

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	School of Philosophy, Religion and the History of Science
Subject(s):	<i>History and Philosophy of Science</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	HPSC 2111, 2115, 2307, 2400, 3111, 3200, 3313 PRHS 3001
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**

The engagement with student's work was of a very high standard. Comments were

Enhancements made from the previous year

N/A

Matters for Urgent Attention

None.

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?	Y
3.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Mentor?	Y

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

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

Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School

Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Y
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
<p><i>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</i></p> <p>Overall this is a high standard on an established programme. The course structure is logical and the learning outcomes are clear for each course I examined. Progression through a field of study was evident, and thought was given to overall course design and construction, to enable students to progress in building knowledge. Some Semester 2 courses built on Semester 1 courses, which meant students could further their study in a particular field of interest.</p> <p>Clear communication in written format is fundamental for students to understand what is expected of them and makes ILOs clear. There was evidence of good practice here in course outlines. There was a sufficient combination of this in course outlines and other information provided to students. As some of the students have a science background, and even for those who do not, the guidelines which explained the number of hours required on the course for reading and preparation were useful.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p><i>Please explain how this is/could be achieved (examples might include: curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research)</i></p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i></p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<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 assessment methods were clear and appropriate. In particular, I thought the procedural element of the Monitor's Report made it easy for me to understand the way that both examiners had approached the marking, what they had marked and their rationale for their marks. I thought this was excellent practice.</p>		

The comments on student's work made it easy for the student to understand why they received their mark, and furthermore, how to improve their mark in the next assignment. I thought the comments really engaged with each student's work and were not the generic remarks seen on some essays in other universities.

Students seemed very engaged with the courses I examined. They had undertaken in-depth research in their dissertations and essays, and demonstrated a clear grasp of concepts, methodologies and contexts in their chosen courses.

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:

The academic standards were very good, and the students engaged with their coursework and exams. There were no consistent weaknesses apparent in the courses I examined. The student's strength was most evident in their ability to grasp complex theories and concepts, and apply them to their own work.

There was one small issue I raised in relation to the consistency of the instructions for candidates sitting examinations. I suggested that instructional wording should be consistent across the examination papers.

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?	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
All administrative and organisational functions performed to a very high standard.		

Other comments

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

School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND CULTURES



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

School response to external examiners' reports

Dear External Examiners,

Thank you for your assiduous work as external examiners for programmes run by the School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science (PRHS). This letter is in response to the reports that each of you kindly submitted on our BA programmes for the academic year 2016–17.

As has become our practice, I shall here respond to key points from all the reports rather than providing separate letters to each of you. As ever, if you feel that any issues you raised in your report have not been given sufficient consideration below, please do let us know at your earliest convenience. For ease of digestion, the response below is set out in tabular form. Specific action points are indicated by bold font followed by '(AP)'.

Issues raised in examiners' reports	Further details and School response
Exam Board procedures	Both [redacted] and [redacted] raise important concerns about the value and format of the School Exam Board, noting that it remains a highly time-consuming operation despite having been largely stripped of opportunities for genuine deliberation about the classifications that are recommended. In response, although there is relatively little we can do at School level to change the way that examination boards operate, we shall certainly continue to consider ways in which the process might be streamlined further in order to avoid unnecessary time wastage [redacted]. It is a reflection of the fact that the School is following University-wide regulations that the University's Quality Assurance Team deemed it appropriate to reply in a letter to [redacted], reiterating the University's policies pertaining to examination boards.
Dealing with cases of mitigating circumstances	[redacted], who, in addition to attending the School Exam Board, also kindly attended our Pre-Exam Board in June 2017, notes the oddity of trawling through every instance of mitigating

