

**The University of Leeds**  
**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**  
**ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014– 2015**

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

Faculty / School of:	School of Languages, Cultures and Societies
Subject(s):	<i>Classics</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	All UG modules in Greek literature, history and culture. MA theses in this field.
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA/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](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*

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*

The teaching throughout my period of external examining has been consistently high and innovative. In particular, I have witnessed more effective moderating and better use of feedback forms. Of course, there is always opportunity for further improvements (see below): but the greatest and most needed change has been in the organisation of the external examining itself. This year's external examining has been the smoothest running to date, thanks to the dedicated support staff, which had been so sorely lacking on my first visit to Leeds three years ago.

## 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 aims and intended learning outcomes were fully 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.*

Yes, the programme fully 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 design and structure of the assessment methods were appropriate (though some tweaking may be desirable – see below). The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods across the board is indicated by the consistently strong student performance: the students are given every opportunity to show their potential. Furthermore, there are many examples of innovation in both delivery of teaching and assessment from which others can learn (including myself).

### 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. The work produced by both UGs and PGs at Leeds is in line with the sector. If anything, Leeds students “punch above their weight” (given the staff-student ratio and the educational standard of students when they arrive).

### 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 were many examples of what I would consider best practice. A good example was in Moderation, which is an aspect of assessment at Leeds that has really come on leaps and bounds over these past three years. In one case the moderator pointed out that, while the mark given to a student was entirely fair, there was a missed opportunity to provide the kind of feedback a student would need to improve their mark (i.e. not only the kind of criticism that identifies weaknesses and justifies the mark, but also one that makes clear what else they need to do and how to get e.g. a first). In another instance of good moderation, the moderator themselves drew attention to best practice, where the convenor had highlighted phrases on grade descriptor sheet to point to precise qualities in the work. In fact, I strongly support both moderators' comments and would recommend that both ideas here be adopted across all modules (see below).

There are two other examples of best practice that I wish to highlight. In the first, students in a number of modules were given a great deal of freedom to develop their own research question. This worked as well as it did because certain parameters were clearly marked in advance. For example, students could comment on any passage from a text (from one line to two pages), but they had to run at least two versions of their argument past the instructor, before submission. In another module, students were asked to discuss key terms used in a complex (philosophical) text by identifying for themselves the key passages in that text that they needed to discuss and then apply those theories to material of their choosing (frequently contemporary in nature): what impressed me most about this exercise was the fact that it empowered both stronger \*and\* weaker students alike to think creatively and participate in the process of doing research. At the same time, clear guidelines were given in the module booklet (including a list of simple dos and don'ts). In the second example of best practice, one instructor used feedback in such a way as to treat students as fellow researchers (e.g. “I hadn't thought of about this before, until you...”), and found positive points even for the weaker students. If I were a student receiving such feedback, I would feel empowered to work harder and, at the same time, I would be much clearer as to what worked and what I needed to improve on.

### 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 examples from the second paragraph that I discussed in the previous section on best practice derive from modules that put research at the heart of the learning experience (see especially the final example). In fact, I was struck by the degree to which throughout the degree programmes developed by the Leeds Classics team research and learning go hand-in-hand. There are two aspects to this. On the one hand, it is evident that the degree to which an instructor's research interests are present in the design of the curriculum greatly enhances the detail and liveliness of a module and provides a motivating spur

for the students. On the other hand, where students themselves are empowered as researchers, their performance also improves, and this is true equally for weaker students. There were consequently exceptional pieces of work among third-year undergraduates, who had the opportunity to pursue their own research interests. What was particularly impressive by this work was the ability for students to use and reflect on various theoretical positions (and not simply ape them), and to apply complex ideas to materials of their own choosing (often contemporary and seemingly unrelated to the world of Classics).

**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 – although, it should be noted, the research essays that not only a good number of MA students but even some third-year UG students produce reveal potential for PhD study, which in turn shows the quality of the teaching programme, particularly for enabling strong students to start engaging in research.

**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, absolutely. Communication was particularly effective.

**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, absolutely, though some small improvements could be made (see comments below).

**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, absolutely.

**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, absolutely.

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

Yes, absolutely.

**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, absolutely. I attended the departmental board, not the official Board of Examiners, where another External Examiner had been invited – as per new School guidelines.

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

Yes, absolutely.

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

While significant progress has been made to ensure the highest level of consistency across the programme of study, there remain a couple of outstanding issues, as well as some final recommendations that I wish to make.

I have already mentioned the very good use of moderation, which now works effectively for all the modules. Perhaps less consistent are the initial comments given as feedback to the students. While all feedback seemed accurate and fair (and appropriate to the marks given), some was rather too pithy. I would encourage the department to remain vigilant in ensuring that feedback with sufficient detail is given, particularly for essays and comment passages (which often require more hand-holding initially, since students come to university largely unaccustomed to them). To pick out two elements of best practice that I observed: (i) one instructor gave specific information about what would be needed to improve a grade (e.g. "failure to do x meant that..", or "if you had done y, then...", etc.); and (ii) another instructor was specific and transparent in tying comments to the grade descriptors (even to the extent of bluntly highlighting key terms in the feedback text that match the descriptors). The second issue requires a little more attention and thought, since it has to do with the structure of the modules themselves. From the modules that I examined, a lack of consistency in the spread of marks emerged: that is to say, it seems that it is easier to get a first in some modules than in others. I am confident that the disparities in student performance are not correlated in any way with the standard of lecturing or a leniency in marking. It is, rather, more a question of the very structure of the examined component influencing the kind of mark a student may gain. I would urge the department to look again at this and to try to harmonise assessment practice (e.g. the choice of essays or length and number of comment passages in an exam) so far as possible, while keeping the variation that is needed to reflect the subject under study.

