

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

QA Team received 20/10/2017

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:	
Faculty / School of:	School of Philosophy, Religion & History of Science (PRHS)
Subject(s):	<i>Philosophy</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA Philosophy
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

The quality of the written feedback provided is excellent. Staff are to be congratulated for this.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.
The process used to resolve disparity in the marks awarded by first and second markers is now well documented. The respective roles of first and second markers' comments appears to have been clarified, and, unlike last year, none of the comments are wholly negative in tone.

Matters for Urgent Attention

N/A

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?	N
3.	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	Y

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	Y
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y
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

On commencement of my term as external examiner, the standard of feedback provided on students' written work was very variable. Some of it was excellent, but some poor – both insufficiently detailed and predominantly negative in tone. It is now much more consistent in quality and much more encouraging in tone. Moreover, at the beginning of my term, it was unclear how disparities in the marks awarded by first and second internal markers (often large – sometimes over 20 marks/100) were resolved. There is now a space on the marksheet for recording this and this section of the marksheet is (usually!) completed.

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>The programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes are of high quality and commensurate with those of comparable programmes at other UK institutions .</i></p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p><i>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)</i></p> <p>The curriculum design is clearly informed by staff research interests, and this is clearly beneficial to students' understanding and research.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p> <p>The programme provides appropriate preparation for those students intending to go on to a PhD.</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> <p>n/a</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> <p>n/a</p>		

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>These are all generally good and appropriate, with the possible exception of PHIL5915M and PHIL5920M (see comments under 19 below).</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>		

The academic standards demonstrated by students are, in my experience, similar to those of students on comparable courses at other UK institutions. As with many taught postgraduate programmes in Philosophy, they demonstrate a wide range of abilities.

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

Numbers of students on the independent study modules PHIL5915M and PHIL5920M are low and their results (as, in memory, in previous years) are not especially good. Feedback on the work for these modules (this year and in previous years) often reflects the fact that students chose topics that are too broad or too ambitious. I worry that, in general, students are not provided with sufficient guidance to enable them to perform well on these modules. I think it might ultimately be in students' best interests for these modules to be scrapped. What is the pedagogical rationale for their inclusion on the MA? If they are necessary, what measures can be adopted to ensure that students select more appropriate topics for their assessment tasks and are provided with adequate guidance in their completion of these tasks?

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?	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?	n/a
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	N – see additional comments under 19 above
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?	N
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	n/a
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	n/a

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

Other comments

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

I have never been provided with the School's response to my external examiner's reports. It would have been helpful if these had been provided.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:	
Title and Name of Responder:	
Position*:	Head of School
Faculty / School of:	<i>PRHS/Arts, Humanities and Cultures</i>
Address for communication:	School of Philosophy, Religion & History of Science University of Leeds Leeds LS2 9JT
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 gat@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

We were pleased to receive praise for the quality of written feedback.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

There is, as notes, a space on the feedback sheet returned to the office where markers indicate how any initial disagreements over the mark have been resolved. Neither this particular part of the form, nor the initial internal marks, are returned to the student.

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:

We will ensure that external examiners are given access to previous externals' reports and responses.

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:

No comment required.

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:

notes an issue concerning the Independent Study modules, PHIL5915M and PHIL5920M and asks about the academic rationale for them. The specification for these modules is somewhat more flexible than that for the dissertation modules, in that students may opt to produce a literature review or a PhD proposal instead of an extended essay, though they may produce an essay if they wish. The Independent Study modules thus provide students with a greater degree of choice of assessments than would otherwise be available. They also allow a student to take a predominantly research-based pathway through the programme. The supervision arrangements are the same as that for the Dissertation modules: students are assigned a supervisor who can advise them on the choice of topic and provide feedback on their progress. There is thus no structural reason why students would be likely to perform less well on these modules than in the Dissertation modules. It is therefore likely to be a purely accidental fact that student performance on these modules has been somewhat under par. Nevertheless, we note 's comment on the choice of over-general topics, and will be especially vigilant in ensuring that students are advised appropriately on their choice of topic.

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:

On response to question 30, see previous box.

Other comments

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

We note with concern that had not (at the time of writing this report) been provided with the School's response to previous reports. This was subsequently rectified, and we are now clear that the responsibility for returning the response to reports lies with the relevant school, not with QAT.