

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 26/06/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	School of English
Subject(s):	English Literature
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BA English Literature and associated joint honours programmes
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 School of English is maintaining good practice in virtually all elements of its programmes and processes. I remain very impressed by the School's willingness to encourage students to experiment with innovative forms of assessed work (such as elements of creative practice in the context of modules that are more generally "critical" in orientation).

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

In my report last year, I noted my sense that markers didn't always respond to strong work as positively as they might. The encouragement that colleagues are being given – under the new assessment guidelines introduced this year – to mark across the full range of marks seems to have provided a helpful "push" in this regard. I looked at a good number of pieces of work awarded very high marks (in the 80s and even, in several cases, the 90s), and was happy to endorse the mark in each case.

Another point that I noted last year was that there was often quite marked variation in the quantity of feedback given to students – often within a single module where multiple markers were involved. While I didn't feel that this was a major issue – as even where markers wrote less on feedback sheets, they invariably pinpointed key issues very clearly – I did wonder whether student perception might be an issue. This year, I looked at a very wide range of modules, and these disparities seemed to have evened out, with variations falling within a narrower band, and – most significantly – different markers on the same module providing comments of roughly equal length.

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

None.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y / N
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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 an 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.

I remain thoroughly positive about the programme, especially in the way in which it blends in-depth treatment of the central traditions of the discipline, via core modules, with opportunities to explore cutting edge developments in literary studies via a wide variety of exciting, distinctive, and innovative option modules. I appreciate the way in which the relationship between learning outcomes, module content, and modes of delivery and assessment is carefully tailored to each module, ensuring a coherent, logical structure in each case.

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)

The influence of research on the design of the programme remains abundantly clear – especially (as suggested above) in the presence of a range of modules allowing students to explore emerging paradigms in the discipline in which module leaders are themselves engaged in pioneering scholarship (examples I looked at would include “ExtraOrdinary Bodies,” “Bowie, Reading, Writing,” “Medical Humanities,” and “Text is Technology,” though this is not an exhaustive list). The Final Year Project remains the key opportunity for students to undertake fully-fledged research activity in their own right – one which even less able students invariably take up enthusiastically.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	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?	N
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Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:

16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	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
<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>As I did last year, I commend assessment methods that are consistently well keyed to intended learning outcomes and which, in their diversity, allow students to demonstrate a wide range of aptitudes across the breadth of the discipline.</p> <p>Marking remains unfailingly rigorous and consistent. The School is evidently home to a cohesive group of colleagues who have a clear collective understanding of where the benchmarks for the various levels of attainment lie.</p> <p>The quality of feedback remains exemplary across the board: never less than thorough, detailed, constructive, and helpful. In particular, I saw obvious evidence of the concerted effort that colleagues are making to use feedback with a view to students' next piece of assessment as much as the one under evaluation. Having a designated box for this purpose on feedback sheets is an excellent idea, and markers use this space to offer helpful practical suggestions (e.g. making an appointment with the Writing Mentor; looking at sample essays on Minerva) as well as pointing out areas for intellectual development.</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></p> <p>I was again impressed by the standard of students' work in the School. I looked at some truly exceptional material at the top end of the cohort, but was equally impressed by the way in which, even at the lower end, students' exams and assignments invariably show real substance and evidence of care, attention, and diligence in their composition, as well as clear signs of the authors having gained a genuine level of knowledge and understanding from their modules. As last year, the standard of work is very closely comparable to that on other English Literature programmes (predominantly at Russell Group institutions) with which I'm familiar (and, as noted above, I was pleased to see markers showing an increased willingness to mark positively when assessing strong work).</p> <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 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:

While I have no concerns at all about the accuracy and appropriateness of the marks awarded to the work I examined, I'd question the way in which moderators on occasion suggest amendments to first markers' individual marks. Not only does this practice raise issues of equity (since under a moderation system only a selection of scripts will be examined by the moderator), but it also introduces an unnecessary complication into the marking process. I'd suggest that the School aim to move away from this practice over the coming year.

I received samples of work from over twenty modules to examine this year. While this provided me with a good flavour of the programme as a whole, this selection struck me as a little indiscriminate: the School might make more valuable use of its externals by being more targeted in what it sends, and having a clearer rationale for selection (e.g. new modules; modules where issues may have arisen; individual student runs as well as module samples; etc.). In particular, I'd question the usefulness of sending work from the preceding year (especially by students who have now graduated), and would suggest that this practice be discontinued.

I'm aware that there has been substantial disruption to administrative provision in the School this year. This disruption had some significant knock on effects on my access to materials, and while I'm very grateful to administrative colleagues for their efforts in ensuring that I was eventually able to view the necessary documents, I trust that the University will ensure that adequate resources are in place to avoid such acute pressures arising in future.

Other comments

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

Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Subject(s):	English Literature
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BA English Literature and associated JH programmes
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA
Title and Name of Responder:	Dr Fiona Becket
Position*:	Head of School
Faculty / School of:	AHC
Address for communication:	10 Cavendish Road University of 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 extremely pleasing to read about the exemplary feedback received by students, and confirmation of the success and effectiveness of the new feedback sheets, in particular when they prepare students for guidance on improvements for the next assessment point. It is also pleasing to have recognition of the high quality of option modules which are inspired by pioneering scholarship; and to have acknowledgement of the opportunity presented to students in the Final Year Project, including those less able students who, nevertheless, approach the independent study with enthusiasm.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

The School has responded positively to the advice to mark across the full range of marks compared with the previous year. The School has also progressed to reduce the variation in the quantity of feedback offered to students, including within a single module. It is heartening to see the acknowledgement that different markers on the same module are not providing comments of roughly equal length. The newly introduced feedback sheet is a factor in this regard.

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:

None.

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:

The acknowledgement that the standards of programme structure, aims and learning outcomes are commensurate with the level of the award and level of study is welcome. Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark. The programme is comparable with similar programmes at Russell Group institutions. The School will be delighted to read of this highly positive response to the programme, including the ways in which it is distinctive; with recognition of the relationship between learning outcomes, module content, modes of delivery and assessment. The pioneering scholarship that has inspired a range of modules is noteworthy, as is the positive impact on student education of the Final Year Project.

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 appreciates the commendation of its assessment methods aligned with the intended learning outcomes. The diversity of assessments is praised, which is evidence of a change of approach in the School to types of assessment. The rigor and consistency of marking is praised, and mention is made of colleagues' awareness of attainment benchmarks. It is very pleasing to have the exemplary nature of feedback highlighted in this report – thorough, detailed, constructive and helpful. It is also pleasing to have the new feedback sheet endorsed on the basis of good pedagogical practice. The report comments on the high standard of students' work in the School, with evidence of 'truly exceptional material' at the high end, combined with a sense of how students are enabled to achieve at the lower end. Strong work has been properly and fairly rewarded this year, according to the marking criteria.

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:

The progression and awards boards were conducted according to expectation. Questions are raised in this report which the School is attending to, in particular: the rigor of the moderation (or check marking) process. The Director of Student Education is taking this to the School's Taught Student Education Committee (STSEC). The selection of samples to be sent to external examiners to be more targeted and methodical in the future, with a discontinuation of the practice of sending samples of the previous year's work: the Student Education Service Manager (SESM) will address this for the next examining period. The substantial disruption to the School's administrative provision is not something the School can control but the issues of 2017 and 2018 have been raised with the Student Education Service via the Faculty Student Education Manager (FESM).

Other comments

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

The School remains extremely grateful for the conscientious way in which _____ conducts responsibility as an external examiner in the School.