

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:	POLIS
Subject(s):	<i>MA Global Development; MA Global Development and Africa; MA Global Development and Education; MA Global Development and Gender; MA Global Development and International Political Economy; MA Global Development and Political Economy of International Resources</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	PIED5210M; PIED5235M; PIED5255M; PIED5275M; PIED5523M; PIED5523M; PIED5562M; PIED5764M; PIED5766M; PIED5777M
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA

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 quality and detail of feedback provided for each assessment across all these programmes is notable in its level of detail, rigour and value to the students. Staff clearly bring a great deal of subject knowledge and expertise to these programmes, and this is, critically, based on longstanding and current research, which is essential for this field of global development.

The organisation of the process of assessment throughout the year has been excellent. As with many colleagues no doubt, I have found the move to yet another VLE a little challenging, more passwords and systems etc. but once I got the hang of it, it has worked well. The POLIS Assessment team, and in particular Sheila, have been excellent in their support and efficiency. During the final Progress Board it was notable that the Exams Officer and Assessment Team were extremely dedicated, professional and committed to the quality of student experience. Care was taken to consider each case, and staff clearly wish the best for their students, and are dedicated to their modules and programmes.

I am very pleased to hear that Sheila and POLIS have also now put a new member of the team in place who will be a dedicated MA support worker for the students. This staff member will be able to ensure that each student is aware when and if they need to submit mitigating circumstances or reassessments and be able to offer support to this diverse international cohort. This will further enhance the student experience.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

N/A, first year of examining these programmes.

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

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	I don't believe so but I may have overlooked these.
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?	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 an 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 programmes are well designed and coherently structured. Learning outcomes are clear and the standard of assessment is entirely commensurate with MA level 7.

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)

It is clear that staff expertise is a central and critical element in the success and quality of this MA provision, and this necessitates the ongoing cross fertilisation between research, knowledge and pedagogy. Moreover, students are drawn from diverse international backgrounds and bring their own areas of expertise and situated knowledges to the programme. Bringing together both staff and student expertise in this way thus further enhances the quality of learning, teaching, dynamic knowledge exchange and sharing of experience and understanding of the field. These programmes could not be effectively delivered without contemporary research pertaining to global development feeding into the teaching.

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:

I do not believe that these programmes form part of an integrated PhD, however, the range of postgraduate research training in addition to substantive knowledge provided within these MA programme would effectively facilitate doctoral training.		
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>		
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>		

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>		
The assessments are well crafted and are appropriately challenging for the students, ensuring that they demonstrate a range of knowledge and understanding of the topics covered. The quality of student work was high overall, and the quality of feedback provided to students on their assessments was excellent.		
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>		
The quality and standard of the assessed work produced by students on these programmes is high overall. Grading spans the range of quality indicators. In some cases, from my experience as external examiner, I felt that students would have been awarded slightly higher grades at comparable HEIs for the same work. However this has not on the whole affected the overall levels of Pass/Merit/Distinction awarded here.		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i>		
Feedback provided to students is detailed and comprehensive, and clearly draws on relevant expertise and subject knowledge. Staff clearly take a great deal of time and care to assess work and provide useful feedback.		

The Progression and Awards Process

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

24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	N/A
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i>		

Other comments

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

I noted at the Board that several students seemed not to resubmit assessments when they were entitled to do so and this led to the failure of a small number of students who might otherwise have passed their programme. It seems that students at MA, Level 7, have a different system required of them in order to request a resit than is the case for undergraduate students. I feel that the practice should be comparable across both PG and UG levels – at UG level I am led to understand that students merely have to respond to an email to accept the offer of reassessment whereas PG students have to obtain and complete a form of some kind and submit that. I feel that this may act as a deterrent to some, particularly international, students who may be less familiar with the process. Missing the opportunity to reassess when it is available is clearly extremely detrimental to a student's programme outcome. I would recommend that the system is reviewed across the university to make the process streamlined and simple for students at all levels. This is not a critical comment concerning POLIS, this is a University-wide system.

I feel that the degree regulations at Leeds are particularly strict and mitigate against the Board being able to raise a borderline student to the next level, for example from Pass to Merit, even in cases where the GPA is over 59.5. This does not seem to be comparable with other HEIs and may lead to fewer higher awards for borderline students who in my estimation are deserving of the higher award. It also means that Leeds may be disadvantaging itself in terms of KPIs and this may have an effect on your TEF. I also understand that there may again be some disparity between UG and PG regulations in terms of borderline cases and latitude of the Board and this may be something that the University quality team consider.