

# The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

### Part A: General Information

#### Subject area and awards being examined

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

Design

*Subject(s):*

Graphic and Communication Design

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

DESN 1250 Fundamentals of Imaging  
 DESN 1415 Introduction to Photography (Digital)  
 DESN 1975 Theory and Research in Graphic Design  
 DESN 1989 Graphic and Communication Media A  
 DESN 1999 Communication and Design Process  
 DESN 2150 Contemporary Digital Media  
 DESN 2415 Photography (Digital)  
 DESN 2730 Principles of Typography  
 DESN 2980 Design Application  
 DESN 2989 Graphic and Communication Media B  
 DESN 3150 Contemporary Moving Image  
 DESN 3720 Contemporary Typography  
 DESN 3725 Information Design  
 DESN 3765 Brand Communications  
 DESN 3770 Contemporary Advertising  
 DESN 3989 Graphic and Communication Media C  
 DESN 3994 Independent Project  
 DESN 3660 Ind Study Dissertation

*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.*

The programme team have fully applied and embedded the assessment feedback process developed during my tenure as external examiner. It makes very clear where learners' strengths and areas for development lie within their module work. The rubrics used are constructively aligned to the modules and provide succinct, clear feedback and are well written in appropriate and plain language relevant to the assignments and projects.

As stated in my previous reports the option for the year in industry really seems to benefit those who opt to undertake it. Students return with a wealth of experience that both enhances their employability and feeds into final year study. Speaking to and looking at the work of returning students reveals a good balance of academic and professional skills and knowledge.

The range of assignments spread across the programme cover a broad spectrum of design practice and allow for individuals to discover their own path within the discipline. The majority of assignments require the submission of an evaluative element where students have to reflect upon and show how their proposals work and what could be improved in future projects. This focus on the potential impact of designed artefacts is commendable.

#### Enhancements made from the previous year

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

As stated in previous reports it is evident that the team continue to develop and maintain the currency of the curricula and find engaging ways to facilitate the students' learning and achievement on the various modules. There's a good balance of projects – from the experimental and academic to the professional and real world.

The Risograph printer introduced last academic cycle continues to allow some students to explore tactility within design outcomes and gain material understanding of paper and print process. Again, I had the opportunity to see this exploration of hand-made printed documents in the degree show in the Leeds studio and at the London D&AD New Blood stand.

### 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 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*

There have been no major or significant changes since my previous year's visit. I can confirm that the team continue to develop and strengthen their capacity to support students' learning as a team. The members of the programme team seem to function well and offer students a wide array of diverse support and approaches to the subject that aligns with the diversity of individual student goals and ambitions.

### 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.*

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y / N
<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>All the projects and assignments require the students to undertake research – this varies from project to project but includes research into the project’s context, research into the various stakeholders, research into the message and point of the visual communication and research into materials and formats to deliver the message.</p> <p>Graphic Design is not a traditional academic discipline. It has its roots firmly taken from professional practice. Research is more action-based and applied and students need to focus on learning experientially through project based assignments to mirror industry practice. Graphic Designers who study for a BA Hons, on the whole, rarely seek to enter academia and publish in journals. This requires the teaching staff to be more professionally aware and to keep up with cutting edge industry discourse and practice to ensure the programme assignments are relevant. This team do this very well.</p> <p>When appropriate the curriculum is informed by the ongoing research, scholarly activity and professional practice of the academic team. It seems all the academic team are involved in some kind of research – the breadth of which is useful for the students to experience and know about.</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>The majority of the assessments on the programme are project based assignments that require the submission of bodies of work including research and development, written assignments and proposals for communication design outcomes. This suits the discipline and prepares the learners well for life after graduation if they chose to go into professional practice.</p> <p>I would say that given the high tariff points and previous educational experiences of the cohort that I would expect slightly more first class honours. Perhaps there is too much writing as part of the modules and other ways of challenging and assessing academic rigour more suited to the aims of the course could be explored? Many of the students achieving grades in the high 60s might receive grades in a higher band at other institutions for similar work. Sector averages for 1st class honours fluctuate between 25-30%.</p>		

Digital, narrated and designed research documents that include process work and the written requirements – mixed together could help students to intertwine theory and practice? Allowing students to place their writing into a designed format could facilitate greater engagement and synthesis of ideas, research and practical application of design skills.

The sample of work I had the pleasure of looking through on each module was fairly graded and fed back upon however. The work, especially those achieving above 70%, was impressive and demonstrated high levels of engagement and commitment.

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:*

Students on this course, especially those achieving grades above 65%, produce very thorough work. As stated in previous reports, assessment submissions don't just end with the submission/production of research documents and designed outcomes and proposals but they are often required to produce lengthy written evaluations and reflective reports on them also to unearth and highlight areas for further development and the effectiveness of their proposals. This is what makes a University of Leeds student different that the majority of other graduates from other programmes. They not only have the practical skills but also develop a broad range of academic skills which could give them the edge over other graduates.

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

Students on my visits mentioned that they'd noticed how the process of assessment feedback had been changed during their time at Leeds. They appreciated and valued the course teams efforts to continually improve and make more useful assessment feedback.

I would like to see the course team experiment with the format of the written elements of modules however. They are students of graphic design and should be using their written elements as content for designed artefacts. This could encourage students to produce more drafts of written assignments earlier during a module and then have the chance to iterate and improve for submission.

### 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?	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:*

The course team are to be commended in the manner in which they provide organised and efficient access to the student work. This makes my job easier and gives me more time to look at the work of the students. Marks and feedback were made readily available also.

In the final board I did witness what I would describe as some somewhat flippant and 'relaxed' comments regards certain students by the School's education service manager and Director of Student Education in relation to application for mitigating circumstances and academic issues. I thought this conversation somewhat inappropriate in front of the external examiner and would urge all board members to remain objective and professional in future boards.

