

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>International Relations, International Security</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	PIED5510M PIED5537M PIED5323M PIED5410M PIED5504M PIED5213M PIED5255M 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

The amount and quality of feedback given to the students is exemplary.

Enhancements made from the previous year

This was my first year as an external examiner.

Matters for Urgent Attention

None.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

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

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

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

7.	Have you acted as a External Examiner Mentor?	Y /N
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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

The MA programmes offered by POLIS in the field of International Relations are very well-designed and offer students a wide range of topical modules that are very enthralling. In the area for which I am responsible (international security, broadly defined), students have the possibility to take several courses on the most topical subjects, which are taught by academics at the frontline of the research on those.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
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Academic members of staff teach modules in their area of expertise. The reading lists are fully up-to-date and feature cutting-edge pieces of research.

The overall high quality of the Master's dissertations testifies to the ability of the academic staff to clearly explain to students how to design and conduct a research project.

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
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
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Student performance testifies to the dedication of the academic staff. Staff members generally give excellent, detailed and constructive feedback. Marking is fair, sound and transparent. It would be good to see a wider range of types of assessment in use. What about simulations or policy brief writing to enhance the employability of students?

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>I have been very impressed by the standards achieved by the students, some of whom produced outstanding pieces of work. Overall, students' performance is as strong as, if not better than, that of students on comparable courses.</i></p>		
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i></p> <p>I was very positively impressed by the amount of feedback given to students. The double marking of the dissertations (and the necessity for markers disagreeing significantly to explore the reasons for their disagreement) ensures the robustness and transparency of the dissertation marking process.</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?	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 & N
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 understand that this academic year has been a transition year and that new administrative arrangements are currently being put in place in the School. Communication from the School as to what exactly had to be done by the external examiner and how to go about it was not always clear, which made the process rather time-consuming. I would have liked to receive clearer instructions, especially as it was my first year as an external examiner at Leeds.

What was also disconcerting is that it seems there are various practices within POLIS as far as giving feedback and marks to the students are concerned. I was not always sure where I had to look to find the marks and the feedback as an external examiner and was wondering whether students might also be wondering (and possibly miss on some of the feedback left for them)! For some modules, I was told that students' essays could be viewed on-line via Turnitin, but then it was not possible to see any feedback or annotations (only the original essay as submitted by the student), making commenting on the marking somewhat challenging.

Other comments

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

Thank you for inviting me to act as an external examiner at POLIS. It has been very interesting and rewarding to find out more about your very interesting programmes and the excellent work produced by some of your students.