

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:	Leeds University Business School
Subject(s):	PR, Corporate Communications
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc Corporate Communications and PR. Modules examined: Corporate Social Responsibility (LUBS5427); Corporate Communications Strategy (LUBS5413); Internal Communications (LUBS5442); Public Relations in Practice (LUBS5446); Corporate Communications and Reputation Management (LUBS5411); Creative Public Relations (LUBS5416); Dissertation (LUBS5495)
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc Corporate Communications and PR

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

Points of innovation and/or good practice

LUBS5416 Creative Public Relations and LUBS5446 PR In Practice – both have very innovative assessments that use a 'live' case study based approach – super assessment practice in terms of giving students a very realistic insight to working as part of a PR team. Likewise the use of very contemporary case studies across a number of modules and giving students the options to focus on subjects / cases of their own choosing – in particular on LUBS5411 Corporate Communications and Reputation Management. Examination board processes very quick – almost to quick perhaps but the use of the % rules for borderline cases makes this efficient and removes the lengthy debates that often bog these meetings down – very black and white / clear cut.

Enhancements made from the previous year

No significant enhancements other than the improved efficiency of the examination board. That said, last year's report didn't really request or suggest any enhancements. A few improvements to the marking and moderation processes evidenced but all in all, a smooth and well run programme.

Matters for Urgent Attention

None.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y / N
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	Y / N
3.	Were you provided with an 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
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Sometimes
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	Y

Overall experience these last four years has been very positive and I don't feel that there are any really significant issues with the programme. A few areas that I have mentioned several times still flag up on the radar – lack of annotations on students work, marks ending in a 9, consistency in level of feedback given between tutors, language used in feedback by different tutors, broader use of the full marking scale – seem to mention these every year and in most cases there has been improvement. Less 9's than when I first started as external and a broader set of marks seem to be used now (certainly in the last couple of years have seen marks in the 80's which were not there at all four years ago). These though are minor issues and occur on every programme and with every teaching team throughout the UK – they are not exclusive to LUBS and I certainly have similar issues at . Just good to mention them though to get the teaching team considering them and looking to make small improvements where possible. I certainly would not consider these to be overly critical or negative – just some areas to keep an eye on. Overall the programme feels like its got better during my tenure as external – student achievement has improved and a couple of modules now seem a lot more focused and present better learning opportunities (variety of assessment approaches) for the students.

Procedures of the school and exam board have got quicker – feels more efficient and the approach to handling borderline cases and mit circs is more consistent. There was never any real issue with these when I started but some minor refinements to how the boards are conducted ensures the smooth and appropriate running of them.

There have been some changes to the programme since I started and these I feel have been introduced with due consideration. Certainly I was informed of the changes well in advance and consulted for my feedback.

Its been a great experience – have enjoyed the conversations with the team at LUBS and getting some detailed insight into the programmes, assessment and how the school has continued to evolve. I have learnt a lot and taken ideas back to my home institution which has been a massive benefit.

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
<p>Programme is well structured and comprises a well thought out and engaging series of modules. Good blend of the very academic / theoretical with more applied / industry focused elements in terms of assessment. It comes together very nicely to give what I consider to be a very appropriate and applicable learning experience in this subject area. Course aims and learning outcomes are good although the team may want to watch how these translate into individual assessment criteria in places. There are times when students are asked to 'explain' or 'describe' something and at this level there should be more emphasis on 'evaluate' and 'critically assess / analyse'. My overall impression of the course is very positive and students clearly engage with it to a very good level.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p>Evidence of research informed practice remains strong throughout the course, particularly with regard social responsibility and reputation. Students are exposed to current and topical case studies, and encouraged to actively research current industry examples as part of their assessments – a great example being the LUBS5411 Corporate Communications and Reputation Management module. Likewise, dissertations and projects demonstrate current / topical issues and thinking.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p>Not applicable although its possible to see PhD subjects arising from the modules with students having an interest in key areas such as SCR, reputation and corporate communications.</p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<p>Not applicable</p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N

<i>Not at the moment but probably could and should apply for accreditation from the CIPR.</i>		

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><i>The assessment structure on this programme remains informative, challenging and relevant. There remain some great opportunities for students to test their knowledge and the application of knowledge in places is superb. Assessments on the PR in Practice and Creative PR modules are great and the use of student chosen case studies on the Corporate Communications and Reputation Management module are very engaging. Overall level of feedback remains good although some consistency needed re volume of feedback – some clear differences between tutors and in some case between tutors assessing on the same module. Likewise with the use of annotations on student work – would like to see more of this. Overall the assessment methods remain appropriate to the course learning outcomes. Students overall performance across some modules is fantastic – average marks of 68%, 68% and 64% suggests high levels of student engagement with the subject areas. One module has 48% of students obtaining a mark of 70%+ which is brilliant. An assessment that students very much buy into and should be commended for both its approach and staff commitment to this (PR in Practice).</i></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>Students continue to get a broad range of opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and are able to achieve the aims and ILO's in a variety of ways through a range of assessment methods. There is evidence that students have been well supported in the completion of assessment activities and these compare favourably to those methods used in other institutions that I am familiar with. At the top end, students demonstrate some excellent work although I still don't think there are not enough marks pushing into the 80's.</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>		

