

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 02/11/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Design

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MA Design Future Society

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

MA

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.

The collaboration across two programmes in Europe is an innovative approach to curriculum delivery, particularly in relation to intercultural exchange, and will most certainly enhance the student experience. Considering the current political landscape across Europe, it is even more pertinent to support such initiatives, and work collectively on making such provision work for both institutions.

During DESN5210M Integrated Communication UK students benefit from being taught together with students from Advertising and Design and during DESN5122M Design and Society with Service Design and Innovation studied by students from MA Design. Ideally, the programme lead identifies a similar link with Design Futures and Social Design Projects where the Mannheim students could work with UK based students. This would enhance their experience and intercultural exchange during the MA.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

Students from Mannheim were tasked with writing a research paper in English to (a) introduce them to the British approach to research in HE, and (b) prepare students for their semester of studying in the UK. This intervention was welcomed by the students, as it makes them feel more confident about their language skills prior to arriving in Leeds. The number of projects taught on the UK part of the programme were reduced from three to two to support students in managing their workload and provide opportunities for deeper learning in regard to the design process. Students from Mannheim welcomed the opportunity of participating in a workshop taught on the MA Advertising and Design, as it exposed them to different perspectives on design and related topics, as well as introducing them to the wider postgraduate community at Leeds University.

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

Whilst the number of students recruited onto the programme has increased since last year, the promotion and marketing of the provision still requires urgent attention. As this is a very distinct offer, it might be useful to take a more joined up approach across the two countries and look at possible support from organisation such as the [British Council Germany](#).

The UK programme lead shared the results of the recent postgraduate survey with me. Whilst the outcome is disappointing, my suggestion would be to thoroughly scrutinise the data, surface the narrative underpinning it and respond to any issues prior to the next academic year. (the enhancements stated above might already have made a difference in the student satisfaction). Again, any action taken should be a joined up approach between the two institutions. This is of particular importance as the programme embodies two different learning cultures.

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 / N
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y / N
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y / N
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y / N
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y / N

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

The structure of the programme suits its interdisciplinary, cross cultural, outward looking nature and follows a common model used for teaching design programmes at Master's level in the UK. The ILOs meet the national benchmark for level 7.

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

As confirmed by students from Mannheim, the teaching of research methodologies on the programme is conducted with rigour and thoroughness, and exceeds their experience of such provision in the German Hochschulen system. In addition, students are introduced to researchers / practitioners from fields such as social entrepreneurship, introducing them to the potential context of their work as designers, highlighting areas worth exploring during the design process.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	Y / N
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Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	Y / N
<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)?	Y / N
<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 / N
<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>Assessment practices applied are common across design education provisions in the UK. The grading is conducted in a fair and consistent manner. In addition to any documents recording the process, I was fortunate enough during my May and November visit to meet with students and confirm their understanding of assessment processes. Especially students from Manheim commented on the clarity and thoroughness of the process, highlighting the ease of understanding the breakdown of their grades and how to achieve their full potential. It was unfortunate, that a visit to the partner institution was cancelled, as the idea of the trip was for me to observe student presentations. This opportunity could provide an authentic insight into the assessment process as conducted by the German team, and assure me that fairness and consistency are key elements across the programme.</p>		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y / N
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y / N
<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>The academic standards I have seen so far on this programme are of very good quality. Students demonstrate a high level of engagement with their programme and assignments, and are generally very appreciative of the unique experience the programme offers them.</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 students expressed real appreciation of the rigour and thoroughness of the assessment methods as conducted in the UK. It might be beneficial to the overall student experience to compare practices across the programme and align accordingly.</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 / N
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y / N
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y / N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	N/A

27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y / N
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y / N
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 / N
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y / N
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y / N
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N

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

I attended the progression board only. Due to a delay with some of the marks, the awards board will be held at a later stage.

On a different note, the subject of Exit Velocity Principle came up during the board I attended, and colleagues discovered that this was no longer practiced at Leeds University. There seems to be a general consensus that it would be worth revisiting this subject in the interest of student achievement.

Other comments

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

During each visit to Leeds I met students. Considering the turn out, students very much seem to appreciate the opportunity to share their feedback with a person impartial to their studies. My conversations with students focused on their overall experience of the programme, any challenges or highlights, and their feedback on the further development of the programme. Whilst all of these items are crucial, the latter is of particular importance, as the programme is only in its second year and student perception is invaluable to shaping it. The meetings are a great opportunity for me to gain insights into the students' development and progression from their perspective, more valuable by far than simply scrutinizing creative logs or research reports.

