

**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 Languages, Cultures and Societies
Subject(s):	<i>German Studies</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	All German related, undergraduate programmes
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](mailto: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*  
*No urgent matters. However, I invite colleagues to consider my comments below under '10.'*

**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.*

Both the general aims and the specific ILOs for the modules I examined, and for German Studies programmes generally, are in keeping with the level of the award (BA Hons).

### 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.*

When compared against the Aims and ILOs of my own institution and also the FHEQ, the modules I examined and the programmes generally met national benchmarks. This marks a continuation of the high standards set by the School and by German Studies in the previous cycle, 2015-16.

### 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 in evidence across the German programme constitute a major strength. Assessment is diverse in form, appropriate to the material taught, is skills-focussed as well as knowledge based, and strikes an effective balance between conventional methods, such as essay and prose translation on the one hand, and more vocationally oriented forms of text production and oral presentation on the other.

There is a range of target language assessment, especially from year 2 onwards. Here, students are asked to write critically in German on a range of cultural topics – not merely in language work, but in content modules. At first glance this appears to be challenging, especially for non-finalists. I note, though, that Leeds students rise to that challenge and perform to their projected ability and above: TL assessment thus functions a useful differentiator which allows the most able pupils to demonstrate excellence.

Teaching is of a very high standard and demonstrates both high levels of engagement by teaching staff and also reflective practice. The curriculum design succeeds in covering a wide range of materials and periods whilst engaging students with contemporary approaches. Feedback is methodical, timely, detailed and – as any external examiner likes to see – there is a culture of internal self correction, with module leaders playing a valuable role in ensuring parity of marking across multiple marking teams.

In a couple of modules my co-examiner and I noted: i) a slightly lower standard deviation and ii) a tendency to be overly harsh in the II ii class. The former point arguably reflected the natural fluctuations in achievement from year to year, and the samples examined revealed no problems with marking. The latter point was evident in modules examined in German. This is not to contradict my point above on TL assessment and teaching but to point out that it might be better to make more explicit which weighting is being given to linguistic competency and to intellectual content in such cases. This might be quantified in terms of a percentage, reflected in assessment rubric, commented in formative and summative feedback and even standardised across modules, if appropriate.

My note of last year, to the effect that some staff were engaged in 'feedback heavy' practises, has been taken on board and there are already signs of slimming down the length and number of assessments in certain modules. In a few cases modules continue to require of students a number of assessed components and also to offer them the option to submit voluntary, non-assessed work in addition to assessed work: in these cases lengthy feedback of several paragraphs is sometimes given. This level of engagement is admirable, is in many ways a sign of quality, and doubtless underpins the way in which Leeds feedback demonstrably adds value to student performances in German (some students jump whole class marks over a year or degree course). However, younger colleagues with burgeoning research careers might still do well to consider if students might not gain as much from 'lighter touch' feedback that is either less frequent or less extensive.

### 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 diversity of assessment types within and across modules, together with the culture of extensive feedback, allowed the cohort wide ranging choice by which to demonstrate their abilities vis-à-vis the aims and ILOs of modules and also offered them ample opportunity to improve.

The cohort we examined produced some excellent work across all year groups, especially in dissertation work and in TL assessment. As mentioned in 3 (above) in comparison to the samples I examined in summer 2015-16, my co-examiner and I felt that mark profiles were a little flatter. This seemed appropriate, however, as the strongest linguists struck us as not so emphatically first-class in written and spoken German as were the finalists of 2015-16.

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.*

Please see my comments in 3 and 4 above.

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.*

Research in German at Leeds is highly interdisciplinary and also highly socially engaged with schools and communities beyond campus. It is obvious that colleagues are committed to delivering a wide range of modules that fall under the widening rubric of what constitutes German Studies nationally, but do so in a way that consciously harnesses the aforementioned strengths. There is a strong emphasis on modern and contemporary German culture, on translation studies, which is taught with theoretical rigour and an eye for practical and professional applications, and on vocational skills germane to the business world. There are strong teaching collaborations across the school, which makes for interdisciplinary programmes including history, world cinema and literatures. Colleagues use their own research publications within their teaching, which testifies to the synergies between these core activities. There is a strong sense of the need to mesh research foci with teaching in areas of relevance to students and the wider community.

