

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-2018

QAT Received 18/10/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science (PRHS)
<i>Subject(s):</i>	<i>Philosophy</i>
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	Programmes BA Philosophy BA Philosophy, Politics and Economics BA Economics and Philosophy BA Management and Philosophy BA Philosophy and Politics BA Philosophy and Sociology BA Philosophy and Social Policy Indicative list of modules PHIL2221 Ancient Philosophy PHIL2232 History of Modern Philosophy PHIL2295 Ethics of Life and Death PHIL2321 Political Philosophy PHIL2322 Moral Philosophy PHIL3111 Nietzsche and Schopenhauer PHIL3220 Hume PHIL3321 Metaethics PHIL3322 Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art PHIL3700 Feminist Philosophy PHIL3721 Advanced Topics in Value Theory PHIL3722 Philosophy and Literature PRHS3000 Independent Research Project PRHS3001 Integrated Research Project
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	BA

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner

Title and Name of Examiner:

Institution:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Completed report

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Quality Assurance**
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

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

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

Only applicable in first year of appointment

Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?

n/a

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

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

n/a

Standards

1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award

- *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

In my judgement, the ILOs are entirely commensurate with level of the award

2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

Yes

3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs

- *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.*

Leeds offers a strong package of assessment methods, mostly focusing on traditional assessment (essays and exams), but with some variations (e.g. contribution to on-line discussions, and presentations). These methods seem appropriate to the ILOs, but the School could perhaps consider some other options – e.g. pre-released exams.

4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?

- *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.*

Overall, it was clear that the students were given the chance to display their abilities at the right level, and I had confidence in the levels and forms of assessment on offer.

I saw some strong work at all levels, and very few weak pieces of work. In these cases, the students had clearly failed to engage with the teaching provided, and to do the requisite reading.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

n/a

6. Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year

It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.

Marking of presentations. The Integrated Research Project contains a presentation element, and for this an explicit checklist is provided to markers (also attached), and this was supplemented with some further advice from the module leader. However, we recognise that we need to do some further work in ensuring consistency of practice on the assessment of presentations, not just in the Integrated Project.

Use of the full range of marks. Staff were briefed by the Assessment Officer at the start of the academic year on the move to the 0-100 scale (which replaced the 20-90 scale). Revised grade descriptors have been included in an appendix to the Code of Practice of Assessment. As far as actual practice this year is concerned, there is some evidence that markers are awarding marks of 80+ to a greater extent.

Cross-module comparison of marks. Although monitors do look at the run of marks in individual modules, cross-module comparison occurred this year for the first time, and informed the School's response to the effects of industrial action on teaching delivery.

Use of multiple choice questions in exams. This was discussed in the School Education Committee. It is appreciated that it is not easy to devise these in subjects for which more discursive formats are appropriate. However, where very specific information can be asked for, these do have a role, though perhaps as only a relatively small proportion of the exam. In the case of Great Philosophical Thinkers (a Level 1 module), the exam this year continued to use multiple-choice assessment. The grounds for doing so is pedagogical: to motivate the students to engage with the full range of the module's content, rather than picking and choosing only that content which is relevant to the chosen essay titles etc. The MCQ component however only contributes 12% of the overall module mark (i.e. one fifth of the exam mark, with the exam contributing 60% of the overall module mark).

7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching

This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.

It is clear that the general ethos of the department fits the model of 'research led teaching', where students (particularly in the third year) are exposed to cutting edge research that relates to the work of the staff concerned. This is an admirable approach, and there is every indication that it engaged the interest of students.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

n/a

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

n/a

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.

Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.

The guidance is sufficient

11. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?

The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.

The documentation was appropriate

12. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

I was given draft examination papers. All the questions were appropriate, and no significant changes were requested.

13. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

I was given a large amount of material to review. All marking feedback was clear, and in many cases was detailed.

14. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

I saw some strong work in the dissertations.

15. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

I attended both the pre-exam board, and also the main exam board. Both were well conducted and organized. The pre-exam board gave careful consideration to a range of difficult cases, and in my view handled these difficulties in a fully appropriate way. I was impressed by the care and professionalism of the staff at this occasion. The main exam board is a more mechanical process, but was efficiently handled, giving me full confidence in the process.

16. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?

Yes, see comment above.

Other comments

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

Some further areas of good practice can be mentioned:

- The moderation system between markers seems to work well, and is a useful feature of the assessment on this programme.
- In general, feedback on work is good and thoughtful.
- Issues caused by the strike were well handled: care was taken with one problematic module, and the situation resolved in a fully satisfactory way.

