excellent. I attended the SCC and the Exam board and both meetings were conducted in a thorough yet expeditious manner. <<>>, the Exams Officer, was meticulous and in full control of processes and procedures. The Board's recommendations were sound.

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

Another good year for POLIS adding value and stretching their students. Generous levels of feedback. Professional and efficient administrative practices including the two boards. I would encourage colleagues to use a broader range of marks in the first class category. I examined five modules in semester 2 which comprised 106 students and 10 firsts were awarded.

<<>>

Professor of International Relations
Head of the School of Politics and International Studies
University of Leeds, Woodhouse Lane,
Leeds, West Yorkshire,
LS 28 5PP

27 October 2016

Dear <<>>

I am writing to thank you for your external examiner's report for academic year 2015-16. I have taken over from <<>> as Head of POLIS. He passed on your report, which I have read. It has also been discussed in the School's Committee on Student Education.

We are encouraged by your report. We are particularly pleased that you noted the 'generous levels of feedback', as well as the link between colleagues' research interests and their modules, which you described as 'very good'. We were also reassured by your description of our support team as 'excellent', as well as the confidence you expressed regarding the exam board's procedures and recommendations.

We also note that you would 'encourage colleagues to use a broader range of marks at the first class category', and this has been passed on to tutors.

May I take the opportunity to again thank you for this report and your continuing service as external examiner.

Sincerely

<<>>

cc. pro-Dean for Student Education <<>>; Director of Student Education, <<>>; Head of Quality Assurance, University of Leeds

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:	POLIS
Subject(s):	Security, International Relations
Programme(s) / Module(s):	PIED2558 Security Studies PIED3405 Israel: Politics and Society PIED3407 Israel: Politics and Society PIED3750 UG Dissertation
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA International Relations

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

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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

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

I have been consistently impressed with the organization of the external process at Leeds. <<>> and <<>> team have communicated with me in a timely fashion, sent me materials in an orderly fashion and maintained high standards of professionalism throughout. The moderation and assessment process is an example of good practice across the board. Special cases are treated rigorously and every effort is made to ensure that the process is fair and transparent. When concerns were raised about the standard of isolated modules steps did appear to have been taken to remedy any issues raised. The only consistent issue I raised which does not seem to have been addressed is variation and modernisation of assessment methods. The material I was provided with was uniformly in the form of essay or exam. A more dynamic range of assessments might enhance the quality of the student experience and learning. Other than that, it has been a pleasure to be the external for such a well-run and intellectually rigorous programme.

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.*
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.*
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.*
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.*
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.
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.
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.

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.

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. Module leaders need to ensure that questions do not simply repeat previous years and there should be some variation between original questions and resits.

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. No concerns here.

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

Yes. Assessment was appropriate.

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?

Exemplary. Very professional and creates a hugely positive impression of the programme and the University as a whole. I did attend the meeting and was satisfied with the board's recommendations.

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

Hugely rigorous process that would be a model for other institutions. Transparent, fair and exhaustive.

Other comments

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

Module outlines could be given a more rigorous revision each summer to ensure that the reading is not just a top up – otherwise major changes in the field and new developments in world politics might not be addressed adequately.

The programme might wish to consider step marking – this has been a useful mechanism to reduce inconsistent marking across modules and seems to work in other universities.

Feedback is provided at a really extensive level. Examiners could be encouraged to highlight good as well as bad aspects of writing more systematically.

<<>>

Professor of International Relations
Head of the School of Politics and International Studies
University of Leeds, Woodhouse Lane,
Leeds, West Yorkshire,
LS 28 5PP

27 October 2016

Dear <<>>

I am writing to thank you for your external examiner's report for academic year 2015-16. I have taken over from <<>> as Head of POLIS. <<>> passed on your report, which I have read. It has also been discussed in the School's Committee on Student Education.

We are encouraged by your report. We are particularly pleased that you observed high quality student work and you thought this was 'indicative of very impressive learning and teaching'. We also welcome your comment on the use of videos as pedagogical tools and the clear instruction this gives to students on issues such as referencing and plagiarism. We are reassured that you found our administrative process to be 'exemplary'.

We also note your view on the need for more variation in assessment methods. We agree that this would provide students with greater opportunity to develop key transferable skills. I would respond by noting that examiners who focused on other parts of the school have noted a wide-variety of assessment practice. Our students are exposed to these methods of assessment on other parts of their programme. However, your advice is well-taken and it has been passed on to the relevant tutors. We also take on board your comment on the need to ensure that questions do not simply repeat previous years and there should be some variation between original questions and resits.

I understand this is your final report for us. May I take the opportunity therefore to thank you not only for this report but also for your contributions during your full term as external examiner.

Sincerely

<<>>

cc. pro-Dean for Student Education <<>>; Director of Student Education, <<>>; Head of Quality Assurance, University of Leeds

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:	POLIS
Subject(s):	<i>Politics and International Studies</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Political theory modules in the School: PIED 2602; PIED3607; PIED3610; PIED 3750; PIED2601; PIED3604; PIED3606; PIED3608
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

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

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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

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

I have been very impressed with the work I have seen, and the development of the programmes, over the past four years. Throughout, the quality of student work has been very good. The main developments I have noticed have been as follows: richer use of the VLE to support teaching, learning, and assessment; innovation in assessment and feedback methods; and continuous innovation in the curriculum in the area with which I have been concerned (political theory). It is abundantly clear that members of POLIS take teaching and learning extremely seriously, and seek each year to improve what they offer to students at Leeds. The result is excellent provision.

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 standards were appropriate for the awards and elements under consideration. I examined assessment in political theory modules. These modules are imaginative and engaging, and members of staff in this area deserve praise for the care with which they have developed the curriculum. Students taking the modules are to be congratulated for their achievements in producing high-quality work. They are clearly able students, and they are clearly well-taught. The result is impressive work.

