

# 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:	English
Subject(s):	<i>English</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA English Literature MA English Literature (Modern and Contemporary pathway) MA English Literature (Renaissance pathway) MA English Literature (Romantic pathway) MA English Literature (Victorian pathway) MA American Literature and Culture Critical and Cultural Theory (English Studies) Postcolonial Literary and Cultural Studies
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	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*

No.

#### 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 modules that form these MA programmes are exciting and attractive, and represent the diverse and cutting-edge research culture of the School of English. In the context of an unpredictable PGT market, the move to have more pathways and generic research skills modules is sensible and pragmatic. The new Research Methods course was excellent, and I was particularly impressed by the rigorous marking on this module, and the very exacting feedback, which left students in no doubt about what is required of MA-level work. The assessment design for this module—a critical review and an essay—looked to be very sound indeed. During the 4 years of my tenure as external examiner, I have found that the marking was judicious, and clearly aligned with the assessment criteria; I didn't find any evidence of under- or over-marking. In all modules—from Arthurian Legend to Romantic Identities, Modernism and Mass Culture, and Postcolonial Representations—students are given very clear information about how to construct a rigorous analysis of textual detail, critical engagement with critics, and defining the scope of an argument. There's also a commitment to helping students to identify areas where they need to push themselves further in terms of signposting, transitions between points, and in-depth textual analysis. The examinations process for these programmes was handled impeccably, and I would particularly like to commend the administrative staff for their professionalism and efficiency in sending out samples of work and responding to queries. It was particularly useful to have comparative statistical data on all programmes (including pie charts). One of the patterns that emerged from this data was that a greater proportion of Home/EU students tend to achieve awards in the merit or distinction categories when compared to the achievements of international students (who tend to achieve awards in the pass category). International ESL students who have not previously benefited from the research-led pedagogy of a Russell Group English department may be at a relative disadvantage when compared to their

Home/EU peers; on the other hand, the achievement of a pass mark at MA level is a very strong sign of international students' academic achievements ('value added') if it is considered in the context of international students' previous educational training. Staff in the School of English may wish to consider whether a different statistic (provided by the university's international office) that tracks the past educational achievements of international students, and/or an award for the best international MA student might help to address this concern. I would like to conclude by saying that I have been very impressed by the quality of work I have read for these programmes, which is as good if not better than MA-level work I have read at <<>> and <<>>. The unique stamp of the Leeds MA is to turn graduates into critical thinkers and I could clearly see this progression in the samples of work I read from this year's cohort.

## 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.*

I was very satisfied that the ILOs for these modules and programmes were 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.*

The aims and ILOs of the research-led modules for these MA programmes were entirely commensurate with those of MA programmes I have seen at other Russell Group universities, and with national benchmarks.

### 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 and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards for these programmes were perfectly consistent with the ILOs. The performance of students on each of these MA modules reflected a rigorous and high-level critical engagement with debates in the periods and topics that form the discipline of English literary studies, an engagement that is entirely appropriate for MA-level work.

### 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 highest-achieving students on these MA programmes produce work of a quality that is as good if not better than that of MA students I have seen at comparator institutions. This is reflected in the innovative and conceptually ambitious dissertations I read for this year's cohort. Even students achieving lower marks in the merit and pass categories demonstrated a strong potential for incisive textual analysis and critical engagement—even if the scope and structure of the work needed to be more tightly defined. Taken as a whole, my impression of this cohort is that they performed as well as students in previous years.

### 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.*

As mentioned above, I thought the decision to have more pathways and generic research skills modules is sensible and pragmatic. The new Research Methods course was also excellent, and I was particularly impressed by the rigorous marking on this module, and the very exacting feedback, which left students in no doubt about what is required of MA-level work. The assessment design for this module—a critical review and an essay—looked to be very sound indeed.

### 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.*

All of the modules I saw for these programmes are shaped and formed by staff-research expertise. It seems invidious to single out particular examples, but <<>> module on Arthurian Legend and <<>> module on Grahame Greene clearly show how staff research and publications directly inform curriculum design.

### 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, guidance material was more than sufficient.

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.*

The policies and procedures were impressively detailed and coherent; they match perfectly the explicit roles they are asked to perform.

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 MA assessment rubrics and was entirely satisfied that the nature and level of the assessment tasks was made clear to students.

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 representative samples, and the feedback on the scripts/ coversheets was typed and legible.

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

The scope of dissertation topics were generally very clearly defined and nuanced, particularly in the merit and distinction categories. The method and standard of assessment for dissertation was very judicious and constructive.

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 for the whole process were exemplary. I attended the board and was entirely satisfied with the board's recommendations. I would like to commend <<>> and <<>> colleagues for their sterling work in managing every aspect of this process with professionalism and efficiency.

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

Yes, due consideration was given to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence that was entirely consistent with university policies and procedures.

#### Other comments

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

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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

14.03.2017

Dear

Thank you for your positive and helpful report on the English Literature MA programmes and pathways in the School of English. Your comments on the excellence of the Research Methods module are extremely welcome, as are your reflections on the appeal of the programmes, the 'rigorous marking' and 'exacting feedback'. Your comments on the design of assessment will helpfully inform School-wide discussions of our assessment culture in future years. Colleagues will also appreciate your strong sense of how well students are supported to meet the intellectual challenges of Master-level study.

I note that you found the comparative statistical data on all programmes interesting and informative. Regarding your suggestion that international students' academic achievement could be contextualised by their previous educational training I am advised that the relevant data is not yet readily available, although increased institutional familiarity with the CRM data management software will eventually make this analysis possible.

I can confirm that the Charles Barber Award (£200) is offered every year to the highest dissertation mark earned by an international MA student.

May I also request your permission to reproduce, for the website, brochure and other marketing materials your statement: 'The unique stamp of the Leeds MA is to turn graduates into critical thinkers'?

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your insightful and genuinely helpful feedback to the School during your time as our external examiner. We have benefitted greatly from your advice and observations and, as a School, we appreciate the commitment you have shown in your consideration of our teaching practices, students and programmes.

Yours sincerely,

Head of School