

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2015– 2016

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

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|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Faculty / School of: | Business School |
| Subject(s): | <i>Economics</i> |
| Programme(s) / Module(s): | Masters in Economics |
| Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc): | MA/MSc |

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

The main issue that needs to be looked at is the penalty for going over the word limit. Under the current system only 10% of the scripts were randomly selected and a penalty was imposed on those who went over the word limit in the sample.

This is quite unfair, as I saw assignments with a higher declared word count, yet no penalty was imposed. If a penalty is followed, it must be applied across the board, for all scripts, not just 10% of the scripts.

In some cases there was a possibility of it making a difference in the classification of the grade for the module.

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 Programme Aims and ILOs reflects very clearly the level of the award. It provides students with both technical and more descriptive knowledge of the subject appropriate for an MSc. The programme also provides a nice balance between mainstream and heterodox courses.

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 they are in line with national benchmark.

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 wide variety of assessment methods are used in this programme, dissertations, final exams, midterms, course works – which included projects and essays. Taken together provides a very well rounded set of assessments. Even within the exams, in units such as LUBS 5108M and 5102M among other, I found a good variety of questions, from straight forward ones to very interesting and challenging questions.

The markings were fair and consistent. Good feedback was provided in almost all courses.

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 in previous years, students were given ample opportunity through a wide variety of assessments to demonstrate their learning. They covered both theoretical knowledge and real world applications. The overall achievements were in line with similar programmes with majority around the 2:1-2:2 class. In general, students demonstrated good knowledge of both technical and descriptive parts.

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.

In general, the programme has remained quite steady. There hasn't been any major chopping and changes in the units. I can see from the exam scripts and dissertations that there has been an improvement in terms of the learning outcomes and achievements.

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.

Research plays an important role in the curriculum is very evident from the units, particularly the design of optional units. In the core units, there are very one can do, but even from the way the material is being presented it is clear that the unit leaders are experts in the field. In the optional courses, some of the discussions around current world events such as Brexit was relevant and engaging.

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

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, there was a detailed set of information, which was indeed very 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.

The administrative team in Leeds has been fantastic in providing all the necessary documents and making all the necessary arrangements for me to be able to do my job effectively.

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 the draft exam papers and assessments. The design and the level of the exams were appropriate. Some of the papers, such as And most if not all my suggestions were taken on board. I was then given an opportunity to comment on the revised exams before it was finalised.

13. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes, I had checked a sample of all the scripts and it also included a range of the scripts from different grade levels. For most units the scripts were clearly marked and there were clear comments showing why the marks were deducted. Overall the marking was fair and consistent except for the issue of the word count.

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

The topics of the dissertation was relevant and appropriate, and the dissertations were done at a quite high level with many of the them doing sophisticated empirical analysis. The marking was also very thorough.

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?

I think this year the board meeting went very well. The board meeting this year was divided in two parts. First was the PG Assessment Board and the second was the Exam Board. I attended the latter and it was very efficiently managed with a thorough discussion of some of the cases.

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

I am sure they were discussed but I wasn't in that meeting.

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

Overall I think Leeds has a very good and strong programme. Some of my suggestions below are broadly for the whole programme and some of them are more specific to particular units

(1) I think the option choices are a bit limited and it would be nice to have a few more options available. This would also lead to an opportunity to create specialised pathways in the degree.

(2) Most of the assessment and feedback I have seen is extremely good. I felt that it would make it even better if some of the feedback also directed the top students on how to improve their game. For instance in LUBS 5116M it is not clear in the Essay why the high end didn't get more marks.

(3) There are some units where there are huge extremes and not all can be blamed on the cohort as it is not seen in other units. For instance, in LUBS 5134 35 % are first and 15% are fails. We also see a high level of firsts in LUBS 5140M. I have no problems as such with high firsts and failure rates, but I think it is advisable to keep an eye on the extreme distributions. I say this because LUBS 5224M had scaled by the marks of midterm 1 citing difficult questions. So there has to be some consistent mechanism to deal with these kind of distributions.

