

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QA Team 16/07/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Performance and Cultural Industries

Subject(s):

Theatre and Performance

Programme(s) / Module(s):

PECI2701 Creative Practice & Performance Contexts (core)
 PECI2705 Theatre Directing
 PECI2704 Interpreting theatre history
 PECI3704 Ind practice
 PECI3700: IRP
 PECI3702 Enterprise Project
 PECI3703 Performance Project

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

BA

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.

Use of supported student placement opportunities in community and education settings and the relevance of modules such as Directing and Enterprise to work in professional contexts.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

Continuing implementation of new programme and new modules (see below)

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

n/a

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?	Y
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?	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

The Leeds programme was in good health when I was appointed and my first report reflected this. However, the team has had to face significant challenges in response to the difficult circumstances of the subject community as a whole as a consequence of the changing role of drama and theatre in the FE curriculum, changing cohorts, student expectations and concerns about employability and the value of an arts degree. The changed curriculum was timely and appropriate in this context, but it was introduced as an enhancement and as a rationalisation, rather than a fix for anything that was wrong as student satisfaction and achievement continues to be very good indeed. There is a stronger sense of a through-line in the programme and building blocks from years 1 to 3. The increased use of practical work in year 1 has clearly benefitted the work at stages 2 and 3, whilst the research and independent learning skills built through many of the year 2 modules are evident in year 3 work for the IRP, dissertation and practical projects. I have appreciated the improvements in the presentation of the work sent to me so that I can easily access documentation, review the run of marks and check marking against criteria. This was particularly appreciated in the improvements to the Directing module. The Leeds programme is holistic and flexible. It should be noted that there were three external examiners when I started and this year I was the only one. I was also not required for two days as the evaluation of work on site was replaced by access to the VLE. This could work well for the future as long as access is user friendly (and renewed annually) and the work is available in good time.

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 degree programme has been revised as part of the process of rationalising the awards, rather than any concerns about the quality of the programme or delivery. The Leeds team continue to adapt their programme to reflect changes in the subject area and student priorities. The learning outcomes are entirely appropriate to the level of award and there is a clear progression between levels. The year 1 modules create a strong practical and contextual foundation for the approaches developed in years 2 and 3, placing emphasis on creative exploration and skills development. At Level Two there is a clear development from, for example, studying Theatre Performance to Interpreting Theatre and Performance history. The latter is a module I reviewed this year in which there was a huge range of work with the top essay, on futurism scoring a very strong first. Year Two work reflects the research specialisms of the team and also begins to prepare students for practice based research, experimental approaches (thinking beyond the box) and work in community, educational and professional contexts. Politics, Identity and Theatre is new module and timely. Creative Practice and Performance contexts focuses on adaptation and new writing, encouraging high levels of creativity, political engagement and innovation (e.g. top scoring piece on focussed on stimulus of 1917 and rise of communism). The module on Directing is modelled on portfolios based on young director's competitions, an excellent preparation for students ambitious to enter this field., By level 3, students are well prepared for working more independently work through the IRP and performance project, independent practice and enterprise projects.

<p>The standards continue to be appropriate to the level of the award, although it was evident that students didn't seem to be as strong as in previous years, a perception shared by the staff. I noted that students were working better on modules where there were higher levels of independence, less so on the more structured modules. This raised the question about the impact of the industrial action on student learning, but looking at the results across the year, the patterns were consistent so I concluded this wasn't the case.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p><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></p> <p>I have commented previously on the dynamic interaction between the Leeds curriculum and staff research interests. However, what became evident this year was the extent to which students are benefitting from the creative methodologies associated with the research of the Leeds staff team. This is evident not only in the IRP and performance project but in other modules involving independent research. Students working in community or education contexts deploy ethnographic, participatory and action research methods with awareness of the ethics and value of using personal testimony and a keen awareness of identity politics. The highest scoring dissertation (previously mentioned) was an excellent example of this.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i></p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p>		

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>There is a very wide range of assessments as appropriate to the curriculum content and learning outcomes. The assessments include pitches and blogs as well as essays and performances., preparing students well for future work. What I haven't yet seen at Leeds is a poster exercise which can be an extremely useful as a formative assessment for research projects. Although students continue to perform better in practical work than in written assessments, the gap isn't a significant one. This may well be due to the structured support for reflective tasks, such as the performance project evaluative reports. These are a model of of good practice, providing clear guidance on the task, the need for critical and theoretical perspectives, guidance on what to include, questions to support analysis and advice on how to produce high quality academic writing. There was less clustering of marks this year, with the exception of the Enterprise module (for which the convenor provided a clear justification). I was aware of the divergence of marks awarded within modules, particularly the IRP moderating, where one assignment had marks ranging from 38 to 67 and another from 44 to 72. I suggest a calibration exercise at the start of the module might be of benefit to the staff team. There continues to be a tendency to mismatch comments and marks,</p>		

although the assessment criteria are now being used more frequently in feedback. This helps students to understand why marks have been awarded and the expectations for achievement at a higher level.		
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>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></p> <p>Academic standards are compatible with other theatre and performance courses across the UK. Leeds attracts committed students who benefit from excellent teaching, as evident in the overall profiles. Approximately 22% of students achieved first class classifications. There seemed to be less borderline marks this year which is something I commented on in my previous report. I was impressed by the creative strengths of the year 3 cohort as entrepreneurs, producing innovative ideas and being able to realise these independently. The second year cohort included a larger than usual number of concessions, many of which were for students affected by the sudden death of a member of their peer group. I was impressed by the way staff dealt with this at the exam board and their anticipation of the challenge for this cohort next year.</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?	n/a
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	n/a
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

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:

I was extremely impressed by the range of subjects for dissertations and the quality of feedback and marking. The commitment of the students clearly reflects the commitment of their supervisors.

