

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:	Faculty of Arts, School of Languages, Cultures and Societies
Subject(s):	Classics
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Latin and Roman History
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA in Classical Civilization, BA in Ancient History and History, BA in Ancient History and English

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.

This has been my first year as external at Leeds, and I have been devoting much of my time to getting familiar with the overall framework of the programmes and with the general outlook of the teaching portfolio and assessment patterns. I spent a whole day in Leeds before the Exam Board, and was also able to spend some time looking at dissertation work in the hours preceding the Board. Back in the Fall I was also involved with the PG Board, and had the chance to read some MA coursework in preparation for the November meeting, which I also attended.

Much of what I have seen has genuinely impressed me: the close link between the teaching offer and the research interests of the colleagues who contribute to the programme; the level of detail with which most colleagues provide their feedback on coursework and exam scripts, which is in several cases nothing short of outstanding; the close match between marks and published assessment criteria; and the structure of the second year module on dissertation writing, which puts students in very good stead for the work on the dissertation that awaits them in the following year.

The few queries I had as I was going through the material (which had been very helpfully laid out ahead of my arrival) were effectively answered, whether in conversation or at the Exam board. I have a few specific comments and suggestions, which I will make in the appropriate sections below.

I should like to record my appreciation for the quality of the BA teaching currently offered at Leeds, and of the assessment practices, which are closely in line with those in use at my own University and at other HE institutions with which I am familiar.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

As I have pointed out above, this was my first year as external examiner at Leeds.

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

I have no areas of special concern and no urgent recommendations to make.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1	Were you provided with an External Examiners Handbook?	Y
2	Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?	N
3	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	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

n/a

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.

The programme offers a good range of modules, which are mostly aligned with the research interests and expertise of the teaching staff, and are led by colleagues who stand out as thoroughly competent specialists and highly committed teachers. I did not have the chance to speak to students (something that I was encouraged to do in my previous appointment as external examiner) and I have no way of telling whether there is a general feeling that a suitable range of options is on offer. It might be helpful for me to see in my future visits an overview of the structure of the degree programmes currently on offer, so that I can get a clearer sense of the interplay and balance between compulsory and optional modules.

There is a valuable suite of survey courses in the first year, which gives students valuable grounding and prepares them effectively for more closely focused work at Stage 2 and 3. I was especially impressed with the 2nd year module that prepares students for dissertation work, and with the suite of study skills-related activities it offers them. This background has made a discernible impact on the dissertation work that I had a chance to see, which was mostly very solid, although there were only relatively few outstanding pieces.

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 match between the research interests of colleagues at Leeds and the teaching portfolio is very clear indeed. One might even argue that, beyond the first year survey modules, there is relatively little on offer that does not fall within the research interests of the teaching staff. This is also reflected in the choice of the dissertation topics. The constraints presented by the small size of the unit, however, play a crucial role in this connection, and I do not see an easy way of addressing this issue without substantial institutional investment.

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

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

This question does not apply to the UG provision at Leeds. I should like to stress, however, that the current provision places the strongest students in the cohort in a very strong position to pursue MA work.

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

Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:

n/a

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:

n/a

Assessment and Feedback

17	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
----	---	---

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.

Generally speaking, it is apparent that careful consideration has been given to the choice of appropriate assessment methods. The thoroughness of the marking is on the whole outstanding. Students receive mostly detailed, unfailingly constructive feedback, not just on essay work, but on exam scripts as well; this also applies to third year work. The coversheet enables markers to give feedback on each aspect of the marking criteria, and clearly does students an excellent service. For some modules, though, one is presented with what might be (sympathetically) labelled 'feedback overdrive': students are given up to three different sets of comments on the same piece, and I was left wondering whether that is ultimately helpful (not to speak of the risk of giving slightly discrepant comments on individual pieces).

The use of the adjective 'satisfactory' could be more consistent: according to the marking criteria, it should be applied to 2:2 work, but I have seen it being used to work in other ranges as well.

There is scope for streamlining the moderation process: in some modules it is 'granular', with detailed comments being provided on every item of the sample; in others it has a 'big picture' approach, with rather brief remarks on the overall quality of the marking. In a few instances no response is given by the first marker, although as a rule it is provided.

