

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

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

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	Faculty of Performance, Visual Arts and Communications School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies
<i>Subject(s):</i>	Cultural Studies
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	MA in Cultural Studies
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	MA

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards**Points of innovation and/or good practice**

I think the students are covering a fascinating range of material: the course is evidently well-designed and stimulating excellent critical theoretical inquiry. It's fair to say that the assessment methods are very consistent, with students all writing extended essays. This form of assessment evidently serves the students' learning very well and I am confident that they are being assessed against the ILOs.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

I did not see the course last year because of industrial action.

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.

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
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.

As an MA course design it is robust and quite standard in terms of the number and size of modules delivered. Within this, there is a diverse and interesting range of modules covering important areas in critical theory, and these are clearly influenced by the research interests of staff. Thorough feedback reveals how the teaching team go way beyond the basic delivery of ILOs into a rich, nuanced and reflective development of the students' critical thinking with and about the concepts delivered in the courses.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
-----	---	---

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)

The curricula are evidently at the cutting edge of thinking in the specific subfields of critical theory. The assigned essays reveal students undertaking advanced independent research and much of the material I saw was publishable with sml amount of revision. Student feedback is at an exceptional level of depth and sophistication only achievable by thinkers developing their own individual responses to the material.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
-----	--	---

Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
-----	--	---

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
-----	--	---

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>As in previous years, the design and structure of assessments is clear, entirely rational and facilitates an impressive range of work from students. Arrangements for marking are satisfactory and awards are classified appropriately. As evidenced by the feedback, and the work produced by students, the teaching learning and assessment is very good indeed.</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>I was (again) struck by the really exceptional quality of the work by your best students. In particular, the verve, energy, individual voice and intellectual excitement conveyed in their writing is palpable. It is clear that they have been inspired by a rich and fascinating curriculum and some challenging and – I can intuit – <i>singular</i> teaching. It is wonderful also to see this spirit continued in the feedback. Across each of the modules, markers engage with ideas, arguments and students’ theoretical writing styles (and individual learning) with sometimes astonishing individuality and precision. I commend this wholeheartedly.</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> <p>In part because the feedback is so individual and composed quite in excess of the terms of the criteria, I did sometimes find it difficult to understand fully why essays were given eg 90 instead of 85, or 85 instead of 80. This work was consistently superb. However, there is a significant danger of the mark range used stretching out once one gets to the 80s in a way that it does not in the 50s and 60s. While of course assessment is criteria- rather than norm-referenced, it is advisable to consider whether a 90 is as much better than a 70 as a 70 is than a 50. This possible stretch is compounded by the fact that from what I can see at Leeds the upper first region on the criteria document is spread across 20 marks, rather than 10 as are all the others except the fail. I think more clarity around the expectations for work in the 70s 80s and 90s at M level would help with this issue and help ensure that the grades awarded remain in line with the sector.</p> <p>From what I could tell, there is not a moderation process in place for essays for 30cr modules and these are graded by the first marker/teacher. At my institution, all MA essays contributing to more than 20% of the grade are (non-blind) double-marked. The practice of double marking dissertations at Leeds is commendable and I saw excellent practice therein. I think, given the fact that (a) essays are not anonymous and (b) single assessments tend at MA to count for more, it is worth giving serious consideration to some kind of moderation process for these essays if this is not in place at the moment.</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?	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?	N
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>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p> <p>I have a sense that for assessments students are developing individual research projects rather than responding to an assessment paper; that said it would be helpful to see what the students are being given as assessment tasks during the teaching year</p>		

Other comments

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