

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:	School of Languages, Cultures and Societies
Subject(s):	<i>Russian</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	All modules with SLAV prefix at Level 2 and 3 of Joint Honour Programmes MODL 5118 MODL 5128 MODL 2070
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

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 compulsory dissertation as part of a BA degree at Leeds is a commendable practice as it allows students to demonstrate the full range of academic and transferrable skills they have developed during their course.

The VLE was more user-friendly this year and allowed me to scrutinize students' work throughout the year. It would be helpful if this use of the VLE were to be extended to ensure that external examiners have sufficient time to examine students' work in advance of their short visit to the University before the exam boards.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

The assessment for SLAV 3101 has been changed for the academic year 17/18 according to my recommendations last year.

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

None

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	n/a
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	n/a
3.	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	n/a

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	n/a
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5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	n/a
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	n/a
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	n/a

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
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 Russian section at Leeds provides a varied programme which develops students' linguistic skills as well as intellectual and research skills. Due to staff and student numbers the programme cannot be comprehensive but manages to cover a wide area of 19th-century literature and culture, 20th-century history and contemporary culture. The language modules are carefully designed to develop a broad range of linguistic skills. Strong performances in all areas of the programme in the final year testify to excellent teaching, appropriate student support and the success of a well conceived programme and curriculum.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
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Academic staff's research expertise shapes the curriculum in a productive way. Students are exposed to a variety of different research fields, ranging from 19th-century Russian literature and culture to contemporary Russian society in individual modules over the course of their study. The research ethos and rigorous research methodologies underlying all undergraduate dissertations are evidence of the successful translation of academic research into teaching practice.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
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Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
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Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:

16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs, in particular: the design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards; the quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.</i></p> <p>The programme uses forms of assessment which are both innovative and robust. The variety of assessment formats (including essays, statistical reports on online media, student presentations etc.) ensure that different ILOs are effectively tested. Modules are marked and moderated rigorously. Detailed feedback is provided in feedback reports and in marginal comments. MODL 5128 was outstanding in this respect, setting suitably challenging tasks to test different registers and lexical fields and providing scrupulous, detailed, professional feedback. All assessments across the department are fairly and consistently marked according to the published marking criteria.</p>		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on the academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses; the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort:</i></p> <p>Student attainment overall is high in both language and content modules and is of similar standard to the performance of students at my own institution and other institutions I am familiar with. The linguistic performance, especially of finalists, is generally high, as is the intellectual level of research undertaken by students for essays, presentations and the final-year dissertation. Work of a small part of the cohort is marred by poorly developed skills in writing and expression.</p>		
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i></p>		

The Progression and Awards Process

20.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiner's role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Y
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	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?	Y

34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i> I would welcome a list of all modules taught (with details of credits and assessments) to be made available at the beginning of the academic year.		

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:

LCS Assessment Lead and Director of Russian and Slavonic Studies

Faculty of Arts and Humanities, School of Languages Cultures and Societies

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT

**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 very encouraging to hear that our compulsory Final Year Project was highlighted as a case study of best practice and that it was commended for allowing students to demonstrate the full range of academic and transferable skills that they had acquired during their degree programme at Leeds. We are also very pleased to hear that you thought that the VLE arrangements for scrutinising students' work were very effective in 2016/2017 and that the system was user-friendly. I will pass on your comments about the availability of the VLE for external examiners over the course of the academic year to colleagues in the Programme Support team.

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:

Thank you once again for suggesting changes to the assessment on SLAV3101 Core Russian 3. We agree that a timed test is a more suitable and fair method of testing students' language ability, and students, having been informed of the rationale behind introducing an essay under timed conditions to the assessment of the module, also welcomed the change.

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: no matters for urgent attention were raised.

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:

n/a

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 that you were once again impressed by the achievements of our students and that you thought that the standard of our students' work, on both the language and content modules, was high. Your comments about our teaching practices and methods of assessment are very positive, and it is particularly encouraging for us that you could see the clear and logical development of students' linguistic and research skills over the course of the Leeds Russian programmes. We are also very pleased that you thought that our curriculum benefited from staff's research/scholarship expertise and activities and that academic research and scholarship had been successfully translated into teaching practice to enhance the student experience.

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 that you were happy with assessment and feedback procedures on the UG Russian programmes and on the MA modules in specialised translation in 2016/2017, and we were particularly encouraged to hear that the use of a wide variety of innovative methods for assessment and feedback, which we strongly promote at Leeds, had been successful. Internal marking procedures were considered robust and our modes of assessment were considered appropriate for testing different ILOs. Thank you for your positive comments about feedback on

SLAV5128M – I will pass on these comments to the module coordinator as well as to colleagues who teach on the module.

You mentioned in Section 19 of the External Examiner's Report form that "Work of a small part of the cohort is marred by poorly developed skills in writing and expression". Thank you for bringing this to our attention. I assume that you are referring here to the quality of students' written academic English/presentation skills, and I can assure you that we are taking measures, both within Russian and at School level, to help students improve their academic writing and presentation skills, both within individual modules and through workshops with a focus on developing academic skills.

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 glad that our processes for progression and awards ran smoothly and that liaison with the GRASS Exams Tutor and the Programme Support team was effective. We will make sure that we provide you with a list of all modules running in 2017/2018, together with details of credits and assessment, earlier in the year in 2017/2018.

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