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 asked to and agreed to mentor the incoming Russian External Examiner. The most useful approach proved to be personal contact by email across the year, in which I clarified. One problem at Leeds, which both <<>> and I experienced, is the apparent (in many ways inevitable) rotation of support staff through tasks and roles, and a lack of clarity about whom to contact regarding key issues at any one given time. This has improved this year, with Leeds staff emailing at intervals to introduce themselves as 'incoming' colleagues and signing off as 'outgoing' colleagues. I was able to assist the new external for Russian on this matter.

**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.*

The *Guidebook for External Examiners* has been at my disposal since the beginning of my stint at Leeds, and is admirably clear and full. During my visit to Leeds in June 2016, however, it became apparent that there was a disconnect between local understandings in German Studies and the School as a whole with regard to what the external examiner's role entails: colleagues in German had emphasised that it was within the remit of external examiners to moderate and adjust or ask to have adjusted the marks for a module or for a class of marks within a module, and that this could be raised during the sampling process in the base room in Leeds or at the module marks meeting. This would seem reasonable to me and also in line with procedures at other HEIs. During that very meeting in June 2016, however, the School's head of examinations was adamant that it was inappropriate for this process to occur at that point and in the manner suggested by German colleagues; it was emphasised that externals could ask Leeds colleagues to look at marks again, but that this would need to have occurred earlier in the process.

The days of external examiners tinkering with individual marks in an impressionistic way are long gone. However, I think it is important that some capacity be preserved for external examiners to moderate and to ask for adjustments or remarking to occur, and that the processes and associated timelines are clear, accessible and achievable. This was not the case this year in Leeds and needs correction before the next cycle is underway. I like the Leeds model of external examiners NOT being sent work throughout the year and sampling rather over a more intensive, two day period in June: I know that this suits many colleagues working in the busy world of academia today and it suits me well personally. However, some time and space must be given to allow for external moderation requests to be raised and acted upon. If this is not done, the external role is reduced to a rubber-stamping exercise and the legitimacy of the external's role undermined.

**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 materials were provided fully and in good time.

**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?**

All papers were available and questions were of the right level. Initial concerns re. the sophistication of questions in TL on second year modules proved not to hamper student performance – see also above on this.

**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: the range of scripts on offer was comprehensive. Marking was lucid, accessible and appeared to be wholly fair.

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

Dissertation topics are appropriate and are wide in choice. This option allows the best student to excel, and all students obviously receive periodic feedback. Assessment is rigorous but fair here.

**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 did not attend the Board of Examiners, but the German Module Marks meeting. I was able to see that marking was fair, mitigating circumstances were factored in and given opportunity to give general feedback. However, it was not clear at what point any external moderation of groups of marks was to occur: I invite colleagues to address again the points I raise in section 10 (above).

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

Yes – this had been dealt with at a large meeting prior to the and mitigation was factored into the meeting in a way that did not disclose confidential student

#### Other comments

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

# School of Languages, Cultures and Societies

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND CULTURES



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

02 September 2016

Dear

Thank you so much for your examiner's report, and also for all your hard work and extremely helpful comments over the course of the year.

We were pleased to hear that our processes are robust and fair to students, and that our marking and moderation systems work well. We were also pleased to hear that you feel our programme and modules are innovative and that our assessment is challenging and varied. Your comments on our perhaps harsh marking on 2ii candidates, our tendency to over-assess—and the burden this places on more junior colleagues especially—and on the way our research and public engagement activities feed into our programme are particularly helpful.

I will be working with colleagues to make sure that we use the full range of marks and that we always reward achievement, especially at the bottom end, where—I think you are right—we tend to be tight. As you noted, we have made progress on slimming down our assessment, but there is still more to be done, and I hope you will see further progress on this next year. I'm delighted that our deliberate strategy to integrate teaching and research has been successful!

Toward the end of your report, you comment on the 'role of the external' and note that there was some discrepancy between what the section sees as your role and the information provided by the school's exams officer at the meeting. I have asked the school to consider your comments and I am aware that [redacted] has already responded to clarify the policies.

Most of all, of course, we are grateful for your comments on the high standards that our students achieve and on our teaching.

Thanks again for all your work, and for your support.

Professor of Contemporary German Literature, Culture and Society  
Head of German, Russian and the Centre for World Cinemas  
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:	Languages, Cultures and Societies
Subject(s):	<b>GERMAN</b>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	All UG degree programmes with German
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

#### Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner

#### Completed report

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Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building  
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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

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.*

Coverage of ideas and historical concepts is excellent for the 20th Century and contemporary periods. Students are introduced to a wide range of topics and will be knowledgeable about contemporary German culture and society, as specified in the Aims & ILOs.

