

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 24/09/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	English
Subject(s):	Theatre Studies
Programme(s) / Module(s):	ENGL2050 Theatre, Society and Self ENGL3042 Practical Essay
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.

Areas of good practice and innovation include the following:

- The supportive, enquiring and encouraging feedback from the course team across the modules I examined.
- The rigorous and detailed assessment briefings provided to students.
- The extensive resource and time made available by members of staff for the Practical Essay performances.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

This is my first year as External Examiner and I am unable to comment on enhancements to the programme over the past year.

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 are no matters requiring urgent attention.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	N
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	N
3.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Mentor?	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.

This year, I was invited to focus on two modules, ENGL2050 Theatre, Society and Self, and ENGL3042 Practical Essay. Due to the prolonged period of industrial action, I was unable to attend the practical performance assessments for the Practical Essays course. However, I was subsequently given access to video recordings of the performances and appreciated the opportunity to see this work. I was also sent handbook entries and assessment briefings for these two modules. Although I have had only limited engagement with the programme to date, I am impressed with the overall structure of the programme, its linkage of theory and practice in dynamic and exciting ways, and the fostering of creative and critical autonomy in students as the programme progresses.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
-----	---	---

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 assessments I sampled for ENGL2050 demonstrates close and critical engagement with research: the first assignment invites critical reflections on provocations from contemporary theatre-makers, playwrights or academics, and the second assignment invites students to document a performance 'blueprint' which in some way engages with a pressing social issue or problem. Students are thus encouraged to engage in a critical dialogue with current thinking and to apply their own evolving ideas to theatre and performance interventions in the contemporary world. The course team are all leading researchers in their fields, and their research interests are discernible in the design of the curriculum and the way that practice is informed by particular research priorities and methodologies.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
-----	--	---

Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

N/A

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
	N/A	

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
-----	--	---

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
<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 assessment methods are varied and wholly appropriate to the intended learning outcomes of the programme. In the two modules I examined, assessment modes include critical written reflections, structured documentation of ideas for practice, intensive performance work, and written self-reflection on the practical process and outcomes. Given this range of engagement, students are encouraged to think creatively and critically about theatre and about the value of multiple research methodologies to the scholar-practitioner. The arrangements for the marking of assessment are generally clear and satisfactory, and student performance testifies to the sustained and expert input of teaching and production staff.</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>The academic standards demonstrated by the students are impressive. For example, in respect of ENGL3042, the range, ambition and accomplishment of the performance work was notable – with bold images, inventive use of space and levels, dynamic use of puppets, objects and technology, and a vigorous embrace of intermediality and experimentation.</p> <p>The most effective Critical Appraisals for ENGL3042 were those that made use of published research to support and deepen the analysis of creative practice. I haven't seen the briefing or assessment criteria for the appraisals but wondered how far engagement with scholarly research is expected? Some of the appraisals scored highly but with scant evidence of research in the bibliographies.</p> <p>In respect of ENGL2050, there are significant leaps in the marks scored by some students over the course of the two assessments for this module: for example, one student scored 57 in the first assessment and 70 in the second assessment; another scored 45 and then 71, and another 63 and then 80. It is highly encouraging to see students progressing in this way but I wondered about the relatively low marks scored by some students in the first assessment for this course. Might it be possible to include an early formative assessment on the course as a way of addressing this? How far is formative assessment used in the programme as a whole?</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> <p>I wondered if there was opportunity to increase the word count a little for the assessments in ENGL2050? The limited word count is acknowledged in feedback but this may block to more detailed and substantive approach to analysis.</p> <p>I would like clarification on processes of course moderation and second marking for assessments on the programme, and how these processes are made available for external scrutiny.</p> <p>Based on the limited number of assessment briefings I scrutinised, they do not appear to include assessment criteria. I recommend that the relevant criteria are included in each briefing so that students understand what they are being assessed on; this also enables tutors to map the connection between the intended learning outcomes and assessment activities: written feedback can also then be streamlined in such a way as to respond to these criteria.</p> <p>I felt at times that the feedback could (1) be linked more explicitly to the assessment criteria so that students can better understand the reason for the award of a mark; (2) be written in such a way as to more effectively correlate with the percentage mark. For example, in one example of feedback, an essay was described as 'superb' with no critical comment at all included. In this case, the student might justifiably be inclined to wonder why they hadn't scored 100% rather than (as in this case) 80%. It's important to give students the ability, through written feedback, to understand the placing of their mark even when they score very highly.</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? I was given access to module materials, handbooks and resources via Minerva but this happened the day before the Exam Board and the timescale was very tight. It would be helpful for assignment briefings to be sent with the relevant batch of papers.	-
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? I can only comment on ENGL3042 (Practical Essay) but the choice of projects for this module was varied and extremely impressive.	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
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p> <p>I would like to commend the efficient organisation and chairing of the Exam Board.</p>		