#### Other comments

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

Again, as in previous years, it was a pleasure to undertake the role as external examiner for my 3rd year. As has become standard practice, I had the opportunity to meet students and see a very wide range of work from across all the modules I am responsible for. I feel the programme teams' approach to the subject, which is very broad and informed by interesting and emerging areas of professional practice, is a strong one that sets the course up as different than the majority of the many other graphic design courses out there. I would say a student who engages with this programme would leave the course very prepared for life after study, not just for design practice but for many other fields also such as project management or leadership roles within the design industry.

The students I meet on my visits are confident and knowledgeable regards the discipline. Leeds and the programme are lucky to be able to recruit students with high tariff scores and ambitions. As previously stated I would expect more first class honours and urge the team and department to look at the programme to see if aspects could be modified to allow students to play to their strengths as visually motivated practical learners and to bring their writing more into the studio side of things.

Approximately 70% of the 2017-18 graduating cohort being female. The main course team is male apart from one member of staff. A recent report by the Design Council (The Design Economy 2018) portrays a very worrying situation and set of statistics.

*'The UKs design workforce is mostly male (78%), which is higher than compared to the wider UK workforce, which is 53% male. This is also despite women making up 63% of all students studying creative arts and design courses at university.'*

I would urge the course team to reflect upon this and think about strategies for how they could help ensure all their students, especially female graduates, given these statistics go into the industry and become the leaders they have the potential to be. If there is a budget for visiting tutors I would suggest inviting those that mirror the student body and provide strong role models, key advice and share their professional experiences.

I would urge the department to look into purchase Lynda.com software training account acces for the students. This is common practice across the sector and is becoming the norm in helping digital native students learn and keep up with the fast changing range of software skills needed. If they have access to this whilst on their year in industry it would help them become even more valuable to the companies they're working within. I would also suggest that the department looks to employ a digital technical demonstrator to help students embrace technical skills. The majority of other HEIs have specific people in this position and it would help to keep the department and programme inline with sector practice and allow academic staff to focus on the delivery of more critical and academic sessions.

<b>Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)</b>
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<i>Subject(s):</i>	BA Graphics and Communication Design
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	DESN 1250 Fundamentals of Imaging DESN 1415 Introduction to Photography (Digital) DESN 1975 Theory and Research in Graphic Design DESN 1989 Graphic and Communication Media A DESN 1999 Communication and Design Process DESN 2150 Contemporary Digital Media DESN 2415 Photography (Digital) DESN 2730 Principles of Typography DESN 2980 Design Application DESN 2989 Graphic and Communication Media B DESN 3150 Contemporary Moving Image DESN 3720 Contemporary Typography DESN 3725 Information Design DESN 3765 Brand Communications DESN 3770 Contemporary Advertising DESN 3989 Graphic and Communication Media C DESN 3994 Independent Project DESN 3660 Ind Study Dissertation
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	BA
<i>Title and Name of Responder:</i>	
<i>Position*:</i>	Head of School
<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	Design
<i>Address for communication:</i>	School of Design, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT
<i>Email:</i>	
<i>Telephone:</i>	

*\*If the individual responding to the report is not the Head of School please state their position within the School.*

<b>Completing the School response</b>
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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 [qat@leeds.ac.uk](mailto: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***

Firstly thank you for your support and guidance over the past years.

We were delighted to read your comments on the design of assessment, the rubrics used and the role of evaluative elements in modules.

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

We were very pleased to read your comments on the improvements the programme team have made to the feedback process, and the balance of projects offered by the modules on the course. As you noted, access to technologies such as the Risograph printer have made a positive impact and allowed students to explore a range of design outcomes. We hope to continue to embed this in our teaching and encourage more students to take advantage of the technology the School offers.



**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:*

No matters were raised.

**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:*

Thank you very much for your positive comments about the team.

**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 were interested to read your reflections on the difference in the research context of Graphic Design and more traditional academic subjects. As a Russell Group University we put cutting edge research at the heart of all our teaching and aim to give our students experience of both action research and traditional academic practice.

Our focus on Graphic Design is accompanied by a determination to provide students with all the skills a graduate needs beyond education, whether they choose a career in Graphic Design or in another discipline. We do aim to produce graduates that are different from other institutions so I'm very happy you have noticed this.

**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:*

Thank you for your comments about the number of First class honours given this year. We were also somewhat disappointed. Our expectations were high at the start of the year, however the students didn't really stretch themselves enough this year and push their projects and because of this lack of ambition they did not attain the highest marks. We also have to remember they are at a Russell Group University and the expectations are high. The staff team has already had a number of discussions about how this can be addressed next year.

You note that students are required to do a great deal of reflective writing, but we would argue that this is what makes a University of Leeds student stand out. They not only have the practical skills but also develop a broad range of academic skills which give them the edge over other graduates.

We were very pleased to note your comments about student satisfaction with feedback; this is always a challenge to achieve. We are always looking at ways to improve the process so your comment regarding experimenting with the format of the written element is definitely something we will explore.

**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:*

I'm happy you feel your visits are well organised and structured. I am very sorry that you felt some of the comments made in the exam board were inappropriate, this has been raised with the staff concerned and reported to the Head of School.

**Other comments**



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

We were very interested in your comments about the lack of female designers at the top of the industry, and even within the programme team. Unfortunately we have had few female applicants for recent vacancies. We do draw attention to the role of female design leaders in our teaching (for example in DESN2350) but your suggestion of providing role models is a good one which we may seek to address through visiting speakers.

Finally, you mention [lynda.com](http://lynda.com). I have already made enquires about the cost of this and it is currently under discussion with the Head of School.