

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:	Philosophy, Religion, and History of Science
Subject(s):	<i>Philosophy, HSPC</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Ancient Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, and Schopenhauer & Nietzsche, Aesthetics & Philosophy of Art, Advanced Topics in Value Theory, PPE 1 st Seminar, Introduction to Ethics, Introduction to Ethics Discovery, Introduction to Political Philosophy, Ethics of Life and Death, Hume, Metaethics, Feminist Philosophy, Philosophy & Literature, Political Philosophy, History of Modern Philosophy, Science Communication, and a number of dissertations.
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner

Completed report

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Quality Assurance**
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

Matters for Urgent Attention

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box

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?

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 impressed by the sustained excellence of the assessment process – the marking, monitoring, and administrative procedures – throughout my four years as an external. In many ways there hasn't been obvious development and enhancement of learning and teaching, because it was extremely good four years ago and continues to be extremely good today. It compares very favourably with the programmes at similar institutions. I do think that the examination board is more efficient this year than it was three years ago, since there is very little discussion of discretionary and medical cases, which are now dealt with separately. This is to be applauded. But overall, I can only convey my very high impression of how things are done in the School, and the outstanding administrative support that the School provides to the outstanding philosophers teaching in Leeds.

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 Intended Learning Outcomes were entirely appropriate for the modules and commensurate with the level of the award. The structure and content of the modules were excellent, and the standards entirely 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.*

Yes: the Aims and ILOs met the expectations of the national subject benchmark, and the programme compares very favourably with undergraduate work I have examined at comparable 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 materials provided were sufficient for me to make an external assessment. Course syllabi were clear, detailed, and in many cases offered (or repeated from the handbook) good advice on essay writing and assessment criteria. The comments from markers and monitors were excellent and in some cases impressively detailed. I was particularly impressed with the care and attention taken by monitors, across the range of modules, to focus on borderline scripts and failing scripts, and to ensure that the marking in all bands was consistent. I would suggest that *all* monitors make a brief comment on the overall grade profile (especially if this seems anomalous, e.g. a high/low number of firsts) on the monitoring forms, and discuss the overall profile with the marker. Perhaps the head of teaching could look over these each year to form an impression of overall profiles as well. But I am very confident in the rigour and quality of assessment.

I regard the assessment system to be clear, rigorous, fair, equitable, and to accurately measure student achievement against the individual learning outcomes for the modules. Finally, the marking in these modules was entirely appropriate for the levels concerned. The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment methods as indicated by student performance was very high.

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

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 were no notable enhancements to the programme and modules since the previous year; given how highly I think of the programmes and modules, this is not meant as a criticism. Instead, the range of modules given, the quality of the materials provided, and the detailed feedback are all excellent. And the very high standards in marking, monitoring, and administration have continued in 2015-16.

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 curriculum is well-informed by current research; this is very welcome, and not surprising. Philosophy at Leeds has an excellent reputation for research, and it is good to see that they use some of their excellent research materials in the courses they teach.

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

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 materials were available both in print form and online, and these were sufficient to enable me to act effectively. I was given opportunities to meet and discuss the modules with all module leaders in advance of the examiners' meeting, which is a welcome feature of how things are organized at Leeds. (I didn't take up the offer to meet with conveners, since I was very satisfied with all of the marking and monitoring I saw.) The online provision was very good and worked well, and staff were extremely efficient in answering queries I had about the process. In this and in other matters, the support and guidance offered by the department and the school were excellent.

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 made available either in print form or online; materials were in general very impressive.

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. The nature and levels of questions were entirely 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?

Yes – I was given sufficient access to a wide range of assessed and examined work to have confidence in my judgement of the standard of work and rigour of marking. The scripts were clearly marked, and in very many cases the standard of feedback on assessed work - and detailed comments on examined work – were exemplary.

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

Yes to both questions.

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?

The administrative arrangements were excellent. I travelled to Leeds the day before the meeting, and that afternoon had a look at final assessed work and dissertations. I then attended the meeting of the Board of Examiners, and was satisfied with its operation and with the recommendations of the board. The meeting was conducted with efficiency, clarity, and fairness, and the process struck me as robust.

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

Yes, and I welcome the fact that these cases were discussed thoroughly prior to the meeting, so that one of the externals had full information about these cases. That procedure seems rigorous and robust, and made the examiners' meeting run smoothly.

