

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 Politics and International Studies
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Conflict, Development and Security Global Development Global Development and Africa Global Development and Education Global Development and Gender Global Development and Political Economy of International Resources
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 gat@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

As this was my last year in this role, I have tried to re-iterate some of the strengths I have found in the teaching and assessment of these MA Programmes, but have concentrated my comments on larger scale/strategic issues which I think would be useful to further enhancing the (high) quality of the programmes.

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.*

As with previous years, I am content that the structure and content of the programme is appropriate to the ILOs, and that it meets all the standards required for an award of this level.

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.*

Yes. Based on my reading of the national benchmark, and in comparison with similar programmes in other institutions, this is comparable and appropriate.

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.*

As in previous years, I am happy to say that the assessment methods are appropriate, diverse and robust. I note again the very detailed comments available to students, and the fact these seem to be the norm rather than exceptional. This demands time and academic energy from the teaching staff, and is a strong demonstration of professional commitment and high standards.

Students perform across the range of standards one would expect – mostly clustered in the Pass with Merit category, but some on either side. Arguably one might expect to see a few more Distinction candidates (although I am wary of both grade inflation and some sort of target). Collated metrics (suggested below) would help provide better data from which to make an informed judgement. Either there is still a reluctance to mark excellent pieces beyond, say, 75%; or alternatively, somehow the programme is not stretching and pushing on the best students. Or it might simply be that in this year (and others?) that there were a low-ish (not alarmingly so) number of Distinction students. It is something I think worth picking up on by the teaching and assessment committee(s).

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 show a lively engagement with the rich range of topics taught on the programmes, and relevant to them.

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.

I don't think I saw any major formal changes in the content or structure. Over the four years I have acted as external examiner on the programmes, I think the assessment forms have gone from very good to excellent.

One innovation is the provision of audio file feedback. This seemed interesting and useful to me. It would be interesting to canvas how useful different students found it, and keep track of it.

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.

This seemed strong and at an appropriate level to the MA programme.

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, the material was sufficient.

However, as I have mentioned in previous years, I really don't like the way it is managed, and think that this erodes some of the value of having external examiners. The material tends to come in dribs and drabs. The administrative staff have always been extremely helpful and efficient, but it seems that at best they only have a short time for me to turn material around, and should a staff member hold anything up for any reason, it has to be sent separately with even less time. The effect on me is a drip feed of material, sometimes with very little notice. As well as being a bit irksome, I have a reduced sense of the overall degree by the time I get to the exam board. Should the University allow it, I would propose the more common system of sending out unconfirmed marks to students (for Semester One marks, say), and then inviting examiners up the day before or morning of the board (depending on the workload), who could have a concentrated and consolidated period of time to work through the material, and ask questions of the administrators and chair of the board. This is a much more efficient way of dealing with the material for us, but I hope it would also improve the quality of our oversight and knowledge of the programme(s). It might also have an effect on the slight grey areas encountered in most exam boards, which is what happens when students sit at grade boundaries. Such students would be identifiable in advance of the board, and one task that externals could perform would be to look through all of their assessment in helping decide whether or not they should be moved up (in line with the University's policies on mitigating circumstances, being in the uplift zone etc).

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, although some more data would be desirable, and from what I can see on other programmes in <<>> and other institutions, not out of step. It would be really useful to see module and programme data collated – numbers/percentage distributions of marks in collated form, average/median performance, standard deviation. These should – emphatically – not start to become targets, but I hope would act as useful information for those running teaching and assessment, and for externals.

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?

Yes

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, although in line with the point made above, if all of the work was available in one room over one fixed period of time, I would be able to check through more, and get a better overall sense of the programme.

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

Yes.

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. As in previous years, the Board is run with professionalism and integrity, and well supported administratively.

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

There were one or two occasions when discussing very tricky cases that the nature of particular mitigating circumstances crept into the conversation. Even though this was with good will and supportive of the students in question, I would encourage a complete wall between the sub-group and the board when it comes to the details of the MCs. My comments above may (University rules permitting) allow marginal candidates (a number of whom had MCs) to be considered by the board with additional input from externals who had just looked at all of their assessment as a whole; and a steer from the sub-committee on how severe the MCs were. Otherwise the decision falls mostly on the shoulders of those on the MC sub-committee, who rightly try to navigate a way between letting the board advise, without revealing too much of the substance of the MC.

This aside, MCs seemed to be handled thoughtfully and well. It is clear that despite considerable effort by programme managers to explain and provide information to students that some don't follow advice or guidelines, often to their detriment. Further and ongoing efforts to appraise the students of the MC rules and advise them are encouraged, but I appreciate that there is a limit to what can be achieved.

Other comments

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

It has been a pleasure to act as an external examiner on these programmes, and my thanks to everyone involved.

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Head of the School of Politics and International Studies
University of Leeds, Woodhouse Lane,
Leeds, West Yorkshire,
LS 28 5PP

05 January 2017

Dear <<>>

I am writing to thank you for your external examiner's report on our MA programmes for academic year 2015-16. We are encouraged by your report. We are particularly pleased that you note 'the very detailed comments available to students', which in your view 'is a strong demonstration of professional commitment and high standards'.

We also note your comment on the potential 'reluctance to mark excellent pieces beyond, say, 75%'. We would add here that external examiners have welcomed what they see as an increased willingness to stretch marks at the top end, but your observation is important as we strive for consistency. This will be acted on in the relevant committees, as will your suggestion for data such as standard deviation. Your suggestions on marking deadlines (section 10) will also be reflected at to the Faculty/University. Your point (section 16) about how to deal with the mitigating circumstances of a student that has not formally lodged notice is also well taken, and this too is under consideration.

I understand this is your final report for us. May I take the opportunity therefore to thank you not only for this report but also for your contribution during your full term as external examiner.

Sincerely

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cc. pro-Dean for Student Education <<>>; Director of Student Education, <<>>; Head of Quality Assurance, University of Leeds