

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:	Faculty of Arts/School of Modern Languages and Cultures
Subject(s):	<i>Linguistics and phonetics</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BA in Linguistics and Phonetics (and combined honours programmes)
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

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 Academic Quality and Standards**
Academic Quality and Standards Team
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

NA

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?

NA

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

There have not been major changes from year to year in terms of the range of modules offered, or the content within those modules. However, I would not have expected to see such changes, firstly because the course was already working extremely well at the start of my appointment; secondly because it would have required a number of new staff: existing staff already have a rather high teaching load relative to similar institutions, and I understand that the funding that would be required is not available. One important change, however, has been the new option for students to take essentially the same modules at Level 2 and Level 3 (though with the latter requiring a higher standard of work). This is an ingenious solution for broadening the available

curriculum without necessitating staffing increases (though I do discuss below some potential drawbacks). Thus, overall, it has been gratifying to see that standards of learning and teaching provision have been maintained, and even improved. There have also been improvements in the marking and assessment procedures: When I first started my appointment, I felt that the marking standards were out of line with comparable institutions: Only 5% of students achieved a first class honours degree, as compared with 20% nationally. Having raised this issue in previous reports and meetings, I was pleased to see that the department took steps to address this issue, and for the past two years have been marking at an entirely appropriate standard.

When I was first appointed to this position by _____, _____ outlined _____ hope that I would be able to help you bring more quantitative methods into the course. Although I have emphasized this goal in previous external examiner reports, it has not yet been achieved, though steps have been taken in this direction this current year, with the introduction of a quantitative element in one of the compulsory Year 1 Modules. In my view, you still need more, particularly given that some of the Year 3 Projects require relatively advanced statistical analyses (e.g., 2x2 ANOVA). There is clearly a resource issue here: you do not have the staff available to introduce a new research methods and statistics module, but I would encourage you to think seriously about alternatives. There are some excellent online courses available. Other departments at Leeds will run such modules that your students could possibly join (e.g., Psychology, Medicine?), or you could have a once-a-year training day, given by an external expert.

Finally, I have been pleased to see significant improvements in the procedures – particularly module moderation, which is now both smooth and effective – and the feedback given to students. For most modules, students receive extremely detailed cohort and personalized feedback, in addition to detailed marking schemes and model answers that demonstrate exactly what needed to be done to obtain a top mark.

Overall, thanks to the efforts of both linguistics staff and my predecessor _____, this course was in an extremely strong position when I took over; and thanks to the adoption of more appropriate marking standards, I am pleased to be able to say that I am leaving it in an even stronger position than I found it.

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 intended learning outcomes are entirely appropriate for both the single and combined honours programmes.

The standards are appropriate. In previous years, I noted that the proportion of students achieving a first-class honours degree was well below national benchmarks for comparable courses at comparable institutions. After I raised this issue, the department consciously took steps to address it, and am I pleased to say that the resultant increase in marks last year has been maintained this year, with module modules having around the expected level of firsts (i.e., around 20%, as opposed to around 5% in previous years).

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.*

Both the single and joint honours degree programmes meet national benchmarks, and are extremely similar to those of equivalent degrees at other institutions.

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.*

Each module (except the dissertation) includes one exam and one piece of coursework (typically 50/50 split). Previously some modules had more than one piece of coursework, but I understand that this has been discouraged, and now all (except some phonetics/phonological practical tests) have only one. The range of tasks in the assignment was excellent (discourse analysis, phonology practical, essay, oral/aural components) and I appreciated the flexibility module co-ordinators have in matching the task to the intended learning outcomes of the module. The exams also followed a wide range of different formats (MCQs, short answers, essays).

The only concern I would raise is whether MCQs, True/False answers and definition-giving questions are suitable for Level 2 and, particularly, Level 3. These types of questions have their place –when it is important to establish a strong factual base (e.g., in Year 1). However, I really feel that Yr3 modules should be about sharpening students' critical/analytical skills, which can really only be done with essay exam answers (and you have small enough numbers on your modules for this to be feasible). There may be a place for *some very limited* use of MCQs, T/F questions in Yr3 – when the goal of a particular module or part of the exam is to test factual knowledge – but this should be the exception rather than the rule. Certainly, Yr3 students should not – in my view – be taking exams that consist entirely of MCQs, as is the case for one module. This may mean splitting up the combined Yr2+Yr3 modules. But a better solution I believe would be to introduce more essay answers at both Levels 2 and 3.