(4) Finally, I would suggest that LUBS 5228M needs more advanced topics if it is to be taught at the Master's level.

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12 June 2017

Dear <<>>,

Thank you for your recent Examiner's Report for the MSc in Economics and the MSc in Economics and Finance.

We are delighted by your comments on our Masters programmes, especially in relation to the plurality of economics content, including both mainstream and heterodox perspectives; the programme aims and intended learning outcomes, which are commensurate with the MSc award; the technical and descriptive knowledge of subjects appropriate at this level; the general level of student attainment, including on the important dissertation module..

- **Most of the assessment and feedback I have seen is extremely good. I felt that it would make it even better if some of the feedback also directed the top students on how to improve their game. For instance in LUBS 5116M it is not clear in the Essay why the high end didn't get more marks.**
- **There are some units where there are huge extremes and not all can be blamed on the cohort as it is not seen in other units. For instance, in LUBS 5134 35 % are first and 15% are fails. We also see a high level of firsts in LUBS 5140M. I have no problems as such with high firsts and failure rates, but I think it is advisable to keep an eye on the extreme distributions. I say this because LUBS 5224M had scaled by the marks of midterm 1 citing difficult questions. So there has to be some consistent mechanism to deal with these kind of distributions.**

We appreciate your comments about the standard of feedback, which you note as being extremely good. Your valuable suggestion that convenors should look to provide sufficient feedback at the top end of the marking scale if at all possible has been relayed to the teaching team. We are also glad that you consider marking on our programmes to be fair and consistent. In response to your point about extreme distributions and consistency in treatment, this will be relayed to the teaching team and monitored. It is worth noting that the quantitative nature of certain modules, such as LUBS5108M and LUBS5134M, does bring about associated variation in marks, whereas other modules are more prone to natural variation in the marks due to small class sizes.

- **The main issue that needs to be looked at is the penalty for going over the word limit. Under the current system only 10% of the scripts were randomly selected and a penalty was imposed on those who went over the word limit in the sample.**

The importance of applying word count penalties where appropriate has been highlighted within your report as an urgent item and we are grateful to you for raising the issue. It was quickly established that the original error in application of the penalty within the module LUBS5116M did not affect the

overall degree classification of the student concerned, though it does highlight the need for careful monitoring of word count and appropriate application of penalties. However, recent changes to word count policy across the faculty mean that all scripts will be scrutinised to the same degree. Therefore, all scripts are liable to be penalised, where appropriate, for breaches of the word count policy.

- **I think the option choices are a bit limited and it would be nice to have a few more options available. This would also lead to an opportunity to create specialised pathways in the degree.**

Thank you for your suggestion regarding the incorporation of additional optional modules. We concur that expansion may facilitate specialisation and help further distinguish our Masters programmes from the competition. However, there are currently considerable financial implications of increasing the number of optional modules, in light also of a number of significant changes to internal admissions policies and volatility in external environments. Therefore, unfortunately, at this time it will not be possible to expand further without reducing resources elsewhere on the programme. However, specialisation remains an option for future consideration.

- **Finally, I would suggest that LUBS 5228M needs more advanced topics if it is to be taught at the Master's level.**

We take on board your suggestion about LUBS5228M and the possible inclusion of more advanced topics. Student feedback on this module has been pleasing, both in terms of quantitative evaluation of intellectual stimulation and qualitative feedback, while the module is perceived by many to be challenging due to the mix of qualitative and quantitative skills required. However, there is some scope for advancement of topics as suggested. Indeed, this had previously been planned in the form of an adapted component of the module on (historic and contemporary) theories of crises; the module leader also plans to add a new, more advanced lecture, from 2018, on endogenous growth theories, drawing from higher level texts and academic research. We trust that these advancements will make the module more challenging for MSc students.

We appreciate very much your overwhelmingly positive evaluation of our Masters programmes and for highlighting the competency of the teaching staff. Your valuable feedback and suggestions are very gratefully received as we continue to enhance our successful programmes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

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Dean

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