

**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:	School of Design, Faculty of Performance, Visual Arts & Communication
Subject(s):	<i>Fashion Design</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Fashion Design
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	B.A. (Hons) Fashion Design

**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*

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*

At the end of the academic year 2014/15, I had been under the impression that I had completed my period of External Examination tenure and completed this sector at that time. However, having been asked to step back for one further academic year 2015/16, my reflective perceptions over the past five years have not changed since last year. I am delighted to be able to report that for the second time in two years, a Leeds University student on the B.A. Fashion Design programme was awarded the prestigious national Graduate Fashion Week, Karen Millen Portfolio Award, in addition, the programme also secured the position of Highly Commended for a second student from Leeds University as well. This repeat national accolade, speaks very well for the health of the portfolio aspect of study at Leeds University.

The delivery of the Dissertation has for the second year continued to be more carefully aligned in supporting the students in their future quest for graduate employment. Few graduates, if any, from fashion, will be required by the fashion industry to ever consider the undertaking of a PhD, unless the individual returns to the Higher Education sector in the future to teach. I would continue to further encourage, the dissertation topics be chosen, as closely interlinked as possible with their main subject area/interest of 'Fashion'. At Leeds University there are greater strictures of time placed upon the principal study of Fashion by the advised programme framework that the staff and students are obliged to work within. The university's programme framework e.g. places twice the module weight onto the Dissertation compared to that of their national competitive universities who also deliver the subject of Fashion. The Dissertation, when combined with other earlier programme non-fashion specialist topics, does result in an absence of subject specialist awareness being observed within some of the student's balance of Fashion knowledge, this is observed in particular, within the work of those of both an 'average' and those of a slightly 'below average' ability. This lack of available time within the programme framework to be able to be devoted to their chosen topic of interest 'Fashion', results in the forfeit of the much needed element of continuous practice, within the more practical aspects of their fashion study.

Students I also believe require to be nurtured a little more carefully on the choice of the Dissertation topic, one student I examined this year, ventured too far away from their specialist knowledge base, by the undertaking of a technical investigation into man-made fibres, an investigation more readily related to the study of textile technology and outside the knowledge boundaries expected of a fashion undergraduate. The result, from my perspective was that this over ambitious choice of topic for the level of their study, almost set the student up for 'potential failure' in this weighty module of study.

The continuance of more careful balancing of student numbers, has again this year paid excellent dividends in terms of the graduating cohort who displayed a greater wealth of experimentation, frequently endeavouring to breakthrough individual knowledge boundaries in both garment cut, fabrication & manufacture. In an ideal world, more time in the future should be devoted to the manufacture of the realised design outcomes, as ground breaking/experimental production techniques, also require greater time for technical resolve.

The assessments recorded, were as always fair, while the student feedback provided by the provision was very detailed and allowed each student to successfully further build upon the feedback, to enhance their future academic performance. Year One, Level 01, in comparison to Levels 02 & 03, has a higher proportion of module assessment stages, this can perhaps result in a 'glass ceiling' on how high an averaged module mark of attainment can be achieved, e.g. it was rare that a Level 01 student achieved an averaged module mark of over 70/72.

Throughout my full period of examination tenure, all comments have been taken seriously by the programme team, they have been reviewed with diligent care and attention and where appropriate acted upon. I feel I now leave behind a programme of study that is much more experimental & international in it's design outlook, with graduates appealing to a diverse range of international employers.

**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 Intended Learning Outcomes of the Fashion Design programme are carefully aligned to the anticipated demands of the international Fashion Industry into which the students anticipate entering on graduation. By the time the student has had the optional opportunity to work within the industry in Level 02, they are able to display creative drawing skills, carefully balanced by exacting technical schematic drawing insight to the proposed products to be created. The portfolios are very tactile in their presentation outcome, very appealing to first destination employers.

As noted before, the university programme framework does place unnecessary stricture on the learning of fashion by the insistence of the inclusion of non-specialist topics in Levels 01 & 02, which do detract from the student's desired learning of the chosen specialist subject 'Fashion'. In addition the weighting in Level 03, of the Dissertation being 40% compared to 20% at competitive universities, thwarts in particular 'the average to the less able student' from graduating with a very strong understanding of their chosen fashion discipline, this can be seen in their limited understanding of how a garment is formed.

National academic standards are being upheld at Leeds University but standards could again be raised, by future programme restructuring with the addition of greater fashion specialist modules of learning support, replacing the current more generic modules that are less appealing to specialist Fashion employers.

While the topic of the Fashion portfolio is achieving strong national standards in performance, the more practical aspects associated with the subject, while built upon a solid foundation, are hampered by the student's inability to sufficiently practice their practical realisation, to permit the more practical aspect to achieve a comparable standard to that of the portfolio. At Leeds University the programme time stricture limits a student from being able to realise a full collection of six outfits. Time permits for only three outfits.

