

**The University of Leeds**  
**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 02/07/2018

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

School of Design

*Subject(s):*

*Art and Design* International Foundation

*Programme(s) / Module(s):*

DESN0010 Visual Research and Drawing  
DESN0020 Materials, Media and Processes  
DESN0030 Understanding Design  
DESN0040 Personal Study

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

**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.*

DESN0040 Personal Study

This module has been amended to encourage students to critique their own work more fully and in a wider context and worked well for some of the more competent English-speaking students.

**Enhancements made from the previous year**

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

A graphic design specialist member of staff gave support to the graphic design element of the course.

Amendments to the module mentioned above.

**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*

There is unfortunately a continuing issue with the level of attainment by the Chinese cohorts, resulting in a woeful pass and progression rate. I note that the previous External Examiner in 2015/6 report stated that there was, even, then an issue with some IFY students struggling on their future courses and highlighted that recruitment was an issue. Here again I have to express concern. Non-Chinese students who come with IB qualifications and some art and design background can flourish, produce good work and progress; a top student this year will be undertaking an undergraduate course in another European institution, a sad loss to the University. However despite completing sufficient work to create adequate portfolios the majority of the Chinese students do not possess the necessary level of initiative, understanding or ambition to progress to an undergraduate programme at the University of Leeds. This leads me to ask several questions: what is the purpose of this course for the University, how do the undergraduate courses in the school benefit, is it right and proper to recruit students with such a low level of art and design education and are students from other backgrounds with ambitions to enter the UK systems well served?

**What is the purpose for the University**

Clearly it is good for the University to offer routes into their undergraduate courses to International students. The premise of the course is excellent offering students the opportunity become familiar with the University system, levels of expectations and culture. The course is appropriately positioned to meet this need. International fee income is important for the University, but surely it would be preferable to gain 4 years worth of income rather than one. The short term recruitment of poor students for one year of income does nothing to enhance the reputation of the course and the School.

**How do the undergraduate courses in the school benefit**

From personal experience running the Erasmus scheme in my previous employment I would always promote the benefit of having International students in a cohort. It's a fantastic opportunity to share cultural knowledge and international students can bring unexpected perspectives and broaden the outlook of their peers. However they can also require extra support and with already weak students who are not driven to achieve or compete then they can become a real drain for staff and this can store up problems with students at best scraping through or worse failing to progress. This has a negative impact on undergraduate course statistics, the moral of the staff team and the students themselves. Last year I discussed with the programme leader the need to keep statistics on the progress of students accepted to progress to undergraduate level.

**Is it right and proper to recruit students with such a low level of art and design education**

Once more during my meetings with the Chinese students I was shocked to find that some of them thought they were coming onto a marketing course and did not realise that they would have to do any art and design as part of their studies, as last year. Some of them had very little art and design experience. This led to poor time management and a lack of engagement outside of studio time. The development of drawing, painting and learning software is a time consuming activity and without the basic tools that you would expect from a student entering a foundation course it's a tall ask for them to do this well independently. With an intensive studio/workshop based course then this would of course be possible, but time allocated on THIS course as part of the University of Leeds there is little likelihood of students achieving the levels that one would expect despite the best efforts of staff. As a result students turn up to tutorials with no work to discuss and fail to make week on week progress, simply doing sufficient to meet the basic module requirements. Students therefore do not develop the language, critical abilities and robustness that is an absolute necessity to engage in an undergraduate programme. In addition the English language module is a challenge to those with only a rudimentary level of understanding; in my interviews two of the students found it difficult to converse with me about their work, one in particular said that she had found the work difficult and that she couldn't understand at first. I have some experience of working in China with high school art and design students and found there to be a wide range of ability in comprehension, but there are many fantastically talented and able creative young people eager to study in the UK. Of the students in this cohort some were articulate but with no technical ability, some were good at drawing with a very poor level of language. I would suggest that either the recruitment is reviewed to ensure that the right students, with a good level of English and a portfolio that is reviewed (preferably face-to-face by an art and design specialist), are enrolled, or that recruitment is redirected to other parts of the world with a more established culture of art and design education. The ethics of recruiting students who are unlikely to succeed is questionable and could do damage to the confidence of the student, have significant financial implications for them and damage the reputation of the University, these are students that should be good ambassadors for Leeds back home. Maybe it would be possible to arrange for portfolio development / summer courses to be a prerequisite for entry.

