

**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:	Design
Subject(s):	<i>Graphic and Communication Design</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	DESN 1250 Fundamentals of Imaging DESN 1415 Introduction to Photography (Digital) DESN 1975 Theory and Research in Graphic Design DESN 1989 Graphic and Communication Media A DESN 1999 Communication and Design Process DESN 2150 Contemporary Digital Media DESN 2415 Photography (Digital) DESN 2730 Principles of Typography DESN 2980 Design Application DESN 2989 Graphic and Communication Media B DESN 3150 Contemporary Moving Image DESN 3720 Contemporary Typography DESN 3725 Information Design DESN 3765 Brand Communications DESN 3770 Contemporary Advertising DESN 3989 Graphic and Communication Media C DESN 3994 Independent Project
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA Hons

**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*

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?*

I was supplied with the previous report but wasn't supplied with the School's response.

**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 itself has a clear structure and the ILOs for the individual modules all seem appropriate to support the aims of the programme. The modules work together well and the opportunity for choice of modules at various points is good to allow students ownership of their learning experience.

The only area I would suggest to improve is the greater consistency in the way modules and their related assignment briefs are actually presented. The folder of module descriptors, briefs etc I was supplied with shows a variety of formats which, if this is what is presented to the students, could create unnecessary confusion. One format for all modules and briefs should be considered to avoid this.

The work I reviewed was all graded appropriately and the spread of marks matched the levels of achievement and was, in my opinion, also 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.*

The programme is similar and compares in most ways in regards to the practical design project assignments to the other UK graphic design programmes that I am aware of. However, there is much more written work required of students on this course than I am used to seeing. This is not a negative or a positive, just a difference which may suit the nature of the students that are attracted and apply to the course at Leeds and help differentiate the graduates. In some cases the strong students who can produce both practical work and written work to a high standard will leave with a strong set of skills – both transferrable and subject specific and be employable in a wider range of roles. I do wonder if, for the less academically strong students who might excel at the more design related, practical side if they may leave with a lower class award than they might achieve at an institution that pushes the practical aspects more and has less written requirements. Perhaps other formats in addition to the traditional essay etc to allow learners to demonstrate critical and cognitive understanding could be investigated?

From reading the module descriptors I can confirm that the modules and levels are aligned to the FHEQ benchmarks and the course design is appropriate and well constructed.

### 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 used by the course team seem to all constructively align with the individual module learning outcomes. There appears to be an appropriate use of the full range of marks by the whole team as evidenced by student achievement.

The quality of teaching (course delivery) and learning (student achievement) is appropriate and in line with that which I have experienced in my own and other institutions that I am aware of.

### 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 requirement for a written evaluation as part of the some module requirements is something that other design courses at other institutions could learn from. Often design projects end with the submission of the designed artefact and little in the way of evaluation of the potential impact or areas that need further development is undertaken by the learner. This evaluation aspect of the design process is vital and is a major part of professional practice.

### 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 this is my first year in post this is challenging to comment upon. I am aware that the course leader and team have instigated new assessment feedback forms which clearly communicate how learners have achieved against the specific assessment criteria and learning outcomes. The feedback forms are thorough and should prove effective in helping learners see their strengths and areas to develop.

**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 the student projects I reviewed included a research and development aspect in the production of designed artefacts, proposals and written texts. Encouraging and expecting students to undertake and apply research findings and insight into communication design projects was clearly evident. Staff and module leaders were all able to articulate how their own research was informing their curricula and supporting learning. A range of subject specific processes and methods for undertaking and applying research findings were also evident. This is a strength of the course. I would suggest areas to develop are to encourage and facilitate learners to engage in more material process and tactile research into the development of physical outcomes e.g. print, paper stock, book binding and production methods. A control and mastery of the physical aspect of designed artefacts is a key employability skill that is not easy to develop and, with learners now being more digitally native, this is at risk of becoming neglected across the graphic design HE sector.

**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.*

The material provided was sufficient and appropriate to allow me to carry out my role effectively.

**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 course leader provided a folder with hard copies of all appropriate documentation relating to the programme during my initial visit. A digital version would be useful for the next cycle. The course administrator was also very helpful in supporting me in my role.

**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?**

Again, I did not receive any assignment briefs in advance. Perhaps this is because of it being my first year in post? I did have view and was provided with hard copies of the assignment briefs set during my first visit however. Next academic year I would expect and like to receive all project briefs/module assignments in advance if possible.

**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 various module leaders provided a broad ranges of student work for each module and talked me through the way the module was delivered, the assessment process and the student work itself. This was useful to see how decisions are made and arrived at, students supported in meeting course/module aims and ILOs and gaining a sense of the philosophy and approach of the course team. I am more than confident in the way that student work has been evaluated on this programme. The assessment was fair, consistent and rigorous. Feedback was aligned to the module/assignment aims and useful for students to develop their continuing practice.