	<p>circumstances at the latter meeting rather than limiting consideration to those cases that have not already been dealt with by means of deadline extensions, resit opportunities and so forth. At present, we do not have a reliable procedure for distinguishing between these two categories of mitigating circumstances prior to the Pre-Exam Board. Since some students continue to experience mitigating circumstances well into the exam period immediately preceding the Pre-Exam Board, it would be difficult to make categorical decisions about such matters in advance of the latter meeting. Again, we shall continue to review our procedures in this regard, especially as the number of students submitting claims of mitigating circumstances appears to be increasing each year.</p>
<p>Consistency of instructions on examination question papers</p>	<p>helpfully reminded us of her observation concerning examination papers, that the instructions in the rubric are occasionally more explicit on some papers than on others. We certainly aim for consistency in this regard, and convene an ‘Exam Paper Committee’ in October and February to look over all the School’s exam papers. We shall give particular attention to consistency of instructions at forthcoming meetings .</p>
<p>Weighting of examined components of modules</p>	<p>noted the need to keep under review the relative weighting of different assessed components. This is certainly something we take care to do, with regard both to individual modules and across the range of modules available on our BA programmes. In 2016–17 one of the School’s administrative staff helpfully devised a spreadsheet displaying the methods of assessment across all our modules in a way that facilitates easy comparison.</p>
<p>Bunching and depression of higher marks</p>	<p>noted some bunching of marks ‘in one or two modules’ and again observed that the upper range of marks is not being fully utilized by all markers. The coming academic year (2017–18) will be the first in which the School has used a 0–100 marking scale across all modules rather than the previous 20–90 scale. In principle, this encourages a wider spread of marks in the highest grade band, since markers have the option of awarding a mark between 70 and 100 for the best work. We shall endeavour to keep an eye on whether use is being made of the full range.</p>
<p>It would be advantageous to introduce some means of easily comparing marks across modules</p>	<p>Both and recommended introducing, as put it, ‘some mechanism to enable examiners to view at a glance how particular modules were marked compared to others’. This could potentially assist in pointing up discrepancies between markers or between modules with regard to the respective difficulty of their assessment methods. At present, our module and programme review processes are fully capable of detecting peculiarities within modules or within programmes as a whole, but we do not specifically compare marks between modules.</p>

	<p>Whether there is a suitable mechanism that could be introduced is a matter that should be raised at a School Taught Student Education Committee (STSEC) meeting</p> <p>.</p>
Academic progression tracking	<p>recommended ‘some form of academic progression tracking tool’ that would enable comparison of student cohorts over three successive years. Such a tool would indeed be useful. Indeed, it would be interesting to track not only diachronically within the same programme but also synchronically across multiple programmes run by the School. At present, we do not have the technological wherewithal or the staff time to carry out such comparisons, but we shall keep under review the possibility of instituting them.</p>
Consistency in monitoring procedures	<p>While noting the usefulness of the School’s monitoring system, indicated inconsistencies in our practice and a lack of detail in the School’s <i>Code of Practice on Assessment</i> concerning what our practice comprises. To some extent, the inconsistencies are due to the flexibility that we give to monitors. Provided they give close attention to all fails and to any work that has been highlighted as problematic by the primary marker, monitors are free to sample work from across the assessed components. In most instances, owing to time pressures, this will involve merely inspecting the overall spread of marks for mid-semester assessments, with closer scrutiny being given to individual assignments in end-of-semester assessments. The minimum requirements for monitoring are specified on the monitor’s report form. We concur that the guidelines in the <i>Code of Practice on Assessment</i> for 2016–17 were imprecise. We reviewed this matter at a meeting on 11 July 2017 and will amend the wording in future editions of the Code . As points out, the monitoring process should not involve making ad hoc changes to individual marks. It appears that this did happen in the case of at least one module. We shall reiterate to module leaders that in instances where a monitor has doubts about particular marks, amendments should be made only after due consideration of these in relation to the marks assigned across the assessed component as a whole .</p>
Possible overgenerous marking of reflective logs	<p>raised a concern about the marking of reflective logs, noting that, in one particular module [THEO3280], out of a total of eleven students, nine had received a mark in the First Class band for their reflective log (five of them in the mid-80s), these marks being considerably higher than for other components of the module’s assessment. Although the reflective log constitutes only 10% of the assessment for THEO3280, care needs to be taken to ensure that the marks awarded for the reflective logs are not out of line with those awarded for other components. In the case of modules with a reflective log component, we shall request</p>