Other comments

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

I have not yet been contracted in my appointment as External Examiner which may explain why I have not yet received the External Examiner Handbook, the Code of Practice on Assessment, and the Student Handbook. I am also not entirely sure if my access to Minerva is now functional. Finally, I would appreciate as much notice as possible on the dates of production events, site visits, and Exam Board next year.

I would like to commend all of the course staff – academics, production staff and administrative staff – for their sensitive negotiation and support of students during the period of intensive industrial action this year.

My thanks to _____ for their hard work in preparation for the Exam Board (including sending me video material) – I was most impressed with these arrangements and with the efficient running of the Board itself. I would also like to thank _____ for _____ warm and constructive engagement throughout the process.

Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Subject(s):	Theatre
Programme(s) / Module(s):	ENGL2050 Theatre, Society and Self ENGL3042 Practical Essay
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA
Title and Name of Responder:	
Position*:	Head of School
Faculty / School of:	AHC
Address for communication:	School of English
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 pleasing to read of positive sense of the overall structure of the programme, the 'dynamic and exciting ways' in which theory and practice are aligned in teaching, and the 'fostering of creative and critical autonomy in students as the programme progresses'. Singled out for attention are the ways in which students are enabled to engage in a critical dialogue with current thought, and to 'apply their own evolving ideas to theatre and performance interventions in the contemporary world'.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

N/A

is in the first year of appointment.

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 identified for urgent attention.

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:

It is regrettable that the relevant documentation was not sent out as required for an external examiner in the first year of service: there were some significant disruptions to the SES as a result of serious ill-health, and as a result not all processes necessarily ran smoothly. This was explained and apologies were offered on meeting the examiners in June.

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 pleasing that [redacted] was “impressed with the overall structure of the programme, its linkage of theory and practice in dynamic and exciting ways, and the fostering of creative and critical autonomy in students as the programme progresses”. It is helpful to have the programme learning outcomes approved, and to receive the positive evaluation of the modules within QW34 (‘English Literature and Theatre Studies’) according to the relevant bench-marking criteria. It is also helpful to have such a clear and affirmative statement about the nature of research-based learning and research-led teaching in relation to these modules and programme. Comments on the strengths of practice-based analysis in relation to critical reflection, as evidenced in the students’ work, are also helpful.

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:

Again, it is pleasing to see the range of assessment modes acknowledged positively by the external examiner, with a view to a range of skills being developed. The suggestions about formative assessment are thoughtful and will be given serious consideration by colleagues in Workshop Theatre. The teaching team will also be able to reflect on the instructions to students in relation to responses to published research for ENGL 3042. Clarification regarding module moderation and second marking for assessments on the programme will be provided to all external examiners, including how these processes are made available for external scrutiny.

The teaching team and the Director for Student Education (DSE) will consider the following suggestions:

- Whether to increase the word count for the assessments in ENGL2050.
- The provision of assessment criteria, and the recommendation that criteria are included in each briefing/feedback opportunity so that students understand in relation to what criterion they are being assessed (stream-lined written feedback).
- The provision of a rationale for a particular percentage mark.

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 tight timescales that pertained in 2018-18 were a direct result of challenges experienced by a short-staffed SES team as explained elsewhere in this response. In future, batches of papers will be sent out with the agreed and recommended course/module information.

Other comments

Response to items included in the ‘Other Comments’ section of the report

The external examiner contract issue has been addressed. The School is gratified that the contributions of particular academic and SES colleagues has been recognised and celebrated.