

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:	Institute for Transport Studies
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA Transport Economics MSc Sustainability in Transport MSc Transport Planning MSc Transport Planning and Engineering MSc Transport Planning and Environment
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	

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

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?

Not applicable.

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

Not applicable.

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 Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes of the Programmes continue to be appropriate for the awards under consideration, as are the structure and content.

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 Intended Learning Outcomes of the Programmes continue to be comparable with those of similar programmes at other leading institutions and meet (or exceed) 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.*

There is a clear code of practice on assessment that is largely adhered to. As I remarked last year, the balance between courseworks and examinations could usefully be reviewed for a number of modules as to their appropriateness with respect to Intended Learning Outcomes. In particular, my sense is that examinations are relatively underutilised.

The quality of teaching and learning is reflected in the range of modules and assessments offered and in the good student performance, in particular in terms of some excellent dissertations.

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 exhibited good academic standards, with appropriate proportions at Distinction and Merit level.

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

Not applicable.

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.

I am not aware of any substantive changes to programmes and modules, although there was evidence that the process for assessing dissertations has been improved.

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.

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

It is clear that these Programmes are examples of research-led education, which permits a wide range of modules and of dissertation topics.

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

Not applicable.

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 guidance for External Examiners is available of the Web, but might be more helpfully signposted.
I have had full access to exam scripts, completed courseworks and to the students.
The latter is particularly helpful.

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.

A Taught Student Handbook for 2015/15 was provided. Module specifications were available on the web.
Marking criteria for the dissertation were not made available.

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 examinations and the nature and level of the questions were appropriate. I was not provided with the courseworks in advance, nor would I expect to be, given the practice at other institutions. However, I was able to assess them retrospectively and deem them to be 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?

I had sufficient access to assessed/examined mark and all scripts were clearly marked and annotated. However, I did notice some minor inconsistencies in terms of, for example, the transcription of marks to the front cover of the exam script and the sampling rate for second marking.

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

There was a good range of dissertation topics and supervisors. I was given a sample of five dissertations to inspect and considered the standard of assessment to be appropriate. However, I was not given the assessment sheet or the feedback comments from the examiners/assessors.

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 good and I was satisfied with the recommendations of the Boards, in both June and November.

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

Mitigating circumstances were appropriately dealt with.

Other comments

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

I understand that the 20 to 90 adjustment is under review and likely to be abandoned. I welcome this but would strongly urge that this should not be replaced by a similarly arcane and curious local practice. If the adjustment cannot easily be explained to students, it should not be applied.

There has been some tightening of the marking process for the dissertations with the intervention of a third assessor on a number of occasions. However, there remains a remarkable consistency of the first and second mark given a double blind marking process. For the next academic year, I would like to see the dissertation assessment criteria and separate mark sheets for the first and second marker and, where relevant, the third marker.

The Exam Boards make use of a range of spreadsheets (and similar tools) at the University and School level. There are dangers of interface problems here but it is clear that is checked very carefully. The School provided spreadsheets have columns for (as examples) academic integrity, mitigating circumstances and third marking that were not always used. This information should be provided.

There was good attendance at both the June and November Exam Boards.

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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

20 December 2016

Dear

Institute Response to Issues raised in the External Examiner's Report for Academic Session 2015-2016

Thank you for your annual report in your role as one of our External Examiners. The report has now been tabled and considered at our School Teaching and Student Education Committee, so I am now in a position to make our response.

Once again we are grateful for the generally very positive feedback you have provided on your experiences as one of the External Examiners for our Masters programmes.

There are four areas raised in your report to which I would like to take this opportunity to respond.

The first of these relates, as last year, to the University's use of the 20-90 scale which also has implications for our degree classification system. I can update on last year's information, that it is likely that the practice of using the 20-90 scale will be discontinued as from the start of the 2017-18 session, to be replaced by a categorical marking system. Full details are not yet available, and particularly not for assessment of postgraduate student work. I will ensure that you are provided with full information once this becomes available.