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 compares well with similar programmes at other institutions. It also meets the expectations of the national subject benchmark.

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 are especially praiseworthy. The School is unusual in the wide variety of assessment methods it uses. These appropriately test achievement of the ILOs and they are suited to a variety of learning styles. They seem to me to be an attractive and valuable feature of the programme.

The only caveat I would offer is that there can be such a thing as too much diversity of assessment methods. Students typically appreciate and benefit from the opportunity to repeat kinds of assessment. I emphasise that this is not a criticism of the current state of assessment in POLIS, but merely a caution to avoid excessive fragmentation and diversity in future.

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.*

Yes. I was impressed with the work produced by the students. They are clearly a strong cohort and have been well-taught. They produced work that was imaginative, scholarly, and showed high levels of engagement with the material. They have also been exposed to different approaches to political theory, and well-taught in these different approaches. The work at the very top end was outstanding, and a credit to the School and University.

It is also possible to see development between different stages of the course. Students are clearly benefitting from the excellent feedback and guidance they receive on writing essays, and improving as they go through.

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.

The political theory element of the BA curriculum is updated in a very thoughtful way each year. The members of staff concerned deserve praise for the care with which they do this. One thing that struck me more than ever this year is the richness of the use made of the VLE in many module pages. These contained very valuable and thoughtful additional content and guidance, from which I am sure the students greatly benefitted.

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.

Much of the teaching at higher levels is clearly research-led, and this contributes greatly to the value of the programme.

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. I was provided with extensive written material explaining the role of External Examiners at 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. These were provided efficiently and comprehensively.

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 examined the draft papers and in some cases suggested amendments. My comments were taken into consideration appropriately.

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. I was provided with a suitable selection of the assessed work. The markers' comments were also provided, as were the moderators' comments. The use of Turnitin worked very well.

The internal moderation process is clearly taken seriously, which is vital. Being able to see the moderators' comments is very helpful. The only thing I'd add is that I have seen relatively few cases in which marks were changed as a result of the moderation process. This may have been for perfectly good reasons, but I would certainly encourage internal moderators to feel empowered to recommend changes to marks, or further consideration of marks, where they deem it appropriate.

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

Yes, the choice of subjects for dissertations was appropriate. I read some excellent work on political theory.

As in previous years, I was very impressed with the work that students produced in their dissertations. They clearly work very hard on them, and also receive excellent guidance (again, I must praise this: I think it is really excellent).

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?**

These were, again, exemplary. They were conducted with an extremely high degree of clarity, scrupulousness, and efficiency.

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

Yes. These procedures were exemplary.

Other comments

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

This is my final year as External Examiner for POLIS. Each year, I have been impressed, and each year more impressed than the year before. I am impressed both with the work produced by students, and by the culture of continuous improvement of teaching, learning, and assessment practices within the School. This is evident in teaching materials, feedback on assessed work, and in the assessment and examination procedures. It is greatly to the credit of the School, and I am certain that it is also greatly to the benefit of the students.

There are just two final suggestions I would make—and I want to emphasise that they are suggestions for consideration, rather than recommendations or criticisms.

First, there seems to be some variation between modules in the proportion of first class marks awarded. In the modules I examined this year, this varied (for a single item of work) from 11% to 50%. No doubt some of this variation is to be expected given the small enrolments on some of these modules; and there may be other good reasons for variation. However, it might be worth considering the use of statistical norms—not quotas or targets—for the award of marks within the School. Comparable institutions use these successfully. Norms can be tailored to level of module, e.g. 'in second year modules, 15-25% of items of assessed work usually received first class marks' (or whatever). Obviously, such norms can be used for all mark ranges, not just first class marks. They needn't lead to grade inflation—indeed, they can help to avoid it.

Second, I detected different attitudes amongst markers to the use of quotations by students. Some encourage it, while others discourage it. This variation may be for good reasons to do with the subject matter of the work in question—but I wonder whether, as a student in POLIS, I would pick up on those subtle differences in expectation. It could be worth discussing this issue as a School, and coming to some shared view about the use of quotations in assessed work which could be clearly reflected in guidance to students.

Finally I would like to thank the School for the warmth of its welcome on each occasion that I have visited it. It has been a pleasure to act as External Examiner for POLIS.

<<>>

Professor of International Relations
Head of the School of Politics and International Studies
University of Leeds, Woodhouse Lane,
Leeds, West Yorkshire,
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27 October 2016

Dear <<>>

I am writing to thank you for your external examiner's report for academic year 2015-16. I have taken over from <<>> as Head of POLIS. He passed on your report, which I have read. It has also been discussed in the School's Committee on Student Education.

We are encouraged by your report. We are particularly pleased that you found the modules you examined to be 'imaginative and engaging', and that you were 'impressed with the work produced by the students'. It is reassuring that you found evidence that the students 'are clearly benefitting from the excellent feedback and guidance they receive on writing essays'.

We also note the caveat you attach to the praise you give the variety of assessment methods. We will of course remain sensitive to danger of 'excessive fragmentations and diversity' in this area. Likewise, we will consider your suggestion on the use of statistical norms and we appreciate you identifying the different attitudes among markers on the use of quotations by students. As you note, this advice could cause confusion among the students and I have asked the relevant tutors to make sure their guidance is clear.

I understand this is your final report for us. May I take the opportunity therefore to thank you not only for this report but also for your contribution during your full term as external examiner.

Sincerely

<<>>

cc. pro-Dean for Student Education <<>>; Director of Student Education, <<>>; Head of Quality Assurance, University of Leeds