Other comments

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

I have once again been very impressed by the range of modules on offer to the students, the helpfulness and thoroughness of written comments, the operation of the online system for submission of essays and for marking and monitoring, the procedures for marking and moderation, and the professionalism with which the modules are administered and the external examining process conducted. It has been a pleasure to act as external examiner at Leeds in the past four years, and the staff in the School deserve great credit for their work.

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:	Philosophy, Religion, and History of Science
Subject(s):	Philosophy
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Undergraduate Philosophy modules
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	Bachelors awards involving Philosophy

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.

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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

N/A

Standards

- 1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award**
 - *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
 - *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

The programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes were commensurate with the level of the award. The standards employed were appropriate and compared well with the sector.
- 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
- 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 were appropriate to the ILOs. The teaching, learning, and assessment programme is clearly of a high quality and is effective in enabling students to achieve their academic potential. In addition, the marking was fair and accurate.
- 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 students were indeed given an adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and the ILOs. The students were given a number of assessments, typically two or three per module, to demonstrate their achievement, which is a relatively large number of assessments. The best work I read compared favourably to the best work I've read not only at my own institution but also at other institutions where I've served as external examiner.
- 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 Philosophy in Schools module was a particularly interesting module and a great element of the programme.
- 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.

Many of the third-year modules tackle subjects at the leading edge of contemporary research in philosophy, led by tutors who themselves are key players in these subjects.
- 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 a mentor, and the arrangements were fine from my point of view.

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

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

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. <<>> and <<>> were extremely helpful in the examinations process. I attended the Board of Examiners, and they ran it very well. I was satisfied with all of the recommendations. Everything was done effectively, efficiently, and even enjoyably.

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

I attended the pre-Exam Board meeting when mitigating circumstances and medical evidence was considered. I don't think that this meeting is necessary. In my view, mitigating circumstances should be dealt with at module-level, and only when students have a complete run of 'safe' marks, that is, marks they do not think are affected by mitigating circumstances, should their results go on to be classified. Nevertheless, the meeting was run very well by <<>>, and <<>>. I was impressed by the level of support and care provided by the team for their students. It's clear that they care about them and do their best for them.

Other comments

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

I would like to thank <<>> and <<>> for making the examination process the best it could possibly be. They were professional, helpful, and friendly. They are a joy and a pleasure to work with.

University-level comments:

- I don't see the point of the mitigating circumstances pre-Exam Board meeting for the reasons given in my answer to question 16.
- I disagree with 69 being counted as a first-class mark. I see no reason to set it below 70, and much reason not to: it is confusing and misleading. (And similarly for 2.1, 2.2, and so on.)
- I disagree with Exam Boards having academic discretion as it leads to opacity in the classification process and charges of unfairness. As it happened this year, though, there really wasn't any academic discretion exercised. When a mean mark appeared in the borderline region, we checked to see if there were 120 credits in stages 2 and 3 in the upper level, and the classification was given in the upper level just in case that occurred. Given that procedure, there wasn't any real discretion exercised, and the procedure could have been coded into the algorithm. However, I would disagree with doing that, since, together with making 69 a first-class mark (and similarly for 59 being a 2.1 mark), it makes it too easy to achieve a higher classified degree.

School-level comments:

- I would like to see a more precise procedure for dealing with word-counts on essays. This is the Philosophy Department at the University of

The upper word limit for assessed essays for modules advertised in current handbooks is defined as the upper figure in the range specified under 'Assessment' in the module outline. (For instance, where a 2,500 word essay is specified, the upper word limit for the essay is 2,500 words.) No lower word limit is set, though students will normally be expected to submit essays within 500 words of the upper word limit.

Where there is an over-run and the excess is less than or equal to 10% of the set word limit, 5 marks will be deducted from the agreed mark for that essay. Larger over-runs will be penalized as shown in the following table:

Over-run greater than	Over-run less than or equal to	Penalty applied to agreed mark for essay
0% of upper word limit	10% of upper word limit	5 marks
10% of upper word limit	20% of upper word limit	10 marks
20% of upper word limit	30% of upper word limit	15 marks
30% of upper word limit	40% of upper word limit	20 marks
40% of upper word limit	50% of upper word limit	25 marks

The word count of a submitted essay is the total number of words it contains excluding the bibliography: all other text must be included in the word count. This includes all quotations, footnotes, notes, references and any appendices. (To simplify the process of determining a word count for each essay, you may find it helpful to keep bibliographies as separate documents/files.)

Over-runs of still greater size will be penalized on the same pattern, with 5 further marks deducted as each 10% band is passed until the mark for the essay is zero.

