

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:	Language Centre
Subject(s):	<i>Pre-sessional EAP</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Language for Law ELU3010 Language for Communication and Society ELU3008
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	N/A

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.

The strong relationship the Language Centre has established with the academic departments ensures that both the Law and Language and Communication Pre-sessional programmes demand genuine academic engagement and very much reflect the values and practices of the disciplines and therefore offer strong preparation for students. The model of requiring all departments to provide appropriate content 'blocks' ensures that students are challenged throughout the course and their summative work demonstrated extensive use of appropriate and relevant discipline-specific language.

The level of engagement with the wider university embedded into the Pre-sessional programmes is innovative and without question 'best practice' in the field of EAP and a credit to the Language Centre and the wider University. It is an approach many Pre-sessional programmes (including that in my own institution) would wish to emulate.

There are other elements of the programmes that also deserve praise: teacher induction on both programmes is thorough and of sufficient length (4 days). There is also meaningful time for on-going materials and programme development which is so essential with this type of course. This will need to remain in place if the programmes are to continue to evolve and develop.

Marking across the programmes is detailed, consistent and in line with the assessment criteria.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

This is my first year as external examiner

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

N/A

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiners Handbook?	Y / N
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School 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 a 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 / N
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y / N
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y / N
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y / N
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y / N

The subject course leaders have almost total autonomy over the development of their Pre-sessional courses with limited oversight from the Language Centre management. This approach seems designed to ensure that each Pre-sessional can be developed so that it best serves the interests of the academic departments and their students. To a certain extent this is successful. The current Law and Language and Communication courses are generally well-conceived and this comment is certainly not a criticism of the course leaders. However, this total autonomy means developments are entirely guided by the course leaders and their interpretation of the materials provided by the academic departments, and their knowledge and understanding of EAP. This places considerable pressure on them and could ultimately lead to programmes of very different quality across the disciplines.

I would suggest that the Language Centre consider implementing some kind of oversight that at least ensures that key aspects of academic language and literacy are addressed to within the Pre-sessional programmes. For example, the course leaders should be able to discuss/ justify the approach their course takes to, for example: argumentation, paraphrasing and referencing, reading and note-taking, genre, library skills, discipline-specific vocabulary etc. This would be to ensure that these key things are being taught or, if not, a clear justification offered for why this is the case.

A related issue is the extent to which the content in the courses is slightly overwhelming the EAP. In the Law programme for example, students and teachers are spending so much time grappling with the (excellent) input provided by the department that input on argumentation, for example, becomes rather crowded out. Both the Law and Social Sciences programmes should perhaps consider taking out one of the content blocks to ensure there is sufficient time to address the language and academic literacy issues that arise from introducing conceptually dense ideas.

<p>A minor point: when the course is short, intense and focused on texts that need to be analysed and deconstructed, I did wonder if providing printed course materials (rather than online) would save teachers, students and course leaders significant amounts of time and inconvenience.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y / N
<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>This programme is an excellent example of putting into practice ideas much discussed and debated in EAP literature. The concept that academic language and literacy practices differ across the disciplines is widely established but addressing this meaningfully in Pre-sessional EAP programmes can be challenging due to lack of access to academics and academic input from the discipline. The model established on the Leeds Pre-sessional delivers access and content and therefore enables rigorous, focused EAP to be delivered.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	Y / N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	Y / 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)?	Y / 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 / N
<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>The programme is 'low stakes' in that the students have automatic progression to the department. The focus of the assessment, therefore, is on 'feedforward' and creating tasks that push students to develop the academic language and literacy skills most valuable to their future academic studies. Both programmes make the most of this and ask their students to engage with complex content and produce challenging, rigorous and relevant writing. Both programmes also require an academic presentation on a related topic. Work at the top of the mark scale compares well with students working in their first language, and even work further down the mark scale showed effective engagement with academic language and concepts.</p> <p>On the Law Pre-sessional I do wonder if the summative writing task genre could be even more closely related to the type of writing students might do in their department, as the current assignment seems to have been designed either specifically for the Pre-sessional or to mirror a formative task in the department. Students may be missing an opportunity to develop the argumentation skills so key in Law writing.</p>		

On the Language and Communication programme there is clearly a highly effective drafting and reviewing process in place as the final essays very much represented the students' own work and the progress they had made was clearly evident.

On both courses I note that the marking criteria look very much like IELTS criteria and are segmented rather than holistic (separate marks for language, structure, content etc.). This very occasionally resulted in marks that were difficult to justify. The criteria are also extensive and detailed and not particularly accessible or clear to students. Given the purpose of the programme and the types of tasks undertaken by students, I would suggest shorter, sharper and more holistic marking criteria to benefit all.

18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y / N
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y / N

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:

Overall the student work is very strong. Students engage effectively with the academic content and produce meaningful work of good quality. Particularly strengths included understanding of the reading to writing process and effective use of discipline-specific referencing conventions. These programmes are beneficial to Leeds University students and to their academic departments.

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 Examiners role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Y / N
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y / N
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y / N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y / N
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y / N
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y / N
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y / N
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y / N
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y / N
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N

33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y / N
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p> <p>A minor point: I noticed that the marks were not listed according to anonymous code during the exam board. This did not create particular issues but is counter to normal practice at my own institution</p>		

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*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Deputy Director of Student Education

Faculty of Arts, The Language Centre

*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

Thank you for all your positive comments on a number of areas, particularly on tutor induction and on course development. Time for course review and standardisation has been provided for strand leaders to continue evolving their programmes with the aim of sharing best practice for 2018.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

N/A

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:

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:

Thank you for raising some helpful questions regarding the autonomous nature of programme development on this suite of CBPS programmes so far (point 12.). Now in their third year running a key aim is for strand leaders to collaborate closely in order to facilitate standardisation and to share best practice. Remit for review and development has been added to the leadership allowance over terms 2 and 3 for strand leaders to participate in peer reviews across programmes. Your comments made here will be helpful in supporting this process and are therefore much appreciated. You also comment on the balance of content and language on both programmes. In response to this and other routes of feedback, both modules have reduced their content from 3 to 2 units.

The question of whether to print course materials is under discussion and strand leaders have had the opportunity to send a rationale for further consideration. However, since printing is not in line with university policy, it is likely that becoming as paperless as possible will be 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:

Thank you for your careful consideration of the summative writing task for ELU3010 and of the criteria (point 17).

Regarding the first point, the rationale for including the case brief is that students are assessed on this in department and even though the weighting is small, case briefs are considered an important academic skill which students will benefit from integrating into their learning and recording strategies. However, we fully agree that space for argumentation to develop within the essay must be accommodated. Therefore, the case brief will be marked as a separate submission and not included in final assessment, as a result it is hoped the word count for the final essay will be sufficiently long enough to allow students to better demonstrate a position.

The same criteria for assessment across all modules in 2017 were considered and revised under peer review from feedback advice in 2016 and as a result some descriptors were merged or removed in order to reduce them. On balance when considering other feedback, it has been agreed that the criteria remain largely the same for 2018. While I agree that a more holistic set of descriptors would have benefits for experienced EAP tutors, the concern is that less experienced EAP tutors, who we welcome and support in our busy summer period, may find scoring in some areas of assessment harder to justify. We acknowledge that the language descriptors and mapped scores are related to IELTS; this is due to it remaining a main entry requirement and a benchmark which can be related to better. That said an intention *is* that the criteria can also be used as a student facing document so this will need to be considered carefully for 2018.

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:

N/A

Other comments

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

N/A