A few issues were raised with the School:

- It might be useful to compile statistics comparing marks and classifications across modules, and to keep a historical record over time, to help compare how markers are using the scale, and to keep an eye on issues like grade inflation. This data could also be considered by the external examiners. This might ensure all staff are using the scale in the same way, particularly the 70-100 marks.
- In the case of some modules, feedback is provided anonymously for the whole module. It is perhaps inappropriate that students can see comments on the work of other students.
- Overall, the School might re-consider the way external examiners are being used, and whether this is the most effective use of our time. At present, we are asked to read quite a lot of work, but at a stage where we can make little difference to the actual marks, and it is not clear that so much reading is necessary for quality assurance purposes. We could be used more strategically, e.g. to review a certain number of modules in depth each year (e.g. including access to student questionnaires, and more detailed lecture material).
- Finally, if the current system is to continue, it would be helpful if we could be given specific scripts with the comments/marks attached, to avoid searching across a range of sources to put scripts, marks and comments together, which became rather time consuming.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Philosophy

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Programmes

BA Philosophy
 BA Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 BA Economics and Philosophy
 BA Management and Philosophy
 BA Philosophy and Politics
 BA Philosophy and Sociology
 BA Philosophy and Social Policy

Indicative list of modules

PHIL2221 Ancient Philosophy
 PHIL2232 History of Modern Philosophy
 PHIL2295 Ethics of Life and Death
 PHIL2321 Political Philosophy
 PHIL2322 Moral Philosophy
 PHIL3111 Nietzsche and Schopenhauer
 PHIL3220 Hume
 PHIL3321 Metaethics
 PHIL3322 Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art
 PHIL3700 Feminist Philosophy
 PHIL3721 Advanced Topics in Value Theory
 PHIL3722 Philosophy and Literature
 PRHS3000 Independent Research Project
 PRHS3001 Integrated Research Project

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

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Assessment Officer

Faculty / School of:

School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science

Address for communication:

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.

15 October 2018

Dear

Thank you very much for submitting your External Examiner's Report for the Academic Year 2017–18. As ever, we greatly appreciate the careful attention that you have given to the selection of Philosophy-related programmes and to a large number of modules connected with those programmes.

We are pleased to see that, for the most part, our assessment processes and standards are satisfactory. It is especially helpful that you have included some suggestions pertaining to elements that warrant improvement or at least closer attention. I shall respond to each of your points in turn:

1. In connection with your comment on assessment methods (under Question 3 above), it is encouraging that you view our assessment methods as offering a strong package, and we appreciate your suggestion that further options, such as pre-released exams, could be considered. We do already use what we call 'seen exams' (i.e. exams with questions seen in advance by students) in some modules in the Theology and Religious Studies side of the School, such as THEO2201 Hindu Traditions and THEO2040 Modern Theologians, but not currently in any Philosophy modules. It remains, however, a possible form of assessment for module leaders to adopt.
2. We appreciate your reminder (under Question 6) that more needs to be done to ensure consistency of practice in the use of student presentations as part of a module's assessment. My understanding is that, during the forthcoming exam period (in January 2019), the presentations associated with PRHS3001 Integrated Research Project will all be observed by two members of academic staff. We also require students to submit written notes or a handout as part of the assessment, and these can be made available to External Examiners, even though the presentations themselves will not be recorded. We aim to ensure that equivalent procedures are implemented in the case of other modules with an assessed presentation component.
3. One of the points you raise under 'Other comments' concerns the provision of feedback to students 'anonymously for the whole module'. The practice of pasting feedback forms into a single pdf file, which is then uploaded to a readily accessible area of the module VLE, typically applies to feedback on exams and, in the case of coursework, to members of staff who prefer to mark printed copies of assessments rather than marking them online. (Staff may have various reasons for not wishing to mark electronically.) In the case of such members of staff, it is our recommended procedure to enter comments into feedback forms that are identifiable by means of the student's ID number. To maintain anonymity, these forms are then pasted into a single document and uploaded to the VLE. The students can then find the feedback on their own assignment by searching for their ID number.

In most such cases, it is not obvious what other means of returning feedback would be preferable. To return feedback individually by means of email is sometimes done in the case of modules with low numbers of students. We shall continue to do this even though it does slightly compromise the principle of retaining students' anonymity throughout the marking and feedback process. But it would not be practicable in the case of modules with large student numbers. We shall, of course, continue to reflect on possible alternative means of supplying feedback to students, and we welcome constructive suggestions from our External Examiners.

Students are notified in advance about the method that will be used to provide them with feedback. But to avoid causing confusion for External Examiners, we certainly need to ensure that this same information is provided to them.

4. Your suggestions (again under 'Other comments') for how External Examiners' time and effort might be used more effectively are extremely welcome. We have long been concerned that devoting so much time to sampling individual assignments at a late stage in the overall process is not a very effective means of evaluating our assessment procedures as a whole. Members of School staff with a close interest in assessment matters – including myself as Assessment Officer, Professor [redacted] as Director of Student Education, [redacted] as Education Service Officer with particular responsibility for assessment-related matters, and other members of our School Taught Student Education Committee (STSEC) – are currently undertaking an intensive review of our External Examining procedures with a view to implementing precisely the shifting of priorities that you describe: namely, a reduction of routine sampling and a stronger emphasis on pertinent statistical information along with monitors' reports and other materials demonstrating how final marks were arrived at. We also intend to make information about changes to programmes and modules more readily available to External Examiners. We hope and expect these improvements to our External Examining procedures to be implemented during the current academic year (2018–19).

With gratitude once again,

Yours sincerely,

(Assessment Officer, on behalf of the Head of School)