

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:	Arts/English
Subject(s):	English
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Single Honours English and Joint Honours with English
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

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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

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 entirely commensurate with the level of the award. The degree programmes for both Single Honours English and Joint Honours with English are excellently designed and comprehensively address various aspects of students' key learning. The marking was consistent and scrupulous and the criteria for awarding the degree classifications are rigorously and fairly applied.

2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

The programmes achieve a literary-historical coverage commensurate with English programmes nationwide. The range of available options is impressive, and the retention of core components at each level of study is an important and valuable aspect of the programmes and, in my opinion, should serve as a model to other English departments. The method (capping of marks) for ensuring submission of non-assessed work is strong and effective.

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.*

Considerable thought has gone into developing a variety of assessment modes – presentations and performances, as well as more traditional exams and assessed essays – that stimulate and address a range of student capabilities. The assessment methods correlate very well with the ILOs. The content and detail of feedback are exemplary, and the improvement in the standard of performance, especially from Level 2 to Level 3, which I observed in a high proportion of students, is a testament to that feedback as well as the academic staff's teaching methods. On a number of courses, the students were encouraged to frame their own question or otherwise encouraged towards critical reflection and analysis of their own creative or academic performances.

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.*

Student performance was generally strong: fails and 3rds were few and far between, with most students achieving solid 2.1. and upper 2.2. marks. The first-class work I saw was exceptional by any standards, achieving a sophisticated level of expression, but more importantly a genuine originality in content and approach: across courses, I saw a combination of close reading, the use of contemporary philosophical or theoretical frameworks, and contextual approaches. As a cohort, students compared extremely favourably with their peers nationwide.

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 making of the final-year projects compulsory is a welcome development, in furthering the emphasis on independent and self-reflective learning, already a distinctive aspect of the programmes.

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 programme achieves its literary-historical coverage in a way that bears the unique stamp of the School, and reflects the research strengths of its teaching faculty. The range of options, especially at Levels 2 and 3 derive directly from the research interests of the academic staff, and contribute to a rewarding and distinctive programme of study.

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.

I was given access to all the material I needed, and was supplied with additional material and information promptly on request.

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, this was entirely satisfactory. All requisite documentation was provided.

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 all draft papers. My only adverse comment here is that responses to my comments on draft papers were not relayed to me, although I was fully satisfied with the final shape of exam papers and assessments.

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?

Sufficient assessed and examined work was made available to me. First marking of scripts and essays was clear and full. My main criticism is to do with moderation. The implementation of the guidelines for moderation was not uniform, although in every instance, I satisfied with the final outcome. Sometimes, marks were adjusted by 1% or 2% on work that was clearly sent to the moderator only as a sample. Often, when advice was sought by the first marker and the final mark was based on the moderator's advice, the comment sheet that I saw did not reflect this process. Frequently, moreover, the spreadsheet of marks I saw for a module only covered the sample that was sent to me, rather than the marks of the whole cohort, which made it difficult to judge the cohort as a whole. However, the full range of marks for the cohort was always promptly supplied when requested.

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

The choice of subjects for dissertations were always appropriate for undergraduate-level research, and the assessment here, as in other modules, fair, consistent, and scrupulous.

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.

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

In the interests of consistency and transparency, I would urge that in all instances where work is moderated, the comment sheet reflects the basis for the first marker's doubts and the moderator's decision. Similarly, where modules are fully double-marked, I would urge that comments from both markers are recorded, not simply the agreed mark. For the purposes of internal and external auditing, the School might also wish to consider generating mark-sheets for modules that clearly show the first marker's, moderator's, and final marks, in keeping with the practice at comparable institutions.

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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

24.11.2016

Dear

I am writing to thank you for your dedication to the School in the first year of your appointment as external examiner for the Single Honours English programme, and Joint Honours programmes and English. I came into post on 1st August 2016 as Head of School, and it was heartening for me to read in your report that you found the degree programmes excellently designed in ways that comprehensively address various aspects of students' key learning. I am glad to hear that you found marking to be consistent and scrupulous and that, in your view, the criteria for awarding the degree classifications were rigorously and fairly applied.

You are not alone in finding the range of options on offer impressive, but it is always good to have this confirmed. We note your support of the retention of core modules at each level of study as an important and valuable aspect of the programmes which, you say, could and should serve as a model to other English departments.

I was also encouraged by your acknowledgement of the considerable work that has gone into developing a variety of assessment modes that stimulate and address a range of student capabilities. I can tell you that we in the School are focussing this year on 'less assessment done better', in the context of a university strategic directive to ensure that we do not over-assess the same skills in our students but, on the contrary, concentrate on the development of a range of rigorous but varied modes of assessment to test a range of skills, following scrutiny of assessment patterns at programme level.

Thank you for affirming that the content and detail of feedback are exemplary, and for drawing attention to the improvement in the standard of performance, especially from Level 2 to Level 3, observed in a high proportion of students. Again, I am heartened that the first-class work which you saw was 'exceptional by any standards, achieving a sophisticated level of expression, but more importantly a genuine originality in content and approach' and that 'As a cohort, students compared extremely favourably with their peers nationwide'.

I believe that externals' comments on draft papers are relayed to the relevant teams and acted upon where helpful and appropriate – I do not think responses to suggestions are routinely sent to externals, although in particular cases this can occur. I am glad to hear, however, that you were fully satisfied with the final shape of exam papers and assessments.

I take very seriously your sense that the system of moderation in place raises a concern, in particular where you feel that implementation of the guidelines for moderation was not uniform, even given that, in every instance, you were satisfied with the final outcome. We will endeavour to address the issue that the comments sheets which you saw did not seem to reflect the process of moderation or discussion between the colleagues involved. We note

your recommendation that, in all instances where work is moderated, the comment sheet reflects the basis for the first marker's doubts and the moderator's decision. Where you recommend that, where modules are fully double-marked, comments from both markers are recorded, and not simply the agreed mark, we are committed to the merging of comments in student-facing feedback, and to the recording of 'agreed' as a comment when there is no difference between markers. We will consider your advice that, for the purposes of internal and external auditing, the School might generate mark-sheets for modules that clearly show the first marker's, moderator's, and the final (agreed) marks, in keeping with the practice at comparable institutions.

Your comments and report will be discussed at the appropriate fora in the School. I look forward to meeting you again in June.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School