

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

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

Faculty / School of:

Performance & Cultural Industries

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MA in Writing for Performance and Publication

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

Modules examined:

Semester 1

- (1) Story Workshop
- (2) Writing for Theatre & Radio
- (3) Research Perspectives

Semester 2

- (4) Individual Project
- (5) Writing for Film & Television
- (6) Research Project

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner

Title and Name of Examiner:

Institution:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Completed report

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

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Quality Assurance**
 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: It is pleasing to see that the staffing issues raised last year have been addressed. See more general comments below.

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?

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

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 programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are commensurate with the level of the award, and standards are appropriate.

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.*

The aims and ILOs do meet national subject area comparisons

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.*

The assessment methods and degree classification of this programme are in line with expectations. Student performance indicates that teaching learning and assessment on this programme are very good.

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.*

From the work submitted, students did appear to have been given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs. This cohort was generally of a moderately high standard. Where weaknesses were exhibited it had been correctly identified by the teaching team. The achievements of the best students were suitably recognised.

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. Please comment on 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.

The changes to the Research Perspectives module discussed last year appear to have enhanced the overall programme.

7. Please comment on 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.*

Once again, the research element of these MA modules was generally impressive. Pleasingly this year's cohort seemed less overawed by theory and consequently more relaxed in their creative components.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

N/A

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. 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

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. 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.

It was sufficient.

11. 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, marking criteria?

The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.

Yes.

12. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

Papers were provided and the questions were appropriate.

13. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes.

14. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

Yes. It appears the staff give careful advice.

15. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

The arrangements were excellent. The Board which was exemplary -- well-run, confident and concerned at all times to be fair and balanced. Most impressive.

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

Yes.

Other comments

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

This is my third year as external examiner. This MA programme continues to impress me, all the more so this year given the expansion in student numbers. I congratulate the teaching team on their commitment to the pursuit of creative excellence and to individual student development. It is pleasing to see that staff resources have been increased, with due consideration to gender balance, in line with my recommendations last year. I note, however, that staffing additions have been sessional and whilst this has been admirably successful in the short term, it does not fully address the longer-term need for enhanced core staffing. Creative MAs are, by their very nature, mentorship programmes – students writing creatively need constant feedback and guidance -- and this task falls inevitably on the core staff. I recognise that this development may take time, however I would recommend that it be held in mind in any future reorganisations. One small aspect of this question can be addressed more quickly, however. With the introduction of new part-time staff, feedback comments seemed to me rather variable in style and approach. This did not have a bearing on the marks and grading, but was rather a matter of register. Perhaps a meeting to agree some parameters would be appropriate? Finally, the area of the programme which it seems to me would benefit considerably from further resources is prose fiction. This is, after all, part of the title of the degree and its stated offering, but at present it is somewhat overshadowed by this successful MA's areas of strength in performance writing and research.

FACULTY OF PERFORMANCE, VISUAL ARTS and COMMUNICATIONS
EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT: SCHOOL RESPONSE

Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report

QAT Received 23/04/2018

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Programme Leader
<i>Performance and Cultural Industries</i>

**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

Please note that the External Examiner's Report was written in old format, and the boxes in this response do not conform.

Innovation and Good Practice:

As with last year, we're pleased the quality of the research components of the programme has been recognised.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

We are pleased you feel new Research Perspectives (WPP) module (PECI 5405M) has enhanced the programme. Being discipline-specific, it proved to be, as hoped, a much more focused introduction to theoretical approaches as relevant to WPP students. This was borne out in the SEQs and end-of-year programme survey, where criticism of the module was notable for its absence in stark contrast with previous sessions. If it's true that this modification has enhanced the degree as a whole, we would like to think that such an

outcome was the result of the greater concentration on methods and methodologies applicable to creative writing e.g. narratology, textual analysis and writing practice-led research.

We believe like you that the changes to Research Perspectives have allowed students to theorise their creative work in ways that don't inhibit their imagination. This has removed much of the strain in the creative components previously observed. We will continue to monitor and finesse the module in the light of experience.

As you correctly observe, the expansion of the teaching team through the employment of seven Teaching Assistants brought much-needed diversity in age, race and in particular gender. Five of the seven Teaching Assistants employed in 2016-17 were women, and two of them have been retained for 2017-18 (in proportion to need). Our hope and intention would be to maintain gender balance where possible in future programme delivery.

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:

n/a

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:

This box does not correspond to the Examiner's Report.

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:

This box does not correspond to the Examiner's Report

On questions of standards, the Examiner responded positively in all aspects.

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:

This box does not correspond to the Examiner's Report

Assessment and feedback:

We recognise that there was some variability in feedback this year, caused by the temporary influx of Teaching Assistants and the lack of time available to core staff to monitor marking quite as assiduously as they would have liked. The problem is not likely to arise in 2017-18, as all marking on the MA WPP will be undertaken 'in house'. But if a similar situation occurs in future, we will certainly seek to coordinate marking and feedback more tightly. Indeed, as a School we are this year instigating a moderation meeting for Research Project (PECI 5102M) to harmonise approaches to marking and assessment across all of our MAs.

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:

This box does not correspond to the Examiner's Report

There were no issues with the Progression and Awards Process.

Other comments

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

As you've noted, there was a substantial rise in programme recruitment in 2016-17, with 26 new entrants and, with second year part-timers, a total cohort of 32 at the beginning of the session. This represented an increase of more than 100% on the previous year – by far, a course record – and necessitated teaching in two groups across several modules.

Numerous challenges were posed by this, not least to staffing. As mentioned in last year's School Response, the delivery issue was solved by employing seven Teaching Assistants on temporary contracts. It was a solution not without risks, but generally speaking we were able to maintain standards and consistency, and it's gratifying that our efforts continue to impress. As a footnote, we should mention that numbers have fallen back in 2017-18, with 16 new recruits and 22 students in all, although this is still high for the degree by historic standards and has allowed us to employ some of the Teaching Assistants again.

We accept your point that sessional staffing additions are not a long-term answer to the aspirations for a larger programme team. Core staffing is naturally dependent on resources. If, as hoped, recruitment to the MA remains at an increased level on a sustained basis, the School may be in a position to look at a larger programme team in the future. In addition, embryonic research by the School of PCI is underway, funded by the Faculty, to explore the possibility of expanding Creative Writing provision across the University. This may in time

lead to opportunities for enhanced staffing, but these developments are still at a very early stage.

The point about Prose Writing is also fair, and an ongoing matter of academic concern. The programme leader is currently in discussion with the Director of Student Education about the possibility of introducing an optional Prose Writing module, and a proposal will be brought to the School Teaching and Student Education Committee soon. Again, there are resource considerations. But any possible expansion in Creative Writing (see above) is likely to require a Prose Writing component, making such a development more of a priority.