

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016–2017

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION*Subject area and awards being examined:*

School of: DESIGN	Subject(s): Advertising & Design
Programme(s) / Module(s): MA Advertising and Design	awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) MA

Name and home institution/affiliation of examiner:

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than 6 weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to:

**Head of Academic Quality and Standards,
Academic Quality and Standards Team,
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?

NA

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.

The MA Advertising and Design course is still quite unique in the sector with its co-delivered modules deriving from the Schools of Design and Business. Over the period that I have been External Examiner students have become better able to assimilate the different modes of learning and teaching delivery as well as the differing types of output, deadline stacking and rhythms of work set for the course by the two Schools. The creative Advertising Design team have adjusted delivery of Semester one modules in particular (DESN5210M/5220M/5230M) to assimilate lecture-based know-how from the Business School with studio-based learning through practice. This addressed concerns raised by students in initial meetings that the education cultures between Business and Design Schools were at odds. This is no longer the case. Students graduating from the programme now tend to reflect on the advantage they have in the workplace of being skilled for a wider variety of graduate opportunities. Experiences developed through the programme enables students to operate

between two registers, which is the right type of preparation for a set of communications industries that are expanding and converging in their practices.

The levels of achievement have improved year on year (see notes, page 7). The high retention rate continues to reflect the course's success in nurturing students through a steep learning curve – no matter what previous programme they are relocating from. The levels of achievement reached by the end of the course is all the more impressive given the growing size of the cohort and its increasingly international profile. In preparation of future cohorts, it is worth the team and managers considering strategies for managing a much larger cohort than the programme traditionally recruited to. Base numbers were approximately 25 but now average around 35, which will impact on the approaches to delivery and student-owned learning.

Over the period of my Examinership the course has made significant adjustments in recognition of developments in the communications industries. A change of course leadership in 2015 was managed as an opportunity to update the course. Stronger research and analytical skills were introduced in response to new skills required of the advertising, marketing, PR and 'social' sectors. While strengthening research skills has led to a wider range of opportunities after the course, it had also made the potential transition to further higher-level study more feasible.

Over the period I have found that the team have benchmarked very well against other communications Masters courses in the UK. The assessment regime has consistently been thorough, with layered methods of team and 'blind' marking assessments as well as parity meetings to agree marks. Formative written feedback has consistently been direct in spelling out opportunities for student improvement, and the Course management have tried to keep a small team in place and share tutoring duties to ensure students receive a parity of experience, especially in the more self-directed final Semester projects. The nature of final outcomes has, incrementally, shifted in appearance from portfolios of course work with highly executed visual elements, to more professional-looking reports, detailing layered communications strategies that blend varieties of media. The business and ideation skills through the programme are more in evidence and, more recently, there is a sense of how the campaigns could be taken further after graduation.

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 intended Learning Outcomes in 2016-17 are clearly trackable in this year's work, as the body of work produced is more strategic than in previous years. They ILOs are still consistent with the Intended Learning Outcomes as in previous years, and is commensurate with the FHEQ Masters level descriptor. This year's final year work in particular delivered outcomes that contained clearer lines of research and development than in previous years (for instance DESN5245 Creative Direction, as noted last year). The ILOs are consistent with a Masters-level work in arts and humanities at other HEIs, and levels of achievement are evident in the work under review. This is consistent with the outcomes and achievement descriptors in the Student Handbook.

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 – although the diversification of outputs and types of responses to self-initiated briefs put more pressure on students to justify the 'Advertising Design' element in their work. This was not always self-apparent. Given the diversification of advertising content in the communications sector, it is appropriate for students to explore ways that advertising takes on new guises. However, the students are still required to meet their ILOs within the frame

of the course programme. This might require a tighter rein for guidance and support in the selection of independent projects.

It is apparent from the preliminary project development work and from final major project presentations of coursework that the Intended Learning Outcomes match the national subject benchmark for Art & Design. The organisation of outputs against assessment criteria make it straight forward for the course team and examiners to identify how the students meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark for Masters level Art and design subjects.