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

The range of dissertations I reviewed demonstrated a range of subjects, mostly related in some way to design and visual communication. Most had a sense of purpose and related to more business and pragmatic aspects of the subject discipline. It would be good to see students engaging more with the critical aspects of the discipline and in my discussions with the module leader it is apparent that this is encouraged. The choice of subject is and should be determined by the learner however and it is understandable how students may try to align the dissertation towards a practical, personal agenda. I was impressed by the standard of the writing of the higher achieving students which was comparable with master level in some cases. The lower end achieving work still demonstrated good and appropriate use of academic conventions. It is clear the module is run well and students are supported effectively. The method and standard of assessment was appropriate and I agreed with the decisions made by the 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?**

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**

I think, based on my first year in post, that Leeds is a strong course which provides a worthwhile learning experience for its students. My suggestions to build upon the course are:

- Look to increase the amount of physical making the students undertake – much of the work relied on a limited range of print processes (mainly laser prints) and an understanding of the more tactile aspects of the practice such as paper stock and print processes is still a vital aspect of graphic design practice. Many courses are purchasing Risograph reproduction machines which being relatively low cost and easily maintained are an excellent means of creating/supplying a more hands on resource for learning.

- Look to link the theory and written elements to the studio practice more – it would make sense to require students to apply graphic design skills in the production and presentation of their written components and this could help transfer the skills and knowledge between the theory and practice aspects of the course.

- Look at the possibility for students to choose alternative formats for the critical/contextual assignments/aspects of modules. Many courses allow students to choose between a written assignment, a presentation, a film etc, all with equal requirements of academic rigour and challenge. Many students who chose to study graphic design do so because they are stronger in less textual ways of learning and providing an environment where all learners can be challenged in a variety of ways would allow a wider array of achievements to be demonstrated.

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20<sup>th</sup> April 2017

## **RESPONSE TO THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER GRAPHIC AND COMMUNICATION DESIGN BA HONS**

Dear <>,

Firstly I would like to thank you for such a helpful and reflective report. I also thank you for your co-operation, support and flexibility during meetings, and your ability to inspect large samples of student work. I am particularly pleased that you find the methods of assessment, feedback and marking to be fair and thorough, the quality of the student work to be of good standard, and that research/practice-led teaching is clearly evident to you.

The following sections deal, in turn, with specific areas for consideration that have been raised.

### **The physicality of design**

Your point raised about the need for continued engagement with the physical aspects of the course is very valued. This year we have improved our teaching of this particular aspect of the subject, including additions of printmaking inductions, monoprinting sessions and collage workshops, paper stock demonstrations by Fedrigoni, visits to printers, 2 binding workshops (run both by external and internal facilitators) and the purchase of an A3 Risograph (from Midshire, on your recommendation). We will continue to look at other ways we can extend these areas.

### **Module handbooks**

As a team we have definitely valued your comments about the way modules are presented to the student. During the summer 2016 we redesigned the module handbooks for all core and optional graphics modules in a consistent style and made additions of examples of student work. We also formatted assessments in the same way and ensured that these were all provided to the students during week 1 of each semester. This seems to have been an effective way of communicating module content to students and, as such, has seen a reduction in the number of querying emails about the modules and assessments (whether formative or summative).

### **Written work**

The point raised about written work-load is worth noting and our course does provide a strong academic challenge to students, some of whom are predominantly visual thinkers. Our entry grades to the course are higher than at other institutions (ABB)

and thus most students can rise to the challenge of design theory, history and dissertation study. We also make the mixture of modules apparent at open days and stress the non-production elements of the course. We are confident this has distinctive appeal for students who wish to combine the vocational and visually creative skills with critical thinking and deeper/broader contextual awareness. We do have to support students from non-traditional backgrounds and international students in their ability to conduct written work and we are looking at ways of giving students more one-to-one contact for their written work at level 2 (as part of Research Methods which is being rewritten). We are also hoping that this will steer dissertation topics more towards visual analysis and graphic designers/graphic design than the current choices towards business/branding topics.

Reading, thinking and clarity of expression can be manifest through formats other than writing (in some ways, it is reading and thinking, rather than writing that we want to increase). We will continue to think about this topic though at the moment; the choice between making and writing isn't an option we can feasibly pursue.

### **Linking practice and theory**

This year we have enabled students to respond to theories and histories through practice (in DESN2989, in the level 2 book assessment you will see in June) although it is unlikely, given Russell Group expectations, that this would replace traditional essay formats (however the point is a valuable and useful one). The course is currently being rewritten to gain 20 credits 'back' into the course at levels 1 and 2. This is a great opportunity to make the link between theory and practice stronger with more space to engage with graphic design theory and making together.

### **Evaluation Work**

Thank you for your comments about our use of evaluation reports. We believe that evaluation is, in some ways, just as important as the process or outcome. We are also wanting to expand this to other modules, at the very least, in presentation format.

### **Feedback Forms**

Many thanks for your comments regarding the thoroughness of our feedback forms. We are constantly reviewing them and I suspect the final level assessment criteria will require some simplification (as this is its second year in usage). I look forward to sharing further details with you during your next visit.

### **Assessments in Advance**

Apologies if you did not receive assessment details in advance. In the next session we shall ensure these are forwarded in good time.

Finally, many thanks once again for all your work and support as our external examiner. I look forward to our next meeting.

Yours sincerely,

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Head of School  
School of Design  
University of Leeds