

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18 QAT Received 29/11/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	English
Subject(s):	<i>English Language & Literature</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	various, as taken by 2 nd and final year BA English Language & Literature students (including final year Dissertations, Power of Language; The Politics of Language; Keywords; Forensic Approaches to Language; and Language of the Media.
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.

- As before, the ambition and diversity of projects and methods evident in the large sample of final year dissertations I read is very impressive, and suggests strong student engagement with and enthusiasm for English studies.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

- The use of a poster presentation as an assessed task, required of every dissertation, is an innovation that has much to commend it. The best of these were a stimulating encapsulation of the projects' main elements.

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 Examiners Handbook?	Y / N
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School 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.

As I have noted before, the Language modules sit very well within the Language & Literature programme to which they contribute, coherently and rigorously exploring such important themes as the place of language in society, the power of language (in everyday life as much as in politics or commerce), the interrelations between language/dialect and identity and evaluation (including prejudice). I have seen some very accomplished and assured work among the assignments and exam scripts this year, as in the past, and students are continuing to graduate with a solid training in the key components of English language studies.

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)

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?	NA
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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
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

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.

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>As in previous years, I have been impressed the work produced by students on all the modules I examined. They are in my opinion working at a level comparable with that in other top English departments in the country. There are some outstanding performances among the examination essays and the longer written assignments. As before, feedback is conscientious, thorough and very fair, but also probing, and challenging where the internal examiner believes the student could go further and produce better work. With regard to the latter point, I sometimes felt that guidance to the student on how to improve might usefully have been more specific or more fully explained—even though, of course, this can be time-consuming. Where an examiner tells a student they ‘could be more ambitious’ or that their writing needed to be ‘tighter’ or that their writing skills needed ‘refining’, it might be helpful to explain or exemplify to the student just what the examiner has in mind.</p> <p>My general sense was that students performed rather better when the assignment (and this did seem to apply to assignments exclusively, not exams) set them specific analytical or creative task. In courses like Forensic Approaches, Keywords and Language of the Media, where students have the security of having a specific task to complete, outputs were more satisfactory, the writing, structure and coherence of assignments were more secure. Where—often in exams—students had to grapple with a more open question (regardless of topic: language and colonialism, non-standard Englishes, language as a prison, etc.), where thinking on your feet, developing an argument, assessing counter claims etc. were involved, the writing was sometimes noticeably weaker. I’m sure that some contrast of this kind has always existed in Humanities students’ performance, and that it certainly isn’t special to Leeds. But it may be that students today are marginally less exposed to practices of non-instrumental deliberative writing than in past years, and that this may need attention if competence in that area continues to be deemed important.</p> <p>For parity with marking norms at other RG English departments and without wanting to encourage grade-inflation, I last year urged internal examiners to use more of the range of First Class marks than they were tending to, for work which in my view was unambiguously First Class. I.e., giving marks of 75 or 78 rather than 72 for sound first-class answers. I cannot be sure how directly examiners have taken this on board, but I can say that I did not notice any of the occasional ‘cramping’ of the marks this year, as I had last year.</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 Examiners 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
<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

As I told the internal examiners at the English exam board, I came away from reading all these students' scripts and essays with the impression that the vast majority of Leeds English students have positively enjoyed the modules they have taken, and realise they have been intellectually enriched in taking them. These less tangible or measurable achievements, by no means assured outcomes in many degree programmes, are undoubtedly the result of a lot of hard work and taking care by all concerned. They are something the School should take pride in.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Head of School

AHC

School of English

*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 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

It is pleasing to have attention drawn to the ambition and diversity of projects undertaken by FYP students as well as of the methods employed in the Final Year Projects. Strong student engagement, evidenced by the Final Year Projects, is commendable. The use of the poster presentation in the context of English Language FYPs is acknowledged to be an innovation and an example of good practice.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

See above.

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. In particular, the Language modules fit well within the broader Language & Literature programme. They coherently and rigorously explore key issues in the discipline and provide 'a solid training in the key components of English Language studies'.

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 programme design aligns intended learning outcomes with assessment; the design and structure of the assessment methods are appropriate to the level of the award, and students are given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes. The standard of student work produced is high, and the feedback is conscientious, thorough, fair, probing and challenging. The team will consider how feedback can more fully describe the ways in which pieces of work could develop in relation to comments that work 'could be more ambitious'. 'tighter' or when writing skills require 'refining'. The team will also consider the differences in quality manifested in student responses to specific tasks for completion in comparison to more broader exam topics.

It is pleasing that this year the range of First Class marks appears to have been used, in contrast to the previous year.

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 processes were sufficient, and no additional comments were made.

Other comments

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

It is very welcome to have this feedback about the students' positive enjoyment of the modules they have taken, and the levels of intellectual enrichment that these modules represent. That this reflects a great deal of work, and care for the student experience, on the part of the School is something that the School will reflect on.