There is a heartening willingness on colleagues' part to recognize and reward outstanding work by going in the 80s range.

I note in passing that at my own institution there is no notice attached to the work submitted by students with dyslexia or other special needs, whereas that is the case at Leeds: extenuating circumstances of any kind are confidentially dealt with by a designated committee ahead of the Exam Board and fed into a confidential recommendation that makes no reference to the specifics of their circumstances. I appreciate that this policy

was probably not set at School level, but I think it is worth drawing attention to sharply diverging practices at different, but in principle closely comparable institutions.

I have noticed with interest the reference to the importance of legibility for exam scripts. Reminding students of this issue is a sensible course of action, but there is the risk of causing some confusion on this count, as legibility is not mentioned in the marking criteria.

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

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 have read some very strong work, especially at dissertation level, and was on the whole impressed with the quality of the writing, not just in the first class range. The overall marking profile is comparable to that of my own institution, with a somewhat higher percentage of Firsts, and a comparably smaller share of 2:2 work.

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
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?	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?	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?	N
34	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	N
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:

I attended the Classics Exam Board on 15 June 2017, but did not attend the School-wide meeting at which decisions were made on degree classifications and progressions.

Other comments

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

I have specific comments on the marking of individual modules, which I am going to share with colleagues through the Chair of the Exam Board.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

<i>Title and Name of Responder:</i>	
<i>Position*:</i>	LCS Assessment Lead and Director of Classics
<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	Faculty of Arts and Humanities, School of Languages Cultures and Societies
<i>Address for communication:</i>	University of Leeds Leeds LS2 9JT
<i>Email:</i>	
<i>Telephone:</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 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 practiceLCS collective response:

Programmes within the School are regarded very positively overall and are seen by our external examiners as being of high quality, with excellent teaching and student performance.

It is extremely pleasing to receive positive feedback in the area of innovation, not least because of the ongoing investment that colleagues make in this respect. The clear presence of research-led teaching is balanced with the ongoing diversity of modules we are able to offer our students. The development of the Final Year Project, commended as an enhancement, is reflected in the research methodology training offered across our subject areas. In addition, we have been commended for the rigorous approach to assessment, with clear communication to students and excellent administrative organization. The use of different approaches to assessment to respond to the range of skills we want our students to develop is also noted with thanks.

We are grateful to our external examiners for identifying instances of innovative assessment, accompanied by clear feedback, and in particular it is pleasing to see where this has been noted as a focus of improvement for subject areas. Further good practice has been identified in our enhanced use of digital resources and of the VLE, including the introduction of online marking in some areas, ongoing discussions about Health and Safety notwithstanding.

Other areas of good practice identified included the presentation of awards to recognize outstanding academic achievements, as well as the development of key skills that link directly to employability. Praise is consistently seen in relation to high standards of teaching throughout the School, in the existence of co-taught L2 and L3 cohorts in some subject areas – a practice under discussion for wider School implementation in order to extend module choice – and in the rigour of processes overall.

Subject area individual response:

It is pleasing to see such highly positive comments in this section, as in this report overall. The offer of many L2-3 optional modules (normally at least one per permanent lecturer in each year) with a strong element of research-led teaching is indeed something we have worked hard to maintain, while striking the necessary balance with the variety of our offer. It is particularly gratifying to see (again) positive external feedback on the quality of our feedback and assessment practices, which have been a priority in recent years, in an effort to respond to lower marks on that part of the NSS compared with most of our scores.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

LCS collective response:

Pleasingly, in response to the question about enhancements made since last year there was very reassuring evidence of subject areas having responded to examiners' previous comments. Moreover, there were many instances where there were no necessary enhancements because nothing had been deemed necessary to mention in the previous year.

Subject area individual response:

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:

LCS collective response:

Only five of the School's 30 external examiners for UG programmes raised matters for urgent attention. Two of these concerns the implementation of the University policy that all students starting their degree in 2017-18 must undertake a 40-credit Final Year Project (a Final Year Project became compulsory for all students starting their degree in 2014-15). One external examiner was concerned that this would impact upon the provision of a wide range of Level 3 optional modules, restrict the development of employability skills, and that some students would not be suited to such a mode of working. Other external examiners also voiced similar concerns in relation to module choice, though not as a matter for urgent attention.

