

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016– 2017

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	School of Languages, Cultures and Societies.
<i>Subject(s):</i>	
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	BA Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, BA Arabic and Islamic Studies and MA Arabic-English Translation
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	BA , MA

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner

Title and Name of Examiner:

Institution:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Completed report

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

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Quality Assurance**
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

Matters for Urgent Attention

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box

There are no matters for urgent action

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?

N/A

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

During my term as external examiner at Leeds University I have been very impressed with the professionalism of both administrative and teaching staff who ensured that all teaching, learning, assessment and administrative procedures are followed rigorously. This was reflected in the levels achieved by the students and which were consistent during the time I observed the courses as external examiner.

The module handbook for each module produced, detailing the learning outcomes, a scheme of work (week by week), and assignment dates (setting and submission) and a reading list is very impressive and shows the organization of the team.

All marking followed a marking scheme and modules had a marking matrix which enabled me to determine exactly how marks were awarded. Many forms of assessment were used including examinations, coursework assignments, take home essays and translations and oral exams; hence I believe that all types of learners were able to demonstrate their abilities and knowledge. The work of the students was excellent and comparable to other institutions I have been associated with.

I have attended the exam boards, which were conducted in a professional fashion. All students were considered on merit. I was also happy with the way in which borderline cases were dealt with. All students were treated fairly and justly. I also commend the practice of giving exceptional students appropriate awards. This I find very uplifting and shows appreciation to hard work. Not many Universities that I am associated with offer that and therefore I really praise Leeds University for this.

During my term I have noticed the increase in cohorts and number of students joining the course. This in itself shows the popularity of the courses offered and indicates the standards of teaching among UK Universities.

In the future I recommend that the external examiner is given the opportunity to meet some of the students to get feedback from them on the courses they attend. This will give the examiner a more rounded view of the courses based on both the actual data that is being examined and the feelings of the students.

I would like to thank the excellent colleagues for their outstanding work and for welcoming me in the last three years as part of their team and I wish the department all the best in the future.

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.*

Standards of achievement expected by the programme are consistent with the levels of study and fully aligned with the ILOs. The subject matter fully reflects the content and levels set out in the module Handbooks.

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.*

I am satisfied that the aims and ILOs meet the levels of other institutions and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

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.*

Assessment items are set with great care. Examination questions and essay titles are worded in a way that enables the full range of level descriptors to be addressed by the students. Criteria specific to the learning outcomes of the module are clearly stated, relate well to academic levels and professional standards. The criteria is presented to students in a way that articulates to them the levels of knowledge, understanding and skill required to achieve at each grade. The marking criteria are clear and appropriate, and effectively link the areas of knowledge to be tested to the academic characteristics expected at Honours level. All markers make good use of the published criteria, by underlining those which are demonstrated by the students in their scripts and also by using the relevant terminology in their written feedback. Tutors' feedback provides a clear rationale for the mark obtained, together with formative comments designed to point the way to future improvement.

It was clear this year that my comments regarding the high marks in the Arabic language exams have been addressed and it was noticed that the marks are fair and reflect a more realistic level of the students.

The MA cohort this year is a strong cohort. The marks were generally high but it reflected the level of the students. There were a number of good dissertations and essay questions were written to a very high standard.

The new module of (Global Jihad) seems to be a very popular module and I could see from the essays of the students that there were very engaged.

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.*

Overall, the standard of candidates' work is appropriate to Honours level. Students' performance in the core module examination reveals that they generally respond well to the direct teaching and guidance that they receive in those courses.

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

N/A

6. Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year

It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.

The department is demonstrating high quality programmes and modules and the staff should be commended on their dedication, skills and motivation. All material on Blackboard is clear and comprehensive which demonstrated the thorough and dedicated work of the teachers.

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.

The curriculum design of the programmes is informed by current research and issues in the subject areas taught. In general the students' research projects were of a good standard.

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

N/A

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

This year I have acted as mentor for . This has run smoothly and i received all the information needed for to carry out duties. I met in the board meeting and I feel that has done a very good job in following the procedures of reviewing exams.

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.

Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.

Yes. The administrative team was organised and very helpful. All exams papers were sent in a timely manner which allowed enough time for feedback.

- 11. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?**
The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.

Yes

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

All of the examination papers and assessments were suitable and to a high standard. Any queries I had regarding these were adequately responded to by members of staff.

- 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. I was provided with all of the scripts with comments and grades necessary to provide an informed evaluation.

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

Yes. These were appropriate and the methods and standard of assessment were appropriate.

- 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. This was appropriate. I was able to attend the meetings and I was satisfied with the recommendations of the Board.

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

Yes and I was satisfied with the pastoral care plan put in place to follow up these circumstances.

Other comments

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

The Department's programmes and modules cover a wide range of subject areas. The courses are informed by cutting edge research and are taught by a dedicated team of academic staff. The Department is maintaining excellent standards and as such is to be commended.

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 Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies
<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	<i>Arts, Humanities and Cultures / Languages, Cultures and Societies</i>
<i>Address for communication:</i>	Michael Sadler Building, University of Leeds, Woodhouse Lane 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 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:

It is delightful to see this extremely positive feedback from AIMES external examiner. Examples of innovation and good practice that have been specifically highlighted in the examiner's report include: 1) rigorous and professional procedures of assessment by tutors and managing the examination board by admin staff; 2) clear communication of details of the assessment process to students through module handbooks that include submission dates and relevant details – this is seen by the examiner as 'impressive' and reflecting the 'organisation of the team'; 3) the use of different forms of assessment to evaluate different skills; 4) processing borderline cases in exam borders with consistency and fairness; 5) giving awards to distinguished final year students who demonstrate excellent academic achievements.

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:

The external examiner noted the increase of cohorts in some years which demonstrate the popularity of the range of modules offered within AIMES.

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:

The external examiner recommended meeting some students in order to get feedback from them on the modules they take. While AIMES welcomes the suggestion, it is up to the school to decide whether this falls within the remit of the external examiner's role. Students are given the opportunity to provide feedback on individual modules (through mid-term and end of term module surveys) and whole programmes (through programme surveys).

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 examiner's answers to questions 1-7 are generally very positive. It has been noted that the comments made last year about high marking of Arabic exams have been taken into consideration this year when marking is seen as more realistic and representative of the students' levels. ILOs are deemed appropriate to the programmes and staff members are commended for their professional performance in delivering the learning outcomes through well-designed and research-based curricula.

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

The examiner's comments are all very positive and nothing has been highlighted which needs urgent attention.

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

Comments on assessment and feedback are generally positive and staff members' professionalism and consistent marking have been commended by the external examiner.

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:

Our external examiner's comments on the progression and awards process have been very positive in the last few years during which _____ has performed _____ role as an external. No issues of concern have been highlighted about the process.

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:

Our external examiner commended AIMES' programmes and modules which cover a wide range of subject areas. The design of individual modules have been praised for its being informed by cutting edge research and taught by a dedicated team of academic staff. We are grateful for the very positive comments about AIMES' teaching standards and the commitment of all staff members.