

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:

Faculty of Arts, School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science

Subject(s):

Religious Studies and combinations

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA Theology and Religious Studies

Modules

THEO 1015	Intro to the Study of Islam
THEO 1140	Religion in Modern Britain
THEO 1910	Religion Modern Africa
THEO 2200	Hindu Traditions to 1600 CE
THEO 2250	Sociology of Religion I
THEO 2780	Pentecostalism
THEO 3021	Muslims in Britain
THEO 3305	Hindu Traditions to 1600 CE
THEO 1030	Introduction to Judaism
THEO 1900	Intro South Asian Religions
THEO 1920	Rel, Pol & Soc in Modern World
THEO 2900	The Sikh Tradition
THEO 3190	Religions & Global Development

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

No matters to report

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

NA

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.*

This is a well-designed programme that enables students to meet the standards of a BA of the Framework for Higher Education qualifications. The standards of modules are appropriate to each level 4-6 and the programme is well structured to enable development through these modules..

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 ILOs are entirely appropriate to the benchmark standards in content and level.

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.*

Overall, the assessment strategy is well designed for students to develop and exhibit their learning.

I question the value of so many examinations with such high weighting eg 02900 The Sikh Tradition – 90% exam; 10% presentation. I think students pay less attention to feedback, thus lessening it's efficacy as feed forward guidance, and the value of the module tutor's significant time in writing comments.

Equally, I would question the efficacy of examinations in assuring deep learning and independent research (they are good for testing certain kinds of knowledge and assuring against plagiarism). I think that the attempt by the highest graded student to write a bibliography is indicative of the desire for students to show research, as are some comments in the margins by the marker 'evidence' and 'reference'.

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. Individual assessment strategies for each module are well designed to ensure formative processes, and feedback, and summative assessment of student achievements.

Students undertaking study of religions at Leeds are achieving at levels comparable to those of other institutions with which I am familiar.

However, I would note that the grade range really needs to be expanded. There was some evidence of mark bunching in some modules. Moreover, it is notable that prizes awarded to top students at the exam board were only 70.3 and 73%. The higher achieving students should be accorded higher marks.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

NA

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.

As a new EE I do not have sufficient oversight of enhancements to the curriculum since last year. I am happy to note that the range of modules, and their content are of a high quality.

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.

Colleagues in the department are all research active and their interests are evident in the content of the modules. Equally, there is clear evidence of research practice informing pedagogy, especially in higher levels where students are supported in independent research.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

NA

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

NA

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.

The role of EEs is expanding with the increased ability to see all material and all assessments. This is a significant improvement from the old hard copy mode of external examining with open access to courses and assignments and no longer selective samples. But it increases workload and can be a time-consuming process of learning new technologies, individual HEIs adaptations of these technologies and matching multiple technological formats. I had to mediate and jump between VLE, Turnitin and Google docs (downloading word docs, excel spreadsheets and other electronic docs) to link assignments with courses and marksheets. **It would be useful for the School, Faculty, University to take a risk-based approach to external Examining and develop guidelines on standard/threshold expectations of External Examiners overview of course material and student assignments. For example it would be possible with overview of general marking, moderation and documentation and selective sampling on specific modules and selective focus on specific areas of the curriculum or levels of students.**

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 – by email and on the VLE.

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 good time. Questions are well designed for students to exhibit their learning at an appropriate level.

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. Marking and feedback is, in general, of an exceptionally high standard.

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

Yes. Dissertations were appropriate to level 6 expectations and topics were appropriate for students to exhibit independent research.

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 exam board in June. The administrative arrangements were completed with professionalism and clarity throughout.

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

This had been presented in a pre-board. Decisions were confirmed in the exam board.

Other comments

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

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):	Religion
Programme(s) / Module(s):	THEO 3040 Ideologies of the Hebrew Bible THEO 2790 Reading the New Testament THEO 2000 Students into Schools THEO 2300 Studying Religion in Context THEO 3400 Dissertation HPSC 3111 and HPSC 5320 Science and Religion
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
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 areas for urgent attention needed

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

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.*

In all the modules which I examined the ILOs were entirely appropriate for the nature and content of the module concerned. The marking of the essays and examinations was consistent and the overall classification awarded to each student was a fair reflection of the standard of their work. The overall standard was entirely in line with comparable institutions.
- 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 the ILOs were in line with 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 arrangements for the marking of the modules was excellent and I was provided with all the information required. There was some initial problem in accessing the VLE since the password used the previous year no longer seemed to apply but this was resolved quickly. The student performance suggested that they had been provided with teaching of high quality. Some of the modules which I examined had a variety of methods of assessment which was most commendable. The design and structure of the assessment methods were entirely appropriate for the individual modules.
- 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.*

Students were given ample opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and ILOs of the modules. The stronger students invariably had good engagement with the secondary literature and their work was well-researched and well-documented. Weaker students were more content in examinations to rely too heavily on lecture notes with insufficient attempt to do background reading. They also tended to introduce matters which were only tangentially relevant to the topic under discussion.
- 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 feedback comments for the students seemed even more detailed and encouraging than those which I saw last year; it is only to be hoped that the students take these comments on board. The internal examiners this year quite rightly used a broader range of marks when it came to awarding First Class Honours; as I noted in my comments last year there was too much 'bunching' of marks in the lower 70s – this had now been rectified.
- 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.

Clearly the research expertise of the internal examiners had been fed very effectively into the teaching of the various modules. Students were given the opportunity to undertake their own research particularly in the dissertation module; some of the students had chosen very challenging and ambitious topics and were able to produce work of quality with some sparks of originality.
- 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.

Sufficient material was provided online to enable me to appreciate fully the role and responsibility of external examiners.

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?

I was provided with a draft of some of the assessments and had the opportunity to comment accordingly.

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 sufficient examples of work to enable me to have a good indication of the standard of the students' work. The scripts were very clearly marked and annotated and the comments of the internal monitor were invariably helpful.

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

I was only given four dissertation to examine but the choice of subjects in each case was appropriate as were the methods and standards of assessment.

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 exemplary and the operation of the Board of Examiners (which I was able to attend) was efficient, and the recommendations made by the Board seemed fair.

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

Yes, special consideration was given to all students where mitigating circumstances might have effected their academic performance.

Other comments

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

1. Consideration might be given to parity of contact time across the various modules; one 20 credit module had 19 hours of contact time, another had 23 hours and yet another had 33 hours. It may be that the nature of the module accounted for this discrepancy, but it is something that the Department might wish to consider.
2. Consideration might also be given to parity of work submitted; in one module the essay (50%) had a maximum of 2500 words; in another module the maximum was 3300 words. This may be because one module was a Year 2 module the other was a Year 3 module, but it might be useful to ensure that there is parity of workload with regard to assessment between modules in each year.
3. It might be helpful if the Department moved to referring to Years 1, 2 and 3 as Levels 4, 5 and 6 as is the norm now in institutions of HE; referring to them as Levels 1,2 and 3 had caused me (and at least one other external examiner) some confusion.
4. If any changes are to be made to modules I would recommend that consideration be given to providing more variation in the methods of assessment. The module THEO 2300 seemed exemplary in this regard and might provide a good example to follow.