The second area relates to our processes for the marking of Masters dissertations. I do apologise for not supplying the assessment criteria and individual makers' assessment sheets when providing you with the sample of reports ahead of our October meeting. This was an oversight on my part. The assessment criteria for postgraduate dissertation reports is in fact included in our Code of Practice on Assessment as an Annex, which you have access to, but I will send you the criteria by email. We will consider our double-marking processes again during our teaching team meetings, and particularly consider whether we wish to insist on individual marker assessment sheets being submitted to the student education office prior to subsequent discussions to settle on the final mark. Whilst such a process may address issues relating to the robustness of marking, there may be implications for meeting deadlines for final submission of marks, particularly if students hand in late for any reason.

We note your comments on the results spreadsheets we use at our Assessment and Classification Board meetings. The particular versions in use at present are recent replacements and we continue to refine them in the light of experience. With respect to your particular point about the extent to which columns relating to matters such as academic integrity issues and mark moderation are fully completed, we will review our processes in an attempt to ensure greater completeness and consistency of information.

Finally, we note your comment about the balance of assessment methods between (e.g.) courseworks and formal examinations and the relationship between such assessments and the module learning outcomes.

I can report that the University has recently initiated a wider review of assessment loads and strategies, the overall aim being focus to assessment on testing learning outcomes at the students' programme level, rather than at module level. This seems likely to result in changes to how we assess students and some reduction in overall assessment load, but it is not yet clear how this strategy will be implemented given the very wide optional module choices we allow across our programmes. ITS will consider what changes should be made once further guidance is provided. I will keep you posted on this initiative as more information becomes available.

I hope these responses satisfactorily address the issues that you have raised. Please contact me if you need for information or wish to discuss these matters further. We will also have the opportunity to discuss them when you visit Leeds for meetings later in the year.

We thank you for your work and look forward to seeing you in Leeds again in the Summer.

Yours sincerely

*Senior Lecturer in Transport Economics
Director of Student Education, Institute for Transport Studies*

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:	Institute for Transport Studies
Subject(s):	Transport Planning
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc (Eng) Transport Planning and Engineering; MSc Transport Planning; MA Transport Economics; MSc Transport Planning and the Environment; MSc Sustainability (Transport); PGCert Transport Studies
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSC

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

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

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.*
- 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.*

1 & 2: The Aims and ILOs of the suite of MSc degrees appear to be appropriate for the award, and for the needs of employers in these disciplines. They are also consistent with national benchmarks, and those of similar courses at other UK academic 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.*
- 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.*

3 & 4:

The Assessment methods used in this degree seem to be appropriate for the degree programme, following the usual pattern of formative and summative assessment. The marks received and the quality of students' work indicate that there is sound instruction and students achieve the expected levels of knowledge and understanding as outlined by the ILOs. Research skills are assessed in the usual manner by means of a Research Dissertation.

- 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 programme continues to offer a wide range of transport related study, drawing on the expertise of the wide range of staff at the University. Commendable efforts have been made to cover for unavoidable staff absence.

- 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.

As in previous years, this will vary between teaching modules. In areas where the University has active research, students appear to be aware of this and are exposed to it. Research is also a key element of the dissertation, and students are expected to show their research skills in this.

- 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

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.

This information was provided, and was adequate for the intended purpose.

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. The programme and module handbooks with full details of times dates and assessments are commendable practice and give a clear first point of reference for students.

The handbooks and the coursework deadlines seem to be planned and published well in advance. While it is reasonable to expect students to plan ahead, it would still be useful for some coordination by staff to ensure deadlines avoid exam periods, and, if possible to reduce any avoidable peaks in student workload.

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?

Draft exam papers were provided in a timely fashion, and I was able to comment in these.

Examination questions were generally of an appropriate standard. Most allowed for differentiation between students of differing ability. However, there was a notable exception of a draft paper with three questions to cover quite a wide and varied curriculum. All three questions had been used with little alteration in the last two years, and offered little to enable differentiation at FHEQ Level 7. This was an isolated case, (which was, I believe, corrected) but it would be good practice to refer all staff who set exams to a relevant University policy on these matters.

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?

On coursework, there was clear evidence of feedback and marking / double marking. This was generally consistent and clear. In some cases feedback was commendably detailed with a clear focus, (as it should be), on helping the student to improve in future. An exception to this is where coursework is marked digitally. Thought needs to be given to how students can be given the most helpful feedback when there is no hard copy to annotate.