In 2016-17, LCS developed a suite of School-wide 40-credit and 20-credit FYP modules, intended to replace the separate subject-level dissertation modules in most subject areas. They include traditional dissertation and extended essay variants, both 20- and 40-credit translation projects and a 40-credit digital documentary project. These modules were piloted in German, Russian and Slavonic Studies, Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, and East Asian Studies. In 2017-18 they have been rolled out across all subject areas in the School. Students doing a degree in the relevant language may choose to write their FYP in French, German, Russian, Spanish or Portuguese.

Enrolment figures indicate that approximately 2/3 of students have opted for a 40-credit FYP, suggesting that students welcome the opportunity to undertake a weighty independent project. The variety of FYP formats is intended to address the fact that not all students are suited to a traditional dissertation format. For students taking the traditional dissertation variants, the peer group meetings, organised by the students themselves, and the presentation of their research at the FYP Conference, develop employability skills; the option to write in the target language in some subject areas enables students to showcase their language ability. The School is also exploring the possibility of co-teaching Level 2 and Level 3 variants of the same module, a system already practised successfully in some subject areas, in order to extend module choice more efficiently. Whilst we are grateful that external examiners have suggested grounds for caution, for the above reasons we believe that we are responding to University policy in a way that will benefit our students and will not restrict their options. We will continue to monitor the place of the FYP and module choice in our curriculum as part of the School-wide curriculum review and programme reform currently underway and due to be implemented in 2019-20. The School continues to discuss and work with the subject area to consider remaining concerns where there seems to be a discrepancy with wider School and institutional experience.

Another external examiner raised a concern relating to moderation of School FYP marks when marking is done within subject areas and the role of subject external examiners in recommending changes to FYP marks in isolation from the School-wide set of marks. We greatly appreciate the identification of such concerns during the FYP's pilot year and we are seeking advice from the Faculty Assessment and Standards Group. We will provide specific guidance to external examiners on the moderation of School FYP marks in May 2018.

The other matters for urgent attention were concerns about exam questions, assessment and August resit administration, relating to specific subject areas. Each of these issues is being addressed in the subject areas concerned.

Subject area individual response:

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:

LCS collective response:

We are extremely grateful to those external examiners who have reached the end of their term of appointment. We thank you for your support, feedback and collegiality during your tenure. We are also very grateful to those of you

who acted as mentors for external examiners new to the role. More than one external examiner suggested that it would be useful to arrange meetings between externals and students. This is a valuable suggestion, and we will consider how to implement this during the externals' visits in June.

Subject area individual response:

The oversight in not providing either external examiner with the previous examiners' reports and our response is regrettable, and will be rectified shortly, though it is less useful at this stage.

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:

LCS collective response

We are delighted that our external examiners have high praise for the breadth and scope of our programmes, for the degree to which they are informed by staff research, and for the comparability of standards with national benchmarks and other institutions. Programme aims and ILOs were found to be clear, appropriate and transparent. Many external examiners also commented positively on the use of blended learning and digital resources in relation to student engagement.

Subject area individual response

N/A

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:

LCS collective response

We are pleased that external examiners regard assessment in general highly in LCS, and that they deem it to reflect both a wide variety of methods and a robust internal marking procedure. There was explicit praise for our transparent marking and moderation processes. In light of the University's aims to 'assess less, better', some subject areas are integrating different skills within a single assessment. One external examiner has exhorted the School to weigh the benefits of multiple assessments for modules against the cost to staff time, and to review regularly the necessity of each assessment with a view to streamlining. There were specific discussions about the nature of assessment at the different levels, and the desirability of standardised approaches to assessment methods. Discussions of these issues, informed by the Leeds Expectations for Assessment and Feedback, will continue in the future alongside the programme reform currently being undertaken by the School.