The marking and moderation systems seem to be very robust. In particular, I was pleased to see that marks were sometimes moved up or down in response to suggestions from the moderator, which does not seem to happen often at other institutions. I was also pleased to see an excellent paper trail.

As in previous reports, I continue to have concerns regarding the use of a fully-continuous – as opposed to categorical - marking scheme: I do not believe that markers can really distinguish work that is deserving of (for example) 64 vs 65 vs 66. Last year I was told that a change to the categorical scheme is now in the offing. It has not yet appeared, but I hope it will do so soon.

The standard of work produced was very high overall, and I was again particularly impressed by performance in the Syntax modules, Life-Cycle of Languages and the Dissertation.

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.*

As noted above, the wide range of assessments offers students ample opportunity to show their strengths and weaknesses. Since the changes in the marking standards two years ago, students are now performing comparably to students at similar institutions. The strengths include a particularly detailed knowledge of the more technical aspects of linguistics, particularly morphosyntax. It feels a little harsh to cite this as a weakness, given that it is not explicitly taught, but I feel that students could benefit from some training in experimental methods and – particularly – statistics.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

NA

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.

There have been no real changes this year, but none were necessary: Since the adoption of more generous marking standards last year, the course has been in excellent shape.

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.

Most modules are taught by a member of staff who has published important research in the relevant area. Students achieving the highest marks in the project often conduct research that is close to publishable standard (particularly the priming study dissertation with a mark of 86).

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

NA

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

NA

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.*

Yes, the documentation was sufficient, and I was easily able to request additional information where required.

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. Most staff went above and beyond what is required in terms of providing a detailed marking scheme/model answer. I understand that this is provided to students where possible, and this is really excellent practice in terms of giving detailed feedback.

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?

Yes - I provided feedback on the draft exams, and was very satisfied with the response from staff. Two staff actually changed questions/markings schemes as a response to my suggestions, which is gratifying.

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 – in rare cases where scripts were not provided I was able to see the work online. One please: Please could the marks be written on the coursework feedback sheets? This will make my successor's job as a moderator much easier!

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

Yes, this was a real strength – everything from Donald Trump to Australian hypocritics (“choccie biccie”). The standard of marking was entirely appropriate, and there were no cases of unresolved discrepancies between markers.

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?

Yes

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

Generally there is an appropriate degree of standardization across modules. One exception is that an essay counting for 50% is usually 2500 words, but sometimes 2000 and – in one case – 1500. Unless there is a particular reason for this discrepancy, I would standardize word limits across modules in order to ensure fairness between students taking different modules.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Responder:	
Position*:	LCS Assessment Lead
Faculty / School of:	Faculty of Arts and Humanities, School of Languages Cultures and Societies
Address for communication:	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 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 organisation. 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 recognise 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:

We are pleased with positive comments on changes at programme and module level made during his tenure. In particular, highlights our practice of co-teaching Level 2 and 3 module variants; our careful attention to module marks distributions in moderation; and the transparency of our moderation practice more generally.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous yearLCS 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:

Again, we are pleased with positive comments on changes at programme and module level made during his tenure. I cannot discern any comments that relate to specific changes made in the past year, and points out that 'There have been no real changes this year, but none were necessary'. made various substantive recommendations in first examiner's report, and addressing these recommendations thoroughly has taken several years.

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:

We are pleased that _____ did not highlight any matters for urgent attention.

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 only specific new points raised by _____ concern the use of MCQ exams at Levels 2 and 3, and the (moderate) variation in essay sizes at each level of study. In _____ own institution, MCQ exams are only used at Level 1, and essay sizes are standardized by level. We have discussed this point, and feel that the appropriateness of assessment methods should be judged on a module-by-module basis, and that there is no good reason to standardize methods by programme level just for the sake of consistency. We will consult the continuing and incoming examiners on this issue.

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:

We are pleased with _____ positive evaluations here.

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

We are pleased with _____ positive evaluations here. We will follow _____ recommendation and return to the practice of including provisional marks on feedback sheets, as opposed to posting a separate marks list. This will make moderation and external examining more efficient.

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:

We are pleased with positive evaluations of the Schools processes in this area.

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:

I have addressed 'other comment', regarding possible standardization of essay sizes, above.