

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

QA Team received 30/06/2017

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	Institute for Transport Studies
Subject(s):	<i>Transport Studies (various specialist subjects)</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	TRAN1011 Challenges in Transport and Mobility TRAN1021 Transport Policy in Action TRAN1030 Introduction to Surface and Air Transport TRAN1040 Global to Local: Challenges in Transport and Mobility TRAN2010 Transport Economics TRAN2020 Transport Land Use and Development TRAN2030 Project Appraisal TRAN2041 Transport, Energy and the Environment TRAN2061 Transport and Society TRAN2070 Transport, Mobility and Safety TRAN3011 Transport Dissertation TRAN3031 Public Transport Policy and Practice TRAN3040 Physical Distribution and Logistics TRAN3052 Case Studies in Sustainable Transport TRAN3060 Travel Activity and Social Analysis TRAN3070 Healthy Cities: Transport and Health
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 wide range of 'interesting' coursework assignments is excellent in my view.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

I think the current changes towards standardising the amount of assessment per module is a positive step.

I also think that the exam paper formats are now much more consistent and hence easier for students to understand than in previous years.

Module handbooks too look more professional across the programme, with information being presented more consistently. One point on this that did seem strange, is that the section labelled 'coursework' didn't really give any specific details of what the student had to do. Instead, these appeared either as an appendix else altogether separately. Perhaps it would make more sense to include that material in the main body of the text?

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 noted

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiners Handbook?	N/A
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School 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
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 a 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

N/A

Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	N/A
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	N/A
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	N/A
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	N/A
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	N/A

Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.

Although it is difficult to comment on this aspect (because there is no single programme), the range of modules available is extensive and appropriate for the aims and ILO's of the various programmes.

N/A

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)

Most modules draw upon staff's research specialisms, and this certainly appears to add richness to the teaching material. Also students all take a research project through their parent schools – probably the most obvious means of translating research into teaching practice.

However, I do wonder if that could sometimes be made more explicit to students. One way could be to have students collecting survey data that could then feed directly into an ongoing research project. For instance, in my public transport operations module, I have students fill in a detailed survey form about their thoughts on the future of public transport, which one day I intend to use to write a journal article with. I am also starting to use final year projects as feasibility studies for project grants.

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/A
<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
<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>Commenting only at the module level, once again I think the variety of assessment methods used is impressive. Meanwhile the assessment exercises seemed reasonable and at the right level, whilst the degree of effort imbalance noted in previous years is now far less noticeable, which is excellent.</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
<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>Previously I have been a little concerned with marking levels – firstly in that for some modules they have seemed to be on the high side, whilst secondly they have tended to be clustered in the mid-2(1) range. This time I felt the marks were far closer to my thoughts with the exception of one module (TRAN2070), which had an average mark of 71% and seemed to me to be marked around 5% too high when I read them. On the second point, there is still some bunching around the mid-2(1) area but it seemed less prevalent across the modules as a whole.</p> <p>One particular weakness in my mind, is that often students did not seem to know how to write in a report or an essay format. Part of this may be due to fairly vague directions being provided in some coursework assignment briefs. I suspect that students may benefit from more detailed briefs, and from links being made to resources that provide some guidance as to what exactly is required. More positively, there is evidence to suggest that many of the students are strong in terms of analytical skills, particularly in the final year modules.</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 level of feedback is generally fine – particularly if one includes verbal feedback that is provided to tutorial groups. However, I wonder if feedback levels may need to become more comprehensive in the near future.</p> <p>In each of these regards (grading levels and feedback), as I mentioned at the board I think it is worth considering the idea of using grading frameworks. These are now used across all the transport programmes at my institution at the insistence of our external examiner and the outcome has generally been positive in several ways, specifically: greater clarity for students of what is expected and why they received the mark they did; greater mark distributions over each assessment; more consistent grading across each assessment; reduced time taken per script marked; and far less student challenges to marks.</p>		

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?	N/A
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	N/A
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:

Regarding moderation/second marking of assessments, whilst the process gone through for coursework appears to be very clear, the process for exams looked to be less so. For the future, it would be helpful to me to have a clearer idea as to which exam scripts have been moderated because this was not the case this time – I think I was missing the documentation, rather than it does not exist.

