

# The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

QA Team received 06/11/2017

### Part A: General Information

#### Subject area and awards being examined

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	Institute for Transport Studies
<i>Subject(s):</i>	
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	MA/MSc Transport Economics MSc Sustainability in Transport MSc Transport Planning MSc Transport Planning and Engineering (Eng) MSc Transport Planning and Environment MSc Mathematical Modelling for Transport
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	

### Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

#### Points of innovation and/or good practice

Good use is being made of electronic submission and feedback.

#### Enhancements made from the previous year

Procedures for double blind marking of dissertations have been enforced and marking schema provided. A Transport Integrated Project module (TRAN5912M) has been introduced, in part in response to industry. However, student feedback suggests that this module has had some teething problems

#### Matters for Urgent Attention

Address problems with TRAN5912M for AY2017/18.

#### *For Examiners in the first year of appointment*

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y / N
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	Y / N
3.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Mentor?	Y / N

#### *For Examiners completing their term of appointment*

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	Y / N
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y / N
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y / N
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	Y / N

*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*

## Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Y
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y
The Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes of the Programmes continue to be appropriate for the awards under consideration, as are the structure and content. They are comparable with those of similar programmes at other leading institutions and meet (or exceed) national benchmarks.		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
New programmes have been developed (such as Mathematical Modelling for Transport) that build on existing research strengths. These strengths are also reflected by the huge choice of modules (over 30). Some of these module are at the cutting-edge of research (e.g. Choice Modelling and Stated Preference Design).		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
However, many of the modules would form an excellent basis for an iPhD scheme.		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y
The programmes have appropriate accreditation from a variety of bodies such as CILT, CIHT, TPP and JBM.		

## Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
There is a clear code of practice on assessment that is evidently implemented. Great care has been put into the design of module level courseworks but I remain of the view that exams are under-used. There may need to be a more proactive coordination of assessments as some subject matter appeared to be tested more than once e.g. health impact assessments. 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.		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y
The students exhibited good academic standards, with appropriate proportions at Distinction and Merit level. They are a very diverse group but with the best students performing at the level you would expect from a world-leading institution.		
A large number of assessors are used. On the 17 taught modules for which I had oversight there were 24 assessors. For the six dissertations I reviewed there were 12 different assessors (including poster and presentation). This clearly presents challenges of ensuring consistency which are largely met, but my sampling indicated that the dissertation marking might be slightly generous. Here there might be a tension between giving the students positive feedback and applying a rigorous marking schema. There may also be a case that the students are over assessed. For example, in the dissertation the poster assessment might usefully be made formative rather than summative. I understand that there are University level initiatives to move toward programme level assessment. Whilst I think there remains a case for module level assessment at Master's level, an overview of assessment practices is worthwhile.		

## The Progression and Awards Process

20.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiner's role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Y
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	N
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
<p>I don't recollect receiving the Student Handbook for AY 2016/17 (if such a thing still exists). I was not provided with courseworks in advance – but would not expect this. I have some concerns about the lack of a harmonised exam grid system and the potential problems of data transfer between the Faculty Excel spreadsheets and the University's Banner system. For example, it was difficult to determine whether capping had been applied and the extent to which special circumstances had been taken into account. It was also evident that some candidates had to be considered outside the June and October Exam Boards. I have been asked to act as a mentor to a new external this academic year and I would find it useful if a short guide to the assessment recording system was produced. As a minor aside, it seems odd to me that the Exam booklets do not have a total row.</p>		

## Other comments

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

The administration of the programme seems to have been affected by staffing shortages in the Student Office where there seems to be considerable turnover of staff. The delivery of the programme also seem to have been affected by academic staff absence. Ways of increasing resilience in these areas should be investigated.

In line with other institutions, a lot of administration has been reduced to dumping material in Sharepoint sites, web links and similar and leaving the academic to sort the material. This is in essence shifting aspects of administration to the academic and is reliant on fast internet links which are not always available.

**Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)**

*Title and Name of Responder:*

*Position\*:*

*Faculty / School of:*

*Address for communication:*

*Email:*

*Telephone:*

*\*If the individual responding to the report is not the Head of School please state their position within the School.*

**Completing the School response**

The completed School response (including the full original report) should be attached to an e-mail and sent to the Pro-Dean for Student Education in the relevant Faculty. Following approval by the Pro-Dean for Student Education, the School must send the response (including the full original report) directly to the External Examiner. A copy must also be emailed to the Quality Assurance Team at [qat@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:qat@leeds.ac.uk). External Examiners should receive a formal response no later than six weeks after receipt of the original report.

**Response to Points of innovation and/or good practice**

We aim to increase our use of electronic marking and feedback further, in line with university strategy. We anticipate that such use will grow as the university continues to invest in enhanced tools for this purpose.

**Response to Enhancements made from the previous year**

Double-blind marking of dissertation reports was introduced as direct result of your feedback from the previous session. We feel it is a clear enhancement of our processes and has improved the robustness of our assessed procedures, and thank you for your guidance in this matter.

We are pleased to see your general support for our Transport Integrated Project initiative, but please refer to the next section for our response to your concerns about how this operated in the initial year.

**Response to Matters for Urgent Attention**

*If any areas have been identified for urgent attention before the programme is offered again please provide a specific response to them here:*

In response to 2016-2017 student feedback and the observations of our external examiners, we reviewed the operation of the TRAN5912 TIP module ahead of the current session. We have made our expectations in terms of tasks and workloads much clearer to students at the outset. We have placed the operation of the module onto a much more compressed timescale, so that it impinges far less on other modules in the semester than before, and we have reviewed teaching and assessment schedules of some other modules to accommodate these changes. We have removed one of the group presentations on the module. Whilst we await formal student feedback towards the end of the current semester, early indications are that students have managed their workloads more successfully this year.

**Response to questions 1-7 (and related comments)**

*Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:*

*No issues raised in this section*

**Standards****Response to questions 8 to 16 (and related comments)**

*Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:*

We are pleased to hear your positive comments on our research-led programmes and on our wide range of Masters modules reflecting the breadth and depth of interests and research in the school.

## Assessment and Feedback

### **Response to questions 17 to 19 (and related comments)**

*Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:*

The University is moving into a new phase of its Student Education Strategy, within which attention will be paid to assessment, both in terms of amount and methods. ITS will engage with this strategy and will be required to map assessment methods and timings across programmes, and look for reasonable ways to reduce assessment loads whilst ensuring that learning outcomes are met. In this light we will consider your proposals such as to make the dissertation poster assessment formative rather than summative, and we will revisit the balance between exams and courseworks.

## The Progression and Awards Process

### **Response to questions 20-35 (and related comments)**

*Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:*

We note your comments on our assessment results and student progression templates used during the progression and awards processes, and potential issues of transferring outcomes from one system to another. I can report that the refreshment of the University's Student Education Strategy will include the development and implementation of new student record systems designed to address these issues. The timing of such implementation is not yet determined.

## Other comments

### **Response to items included in the 'Other Comments' section of the report**

Staffing shortages and changes in the Student Education Service were particularly severe around the time of the November board meetings and were the result of a range of issues, most notably maternity leave. The Student Education Service has been addressing such issues through recruitment but also through the implementation of revised working arrangements, including across faculties, to build in greater flexibility to cover shortfalls in any one school office. The effects of these changes are currently being monitored.