This was the first year that I haven't done a two day visit, so I was entirely dependent on material being sent or accessed via the VLE. Access was an issue and needs to be addressed for the future. I was surprised that passwords are retained from one year to the next as this isn't the practice elsewhere for security reasons. Most institutions require a password change every six to nine months. It should be possible for the EE to be sent a link each year to the VLE and to a folder with all the info they need. It should also be possible for them to browse other modules to get a sense of the curriculum as a whole. Whilst the departmental staff couldn't have been more helpful, it felt as if we are all at the mercy of a system that needs a better staffing resource and simplification in its organisation. Once I had access (through the extensive efforts of), the documentation was in extremely good order throughout, Folders were clearly labelled and the students being filmed identified themselves to the camera. Most staff provided lists of marks and identified issues to be aware of. There was evidence of moderation for most modules .

I think it would be helpful to future external examiners to have module information at the start of the year. If it can be decided which modules they will see (on rotation basis), the convenors could have contact with the external at an earlier stage to ensure the external is familiar with the content and the assessment structure as this means that when marking needs to be checked to tight deadlines, the external is already familiar with the context.

Other comments

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

I would like to thank the Leeds academic and administrative staff for being so welcoming and for their hospitality and courteousness during my visits. Students benefit from an environment where staff know them as individuals and nurture their development. I'd be happy to send my own children to Leeds to study this programme which must be an indication of how impressed I have been.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Theatre and Performance

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA Theatre & Performance, inc.
 PECI2701 Creative Practice & Performance Contexts (core)
 PECI2705 Theatre Directing
 PECI2704 Interpreting theatre history
 PECI3704 Ind practice
 PECI3700: IRP
 PECI3702 Enterprise
 PECI3703 Performance Project

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

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

AHC / Performance & Cultural Industries

Address for communication:

School of Performance & Cultural Industries

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 gat@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

The outward-facing nature of much of the School's teaching continues to be an important principle underpinning much of forward planning. We look forward to seeing further developments here through the introduction of the BA Theatre & Performance with Enterprise programme, the growth of the Professional Perspectives schedule of events with input from leading industry figures, and the continuing development of our relationships with key external partners, organisations and agencies.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous 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:

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 thank _____ for particularly valuable input into the development of the new undergraduate programme as it went through its period of transition to a newer, more flexible model of delivery that responds more robustly to changing student needs and expectations, as well as a rapidly evolving external environment. “Enhancement” and “rationalisation” have indeed been our watchwords during this process, and the ongoing dialogue with _____ about programme and module learning outcomes as well as patterns of innovative delivery has provided the programme team with a broader perspective and a firmer sense of where to place our priorities. The “holistic and flexible” nature of the programme has been an important focus, while various efforts have been made to maintain coherence and “through-lines” of student choice.

_____ in-depth reviews of specific modules such as Performance Project, Independent Research Project, Enterprise Project and others over recent years have helped the programme team to understand better the value of such modules in building a coherent learning experience for students within the unique context of a school dedicated both the Performance and the wider Cultural Industries, and the undergraduate programme is now better situated as such within the sector and compared with our competitors.

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 appreciate _____ acknowledgement of the “timely” introduction of new modules such as Politics, Identity and Performance, the “high levels of creativity, political engagement and innovation” across Level Two modules generally, and the strong foundation provided in preparation for the more independent work at Level Three. We also share _____ confidence that the period of industrial action did not impair student achievement or results, which were in line with expectations.

We are particularly please that _____ previous reports on the Theatre Directing module at Level Two have been addressed appropriately in this session, and that _____ now regards the module as representing “an excellent preparation for students ambitious to enter this field”.

The research-driven nature of the teaching within the School continues to provide a vital dimension to the undergraduate programme, and we will certainly continue to develop the diverse range of “creative methodologies” and the approaches to project development (particularly with external partners) informed by this research highlighted by _____

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 welcome _____ suggestions for broadening our methods of assessment across the whole undergraduate programme, and will continue the assessment mapping exercise to monitor the distribution of types as well as their progression between Levels. Our recent experiments in more structured writing tasks and exercises have definitely born fruit in Level Two modules especially, and student engagement with these have notably increased, particularly where these are tied directly to taught sessions (such as writing blog entries for each lecture).

The marking calibration exercise for the Independent Research Project will be conducted earlier in the 2018/19 session rather than after final submission in order to inform supervision guidance of students as well as ensuring better parity of marking decisions between examiners.

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:

This year we piloted a different approach to preparing and organising samples of assessed work and associated module materials for the External Examiner. Work entirely without paper and without preparation of a base room, we created a special area within the VLE, with colleagues collating and introducing their module/sample. Although this involved some significant additional preparatory work, once set up it enabled a much smoother process for all concerned, and we are pleased that felt sufficiently supported here given very tight schedule in this session.

The PCI Assessment Lead will continue discussions with Programme Leaders to ensure breadth of coverage of modules across the whole period of the new External Examiners' appointment, and will explore new methods of providing meaningful access to performances, presentations and other ephemeral events.

Other comments

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

We are immensely grateful to for the considerable time, energy and effort has devoted to the sometimes complex task of reviewing our new undergraduate programme at the same time as the outgoing programme, often facing a significant workload with good humour and an infectious enthusiasm. We particularly appreciate always supportive and constructive dialogue as a "critical friend" with us over the years, which has pushed us into thinking more expansively about our approach to teaching, learning and assessment, with consequent improvement of student outcomes across the board. We are especially moved to learn that would be happy to send own children to study at Leeds.