**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.*

Leeds University, does compare favourably with similar programmes of national fashion study, while meeting the acknowledged national benchmarks within the national framework of Higher Education Qualifications. In the academic year 2015/16 gaining the accolade of the GFW Karen Millen Portfolio Award, which placed it for the academic year 2015/16, at the forefront of UK fashion portfolio achievement. However, strictures on programme time, does result in the practical realisation of garments being less able to achieve in this also key element of fashion study, the identical level of performance, or breadth of success? Only a structural change to the advised university programme framework, could further support and enhance this practical aspect of fashion study, at present it results in a slightly negative element on the learning pattern of the average & slightly below average student's learning experience, evident in their understanding of how a garment is created. The optional industrial placement does provide an element of enhancement, in which the brighter students, manage to often compensate for their 'lack of experience' within their academic studies through practical commercial practice.

**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 programme's assessment design and the detailed methods employed at Leeds University by the programme staff to provide constructive feedback to the students registered on the programme of study, does ensure that all assessment is undertaken in a methodical manner that gives no rise for concern on the part of the student, nor I as the External Examiner, it is undertaken in a meticulous manner ensuring that fairness has been metred out to all students in the assessment address of their Intended Learning Outcomes.

On conclusion of the academic year 2015/16 the following assessment breakdown was recorded:

Students:	Honours Division
14 x	First Class
18 x	Upper Second Class
04 x	Lower Second Class
00 x	Third Class
03 x	Fail

the above is an indication of the levels of student performance, which support the qualitative levels of the teaching delivery on the programme, alongside the student work achievements gained from their learning.

**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.*

As stated earlier, having won the national Graduate Fashion Week, Karen Millen Portfolio (in competition with the top 39 UK universities and colleges for Fashion) with an excellent tactile portfolio, the content displayed diversity of style, the content tactile, displayed excellent colour reference, investigative research skills, while displaying both sensitive hand-rendered figurative skills, alongside excellent technical specification drawing. As well the content displayed a breadth of design appeal, including the specialist area of lingerie. The balance of content within the winning portfolio, was also reflected within the upper quartile of student submissions under Level 03, Module DESN 3564 Portfolio: Design & Content. More weaker students, still do not readily understand from where the direction of the garment silhouette is derived, rarely selecting secondary research to give this important aspect design direction.

DESN 3568 Fashion Innovation Product. The strongest students, displayed innovation in garment cut, a contemporary approach to manufacture & finish, appropriate use of innovative fabric for the silhouette selected. This module has seen the greatest development moving forward over my period of tenure. A lack of fear of the unknown in their approach.

DESN 2661 Men's & Womenswear. (Garment Technology 2) The proofed fabrication used to realise these garments was a challenge in itself for Level 02 students but neatly divided the ability of the respective students, by their commitment to the address of the related manufacturing issues following the design.

DESN 1653 Research & Design Development, was more successful this academic year than in the past, where the combined address of research, colour, fabric choice and the development of a range of garments for an identified market design brand was successfully undertaken, having been directly drawn from their research, something that in the past was not always so successfully orchestrated.

DESN 1661 Garment Technology 1, lays an excellent practical foundation on which later study can be built upon by the student, however for the size of the module, it holds a significant number of assessment reviews/points, these I believe create 'a glass ceiling' to the averaged assessment outcomes that can be achieved by the more talented within the group. While I have no qualms at the 'pecking order of student ability' being correctly identified, by the assessment methodologies employed, I also observed that no student achieved an averaged mark of above the mid-seventies, due most likely to the numerous assessment hurdles within the module that the student must overcome. Bright students registered at competitive universities may at this level only, be recording slightly higher marks for the identical level of learning, due, to fewer assessment hurdles having to be climbed.

DESN 3660 Dissertation, the new style Assessment feedback sheet was well received, it provided for the first time, a very clear understanding as to how the marks had been awarded, equivalent now in it's clarity to the practice within the specialist area of Fashion. Welcomed again was the further reduction on the reliance of market surveys within the Dissertation research, too often in the past they had been inappropriately forwarded for response within the university community to only produce questionable results on which weak arguments were based. The weaker dissertations, appeared to have either run out of time, leaving an aspect of their argument less well researched and/or could have spent a little more time finding more appropriate, less well documented visuals, to further support the individual argument being made.

**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.*

Module DESN 3568 Level 06, following recent refinements to the practical delivery within the programme, students would appear in the academic year 2015/16 to have been less afraid to step outside of their learning comfort zone, when realising fashion garments in their final year. On this occasion I witnessed true innovation at the upper most marked levels, the innovation covered the creation of new silhouettes, the application and on occasion the creation of experimental fabrications all influencing untried nor tested garment silhouettes, new construction techniques were also being explored. I congratulate the programme team on this forward move and encourage them to continue in this exciting vein of investigation.