**Are students from other backgrounds with ambitions to enter the UK systems well served**

In discussion with the students from non-Chinese backgrounds it was apparent that being in a significant minority had a negative effect on the learning experience. The lack of feedback and poor communication with the Chinese students led to a sense that little progress was being made and the kind of impetus and drive that you would expect within a cohort from diverse backgrounds was lacking. This is not a reflection of course on the individual Chinese students who were personable and charming, but on the learning experience as a whole. A good experience requires a lively and engaged cohort and it is impossible for staff to generate this momentum with a bewildered or unwilling majority.

***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
<p><i>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</i></p> <p>The course offers a range of activities across the art and design spectrum enabling students to develop technical skills through workshops, self critique and applying creative thinking to produce design outcomes. Through written modules the students are introduced to university systems and levels of academic expectations. On successful completion students should feel confident in making a choice of direction for an undergraduate programme. The programme is in line with the level of award offered. It is unfortunate that there is no scope within the limited timetable for students to undertake any 3-D project work such as fashion construction.</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>There is an expectation of students to undertake research within projects, and that this will influence some of their design development. Within written modules students are expected to make reference to and critique art and design current and past practitioners using library resources with appropriate referencing.</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
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*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.*

As is mentioned elsewhere in this report there is concern that the levels of student performance are skewed by a large intake of students with little previous art and design experience. This is not a reflection on the course design or the quality of teaching but on the recruitment, and this has a significant impact on the outcomes.

For the course design itself there are adequate opportunities for the students to attain the levels expected within the ILOs, and assessments are clear and feedback is well articulated. There are regular opportunities for students to gain formative feedback during tutorials. All work is clearly second marked. Students who are failing to achieve the levels expected to pass are informed and it was clear on interview that most had a realistic expectation about their progression. As has been alluded to previously giving students the benefit of the doubt will not serve them well in the future and at the examination board it was made clear by the programme leader why some students were not going to progress, which, after having met with the students I absolutely concurred.

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

*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:*

Please refer to comments made in 'Matters for Urgent Attention'

*Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:*

### 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?	n/a
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	n/a
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	n/a
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?	n/a
<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**

It is disappointing that despite comments made in the previous two External Examiners reports regarding the recruitment of poor students that little has been done to address the issues. Poor recruitment has had significant detrimental impact on the teaching and learning experience this year and does nothing to enhance the reputation of the course.

I was able to see 11 students with their work in January and 6 in June, and would like to thank the course staff for making arrangements to have students, portfolios, written assignments and assessment sheets available for review.

**Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)**

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

*Art and Design*

Programme(s) / Module(s):

DESN 0010,0020,0030, 0040

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

International foundation Year - Design

Title and Name of Responder:

Position\*:

Lecturer in Art and Design

Faculty / School of:

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 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](mailto: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 re-introduction of the critical journal (in *DESN 0040 Independent Study*) was a success for those students who were able to use the art and design history lectures to contextualise their studio practice. For those students less proficient in English the journal proved to be a more challenging assignment. The journal places greater demands on students to engage critically with historical and contemporary themes in art and design history and practice. This year the quality of the journals was variable, with five out of the eleven candidates scoring less than 60%. The quality of written English in those students scoring in the 40s and 50s was very poor. The assessment weighting for the journal is 80% of the module with 15% for a presentation. I recommend changes to the assessment outcomes and weightings for DESN 0040 to accommodate a wider range of learning styles and abilities, namely:

1. The introduction of a multiple choice slide test to assess the student's awareness of significant visual developments in both historical and contemporary art and design practice.
2. The introduction of a wider variety of written assignments including exhibition reviews, commentaries for survey exhibitions and displays of artworks and designed object.