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?	Marked yes, annotated no
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:

Annotations on student work, or rather lack of, is something of a bug bear. Some tutors do it, some don't, some make a simple tick mark, some leave a comment. I personally would like to see more use of and depth to the annotations – particularly on big projects like the dissertations – if anything else, it's a good message to the students that somebody has actually gone through and read their work in detail. Also helps to highlight specific areas for praise / attention.

Other comments

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

The last of my four years as external and I can honestly say its been fun, interesting, informative and educational. You have a great team in place for this course – both academic and administrative – and its been a pleasure working with colleagues at LUBS across all levels. It's a super super MSc programme – engaging, interesting, informative, challenging and, most importantly, successful. Student achievement is great and I have a huge amount of confidence in the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment.

Like all HEI's a few issues to continue to work on. Feedback to externals could be improved a bit – some module tutors responded to comments, some didn't, and likewise the responses from the programme leader were not always forthcoming. That said, not really a huge amount to respond to and I have been consulted when needed e.g. programme or assessment changes.

Overall marks profile has improved by a couple of % which is great to see and other than my issues with the use of 9's and a lack of marks in the 80's, overall student achievement and standards are on point. Examination boards are handled professionally, consistently and efficiently.

Overall this remains a great programme and it feels a bit sad to be losing my involvement in it. Its been a pleasure working with colleagues at LUBS and thank you for the opportunity to be involved.

Best Regards

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Programme Director CCMPR

*Leeds University Business School*Maurice Keyworth
LS2 9JT

*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

Thank you for highlighting the elements of good practice in the core modules in CCMPR. We will continue in our efforts to offer up-to-date case studies across the modules and to encourage activities that give realistic insights into what is like to be working in the Corporate Communications, Marketing and PR fields. We also note your appreciation for the efficient running of the exam board.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Your continued support for the programme and positive comments about the same are appreciated. No further points of action highlighted here.

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.

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:

As comes to the end of term as an External examiner, we would like to thank for all the comments provided in the past years. They contributed to strengthen the programme considerably.

We take note of the further work required on feedback to students, in particular regarding the need for annotations, careful review to avoid marks ending in 9 and improved consistency in quantity of feedback when more than one marker are involved. This latter is particularly difficult in regards dissertations where the number of markers is particularly high and styles of supervision may vary. We also hope that as more and more faculty members are opting for online marking, annotations may become more detailed in an efficient manner. The increasing numbers of students make timely feedback provision more and more challenging to achieve. We will also continue to encourage using a broader set of marks (e.g. into the 80s) to reflect the full spectrum of students' performance.

Noted, as above, your positive comments in regard to the exam board.

The programme has indeed changed and evolved in many ways in the past few years. Your thorough, constructive and perceptive comments provided us with clear guidance in regard to where the important issues were and how to improve them. We gained a lot from your work with us. Once more thank you for all the time, care and consideration given to the CCMPR programme.

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 know that you consider the programme well-structured, thought out and engaging. We are also pleased to see that the blend of theory/academic and applied/industry level content works well. We note your comment in regard to the language in the assessment, so that assessment criteria reflect more clearly the level of study.

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:

Thank you for such positive comments in regard to the assessment structure on the programme. As a challenging programme of study we strive to include diverse ways to test students' knowledge and for them to apply what they learn to case studies and similar. The need to improve consistency across tutors when it comes to feedback will be fed back to the teaching team. Students have been performing very well, as you say a reflection of their engagement in the programme. We will strive to further reward those students that are producing excellent performance with high marks, e.g. in the 80s.

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 take note of your comment in regard to the annotation on student work. The numbers of scripts requiring marking and the tight deadlines given provide a background to perhaps some of the lack of annotations. Nevertheless, we fully take on board that students should see that attention has been given to their work and particularly on large pieces of work such as the dissertation.

Other comments

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

I speak for _____ and myself in this reply, we both thank you for all your work as external examiner on CCMPR. We gained so much from your enthusiastic and expert involvement in it. As the incoming PD, I wish we had a year at least of overlap in our mandates; it would have been a pleasure to work more closely with you. We note your comments and endeavour to continue improving in the right direction.

We wish you all the best in your work at the _____. Hopefully our paths will cross again in one way or another.

Best regards,