

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

QAT Received 07/03/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	Institute for Transport Studies
Subject(s):	Transport Planning
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc (Eng) Transport Planning and Engineering; MSc Transport Planning; MA Transport Economics; MSc Transport Planning and the Environment; MSc Sustainability (Transport); PGCert Transport Studies
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc

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.
Overall, teaching remains at a high standard, with keen and dedicated staff.

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 Integrated Design Project has been introduced, and has the potential to enhance the courses. However, teething problems need to be ironed out.

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
The administrative procedure and computing systems for recording students' marks are seriously flawed. While staff make every attempt, with great diligence, to ensure the correct marks are brought to the Board of Examiners, the recording procedure require marks to be manually transcribed between systems too many times, causing delay and doubt. It is disappointing that the University has not addressed this issue.

The continued use of the 20-90 scale of marking for some, but not all, assessments adds further complexity and reduces the transparency of the assessment process. Most comparable UK Universities use a single 0-100 mark scale, which clearly translates (at MSc) onto a scale of Distinction, Merit, Pass and Fail. This is readily understood, and expected, by students and employers. The University is urged to adopt this without further delay.

Until such time as these two matters are addressed with more robust and transparent procedures, all staff need to ensure a clear audit trail is maintained between any assessments (exam script or coursework) and the final award made to each student.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

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

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	See below
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	No

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

Through my term of appointment, the course has developed in line with research and industry expectations. This needs to continue in a rapidly changing environment, where Technology, Politics and many other factors are changing the demands made on Transport Professionals.

The diversity and turnover of staff has led to problems of consistency. Staff should strive to follow examples of best practice.

The standards of assessment are generally as would be expected, but occasional examples show little attempt at differentiation between differing student abilities, or present disproportionate reward.

My recommendations have received mixed responses.

At an institutional level, there has been no apparent progress on removing the 20-90 mark scale, or investing in a more robust recording system for students' assessment.

At a Course Level, the course team and the School appear to be as diligent as possible in noting and implementing recommendations.

At an individual level, staff response has generally been positive. However, (as might be expected in a diverse teaching group), a few staff have been slower to adopt recommended changes.

Standards

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

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

The course remains one of the leading group of Transport MSc programmes in the UK.

The documentation of the course is clear, and the module handbook is a good guide for students and staff alike.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Yes
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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 staff team who deliver the teaching include many leading researchers, who are keen to include elements of that research as appropriate into their teaching, and in the guided supervision of students' research projects.		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	No
<i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	n/a
<i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Yes
<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i> Employers who recruit from courses such as these expect graduates to have the educational base for future professional qualification. In Transport Planning and related subjects, this is usually through Chartered Engineer status or the Transport Planning Professional Qualification. The courses are currently accredited for these purposes, and should make every effort to retain that accreditation.		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Yes
<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>		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Yes
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Yes
<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> Overall, the standards are comparable with similar courses offered at other UK Universities. The large cohort of students contains the expected spread of abilities.		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i> Generally the alignment between ILOs and Assessments is clear and well structured. However, the course comprises many elements, so there are some notable variations in how well this is done. A particular concern is that occasional examinations are not well written to differentiate between students of different abilities. While questions should be designed to indicate the students' abilities, with some easier elements, and some expecting more advanced thinking, care must be taken not to award disproportionate marks for elementary work.		

The Progression and Awards Process

20.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiners role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Yes
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Yes
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Yes

23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Yes
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	No
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Yes
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	See above
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions? I do not know what actions were taken on my comments on papers.	
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Yes
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated? Inconsistently – see my comments, under 7 and 19 above.	
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Yes
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Yes
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board? Most administrative procedures are good. However, The process of transcribing marks between the systems for recording students' marks is fragile, it causes undue delays in the Board meetings, it does not inspire confidence, and does not compare well with other comparable Universities. (A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.)	
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Yes
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Yes
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Yes
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i> While the Board meetings were generally satisfactory, there were a number of subsequent emails asking for decisions to be ratified outside the Board meeting. The reasons for delays need to be identified and resolved, as these isolated decisions cannot be given the same consistent level of consideration as decisions made by the whole Board.</p>		

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*:	Deputy Director of Student Education
Faculty / School of:	Environment / ITS
Address for communication:	Institute for Transport Studies University of Leeds LEEDS LS2 9JT
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 read that ITS Masters teaching is considered to be high quality, taught by a keen and dedicated team

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

We are pleased to see your general support for our Transport Integrated Project initiative. In response to 2016-2017 student feedback and the observations of our external examiners, we reviewed the operation of the TRAN5912 TIP module ahead of the current session. We have made our expectations in terms of tasks and workloads much clearer to students at the outset. We have placed the operation of the module onto a much more compressed timescale, so that it impinges far less on other modules in the semester than before, and we have reviewed teaching and assessment schedules of some other modules to accommodate these changes. We have removed one of the group presentations on the module. Whilst we await formal student feedback towards the end of the current semester, early indications are that students have managed their workloads more successfully this year.

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:

We note your critical comments both on the 20-90 assessment scale and on the potential for errors due to the need to transfer marks from one system to another. In the former case, I can report that the 20-90 system will be used for the final time in the current academic session, to be replaced in time for the 2018-19 session. On the second issue, I can report that that university is now entering a new phase of its Student Education Strategy. The refreshed strategy will include the development and implementation of new student record systems designed to address these issues. The timing of such implementation is not yet determined.

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:

We wish to take this opportunity to record our thanks for your helpful and constructive feedback throughout your term as one of our external examiners. During your term of office, we have implemented the largest changes to our suite of Masters programmes in more than a decade, in response to changing needs and new opportunities and to benefit from our broad and deep research expertise. Inevitably, there is still some fine-tuning for us to do to complete the process. The revised Student Education Strategy will require us to keep our assessment methods under review, so that we can successfully test students against the desired learning outcomes whilst aiming to rationalise assessment to some extent. Please refer to the previous section for our responses relating to the 20-90 scale and the potential for error in recording student outcomes.

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 are pleased to read your generally highly positive comments in this section. As you will be aware, we are currently refreshing our programmes' professional accreditations in the light of the recent curriculum changes.

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 comment that on occasion, the drafting of examination questions does not tease out the full range of abilities from the student cohort, with insufficient opportunity for the stronger students to excel. Some of the instances to which you refer will have resolved themselves through recent staff changes, but we will continue to use our teaching enhancement activities to consider how to inculcate best practice in this respect.

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:

We will continue to remind staff of the need to provide adequate annotation, particularly when marking exam scripts, to provide justification for the marks awarded.

As noted above, the University has resolved to implement a much more integrated approach to the recording and management of student marks which should address some of your concerns.

We share your concerns that last November, a number of student outcomes had to be ratified subsequent to the meetings. We have clarified the reasons for these cases. Some, but not all, were related directly or indirectly to support staff availability issues at that critical time. Others were due to the emergence of relevant information soon after the meetings, for instance the emergence of information on mitigating circumstances.

Other comments

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

No additional issues raised in this section