	<p>that monitors give particular attention to this component when monitoring the marking of the module as a whole . Last year a similar concern has been raised about the marking of class presentations. To the extent that the marking of presentations can be monitored, we shall also request monitors to carefully check this component of assessments . We would, however, like to note that different forms of assessment often tests different qualities, and it is not necessarily to be expected that a marks profile for non-standard assessment will match those for essay-or exam-based assessment.</p>
<p>Rule concerning breach of essay word limit</p>	<p>has again expressed doubts about the practicability of the School’s rule for dealing with breaches of the word limit. Two main issues are highlighted, namely (1) the difficulty of determining whether, or by how much, an essay exceeds the word limit, and (2) the difficulty of marking an overlong essay as though it ended at the point before the limit was exceeded. As an alternative, recommends adopting the procedure followed at the University of York, which is to impose a penalty for breaches of the word limit. This, notes, encourages students to ‘respect word limits’ and has ‘not caused undue practical difficulties’. After raised this matter in 2015–16, it was discussed by STSEC. We decided that the current policy is working satisfactorily. On the whole, it appears that our own students also respect word limits, and adopting York’s procedure would not eradicate the need to, in most cases, trust students’ honesty in declaring their word count on the submitted work. It is, however, extremely helpful that has raised this issue again, thereby prompting us to keep the matter under review.</p>
<p>Multiple choice section of a philosophy exam paper</p>	<p>helpfully reminds us of the reservation that he had about the exam paper for PHIL1120 Great Philosophical Thinkers, which included a number of multiple choice questions. We are grateful to for the recommended revisions that he made in email correspondence with Education Service Officer), which were duly passed on to the module manager, and led to amendments to the exam paper. Regarding ’s general worry about multiple choice questions on philosophy exam papers, the module manager notes that the multiple choice questions play a specific pedagogical role on the module, namely to motivate the students to engage with all of the lecture content, rather than picking and choosing only narrow aspects of it. (The students are informed in advance of the exam that the multiple choice questions may cover any aspect of the material covered by the lecture summaries and slides.) It is also the case that the multiple choice section of the exam comprises only a small proportion of the assessment on the module (20% of the overall exam mark, with the exam in turn contributing 60% of the overall module</p>

	mark). Nonetheless, the module manager appreciates 's concern, especially with new questions being required each year.
The role of external examiners	Although not stated specifically in his report for 2016–17, it is worth mentioning here 's ongoing concern, raised in his report for 2015–16 and reiterated in conversation with (School Assessment Officer in 2015–16 and 2016–17), that the School would do well to adopt a 'risk-based approach to external examining'. By this, means an approach that involves requesting external examiners to concentrate on particular areas of the School's curriculum that have been flagged up as needing special attention, rather than merely asking the examiners to undertake sampling of assessed work in a relatively unfocused way. In principle, the proposal seems entirely rational. In practice, there is some difficulty associated with requiring School Education Service staff, who carry out the bulk of communication with external examiners, to keep track of individualized and ad hoc instructions for external examiners as opposed to generic instructions that go out to all of you. In addition, University policy is that external examiners should have access to any piece of work. But we certainly hope that if specific issues come to light through our module, programme and curriculum review processes, these can feed into the requests we make of external examiners, enabling attention to be focused more sharply on the issues in question.

The above points, along with your very favourable comments on many aspects of our programmes, have given us much food for thought. We shall continue to reflect upon them through our ongoing review processes – including the module and programme review meetings and the current School-wide curriculum review, as well as our regular School Taught Student Education Committee (STSEC) meetings.

On behalf of myself and colleagues in the School, may I thank you again for your efforts in supporting student education in Philosophy, Religion and History of Science at the University of Leeds. We place immense importance on the quality of education we provide, and greatly benefit from your expertise and advice.

Yours sincerely,