**Response to Enhancements made from the previous year**

Staff from the undergraduate courses in graphic design and art and design contributed to two of the International Foundation Year modules DESN 0030 and DESN 0010, respectively. Their involvement in the delivery of IFY teaching provides a meaningful link to the undergraduate programs. In addition, the fashion and textiles project was delivered in conjunction with the University of Leeds International Textiles Archive. This resource gave students the opportunity to explore the archive collections as part of their visual research for DESN 0030. In the next academic year additional contributions will come from specialist staff in fashion marketing and colour science.

**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:

In addressing the external examiners concerns regarding the particularly poor performance of last year's cohort in both their design studies and study skills modules, it was agreed by the School and IFY programme to:

1. Re-assess the current IFY admission policy for design;
2. Review the current four design module in relation to subject content and existing teaching and assessment strategies;
3. Consider the introduction of specialist study support from the IFY programme team.

The admissions policy has now been reviewed and guidelines are now in place for portfolio submissions for the academic year beginning 2018-19. The guidelines were based on a review of other UK universities offering similar IFY programmes in design.

The portfolio submission guidelines require applicants to provide 12 examples of their own work in drawing, painting and mixed media practice. In addition, two short writing tasks that test:

1. The applicants awareness of historical or contemporary art and design practice;
2. Their commitment to undergraduate in art and design through a personal statement.

I recommend that the guidelines are reviewed and adjusted accordingly after the first year of implementation.

In general, the subject content continues to be appropriate for IFY students. However, the semester two projects do need to reflect the range of design practice available at the undergraduate level: a project covering Fashion Marketing, Fashion Design and Fashion Technology will be offered next year. It has always been the intention of the School that undergraduate staff from all five programmes should make some contribution to IFY teaching and this is something the School will continue to develop. However, some adjustment to the History of Art and Design module do need to be made for the next academic year (please refer to the aforementioned section: Response to Points of innovation and/or good practice.)

#### **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:*

Not applicable.

### **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:*

Changes to project briefs are evaluated as part of the module review process. Currently, the textiles and fashion project form part of the module DESN 0030 Understanding Design that is realised through a portfolio of two-dimensional work. The inclusion of three-dimensional projects in fashion and textiles is possible in the next academic year if the appropriate workshops resources are made available to the programme. Given the School's expertise and resources in fashion and textiles technology, then the introduction of fabric dyeing, materials manipulation and structured textiles would be desirable in enhancing the student's awareness of textiles and fashion construction techniques and in promoting fashion technology as a possible undergraduate option. The idea of art and design research is an unfamiliar concept for many of our international students. As highlighted in this and previous reports, the majority of the students have little experience of art and design education beyond rudimentary art practice. The appreciation of research and the process of researching written and visual sources is introduced and reinforced throughout all of the four modules delivered by the School. However, in the next academic year art and design research skills will be deliberately introduced at a much slower rate than in previous years. Each studio module includes a research file and there are five research files to complete throughout the academic year (in addition to skills required to complete DESN 0040). The intention is to introduce key research and academic writing skills incrementally in order to build the students understanding and confidence in this area in preparation for transfer to undergraduate study.

### **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:*

The School closely monitors student performance throughout the year. In particular, we compare their progress in study skills against their written work in design. Students are provided with detailed feedback and marks at the end of each project. Students also receive weekly, verbal feedback during the studio sessions. Any student failing to meet the pass for progression marks is invited to discuss their performance with the School and IFY team. The cohort for 2017-18 had very poor proficiency in reading, writing and speaking English. This was a serious concern throughout the year and a significant number of the students struggled to cope with the most basic requirements of the course, such as understanding project briefs and responding to feedback. Students not being proficient in spoken English clearly prevented them from meaningful participation in group critiques. (See section B: Matters for Urgent Attention - regarding re-evaluation of the IFY design application process for 2018-19.)

### **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:*

### **Other comments**

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