The audit trail from marks awarded on coursework and exam scripts to the final exam spreadsheets is not always clear. Consideration should be given to a system that reduces the number of times marks are transcribed manually, adjusted or recalculated. The main reason is to improve transparency and clarity, but it should also reduce any chances for error, and the necessary and time consuming process of checking.

There will inevitably be a variation between individuals in the exact process of marking exam scripts, but there should be a minimum and non-negotiable audit trail from students' work on an exam script > a mark > a total > front page of script > mark sheet > exam board lists.

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

Research dissertations covered a wide range of relevant research, making excellent use of the knowledge and skills available in the staff team. I happened to attend on the day of the dissertation "Cafeteria" when topics were chosen by students. This seemed to be an excellent event, which encouraged students to engage with the topic and appropriate staff to supervise.

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?

All assessed work was prepared and neatly arranged for viewing, by an efficient and well-organised administration team.

I was able to attend Examiners' meetings in June and November, and am satisfied with the recommendations of the Board.

All module leaders should be encouraged to attend to ensure decisions relating to those modules are robust and consistent, not only across all modules, but also from year to year.

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

The procedure seems to be robust, and students are aware of how to use it appropriately.

Other comments

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

My comments last year recommended the removal of the 20-90 marking scale, and the introduction of a single 0-100 scale with appropriate guidance to staff on criteria to correlate student performance to appropriate grades. I understand that this process has begun. However, at the time of my last visit the timing of the process and the exact nature of the replacement was not known. I would repeat my comment that the presence of dual marking scales lacks transparency and is confusing to students.

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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

11 May 2017

Dear

Institute Response to Issues raised in the External Examiner's Report for Academic Session 2015-2016

Thank you for providing your annual report in your role as one of our External Examiners. As the report has now been considered by our School Teaching and Student Education Committee I am now in a position to make our response.

Once again we are grateful for the generally very positive feedback you have provided on your experiences as one of the External Examiners for our Masters programmes.

There are various areas raised in your report to which I would like to respond.

First of all, an update on the proposals to end the University's use of the 20-90 classification scale. Whilst significant progress has been made on this initiative during the current academic session, we are not yet in a position to migrate to a new system and it seems unlikely that this will take place for taught postgraduate students before Autumn 2018. Hence at our rapidly approaching examination meetings for the 2016-17 cohort, we will be using the existing system. We will continue to update our external examiners on progress.

I note your comments that examination question papers for one of our Masters modules appear to show relatively little variation from year to year and perhaps do not reflect the full breadth of the module syllabus. We are addressing approaches to the setting of assessments for both examinations and courseworks as part of our School teaching enhancement activities. For the 2016-17 session, some syllabus changes resulting from the recent refreshment of our Masters programmes as well as some staffing changes on modules have given us the opportunity to address these issues. We would however very much welcome your views as to whether this particular problem remains.

I also note your comments regarding digital marking. The University very much encourages electronic marking of student work, but requires that students are given feedback individually, both annotated on their work and via a feedback sheet. Student cohorts should also be given generic feedback on how well tasks were addressed. Until now, electronic marking systems available to us have not been very easy to use for the provision of annotated feedback on the student scripts. The University is now addressing this issue through provision of upgraded software tools for this purpose and the uptake of electronic marking is starting to increase as a result.

I note your observations about the clarity of the marking trail from individual assessments onto the final marking sheets, and the need to minimise opportunities for errors in these processes. We will again remind all staff of the need to ensure clarity in recording marks at all stages of the process, and we will

continue to look for ways to refine our processes to ensure both accuracy and efficiency in the recording of marks.

I hope these responses satisfactorily address the issues that you have raised. Please contact me if you need more information or wish to discuss these matters further. We will also have the opportunity to discuss them when you visit Leeds for meetings in the coming months.

On behalf of the Head of School and the school's teaching staff, can I take this opportunity to thank you for your work. I look forward to seeing you again for the examination meetings here in Leeds in June and October.

Yours sincerely

*Senior Lecturer in Transport Economics
Director of Student Education, Institute for Transport Studies*