- In terms of programme development, I would encourage the School to consider the issue of diversifying the curriculum in Philosophy. It is a fairly analytic heavy programme. Modules in the Kantian/post-Kantian/Continental tradition may be useful additions to the programme. Also, the syllabi for the modules are fairly male-dominated. I would encourage the use of more female authors in the syllabi.

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 Philosophy, Religion, and History of Science
Subject(s):	Philosophy
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Modules in Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Language, and Epistemology
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?

Yes

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

- 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 learning outcomes were appropriate to the modules covered, and the standards at an appropriate level for an undergraduate degree.
- 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

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 were appropriate, with some good use made of short answer exams which ensured that students were preparing material from across the full range of the module syllabi. Students displayed a good grasp of the module content, with some excellent answers and most showing that they had grasped the essentials. Given the complexity of the material, this suggests that students had been taught well and had risen to the challenge of the assessments. There was one case where the combination of essay and exam topics meant that it was straightforward for some students to repeat material from one of their essays in their exam. This is unlikely to have made a big difference in marks, but for fairness reasons such overlap should be avoided, and I have been assured that care will be taken to avoid this 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.*

In most modules students performed across a range as one would expect, with clear opportunities to display excellence in achievement. I noted in one module it appeared particularly difficult to achieve high marks in the first class range, in part due to the exam structure and particularly its marking scheme. This has been noted by the exams officer and I trust that it will be taken into account in future assessment design. The cohort of students performed roughly as I would expect a similar cohort to perform at my own institution, with some excellent work, a lot of competent work, and some more disappointing.

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.

N/A (first year in post)

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.

Several of the modules I examined were clearly research-led, being taught by research leaders in the relevant field, and all were research-informed. Students were being taught state-of-the-art recent debates, with good reference to recent literature. The dissertations I looked at included some very impressive student-led research, and in several cases included the kind of substantial extended study that I would expect to see in Masters' level dissertations. I particularly commend the dissertation element of the programme, where students are really excelling in independent but guided research at the highest level.

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 appreciated having a named mentor, and arrangements for this were good.

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 material was sufficient and was provided in good time. I commend the use of a number of external examiners covering subareas of the undergraduate programme, as it meant that (a) the amount of material to look at was manageable, and (b) I felt well qualified to audit the quality of assessment, as the topics were ones that fell in my broad expertise.

- 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. In some cases I suggested changes in wording, and these were taken into account.
- 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 use of the VLE in this regard was particularly helpful to enable sampling. The marks were clear, and the module monitor comments form was particularly helpful in understanding how monitoring procedures had been applied and any changes made as a result of this. This is excellent practice in ensuring transparency in procedures.
- 14. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?**
- Yes. As noted above, there was some very impressive dissertation work produced.
- 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, with the exception that on some occasions it would have been useful for the software to highlight cases where a rule would be applicable that would result in a change of a student's degree class. This had to be checked manually for some borderline cases, and it would have been easy to miss out and to fail to consider an opportunity to increase the degree classification in accordance with rules that would permit an increase.
- 16. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?**
- These were considered at a meeting prior to the final exam board (which was attended by another examiner). I cannot comment on the decisions made at that meeting, but it does seem appropriate that this information is considered prior to and separate from the final exam board meeting.

Other comments

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

By and large this was an extremely positive first experience as an external examiner at Leeds, and I commend the administrative and academic staff for their efficient and transparent examining processes, and for steering students to produce some excellent work.

I have just one suggestion which the School may or may not wish to consider.

As an external examiner I was able to compare the quality of work and mark distributions across modules, and did note in one case a module where I felt the marking scheme meant that it was hard for students who had performed well to receive good first class marks. Although this will be taken on board in future years, I wonder whether there may be a case for introducing a stage prior to the final exam board for reviewing any marking anomalies picked up by comparing distributions across modules (and in light of any external examiner comments).

At <<>>, for example, once all the module marks are in we have a procedure that checks for anomalous mark distributions (e.g., substantial differences in mean or standard deviation from the 'mean of means' for all modules in a year), and anomalies trigger a final opportunity for review prior to final marks being entered (in light of external examiner feedback on the modules). It is unusual to make any major changes as a result of such a trigger (often the review simply shows up that the module was small with an unusual cohort), but on occasions this does allow the opportunity to rectify problems that may not have shown up at moderation stage (when the module monitor is just looking at the distribution of marks within a module, and not comparing across modules taken at the same level by the same cohort).