Discussions with students highlighted the different motivations of studying this particular MA programme. They value the opportunity of this intercultural approach and suggested that this could be further enhanced by additional workshops / seminars with other programmes in the design school. Students from Mannheim proposed to teach both groups, Leeds and Mannheim, in tandem to increase the level of interaction and exchange.

Another idea that was expressed was for the programme to provide additional insights into the foundations of design businesses and financial aspects relevant to their field.

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

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Design Future Society

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

MA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Principal Teaching Fellow, Programme Manager MA Design Future Society

Faculty / School of:

Design

Address for communication:

School of Design

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 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

The programme team are seeking to identify additional opportunities for collaborative opportunities between the two cohorts and the wider taught postgraduate community in the School. Whilst timetabling and other programme specific activities can potentially hinder greater collaboration there is a willingness from all taught postgraduate programmes to facilitate this where possible. Equally there have been, and continue to be, opportunities to connect and collaborate outside the School, in particular with researchers in the School of Earth and Environment.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Both Programme Managers reviewed the Research Methodology module taught in Mannheim and a closer alignment was achieved in delivering research methods that would assist students in understanding the academic structure of their work when at Leeds. Students from Mannheim have attended workshops providing specific guidance from the Library support team in writing Reflective Reports and Literature Reviews, which are submission components for their modules.

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:

The programme survey results were disappointing. The Programme Manager at Mannheim has conducted a review with 60% of the students involved in the survey in an attempt to understand where the areas of dissatisfaction were and why. His analysis identified a significant difference in academic environment and culture and the greater expectations at Leeds in respect of the amount of work required as part of a submission. It was acknowledged that students were not fully prepared for the differences and to some extent the course team was surprised by this as the differences in culture and learning styles/environments was intended to be a unique feature of the programme.

Marketing the programme has been problematic from the beginning. The nature of a joint degree delivered in two different countries and institutions with a longer duration (18 months) and a different start date (January not September) proved challenging for the standard administration and marketing systems. Given the significant investment in time, resources and commitment, the level of marketing support that was provided was inadequate and there has remained an attitude surrounding the programme of being problematic and 'difficult'. To what extent the impact of negativity has had on the programme and the low levels of enquiries and applications is open for debate and speculation. Although applications steadily increased from one in the first year, to five in the second and 25 in the third, these have not translated into numbers enrolled. In year one there was zero enrolment, 3 in year two and only 2 in year three. As a result, the Head of School and Programme Manager have reluctantly and regrettably decided that the programme cannot continue on the grounds that there is insufficient interest in the programme offer from the Leeds perspective. By contrast Mannheim recruited 14 in year one, 11 in year two and 11 in year three. This imbalance of recruitment has created continued uncertainty and difficulties in both the management and delivery of the programme. Equally, the generation of minimal fees from the Leeds perspective has proved difficult to justify in relation to the business plan.

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:

It is clear from the programme survey that work still needs to be done in preparing students for two different educational and cultural experiences. There is tangible evidence from the work produced for their master thesis by the first group of graduating students from Mannheim that they had integrated learning from both institutions and produced work of a high standard and in some cases outstanding submissions. Those submissions evidence rigorous academic research supporting creative, imaginative thinking and utilising design sensibility and execution which effectively addresses social issues and presented in a highly professional form.

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:

Programme managers have worked hard over a three-year period, both during the validation process and during programme implementation to find common ground in both delivery and assessment methods. Even though there are significant differences in culture and methods the programme teams have, through a strong belief in collaboration and respect to establish a method that works across institutions. There have been some issues regarding grade conversion, but recent research by [redacted] has unearthed comparative grading mechanisms used by both Aachen and Cologne Universities and we are in the process of implementing a similar conversion system, which will benefit students in understanding differences and create clarity for examination boards in determining classifications. There has been an ongoing problem with the design and issue of joint certificates containing grades from both institutions, which as yet is still unresolved.

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:

Clarification was sought from the Pro Dean for Student Education regarding exit velocity and [redacted] has confirmed that it does exist at UG level where double weighting of the final year is possible. However, at masters level it is difficult to recognise lift in achievement from level to level as it is all one level. Clear criteria are identified for those students who fall into discretion.

Other comments

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

It is difficult to comment on the future development of the programme when a decision has now been made to withdraw the programme. The motivation for writing MA Design Future Society with was to create an alternative learning experience that would reconsider the purpose of design and re-position its future role in society. Central to those aims was the encouragement and fostering of cultural and social diversity and multi-disciplinary collaboration in solving problems that would have tangible social benefit. It is with profound regret that we have to acknowledge that the current manifestation of this project has failed. Withdrawing the programme represents both a failure to achieve that ambition and a missed opportunity.