#### 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, the Aims and ILOs of these modules are comparable with those at other institutions.

**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 assessments, in particular the literature review and the reflection on the seminar discussion, were effective in enabling students to use an academic register German. These assessments were innovative and stretching. The inclusion of the poster element encourages students to present their research in a different format. In some oral assessments podcasts or presentations had replaced traditional conversational format which has had a good response from students, although care must be taken to assess spontaneous speech as well.

**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.*

Standards achieved by students:

In writing, especially in the first class bracket, I was impressed by the accuracy, lexical range and variety of idiomatic structures. This was carried over into the dissertation module, of course, often by the same students. At the upper end students seem comfortable devising and pursuing independent research, choosing excellent sources and challenging themselves. But also in the lower ranges, confident and varied use of language is widespread. Students also demonstrated a facility for different registers and discussing different fields of knowledge confidently (eg: in Translation Contexts and German for Professional Purposes).

**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.*

Previous comments that staff might "reconsider practice where a number of different types of assessment are required within the same module, as this can be onerous for both staff and students" have been taken on board. There has been some streamlining of assessment and some inventive use of the VLE and other technological possibilities (eg: podcasts) in assessment (but please see comments at the end of this report of possible drawbacks to feedback via VLE for some modules). In general the department should be praised for its strong commitment to topicality and research-led module content as these provide a constant source of innovation.

**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.*

It is clear from the topics covered and the assessment design that staff are making many links between their teaching and research activity, which is excellent to see and provides a dynamic learning environment for the students.

**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 saw all the draft assessments for which I was responsible and they were appropriate.

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 able to review the complete run of assessed / examined work (incl. audio & visual recordings). The marking was very clear and thorough. The students are given very useful feedback on their work.

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

Yes – the dissertation topics were well-chosen and they had been carefully supervised.

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. I attended the section meeting for German on 14 June 2016 and was satisfied with all procedures.

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

Giving feedback via the VLE is obviously useful for generic points and does allow for individualized feedback as well. It causes a lot of work for tutors initially, although it may save time once set up with tutor's own comments when used for essay-based work in cultural / literary modules.

I would just comment that if this system were to be adopted universally (so going over to a paperless assessment system) there should be consideration given to the implications: tutors would be forced to spend more hours in front of a screen, which is not suitable for everyone and can lead to the danger of RSI, eye strain and headaches, especially in cases of high marking loads (esp. Staff on teaching-only contracts).

Paperless assessment is likely to cause a problem for (core) language modules where frequent detailed (word-by-word) marking for large numbers of students takes place. Accuracy and speed in this type of work (as in proof-reading) can be reduced if all the marking takes place on-screen and is completed within the standard 3-week marking period. It should be noted that staff teaching these modules have already modified their practice (reducing summative assessment and changing formative assessment practices).

Before moving to a paperless system the University should consider these implications and whether alternatives (Adobe mark-up?) are feasible.



# School of Languages, Cultures and Societies

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND CULTURES



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

28 November 2016

Dear

Thank you so much for your examiner's report, and also for all your hard work and extremely helpful comments over the course of the year.

We were pleased to hear that you feel our programme and modules are innovative and that our assessment is challenging and varied, and thank you especially for your comments on our use of posters, podcasts and presentations. (We also take note of your caution about assessing spontaneous use of language). We were also pleased to hear your very positive assessment of the achievement of our students in the First Class range, especially with regard to writing in German, but that we also add value to the achievements of students lower down the scale. It is always a challenge to push the more able students *and* the students who perhaps struggle a bit more, and we are delighted that you feel that we are making progress on this.

I'm delighted that our deliberate strategy to integrate teaching and research has been successful! We have worked very hard on this, and it is good to see that this is working well. The same applies to your comments on the topicality of our modules. Thank you also for your positive feedback on our efforts to slim down assessment, and so reduce the burden on staff while also providing more targeted and useful feedback for students. This is an ongoing challenge for us, and your support is much appreciated.

Your comments on the use of the VLE as a tool for returning feedback to students is noted, of course. Your concerns have been passed up to the relevant committee and we are confident that they will help to shape the most effective use of digital platforms for this purpose. We are all keen to make sure that staff are not unduly burdened – or their health impacted – by new technologies designed to ease the burden.

Thanks again for all your work, and for your support.

Professor of Contemporary German Literature, Culture and Society  
Head of German, Russian and the Centre for World Cinemas  
University of Leeds