

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 21/09/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

UCL

Subject(s):

School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

BA History of Art 2017-2018

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.

This is my second year as External Examiner and again I am deeply impressed by the range of courses, the high level of organization, the attention to detail and what I deem to be marking parity across courses.

I was assigned 29 courses and 2 dissertation areas and given limited space and time, has asked me to comment primarily on third year classes and final year dissertations.

To do so, I have looked to 2nd level courses and see a very logical progression in the subjects areas which have been assigned to me from this and last year. These being African and diasporic art; the ethnographic fetish; theories of the origin of postcolonial England and anthropology, things/material culture and curating, the politics/heritage space of the country house and the museum; Russian culture, medieval art. This exciting range of subjects makes the art history programme at Leeds unique.

The 300-level classes I have moderated, appear to have a cap of 8 students. This makes for wonderful small group teaching. The module handbooks and readings on Minerva are comprehensively laid out; staff placed regular notices for students which were respectful, warm and encouraging. Students were promised feedback within 3 weeks.

It was gratifying to see tutor guidance (for instance ART F3051) -that students were expected to undertake 10 hours of reading for this module per week. It think that is indicative of the high standard of teaching and intellectual demands made by the programme. Some course outlines listed very extensive secondary reading. Clearly they took this seriously given the lively and various topics that they chose to write upon (this is even more apparent in the dissertations for ARTF3170 -to which I shall return.

Whilst courses for Year 2 offer a range of assessment methods, it would seem that in Year 3 an essay and exam are the norm. I did wonder if the word length of the essay had to be standardised (not necessary perhaps); some modules 2,5000-3000 and some 3000 words. I am also curious how essay deadlines are determined.

I wondered in the Third Year if students undertake presentations (this is perhaps a point of curiosity as some other universities use this as a method of pedagogy and/or assessment).

I did take note that ART F3013 Assessing the French Revolution holds 5-10 minute presentations. Students are provided with very detailed instructions -for instance the look of their powerpoint and to ask 3 questions. This seems judicious and very helpful.

MODULES AND MARKS

In terms of marks awarded I see remarkable parity across the courses I moderated. It would seem that in general students were achieving grades between the high 50s and lower 70s with occasional upper firsts.

In terms of individual modules, all I found quite fascinating. For the sake of brevity, I mention but a few. ARTF3168 - Africa and the Atlantic World with a strong focus on Haiti, Cuba, the Middle Passage and Afro-Brazil to be praised also for extensive weekly outlines and for the tutor's very detailed comments made available on the essays.

ARTF3059 Critical Approaches to Photography was set with a creative form of assessment befitting of the arts driven/interdisciplinary nature of the programme.

Aside from the final essay of 50%, the module was assessed by 4 weekly reading responses (40%) and by a student self portrait (10%). I would love to have seen these! I do not know if they can be made available if this module runs next year especially as there were some very high grades

ARTF3101 The Origins of Postcolonial England which seems to be a very necessary and timely course. I just wanted to flag up the work of _____ which is really exceptional. I thoroughly enjoyed 2 essays on the Ruthwell Cross and Beowulf dexterously handled with postcolonial theory (80%) and _____ study of medieval gardens on the edge of the Anglo-Saxon world (85%).

One query I have is about the giving of borderline marks. I saw quite a few 69s.

THE DISSERTATION

ARTF3170 60 credits

A very lengthy undertaking, which might be quite daunting for some students, the dissertation is set up very well for them to succeed. Workshops and a strong dissertation sample (possibly this should be anonymised?) are provided. It is clear that a theoretical focus, strong argument and visual engagement are required.

I read quite a lot of dissertations, taking a 2:1 sample and tracking borderlines and firsts. It would seem here that students that can really excel. There were 6 dissertations of 75% and above. It was good to see the upper marking range being used.

Students organized their dissertations very well into chapters. Their arguments and main focus were successful. They wrote with confidence and verve.

The range of topics was quite staggering and gratifying to see - from The Subculture of British 1980s British football fans to the subjective materialism of Rossetti, Shunga as art/pornography, Tate's BP complicity, modern Japanese painting, PC Music, Abstract Expressionism in the age of fridge magnets read as a Greenbergian approach to kitschification, British Muslims, Islam and social media.

Particularly to be commended - _____ on Selfies and Self Portraits (81); _____ work beyond Nihonga and Yoga (78) dissertation on the Avante Garde/Kitsch.

On dissertation, _____ (69) I think I would graded it up to 70 due to primary research.

Overall 12 distinctions in this modules is superb.

It would seem that among students there is geopolitical, ardent urgency to engage with contemporary media and the dissertation is providing them with that space.

MINERVA

Feedback for the External Examiner on Minerva was extremely clear. I was impressed by the extensive comments provided by the First Marker both in terms of criticism and in terms of future development. I found quite enlightening as it suggests that students will possibly go on to undertake postgraduate study.

IN SUM

A really great programme. Other universities could learn from your combination of subjects, freedom of choice for dissertation topics and interdisciplinarity.

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

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

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?	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
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 an External Examiner Mentor?	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
<i>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</i>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<i>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)</i>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	n/a
<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)?	n/a
<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>		
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>		
<i>As above. An exceptionally high standard of work and range of subjects.</i>		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i>		
<i>As above</i>		

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
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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
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	N
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

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

History of Art

Programme(s) / Module(s):

History of Art

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies

Address for communication:

University Road
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 delighted to note the many positive, complimentary and even superlative comments made by the external concerning the range of courses and their organisation, the high standards of teaching and intellectual demands placed on our students, the “respectful, warm and encouraging” nature of our support materials (particularly so Minerva), and especially the very high praise for the planning, supervision and assessment of the dissertation - aspects which make this programme, in opinion, unique.

With regards to the issue of whether the School should consider standardisation of the word length of the assessed essay component, our CoPA has nothing binding to say on the subject of word counts but as we intend to have a School wide discussion around word counts this year it is something that will come under scrutiny.

The external questioned whether or not students undertake presentations in the third year. This is true of some modules but not all; it is not a prerequisite and staff make their own decision as to whether to include this aspect.

The external noted the parity of marking across modules and singled out specific modules for praise as well as the significant performances of individual students. The question about borderline marks is taken note of and has been discussed by staff on numerous occasions, but unavoidably the split nature of marking (e.g. a 50-50 component assessment) will occasionally yield a borderline mark in the aggregate, even when staff seek to avoid this in marking individual components. Summarily, despite this comment being taken on board, staff agree that there are simply occasions where this is the correct mark to give. It is however something we are keenly aware of.

The external's summation of the BA as one which could act as an exemplar in terms of "subjects, freedom of choice for dissertation topics and interdisciplinarity" is warmly received as a validation of the dedication and hard work of all staff contributing to the programme.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

No comments from the previous report - then the first undertaken by this external examiner - required response 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:

No matters were forthcoming under this category.

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:

The external has answered in the affirmative to all of these questions (or 'not applicable' where relevant) evidencing that all of these aspects of provision were found to be satisfactory.

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:

With regard to structure, learning outcomes, comparability with similar programmes at other institutions and the imbedding of staff research in teaching the external was satisfied that the programme is delivering admirably.

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:

All comments here were positive and supportive of the programme.

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:

Again, all comments here were in the affirmative, expressing that the external was provided with all of the relevant materials and information required to perform task, in a diligent and timely manner, as well as receiving exemplary support from the School as and when required.

Other comments

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

N/A