I end with some brief recommendations, which, if implemented, would make the job of the external easier and more effective:

1. Throughout the year, externals are asked to look over various aspects to do with the modules (descriptions, assessment, etc.). These are all handled efficiently and any questions that I had were dealt with promptly. Nevertheless, I confess to sometimes getting lost in what I've looked at and, more importantly, what I haven't looked at. I think it would be helpful if an overall chart of all the materials to be sent to the externals through the course of the year could be produced, and sent in the initial email to the external. This would provide the external with a checklist of the material, along with the dates when they would be sent out, which would help immensely in planning (i.e. setting time aside for external examining work). One could easily also spot if anything at any one time was missing.
2. On the overall score grid for each module, there is a column for indicating which scripts have been moderated. This is currently not being used, which means an external wastes a great deal of time looking for these scripts. It would also be helpful (and transparent) if on that grid a change to the mark can be shown (i.e. having the original mark alongside the moderated/final mark).
3. I would also suggest that the dissertation grade sheet indicates the breakdown of grades between the two markers, and include a summary table of the mark distribution (how many Is, etc.). Currently, the table doesn't show split pre-moderated marks and thus doesn't show those students on borderlines before moderation. (I picked up on a number that were borderline before moderation, which are occluded since the final moderated mark is not on a borderline: e.g. a script with the marks 50 and 49 was moderated as a 50, and thus not flagged up for the EE, while one with the same pre-moderated marks of 49 and 50, and which was moderated down to a 49, was. This seems to me inconsistent.)
4. Overall borderline cases (assessment + exam) are currently not being looked at. In the past overall borderlines would have been considered in the EAB. Since that is no longer the case, it might be worth seeing whether this can now take place before the EAB.

Finally, I would just like to give my sincere thanks to all those at the department of Classics at the University of Leeds, who have made my time as external examiner such an easy and pleasurable experience. Particular thanks must go to the co-ordinators (in previous years, <<>>, this year, <<>>) and to the administrative staff (overseen for the past two years by <<>>), who make this work. If anyone is tempted to think that organising external examining is trivial, I would remind them of my first year as the external, when the department lacked dedicated support staff and the effort to sort things out during our time at Leeds considerable and distracting from our proper job. Many thanks all, and best of luck for the future.

31 October 2016

Dear

Thank you very much for your external examiner's report on the Classics subject area for the academic session 2015/16. On behalf of my colleagues I would like to thank you for your thorough, detailed and constructive comments on our teaching and assessment procedures.

It is reassuring to know that our procedures and standards are commensurate with good practice in the UK. We are delighted by your positive comments on the high quality of our students and the teaching they receive. In particular, we welcome your comments highlighting examples of innovation in both delivery of teaching and assessment, which will provide models for us as we continue to develop innovative teaching across the range of modules we offer.

Your positive comments about the way the Classics Programmes put research at the heart of the learning experience are very welcome. In particular, your observation that third-year UG students are producing work that shows potential for postgraduate study is encouraging in light of the recent launch of the Classics MRes.

It is also helpful to us that you have provided detailed comments and examples of best practice in the areas of moderation and student feedback. Your comments about feedback are to the point: as of 2016-17 we have adopted a revised template for feedback sheets including a section entitled 'Areas for improvement' where markers will give at least three specific indicators. We aim to relate discursive comments directly to the relevant grade descriptors, and to include a copy of the descriptors themselves with the feedback sheet. We continue to make efforts at both School and subject level to harmonize assessments without losing the variety and range of learning opportunities we offer.

Your suggestions for improvements to the organization of the external examination process itself have been taken on board. As the practices of Classics become more fully integrated with those of the School as a whole, these processes will be continue to be refined. Your suggestion to provide externals with a check-list of assessments and their timings is a good one, and we will aim to do this in future cycles. There is already a robust system of internal monitoring in place, designed to ensure that all relevant assessments are included for scrutiny in each round. From time to time, module leaders may be delayed in preparing their assessments for external scrutiny, but there are internal mechanisms in place to ensure we minimize delays and get assessments to externals in good time.

On including on the marksheets themselves details of moderation, which scripts have been moderated, and changes to marks after moderation: the practice generally adhered to has been to include this information on the moderation sheet and on the scripts themselves and their feedback sheets. It is generally felt that it would not be a good use

of the time of module leaders and moderators to ask for this information to be duplicated on the marksheets themselves.

On the point of borderline marks being occluded on the marksheet where they have been moderated: in fact a mark of 50 is considered to be within the 'thick borderline' on the Millican marking scale we use, so these dissertations ought to have been flagged for your attention as you requested: I apologise for not having done this.

Overall borderline cases: in terms of overall borderline cases with respect to overall classification, in cases where these fall below a class boundary, they are looked at during the School Classification Board. In terms of overall borderline cases within a given module (overall mark with all assessments combined), this information is available to externals on the marksheets for each module. Externals may choose to look at these cases in more detail and raise the issue at the subject marks meeting.

I would like to thank you for all of your support and collegiality during the past year. It has been a pleasure to have you as our external examiner.

Yours sincerely,

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