Module DESN 3660, Level 03, the stronger alignment of the relationship between the dissertation topic and the investigative area of fashion specialization is again seen as being most welcome. As earlier stated, the student at Leeds University has a stricture placed upon the time they are able to devote to their chosen practical specialism and all additional support provided by the programme framework to enhance their specialist area of interest, will only make the graduate more attractive to future employers at the time of their graduation.

**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.*

Fashion by it's very nature has to appeal to a taciturn consumer found worldwide. It is the swiftest moving of all design subject areas, has a design cycle that over the last twenty years has changed from nine months to three weeks, the designer has to be sensitive to immediate change and design direction, fed by political, social or popular culture. Students on the Fashion Design programme of study at Leeds University spend a significant amount of preparatory time, investigating and researching directional fashion trends that they predict will be the next major trend. This year students recorded at the more high levels of module assessment, balanced both the primary and secondary research to fully direct their identified collections found in both their portfolios and in the realised garment collections. Weaker students successfully identified primary research, but struggled without the support of secondary research to fully

realise a directional fashion outcome e.g. they could identify colour, texture, detail but without secondary research, a directional fashion silhouette eluded successful identification.  
Where both primary and secondary research successfully supported the design outcome, there were some excellent examples of three dimensional realisation, alongside some very fulfilling design orientated & tactile portfolios.

**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.*

During, my five year, association with Leeds University, it has consistently been at the forefront of their competitors in the provision of updated materials to support my continuing role as External Examiner. The materials have been clear and on the rare occasion, when I have sought clarification on any matter of concern or doubt a response has immediately been provided.

At the time of arrival for both the interim and the final visit within each academic year, I have automatically been updated on any change of Programme teaching direction, or it's delivery etc., specialist tutors, have also made themselves available when I am on site in order to update or to clarify on any questions raised from the review of the student work.

A problem was encountered this year with the forwarding of dissertations to my home city, as my university e-mail was not aligned with the delivery system in operation at Leeds University for this activity, a satisfactory alternative, was speedily found, permitting me to receive them and proceed without hindrance my examination duties.

**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.*

At the start of my Examination period the appropriate programme materials were forwarded prior to my start of duties. Following, the Programme Leader, supported by programme colleagues, updated me with the appropriate module handbooks, marking criteria etc. I consider the programme to have an exemplary record concerning the documentation provided for examination, which is potentially in part why over the five years of my tenure, no student has ever approached that they were unjustly rewarded following their module assessment, while they may on occasion been disappointed with the mark received, they could all see from the detailed feedback provided, why and how their marks had been formed.

**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?**

The Fashion Design programme like it's national competitors, does not undertake formal examination. Future Module Projects, were frequently verbally discussed in advance of their delivery, followed at the time of the respective visits with the detailed paperwork. I have over my period of tenure, never encountered an issue in relation to the quality of the paperwork, prepared for the module delivery. The module demands are very exacting, as are the respective aims, leaning outcomes and objectives, all meticulously aligned to the module demands set.

Students raised no questions, nor concerns, in relation to what was set within the module demands, their only cause for concern raised was that they ideally sought a greater allocation of time, to work on their specialism of 'fashion', their primary interest in undertaking the programme of study.

**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?**

The opportunity was provided by the university to undertake both an interim and final visit which enabled me to categorically state that ample time was provided for the purpose of examination, having been given full access to the module work assessed in Levels 01, 02 & 03.

In Levels 01 & 02., an advised (up to 16 sampled students per module of study) sample selection of work was reviewed from each assessed mark category/band awarded. Level 03, at the time of the interim visit, all student work was seen apart from a very small number of underperforming students, who hesitated to make a personal appearance on the day of my visit. At the time of the final visit, all work was either displayed in the form of a public exhibition, or private view, the garments were shown on both live models, to see form and hang, on the moving body, in addition further examination was provided on exhibited clothing rails, where one could analyse the construction at close hand. Seven Final Year Dissertations were forwarded for examination prior to my final visit, with the request for comment prior to the sitting of the Final Examination Board. Following the review of all work, only the module work of one student's individual submission, created the necessity for further discussion which was amicable and enlightening with the module lead.

The Final Year Dissertation module, using the newly formed assessment feedback sheets, provided clarity of insight and appropriate annotation on how the assessments had been achieved. The main specialist area of Fashion practice, provided very detailed feedback sheets permitting the student to fully comprehend how all marks were determined and I confirmed.