Just to say that I understand that moderation practices here differ from exam to exam (being dependent on the moderator) and I am happy that this is the case, but being able to see some evidence of the process used would be helpful.

Other comments

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

Student comments

Once again I spoke to a sample of final year students, and this was most helpful. Overall they were happy – the course was useful, unexpected, and enjoyable. Students could see the connections with real life.

Staff: The staff were felt to be fair, helpful and quick to respond.

ITS-Geography: Again there were comments about overlap in introductory elements across modules, and about the liaison between ITS and Geography over coursework deadlines and reading weeks particularly.

Content and assessment: There was a feeling that transport modules were easier than geography – none were too hard. The level and type of assessment/workload was agreed to be fine. Students would like to see more logistics, aviation, resilience, automated vehicles and some shipping – currently there is perceived to be very much a UK local transport focus. The most useful topic was felt to be transport modelling, whilst some/more material about GIS would be appreciated. Students would also like a trip to be arranged.

Links with industry: One issue is that more support could be provided for students seeking placements and jobs in transport. Also, undergraduates felt to be ignored at open days when compared to taught postgraduate students.

Relating to the board next year

The only thing I'd like to see additionally would be the evidence of exam second marking for each module.

I found it helpful to speak to several of the teaching staff and to current students to understand their perspectives on the programme, and would like to do the same thing next year.

Conclusion

Following my looking through all of the coursework and exam assessments for all of the undergraduate transport modules I am satisfied that academic standards are commensurate with other universities where I have experience of teaching practices.

Lastly I would like to state that the administrative support for my visit was excellent in all respects and to thank the programme director and his team for their efforts.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)*Title and Name of Responder:**Position*:**Faculty / School of:**Address for communication:**Email:**Telephone:***If the individual responding to the report is not the Head of School please state their position within the School.***Completing the School response**

The completed School response (including the full original report) should be attached to an e-mail and sent to the Pro-Dean for Student Education in the relevant Faculty. Following approval by the Pro-Dean for Student Education, the School must send the response (including the full original report) directly to the External Examiner. A copy must also be emailed to the Quality Assurance Team at qat@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 practice

We are pleased to note your comment on the range and the topicality of the courseworks that we use on these modules.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Standardisation of assessment loads on these modules has been undertaken as part of our process of refreshment of these modules, and has taken into account perceived norms across modules from other schools typically taken by students taking our undergraduate modules. This process is still ongoing as the refreshment process continues, particularly for final-year modules, and further assessment load changes will be introduced for the 2018-19 session. Standardisation of exam paper formats is in fact a result of greater standardisation across the campus using approved templates, and we have adhered to these wherever possible.

We note your comment that our module handbooks have been improved, but that coursework tasks and instructions do not always feature prominently in our module handbooks. As part of a faculty-wide strategy to encourage student greater use of the VLE, we have now further rationalised our module handbooks by moving much of the more generic content online, and elevating the coursework-related materials so that these are now much more prominent.

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:

None identified

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:

No issues were raised in this section

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:

We note that whilst the modules benefit from the research experience of the teaching staff, you feel that this is sometimes not made as apparent as it could be to the students. We will consider ways in which we can make this more directly visible, such as through the use of case study materials stemming directly from our research projects, or more guest lectures by researchers.

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:

We note your comments that some students struggle to present their work in the required format (e.g. 'essay' or 'report' format) and we will address how best to provide guidance on this matter as part of our teaching enhancement staff development activities.

We thank you for providing us with information on grading frameworks in use at your university. We will consider this issue as part of a wider process of considering how best to move towards more online marking, as this is increasingly encouraged at our university and enhanced online systems are becoming available here for this.

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:

In respect of your comment that it is not always clear which examination scripts have been subject to moderation, this information should be available on the module marksheet. We are however aware that this column has not always been correctly completed and we aim to ensure that this is done in future.

Other comments

Response to items included in the 'Other Comments' section of the report

Thank you for the positive feedback in this section. We will ensure that in the current and future sessions we will continue to provide adequate opportunities to meet with students and staff. Regarding the issue of ensuring good opportunities for students to procure placements and jobs, our Faculty has recently re-organised its support for such professional and personal development activities and new initiatives are now coming on-stream as the new arrangements are fully implemented.