In 2017 all 38 students submitted to the exam board achieved at least a pass level - 8 with distinction and 25 Pass with Merit (see notes on page 7 for comparison with previous years). Last year I remarked that the written pathway was an underused option. This year 10 students chose a dissertation route, which enabled most to contextualise their experiences of studying communications in the UK. However, with a growing number of overseas student in the programme this presented a particular challenge for students new to UK education as students are required to meet academic standards of Masters-level dissertations. It is worth noting that those struggling to pass through the dissertation route were from overseas and may need more support in achieving a consistent level of outcome with their studio work.

The overall student outcomes were up on the previous year, so adjustments to managing a larger cohort has not impacted overall on the final student outcome - nor on the quality of the modules which continue to meet national ILO expectations.

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.*

Students were encouraged to present interim and final project work more in 2017/18 than in previous years, which reflects the greater demand in the communications industries for students to verbally communicate their strategies and decision-making. Team assessment methods were also deployed more this year than for previous cohort, which brought the advantage of getting more of the course team engaged in the final student outcomes. As in 2016, assessment of Design modules involved double-marking, blind-marking, peer review and, during project development phases, verbal and written formative assessment.

The student experience of assessment was consistent with previous years too: assessment incorporated the aural presentation of major project to a panel of assessors and in front of peers. Students also produced a reflective log of their learning journeys which reflected their personal decision-making and student-centred learning through course projects.

MA Advertising & Design students during this year's interim visit students noted that they were clear on their levels of attainment and that feedback informed their approaches to subsequent modules throughout the course.

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 the MA Advertising Design cohort of 2017 were more international and diverse in their previous educational backgrounds, their developmental journey required additional support in helping them to transfer their existing experiences to advertising. This was some achievement given that the programme only runs for just twelve months. Despite this there is ample evidence in learning logs, written outcomes and in practical course work that students were able to demonstrate their achievements in alignment with the course's intended learning outcomes.

This year the practical final major project and dissertation routes afforded students enough scope to express their potential levels of achievement. It's worth noting that more group work was in evidence than in previous years, while learning logs helped distinguish the quality and understanding of personal input into group projects. The strengths demonstrated by the cohort included the depth of research analysis and ability to consider wider cultural contents of products/services, as well as an ability to articulate developmental journeys of campaigns. One area that needs further support concerns the transition between research and contextual work on brands to the development of ideas and final solutions. As a consequence the rigour apparent during earlier research stages is not always evident in the work developed for final module output.

Overall the strength of the cohort remains strong. There were no obvious weaknesses in the cohort's achievements, given the nature of the one-year Masters programme and the rapid learning journey undertaken.

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. 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.

Where in 2015-16 the course team were mostly new to the MA Advertising and Design programme, in 2016-17 the team were able to embed a richer span of analytical techniques. This prepared students with a series of skill sets that would enable them to enter employment as media, consumer and brand planners in addition to their marketing and creative design skills. With a larger cohort size this year students tended to focus on the strand of the industry they wished to be prepared for, and focussed their skills development accordingly through their choice of practical/theoretical route and through the roles they chose within teams.

Areas of good practice this year included:

- Better presentation techniques – and the use of digital presentation formats;
- academic skills and research organisation in the early stages of project development.
- a wider potential range of graduate destinations, given the variety of skills developed during the course.
- A wider frame of reference for advertising practice (although the connection with Advertising Design needs to be made more apparent in the most diverse approaches taken to advertising briefs).

This year during the later stages of the course, students appeared to have been afforded greater freedom in their choice of personal project. The widening of remit enabled students to explore the newer territories of advertising that, in 2017, included branded television programming, branded spaces, national identity and environmental design. Students seemed to grasp the underpinning connection with advertising – though this will need to be carefully negotiated as the course continues to grow and internationalise. As noted earlier, the jump from advertising g to design phase needs greater resolution, so a change of Programme Leader in the coming year will enable more focus on the transition between research to creative concepts and ideation. This will support students in turning strong research into strong advertising outputs.

One aspect of contemporary advertising practice that is currently missing - but is planned for - is digital advertising: social media and Augmented Reality in particular. Skills in both are needed to bring the students up to speed so that they are able to connect digital media with more traditional offline advertising formats.

