

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA

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

Points of innovation and/or good practice

Please highlight areas of innovation or good practice within the programmes or processes you have been involved with in this box.
Another cohort demonstrating high teaching standards and academic rigour.

A good range of pieces of work

International students – international themes picked up – able to apply their learning and thinking to their own home context – beware the application of western museology and ideas borne from a western thinking to museum cultures with different histories – enable them to ask questions within their own cultural context.

Range of writing style evident through a range of assignments – would question the rigour and therefore benefit of the reflexive essay within the wider panoply of written work.

Students are able to explore their own ideas and from the small sample available it is possible to see progression of those ideas into dissertation (it would be good to track the progress of one or two candidates to see how this progression plays out during the course of study). The course is well thought out, pitched at a high academic level and has a rigorous pace of academic study, site visits and self –directed study.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.

Support for English as a second language is clearly improving year on year

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

Nothing particularly urgent, but would encourage thought around the students ability to explore museum cultural context beyond the traditional western model. Sometimes in the written work you could see the student struggling to interpret their target of study (Oman, China...) within the western museological philosophies and experience framework

Also consider the stringency on the marking scheme with regard to written English – some markers are strict on the use of good written English, others are more forgiving if the ideas are good – it would be good to ensure some consistency in the approach to this.

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 a 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
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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

Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.

This MA course is one of the top-flight museum studies courses in the UK, for good reason. The standards of teaching are high, the students are challenged to apply advanced critical thought throughout and encouraged to progress their own ideas and explore their own contexts (particularly if they are from overseas) in a high calibre environment.

The range of modules available is impressive so that students can create a palette of study which will stimulate and challenge them and are a good mix of theory and practice. This means that the candidates emerging at the end have a sound appreciation of the sector, new practical skills and, crucially, well-developed critical skills, all of which make them ready for either further academic study or a career in the sector.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
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Please explain how this is/could be achieved (examples might include: curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research)

Very much so, the teaching staff are all acknowledged researchers and they are given the freedom to bring their own field of study and discipline to bear on the course. Giving the opportunity to students to explore Anglo-Saxon culture or a German contemporary art show and much in between, with practitioners, researchers and experts is enriching and sets a tone for the course of the importance of original thought and exemplary research practice. Students are given the opportunity to undertake their own research through their thesis, often developing ideas formulated during the teaching modules. The rigour of the academic challenge from staff and peers is fundamental to ensuring students' work is of high quality and rooted in sound research and ideas.

Where this could be improved still further might be to consider augmenting the research expertise in areas beyond the traditional scope of Western museology. As the demographic of the student cohort moves eastward there is a great opportunity here to develop ideas and thinking as well as scholarship in museum theory and practice in societies and cultures beyond those traditionally focussed on.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
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Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
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Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:

16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs, in particular: 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.</i></p> <p>Each module is well structured, the learning outcomes are clear and expectations are set out at the start. The assessments are varied giving each student the opportunity to demonstrate a breadth and depth of skills. Some of this may be literature-based, some original research and others based on experience – reports, reflexive writing etc. Regardless of the modules selected, every student is asked to demonstrate versatility in their writing and presentation and are stretched to critically analyse information and bring their own experience to bear.</p> <p>Marking is undertaken by two markers and then moderated. This is effective and ensures fairness. There are some differences in how individual module leaders document their marking and rationale, so a look at how this might be rationalised a bit would be beneficial – but this is more an administrative point only affecting external examiner probably, so not of major significance.</p> <p>The award boundaries and the tolerances therein are clear, unambiguous and fair. I cannot comment on how this corresponds with other similar courses.</p>		
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
<p><i>Please comment on 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:</i></p> <p>This year group is a strong cohort. The overall standard of work submitted has been impressive and, where the sample allowed, it was clear that the students showed progression as their studies advanced. There were a couple of unfortunate incidents – personal circumstances and a case of plagiarism, but overall each student was given the opportunity to shine and those with the capability certainly have done so.</p> <p>There is a high proportion of students for whom English is a second language and yet the level of support they get for this and subsequent ability to express their ideas coherently is well demonstrated. Occasionally, markers were forgiving of linguistic errors, focussing on the ideas being expressed rather than exactly how. I wonder if familiarity with the students allows this leniency – if marking was anonymous then this might have an impact on marks, so worth thinking about.</p> <p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i></p>		

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?	Y
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?	Y

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

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:

The overall process for marking and assessment from an external examiner point of view has been good. Administrative support is excellent and communication with programme leaders is effective. The VLE continues to be utterly baffling to the point that it is unusable from outside. This means that the assessments had to be delivered in an enormous package of hard copy – if it were to be possible to have this electronically (Dropbox or similar) I would prefer that, but it would be good to have the option.

The Assessment board meeting was well organised and well attended. External examiners were given chance to talk informally and report more formally and the whole process was transparent with a real focus on fairness and keeping standards high.

Accommodations made for special circumstances were clearly explained where appropriate and the odd occasion where a hard line needed to be taken, this was transparent.

The process is really very good and ensures fairness, transparency and rigour and for that the School should be commended.

Other comments

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