

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 Philosophy, Religion and History of Science

Subject(s):

Religious Studies and combinations

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA Theology and Religious Studies

Modules

2220 Buddhism
 2250 Sociology of Religion I
 3021 Muslims in Britain
 3190 Religion & Global Developments
 2720 Religion, Gender & Society
 3286 God, Sex and Gender in Africa
 2000 TRS Students in Schools
 2300 Studying Religion in Context
 3400 Dissertation (6-8,000 words)
 3000 Independent Research project
 3001 Integrated Research Project

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 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 attention

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

NA

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.*

This programme and suite of modules are effectively designed to meet the learning outcomes appropriate for levels 4, 5 and 6 of the Framework for Higher Education qualifications

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.*

Yes, the programme learning outcomes effectively meet the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Theology and Religious Studies (Oct 2014).

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.*

The overall assessment strategy is appropriate to measuring student achievement at each level and across the programme.

As I noted last year, it may be worth reviewing the weighting of some examined components as means of measuring student understanding and skills, as well as ways of providing feedback to support improved learning.

It is pleasing to see that there is continual reflection by staff to improve modules and where one module was deemed to be over-assessed (a comment I would have made as well) the member of staff noted 'due to my ongoing concerns about the excessive assessment burden in this module, we have withdrawn the essay task for next academic year.'

There is a good range of types of assignment across the programme, with some interesting and innovative means for students to critically engage with academic discourse within the subject area, including analyses of encyclopaedia entries, group presentations and reports on varied electronic platforms.

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.*

I am happy to confirm again that student achievements are in line with National benchmarks and standards.

I noted last year that there may be some mark bunching and depressed upper marks for excellent students where students given awards for top marks had averages only slightly above 70%. I would suggest the upper range is still not used widely enough. In addition, this year, I noted that in one or two modules, student marks were a) perhaps too closely bunched within grade boundaries and b) slightly depressed in relation to other modules NB this was an observation from a small cohort and was not significant enough to warrant re consideration of marks. However, it would be useful for the subject leader and module leaders to compare data of student grades between modules as a 'nudge' to improve moderation and parity in marking before next year's modules.

I am not able to comment accurately in general terms on the students as a cohort, though it would be useful to see comparative data across 3 years using some form of academic progression tracking tool, except to reaffirm that students are achieving at levels comparable to those in the same levels at other institutions,

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.

None to note.

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 modules within the programme are taught by area research specialists whose knowledge clearly informs the content of the modules, which ensures currency and appropriate breadth of resources.

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

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.

All material and access to it was provided in good time. Key points to commend from this period of examination:

1. I am happy to see ever improving systems for managing electronic material for the EE to access.
2. Really strong evidence of robust marking procedures and some detailed moderation procedures
3. Good use of electronic submission and Grademark

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?

Yes. All questions are sent in good time for comment and review.

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. Scripts are very clearly marked with constructive and feed forward commentary on student achievement.

There is a useful further internal oversight of marking in the School-designed 'check mark' monitoring form. However this process and form could be usefully reviewed. I noted variations in the 'mark checking' practice across modules. There is perhaps a lack of sufficient detail and clarity in Guidance in the Code of Practice on Assessment 2016-17 section 5.5. Moreover, there was evidence of a selection of scripts mark checked then some marks changed (fortunately not across boundaries, and no requirement to make adjustments at the examination board) but QAA guidance is contrary to this

practice. I would advise that monitor reports and 'check mark' process needs review to clarify principles and purposes of monitor process and what is required in completing the forms.

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

Yes.

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. Very clear process and principles for decisions.

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

This was discussed and decided in a pre-board meeting attended by another of the External examiners.