I have full confidence in national standards being maintained by the programme team at Leeds University, having reviewed the work outcomes against their respective levels of assessment.

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

Topics for Dissertation discussion this year ranged from:

'Fashion & Modernity: A critique, as to the enduring effect of film & television on Men's fashion'.

'A critique of Female Body Image, in Social Media'.

'The use of performance enhancing fabrics in sport: Are they an advantage, or merely a marketing hype?'

All topics chosen, were contemporary, all were points of current discussion in the national/international fashion media. However, care does have to be taken by the respective Dissertation Supervisor, that the topic chosen, is not logistically beyond the ability of an undergraduate's knowledge boundaries. One dissertation this year forwarded for review, would, judging by their investigation, have been more appropriate to someone studying chemistry, rather than fashion, this opinion was formed following the review of the factual content in relation to it's collated facts and figures? While it was fairly assessed, I do feel it might have been advisable to steer the student away from such a technically aligned dissertation as it was almost setting the student up for potential failure due to their knowledge boundaries.

The standards of marking were again appropriate and one viewed some excellent content, which was reflected in the respective mark outcomes.

**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?**

As observed from my perspective, the administrative arrangements, for the academic year 2015/16 ran very smoothly. The updated guidance materials for the role arrived at an appropriate timing within the academic year, as did notification of when the Final Examination Board was to be held, the information supplied, ensured the dates were blocked well in advance in my diary.

I was in attendance at the Final Classification Examination Board for Level 03, held on the Thursday afternoon 16 of June, 2016.

The paperless Board processed the student awards electronically, allowing the Board's participants, to view, confer and permitted where it was appropriate to enter appropriate discussion. All students across each of the programmes presented for examination were treated with the same even handed and fair manner throughout the Board's proceedings, I was completely satisfied with the recommendations of the Board.

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

At the time of the Board sitting, decisions had already been taken to determine the outcome of any mitigating circumstances that had been forwarded by the student for consideration in relation to their academic performance. The Board was advised at the time of the student's marks being presented, if Mitigating Circumstances had been upheld and whether a further modification had been made to the student's final degree classification. The impression left was that in the academic year 2015/16 there may have been fewer applications for Mitigating Circumstances to be considered, perhaps as many more, Late Submissions were approved and granted throughout the academic year?

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

This being my final year of tenure as External Examiner, I would just like to additionally wish the programme's academic and technical support team well for the future. The B.A. Fashion Design programme has from my perspective grown in stature over the past five years, very much, a reflection on the tight team working practices in operation within the Fashion subject area.

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18<sup>TH</sup> October 2016

Dear <>,

## RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS REPORT 2015/16

Thank you for your fifth report as External Examiner for BA (Hons) Fashion Design programme for the academic year 2015/16. Thank you also for agreeing to extend the period of appointment for an extra year.

The external examiners final report requires an overview of the past four years and you were most helpful and extensive in that report. We are pleased that your observation remains the same with positive feedback for the fifth and final report. Once again you have acknowledged that the programme standards have remained appropriate, with progressive development and enhancement of learning and teaching provision and that the aims are comparable against national benchmarking.

*You commented that "I am delighted to be able to report that for the second time in two years, a Leeds University student on the B.A. Fashion Design programme was awarded the prestigious national Graduate Fashion Week, Karen Millen Portfolio Award, in addition, the programme also secured the position of Highly Commended for a second student from Leeds University as well. This repeat national accolade, speaks very well for the health of the portfolio aspect of study at Leeds University"*

The staff team were also pleased with your observation of the final year Module, DESN3568 Fashion Innovation Product and believe that this is a culmination of progression delivery at levels one and two *"The strongest students, displayed innovation in garment cut, a contemporary approach to manufacture & finish appropriate use of innovative fabric for the silhouette selected. This module has seen the greatest development moving forward over my period of tenure. A lack of fear of the unknown in their approach"*

You also remarked that *"At Leeds University there are greater strictures of time placed upon the principal study of Fashion by the advised programme framework that the staff and students are obliged to work within. The university's programme framework e.g. places twice the module weight onto the Dissertation compared to that of their national competitive universities who also deliver the subject of Fashion"*

As discussed with the staff team during your final visit, we are now in the development stage of proposed increases in the weighting of programme specific modules at levels one and two giving a total of 60 credits in each



year. However, there are no plans to change the weighting in final year and the dissertation will remain 40 credits. The School-wide research methods module at Level two has had greater participation from all design areas with discussion of contemporary dissertation topics and the alignment to student practice. Hopefully this will address some of the concerns regarding the structure of the programme highlighted in your report.

Once again thank you for your continued and constructive support over the last five years, we look forward to strengthening the Fashion Design programme and applying your valued recommendations where strategically possible.

Yours Sincerely,

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Head of School of Design