

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 26/10/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

School of Civil Engineering

Subject(s):

Construction and Project Management

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Engineering Project Management and International Construction Management and Engineering

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

MSc

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.

Overall there are no significant concerns and the programmes are of a consistently high standard that is very comparable to other programmes in this area at other institutions. This is in part through the following aspects of good practice:

- Much of the teaching centres around case-based learning. While this may be more difficult to implement as enrolment numbers increase, the indications are that this is very well received by the students, allowing group interaction and community spirit within the cohort. The value of this is not to be underestimated – with such a wide range of international students it allows students who would otherwise follow their own path to benefit from the collective learning of the group. The university should not allow anything to diminish the ability of the programme team to deliver in this way.
- The research proposal document introduced in, I think, 2016 has clearly enhanced the quality of the dissertations and the experience of the students in this major component. While there are aspects about this which have become unsatisfactory (see below) the assessment and feedback of the proposal document allows students (should they wish to) take on board the formative comments to enhance the research that follows.
- More generally the dissertation component of the programmes continues to be very well organised. The students gain a lot of instruction in the undertaking of what tend to be interpretive and qualitative studies. Such studies are of a very different nature to those that are done in most if the rest of the faculty and would not be natural to those students who come from a technical background.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

- It has been pleasing to see that the team have been able to respond to my suggestion last year that the weightings of the dissertation components be adjusted. This has allowed for a more appropriate focus on data collection, analysis and interpretation.

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

The matters below are not urgent in the sense that the programme cannot work without them being considered, but they are in my view important. They have already been raised directly with the team and mentioned in my verbal comments at the board meeting:

1. I repeat the comment I made at last year's board. While I understand the team cannot directly address this as it is an aspect of university policy, I think it important enough to be repeated: there appears to be no exit route prior to

dissertation stage which means that a student who is struggling with a programme, who perhaps has failed more than one module, still has to proceed and undertake a dissertation even if the likely outcome is PGDip. Such students also find themselves in a difficult situation of taking resits at the same time their dissertation is to be finalised. While of course they have the option to defer and take the resits the following year, the majority of students here are overseas – they often cannot afford to stay another year. The university could consider what is common at other institutions whereby students who do not achieve a certain level by the end of semester 2 are offered an exit at that point of a PGDip.

- The introduction of the research proposal document has shown clear benefits in the general engagement of the students and in the quality of the final dissertation. However, as this is assessed it can lead to the overall dissertation module mark to be higher than that of the dissertation itself, on some occasions to provide a pass even if the dissertation is of a fail standard. The programme team are therefore of the view that the dissertation is passed before the module is passed. This is a view I support but I understand that they have not been allowed to implement this. This has led to the decision to remove the assessment of the research proposal for 18-19 which is not ideal in my view and can lead to an erosion of the benefits of the proposal document in the first place through, potentially, lack of student engagement. I urge the school to consider ways in which this very effective module can be delivered even more appropriately.

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 a 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 / 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 an External Examiner Mentor?	Y /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

Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.

The two programmes are similar in some areas but have sufficient individual aspects to make them viable as standalone programmes. The content of each programme is very appropriate to allow specialised leaning and development in construction and project management. I have very few issues with the design of the programme (other than those noted in the text boxes elsewhere in this report) and consider it to be very comparable to those at other institutions.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
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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)

All staff are research active and this comes in to the teaching, particularly the dissertation delivery.		
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> The programme is very oriented to the needs of industry and would not, as it stands, be appropriate for integrated PhD other than very applied investigations.</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)?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i> The programme is accredited by the Joint Board of Moderators and meets those requirements very well. The team have had to modify some aspects of the programme to meet the accreditation requirements and this demonstrates their responsiveness to PSRB requirements.</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> There are no issues here. As mentioned previously in this report the programme is case based and with a lot of group interaction. This allows a very appropriate assessment of the ILOs.</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>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> As expected there is quite a variable range of abilities on this programme. One weakness would be that a proportion of the students try to find the path of least resistance through the work and submit acceptable work. This is to be expected. Nevertheless, while the assessment methods do reward students who have attempted to go beyond the expected minimums, there is always scope for enhancement in this area to allow the very capable students to demonstrate their ability.</p>		
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i> Feedback appears to be universal for all in-course assessments (not exams) though this appears to be exclusively written comments. It would be good to see if there are other forms of feedback – verbal, visual etc.</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?	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?	Y
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	N
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:
 Regrettably, for 34 above I have answered 'No' again. This is a comment that I made last year and is another reflection of what appear to be rigid university rules, that is the university will not allow rounding of marks upwards. This year a student who gained 59.7% received a pass rather than a merit and I urge the university to consider if this policy is appropriate – most institutions will automatically round up a mark of 59.5% or above to 60%; and most institutions also allow for borderline considerations for marks that are, say, 58% or above that do not depend on mitigating circumstances. At the exam board I suggested the introduction of marks profiling but other judgements can be made. By implementing this the university would undertake comparable assessment processes to many other institutions and be fairer as a result. After all, no academic would ever say that they are capable of marking accurately to 0.5% (indeed many marks I saw for coursework appeared to be given to the nearest 5%).

Other comments

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

- I have suggested to the programme team that I be given brief feedback on my comments that I make on draft examination papers. This allows me to judge whether I have made useful or suitable comments or allow me to understand particular reasons why a paper is structured the way it is.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)*Title and Name of Examiner:*

Subject(s):

Construction and Project Management

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Engineering Project Management and International Construction Management and Engineering

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

MSc(Eng)

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

Civil Engineering

Address for communication:

School of Civil Engineering, 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 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

It is pleasing to note that the majority of elements of our programmes meet with your approval, such as case based learning and the introduction of the research proposal document. In terms of case based learning, this is something that we are keen to continue with as we regard this as one of the core strengths and competitive advantage of our MSc programmes, particularly as the vast majority of our two cohorts are made up of international students who benefit greatly from the 'hands-on' experience that this brings.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Thank you for the comment made.

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:

Exit route prior to dissertation stage and dissertation progression: We appreciate you highlighting the progression route at the University of Leeds as an anomaly compared to other universities in the country, At Leeds, we do not consider PGDip as a 'fall back' and 'inferior qualification' hence the admission requirements are the same for both PGDip and MSc. To implement your request, a wider, University-wide consultation would be required, which is unlikely to result in a change of regulations. Therefore, although we can in some way relate to your suggestions, our proposal is to stress to students how the University regulations on progression work so that they can focus on progression with a clear knowledge of the regulations.

Research proposal document: Due to the reasons you have highlighted in your report, this has now become a non-compulsory artefact as part of the dissertation module. We will closely monitor the effects this will have on the student work during this academic year and will make suitable adjustments for next academic year should students be adversely affected.

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:

N/A

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:

Thank you for the comments made.

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 review our assessment and feedback procedures on a regular basis and will take on board the issues raised.

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:

Progression and Awards Board: Thank you for highlighting the limitations for the current practice on awards. The School Teaching and Student Education Committee will be asked to discuss your recommendations and implement any change in policy that is required after getting the approval of relevant Faculty and University Committees.

Other comments

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

This will be implemented with immediate effect.