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>
Consistency of instructions on examination question papers	<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>
Weighting of examined components of modules	<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>
Bunching and depression of higher marks	<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>
It would be advantageous to introduce some means of easily comparing marks across modules	<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,

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:	Philosophy, Religion and History of Science
Subject(s):	Theology/Religion
Programme(s) / Module(s):	THEO3280 Religion, Politics and the Future THEO3220 Sin THEO3170 Religion, Belief and Ethics THEO2320 Theology and Ethical Theory THEO2310 Ten Commandments PRHS3001 Integrated Research Project PRHS3000 Independent Research Project
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 feedback to students by the first examiner was very detailed and helpful; all the scripts were clearly marked and annotated and the comments of the internal monitor were helpful. It was good to discuss overall procedure with the examination officer prior to the exam board. The guidance provided for external examiners was clear and detailed and any queries were responded to without delay.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.
There seemed to be a greater variety of assessment methods this year and examiners had provided a broader range of marks in the First Class category; in previous years there had been a 'bunching' of marks in the lower 70s.

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
No areas for urgent attention were required.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

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

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

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

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

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 overall programme is well structured and contains a good variety of modules, some of which (such as THEO 3170 Religion, Belief and Ethics) were clearly very popular among the students. The ILOs were entirely appropriate for the nature and content of the module concerned and did meet the expectation of the national subject benchmark. Clearly much work has gone into the design of a coherent programme of study and the module organisers must be congratulated on providing such a broad range of modules which will continue to make the overall programme very attractive for prospective students.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
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Please explain how this is/could be achieved (examples might include: curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research)

The module organisers have been able to integrate their research expertise into their teaching, and the independent research project afforded an opportunity for students to research a particular area in some depth. As in previous years, some of the topics chosen were ambitious and challenging but from the sample of scripts that I saw the students were clearly able to rise to the challenge.

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:

Students intending to pursue a PhD would be well advised to choose the Integrated Research Project or the Independent Research project; they would then be guided by their tutors in the kind of methodology needed for doctoral research.		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i> N/A		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i> N/A		

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>In the modules that I saw, there seemed to be a greater variety of assessment methods than in previous years. This was a recommendation I had made last year and it is clear that the module organisers have responded appropriately. The feedback provided by the examiners was extremely helpful and detailed and in cases where two essay assessments had been given, it was clear that the students had benefitted from the comments made on the first essay as they prepared for the second. In all the modules which I examined the ILOs were entirely appropriate for the nature and content of the module concerned. The marking was fair and was always justified by the comments provided by the examiner. Some of the modules were available via VLE for me to consider while others (such as written examinations) were available for me during the afternoon prior to the exam board. The arrangements for marking were exemplary. There is clearly some excellent teaching in the School and the students have clearly benefited from this; most of the candidates achieved a mark in the 2.1 category or above, and deservedly so.</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>The academic standards on the whole were very high. The academically stronger students were able to engage critically with the primary and secondary material that they had consulted; they had read widely in the relevant literature and made excellent use of the sources consulted. The weaker students tended to produce assessments that were more descriptive than analytical and they were sometimes overly dependent on web-based sources of dubious academic merit. Some of the weaker students seemed at times overly reliant on lecture notes and tended to introduce material that was only tangentially relevant to the subject under discussion.</p>		

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:

Some of the modules had particularly detailed and helpful comments for the students; THEO3170, for example, was exemplary in this regard.

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

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:

All necessary information was provided and the arrangements for the examining procedure were exemplary. The progression and awards board was chaired admirably, with clear communication of decisions arrived at in the Special circumstances meeting, and all queries arising at the exam board were answered satisfactorily.

Other comments

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

It would be good if there were some mechanism to enable examiners to view at a glance how particular modules were marked compared to others; this would ensure a comparability of marking across a range of different modules.

While the marking of examinations and written assignments was generally very fair, reflected in the good range of marks across the module, I did have a query concerning the mark awarded for the log in some of the modules examined, since these seemed to be out of kilter with the marks awarded for other written assignments. In one module, for example, out of the 11 candidates who had submitted a log 9 managed to achieve a mark in the First Class (5 of these achieved a mark in the mid 80s); one had 5 entries missing and one entry submitted late but was nevertheless awarded a mark of 70. While the log may account for only a small percentage of the overall module it is possible that the final mark might be skewed by the award of overly generous marks for the log.

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,