A number of external examiners recommend that attention is given to the full use of the marking scale, especially at the upper end. We are grateful to external examiners for noting where practice could be improved in this respect and agree that to do so will maximise parity and facilitate a smooth move to the 0-100 marking scale in 2017-18. There was one expression of concern that the new marking scale could have an inflationary effect on overall averages, that the introduction of criteria for subdivision within 70-100 would be helpful, and that care should be taken to map student performance on to the new scale correctly. For 2017-18 staff and students have been provided with information sheets about the new scale, which includes a conversion chart and advice on the upper and lower extremes of the scale. The use of the 0-100 scale will be closely monitored throughout this transition year. One external examiner recommended the introduction of a categorical marking scheme. The current University recommendation is for Schools to identify where the use of such a marking scheme may be appropriate; LCS is therefore currently reviewing this in individual subject areas. Work on School-wide assessment criteria and grade descriptors is ongoing in the context of the programme reform.

In terms of feedback to students, we are gratified that the quality of our feedback is consistently commended. We continue to strive to find the right amount of feedback to be meaningful to students without creating a disproportionate workload for colleagues. In addition, one valuable piece of advice has been to vary the language used in feedback and avoid over-use of language that does not offer specific guidance.

Subject area individual response

It is heartening to receive such positive overall comments on feedback and assessment practices, as mentioned in the first response field above, as on the the high quality of much of the students' work. Rewarding this appropriately

by using the 80s range is something we have been asked to keep in mind in recent years, and this has produced the desired result.

The point about 'feedback overdrive' is well taken. We have been encouraged in recent years to show more fully how our marking ties in with the marking criteria, which we have attempted first by adding the latter to every feedback sheet (rather than only making them available in every module's VLE area), and then by highlighting or underlining the relevant words on the criteria, in addition to discursive and check-box feedback. The highlighting has only been initiated in the last one or two sessions, and not by every marker. It is worth considering as a programme team during this session whether including all three forms of feedback on every piece of work might indeed be too confusing and simply too much, and if so, which one or two are the most useful. This is something we will discuss in a programme team meeting this session.

The point about inconsistent use of 'satisfactory' is also well taken, and is something I shall remind markers and moderators to watch out for.

The examiner is correct in assuming that we have no control at subject or School level over practices to do with taking account of dyslexia, so this is something that would need to be fed back and responded to at a higher level.

On legibility, it is worth asking whether the legibility check-box should be present on a feedback sheet if it does not form any part of the assessment criteria. We can discuss removing this from exam feedback sheets for future sessions.

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:

LCS collective response:

We are very pleased that generally our exam boards and the administration associated with progression and awards are found to be transparent, fair and efficient. We are grateful to our external examiners for the vital role they play in subject exam boards, in terms of ratifying module marks and where necessary moderating them, and discussing matters of comparability of student performance at module level with national benchmarks and other UK institutions. As is known, our Classification Board is held separately from our subject exam boards that confirm module marks and is supported by two different external examiners each year. We endeavour to invite each external examiner to attend the Classification Board once during their tenure and we are always pleased to hear from examiners who would like to put themselves forward for this additional duty.

Subject area individual response:

This set of responses is positive and raises no concerns needing to be addressed.

Other comments

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

LCS collective response:

In addition to their reports on our programmes, our examiners have provided valuable feedback about their own experience, particularly in relation to access to samples and materials. Following the University-wide move to online only submission of assessed coursework, many external examiners have welcomed the availability of materials on the VLE and the ability to review these remotely in advance of the visit to Leeds. Some have commented on our hybrid system of marking work submitted electronically, with some modules being marked in hard copy and others being marked using the Turnitin Feedback Studio online. The hybrid system is to avoid a prescriptive approach that would fail to take account of health and safety concerns associated with extended work on screens and keyboards; thus, whilst we cannot standardise at the level of the School or subject area, we do as far as possible ensure a single way of marking coursework for each module. We acknowledge that the first year of this system has highlighted improvements we can make in terms of access to materials, as well as the provision of links to MP4 files to make access easier and the appropriate labelling of all online files. We continue to welcome feedback from our external examiners on these processes throughout the new academic year.

We regret the difficulties concerning access to a key for the base rooms this summer and the issue was raised with Estates, who have assured us that more keys will be available for 2017-18.

Subject area individual response:

N/A