7. 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.

As noted last year, the acting Course Leader developed the research phase of design briefs to give greater depth of understanding to brand (and project) analysis. Object analysis, sociological and other socio-psychological techniques were introduced to help students better understand the dichotomy of brand-making. As with dissertation work, students were able to benefit from the expertise of their tutor's own research and current subject knowledge. The move to fewer campaigns, developed in greater depth, supported students in understanding how to create more rounded and layered media campaigns.

The depth of research on the programme is to be commended, notably within the research incorporated into the Visual Communication and Persuasion modules. The modules were updated for 2016/17 cohort, and outputs now reflect a deeper engagement with deeper understandings of psycho-social research methodologies. As this was the first run of the revised modules, students were still grappling with ways to translate these skills within their own creative concepts. This was most evident in self-initiated work later on the course. The pivotal transition between the 'science' of data and research methods to the art of persuasion ('call to action' and project output plan) may need further work.

The Examination Process

8. 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 to me in advance of my External Examiner visits was ample preparation for the various stages of the Examination process. I was given access to course regulations, module descriptions and had a briefing on the adjustments made for this year's cohort. During the second pre-examination board visit I was able to review final course work.

I was able to attend the self-initiated major project presentations which were part of the Creative Direction module. I was also provided with access to all 10 dissertations, which is the alternative elective to the Creative Direction pathway. Before the examination board I was sent a selection (four) that represented the range of levels of achievement from the graduating cohort.

The material provided was sufficient to base evaluations on the performance levels, on the examination process itself and for me to act effectively as an External Examiner.

9. 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?

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

I was provided with updated course briefs and had meetings with key course staff to identify adjustments to course objectives and programme content.

During my interim visit meeting with students I was able to hear how students learning experiences in Semester one course work had impacted in their work on self-directed projects.

The policies and procedures flagged in support of my role were appropriate to manage the span of activities required for a rounded examination. I have found the administration team, professional services and academic staff fully supportive in preparation and during the examination process.

10. Was sufficient assessed/examination work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?

Yes.

I was given access to all course work during the interim and final visits prior to the October final examination board. I was able to appraise the levels of achievement across the full spectrum of course work and I was able to sample work at different levels of achievement.

I therefore have confidence in my evaluation.

11. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners?

Yes.

Administrative arrangements were very well organised, thorough and supported the examination process. I received guidelines, the scripts and assessment sheets for students that opted to complete the dissertation route.

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

Yes.

For Examiners involved in Mentoring Arrangements

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.

Other Comments

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

Comments that address suggested developments on the course are identified within section 6 of this report.

MA Advertising and Design

Overview

Semester 1 (Autumn) DESN5210M Visual Communication DESN5220M Persuasion

Semester 2 (Winter) DESN5230M Integrated Communication

Semester 3 (Spring/Summer) DESN5225M Dissertation DESN5245M Creative Dir. Project

Overall 2016-17

38 students went to exam board

- 38 students: 10 took dissertation route, 28 took Creative Direction route.
- Creative direction: 1 distinction, 7 merits, 6 passes (before the creative log, individual report and creative portfolio).
- Distinction 8
- Pass with Merit 25
- Pass 4
- Delayed result 1
- = 38n students went to Exam board (Oct 17)

Overall 2015-16

- 25 students: 3 took dissertation route, 22 took Creative direction route.
- Creative Direction route (DESN5240M), 4 Distinctions, 12 Pass with Merit
- The mean average for the cohort was 60%.
- 3 took dissertation route, 2 Pass with Merit

Overall 2014-15 25 students

- 70-90% Distinction 1 (3 in 2014; 0 in 2013)
- 60-69 – Pass with Merit 2 (11 in 2014; 13 in 2013)
- 50-59% - Pass 22 (1 in 2013)

Overall 2013-14 25 students

- Distinction 1
- Pass with Merit 3
- Pass 4
- Fail 1

Overall 2012-13 15 students

- Distinction 0
- Pass with Merit 12
- Pass 3

Achievements list

- Design and Art Direction (D&AD) and the Royal Society of Arts competition (finalist and runners up spots)