

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	Performance and Cultural Industries
Subject(s):	<i>Applied Theatre and Intervention</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA Applied Theatre and Intervention
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

This is has the potential to be a distinctive degree in a growing area. I have concerns, as below, about the amount of practical experience available to students, but other areas can be developed to give the programme more of a unique character. One of these is the 'intervention' in the title, which points to a particular emphasis in the kind of practice that students might pursue. The other is the combination of optional units offered at PCI – for some students this will mean access to ideas in cultural policy, enterprise and/or impact, that other similar courses won't have in the same way.

Enhancements made from the previous year

I had no input last year, due to the UCU boycott. But I am aware of some changes to scheduling and the teaching of practice that go some way to correcting imbalances in the first iteration of the degree.

Matters for Urgent Attention

Though the general structure, content and academic standards of the degree are appropriate for an MA, it has significant weaknesses as a preparation for practice in the field, which the course leader is aware of and actively addressing. Students will come to a course like this to develop a coherent professional approach to working with people in community settings, some of them vulnerable people and challenging settings. Opportunities to put this practice to work is vital, and somewhat lacking in the current programme in comparison to competitors. Finding space in the schedule for this may be challenging, however, and the distinctive needs of students in a discipline of this kind need to be carefully considered: they must have time to practice in the safety of the university context and to test their skills in community contexts with support and supervision.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

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

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	N/A
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	N/A
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	N/A
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	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
<p><i>Placements and contextual learning is vital, and at the moment is underrepresented in the programme. The programme leader is aware of this, and building a stronger network of local practitioners to contribute and to place students with. Administrative support for this would be of benefit. As the programme grows this work will become more demanding, but it also has potentially significant benefits for the university in its impact within its own community, and in student employability, if given appropriate resourcing.</i></p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p><i>Yes, there is course material drawn from the forefront of current practice, practice-research and conventional research. There is the potential for staff-led practice to be more fully integrated into the learning experience of the students (for them to play roles within practice-research projects led by staff for example).</i></p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p><i>Though this is not formally part of the programme, there is potential for a more practice-oriented MA to prepare students for the practice research approaches that are common in this field.</i></p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i></p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<p><i>The feedback given on the work I saw was very clear and complete, making the application of the ILO's to the work transparent. The criteria themselves are generally well-conceived and well laid out.</i></p> <p><i>One thing to pay attention to as they are revised (as I believe they will be soon): the idea of 'impact' has associations in this field, as the impact the work can be evidenced as having on/in a community or individual. Where it appears in the assessment criteria it has a different sense. This either needs glossing for students, or other language could be found for the criteria.</i></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 / N
<p><i>The standards of work I saw were appropriate to this level. There was a range of abilities and ambition in evidence, and interest in different kinds of practices appropriate to the field. The students had engaged with the literature and the practice that was available to them.</i></p> <p><i>As suggested in my comments above, the practical work I saw was less accomplished and less ambitious. More opportunities, more exposure, and more support will allow them to achieve more.</i></p>		

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:

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?	N/A
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

Recruitment may be a concern, with low numbers in the current cohort. Other courses in this area are thriving, so this shouldn't be an insurmountable problem, with more awareness of the course and more integration of it with local and regional practitioners. Standards need to be maintained – it's particularly important that students come with some prior experience of practical drama at least, preferably of leading work in community contexts, and that language competence is not undermined in pursuit of overseas students.

Other comments

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

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Responder:	
Position*:	Head of School / Programme Leader
Faculty / School of:	<i>Performance and Cultural Industries</i>
Address for communication:	Stage@leeds
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. 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

The external's view that PCI offer is enhanced by the range of optional modules points to a strength in the course. The potential for the programme to thus be quite distinctive is highlighted, though underscored by the key considerations for urgent attention discussed below.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

The examiner notes that the changes to module structure for 1718 go some way towards addressing concerns about accessing practice are valuable. The focus on even further implementing the structures for professional contexts of practice are discussed in the points below.

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:

Supporting Teaching and Learning:

Access to professional contexts – to align the need for further access to practice in supported environments. The applied projects may often need one-to-one support and will most likely include off-site visits.

1. In response to the EEs comments on the weakness of the programme being time in the schedule for practice, have proposed a significant change to the applied theatre practices module, which I believe will strengthen the provision in relation to competitors, and address the needs of the particular cohort.
2. Namely: AT Practices is training only – ie: non-assessed contact with guest artists and practitioners as well as members of the team.
3. Another assessed component is run more as a placement module, in which students plan, run and evaluate a project in an existing setting.
4. This obviously has implications for staff workloads.

These points are being discussed as amendments to the course structure at present and hopefully will be able to go forward at STSEC for ratification.

Recruitment:

Need for the programme to continue to ensure robust standards when recruiting, and perhaps a greater sense of the unique offer (within PCI – the focus on cultural industries and intervention) of the MA will enable a wider market for the programme.

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:

n/a

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:

Standards & Curriculum Development:

Developing the satisfaction, integration of practical work and guest practitioners on the Applied Theatre Practices module PECE 5601: worth reflecting on best practices and how to encourage this level of engagement across the programme.

I would also like to see the MA cohort contribute to and have access to attending, professional development opportunities that I have curated as ATI PL.

1. Professional perspectives: an extra-curricular series of talks by industry professionals
2. Enrichment activities: including at least 3-4 visiting artists/ workshops in addition to contact taught sessions
3. Reading groups: additional sessions to maintain critical reading in semester 2.

Maintaining standards & English proficiency

As there are only 3 FT students on the MA this year, all of whom are international students, there are potential issues around quality and standards. To mitigate against this we have devised a programme of additional support for ESL students entering PGT with the Leeds Language centre so as to ensure that students have access to additional support for writing beyond their pre-sessional courses.

Student involvement in Staff-led practice research components

In the 17/18 cohort, there are a greater proportion of students engaged in practical projects alongside staff. This does suggest that these projects are appropriately acknowledged as part of workloading if they form part of the student experience of PGT.

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:

In its first 2 years the programme has had two very different semester structures, and the PL is seeking to change the weighting of how professional practice is perceived across the programme.

The proposed change to the programme (in the first text block above) will change the programmatic structures and thus assessment weightings.

The minor amendment of the Applied theatre Practices PECE 5601 module that is in place for 2017/18 allows for a much more professionally aligned practice. This model, already rolling out in 17/18 seeks to ensure professional practical work is maintained throughout both semester 1 and 2 in a long and thin module design.

Individual Project PECE 5104 assessments: in 2017/18 students have been encouraged to produce outcomes that are indicative of professional status (portfolios/ work packs/ websites/ or other outward facing specific outcomes).

Assessment criteria: Reduce discussion of 'impact'

The PL is working with exams lead on revising the assessment criteria for PGT.

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:

Other comments

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

Curriculum development:

Developing practice research as an area

In the current 17/18 cohort, a far greater attention to practice research has been identified.

Programme administration:

Developing clearer guidelines related to partner organisations, internships and employability (in modules and across the programme)

This is an important opportunity for the MA ATI to inform the good practice in the school, and the PL is working on ensuring that there are codes of conduct, memoranda of agreement and the development of robust reporting in modules that are outward facing. This is an opportunity to build on successes elsewhere in the UG programme, for example; but more can be done to ensure that there are clear guidelines about expectations and deliverables that include details related to ethics, professionalism in the field, and best practice.