

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

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 25/06/2018

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	BA Fine Art with History of Art; BA Fine Art with Contemporary Cultural Theory; BA Fine Art with Museum & Gallery Studies
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.*

Professional practice groups introduced for the show set up provide students with good experience of various aspects of mounting an exhibition;

The interdisciplinary capacity displayed by the students;

The hugely beneficial impact of the year abroad for some students, which was palpable in the maturity of their work and reflected most clearly in their Degree results;

The very supportive pastoral environment that was commented upon by 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.*

NA

**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*

NA

**For Examiners in the first year of appointment**

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

**For Examiners completing their term of appointment**

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	NA
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	NA

6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	NA
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	NA

*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*

NA

## 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 is an ambitious set of programmes that recruits a high calibre of students interested to combine their study of Fine Art with other cognate disciplines. The Programme's challenge is to support students with quite a broad range of interests. On the Fine Art side of the programme the structure is sound and quite conventional, as are the learning outcomes. I did discuss with the programme team how there might be some development of the structure further to support the level and type of student entering the programme, and to perhaps introduce some discussion that would enhance the students' understanding of Fine Art practice as a mode of research and enquiry. This would not be to define the kinds of practices that students would be encouraged to pursue, but to articulate better what was at stake in various activities.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	N
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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)*

I understand that the research allocation for staff at Leeds University is quite generous, and that time staff have for research is augmented by the fact that the University operates and delivers the bulk of its teaching over two relatively short semesters. I would have thought that requiring more extensive presence of all academic staff during the semesters might enhance the research focus of the programme, as well as introducing further opportunities for staff to teach from their own research and in modes other than the tutorial or the crit.

Moreover, I also understand and know that there is no dedicated Fine Art Professor in the School, the presence of which would certainly support the development of more research led teaching in the subject.

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>The final assessment was carried out through a process of blind triple marking, with assessors subsequently meeting to finalise grades and discuss any discrepancies. Staff were open about why any discrepancies may have occurred and I was satisfied that these were resolved in a reasonable manner.</p> <p>The grading seemed fair and consistent and looked at a combination of finished work as well as research and supporting material. I did think the requirements for the presentation of supporting material could perhaps be more prescriptive as, notwithstanding the efforts made to limit material, there was still a sense that more guidance and further specific requirements could be provided, especially to facilitate and encourage a more research focused articulation of the practice.</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 were equivalent to other Fine Art programmes. While there was a range of work presented it was also quite evident that students did not perhaps have as much access to the full range of technical resources they might have in other institutions – although students did compliment the technical provision they did have.</p> <p>Strengths included the students' ability to discuss and contextualise their work, as well as their remarkable ability to talk through various academic disciplines.</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?	NA
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?	N
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?	NA
<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

I was really struck by the difference in degree outcome between those students who had had the opportunity to spend a year abroad and those who hadn't. This difference, entirely justified by the work, indicated just how effective the year abroad seems to be in enhancing student performance.

If it is not possible to organise for all students to have such an experience then it is essential that the programme works towards getting first year students going more quickly. In my conversations with students I learnt that they really struggled at the beginning of the programme to understand what was required of them in the studio, and I think this probably sets them back quite a bit and somewhat needlessly. I think it is very important and quite urgent to consider how the incoming students are inducted in Fine Art and how they are given a sense of what might be expected of them. This is not an easy task, but a very essential one if the students are to be prevented from drifting a bit through their first year of studies.

I think that in order to achieve this more accelerated learning, and to introduce more innovative modes of research led practice teaching, there would need to be more boots on the ground during term time, as it did emerge that there were some issues with staff presence and reliability of tutorial schedules etc.

This is a really exciting set of programmes that have really dynamic and ambitious leadership, and which should and do aspire to lead the way in contemporary Fine Art pedagogy. I very much look forward to working with the programme leader and his team to support all their ambitions.

**Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report****Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)**

Title and Name of Responder:

Position\*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

Associate Professor of Fine Art

FAHACS, Faculty of Arts

\*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](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**

It's good to hear that the various layers of pastoral support offered to the students, between studio staff 1-to-1s, Personal Tutors and the School Office team, are being used and understood by the students. The Int. option has always been a big attraction for prospective students and a great chance for ambitious students to mature (as people and artists). The positive benefit was clear again this year, and we hope the newer Ind. option will have a similarly positive benefit once the scheme settles.

Interdisciplinarity is at the core of the School's make-up. Crucially, we hope to see the knowledge and concerns they develop in one disciplinary context bleed into the ways they think about the other disciplinary areas of study and research they engage in. For 'with' students that's particularly important and we need to keep improving the ways that their two subjects connect, to counter the feeling that the two subjects are isolated from each other. We all feel that 'professional practice' is an awkward term, but the help of our colleagues from Museums & Galleries Studies, and , in delivering these dedicated PP modules has been great.

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

N/a

**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:

N/a

**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:

Pleased to note that there were no issues.

**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:

Q.12: Ambitious students with range of interests make for an exciting cohort but are proving very difficult to cater for. The matter of understanding what practice might be, and what we expect of them, is an issue that seems to effect our students at the start of both Level 1 and Level 2, and needs to be addressed through taught sessions and potentially the introduction of reading lists. It recurs as a problem in Level 3 during the culmination of the Studio module when students have to balance a decision between honing the practice they want to have and developing a body of work that will also suit the assessment methods. We have on-going discussions about the degree to which we should expand and/or loosen the idea of 'practice' we teach and assess against, but are minded that it is a Fine Art programme rather than a general cultural practice programme.

Q.13: Staffing levels and the availability of staff are issues exacerbated by the huge upsurge in student numbers. Both are complicated issues -- staffing levels for obvious budgetary reason; staff availability for less clear reasons. In dealing with the huge growth of student numbers we have largely worried about the staff-student ratios in terms of our capacity to deliver the minimum required teaching levels. We haven't really thought about the more positive aspect of such a change -- that improving the number and regularity of staff on-hand during term time would improve the expansive-ness of research-led teaching and help make the teaching more interesting to staff. This connects to the intellectual and practical leadership that a high profile artist-Professor would bring. A senior figure is needed to guide a culture change.

## 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:*

Q.17: Both EEs commented on the potential value of standardising the format of the supporting material submission. This has been a long-standing discussion among the FAT. To date, we've felt that the negative risk fo making the format and 'style' prescriptive outweighed the positive potential of making the documentation more efficient for us and the students. In 2018-19 we will have our largest ever final year cohort. Given that, we may need to re-weigh the decision. However, we have already worked hard to standardise the terminology and process of submission for studio work and supporting material across Levels 2 and 3, which has had a positive benefit for both the students' understanding and our scheduling. The question of formats is one we will pick up this summer and would not require any amendments (minor or major) to the module documents.

Q.19: The generosity of our technicians is great and deserves to be recognised. Having a fourth technician this year has made a big difference to our capacity. The limits of our technical facilities are very real, particularly in relation to the number of students, though students often miss the fact that what we lack in technical offering is offset by our intellectual offering -- by the number and quality of academic staff they are taught by. In connection with that, it's good to hear that the depth and ambition of the students' interdisciplinary interests came through in discussions.

## 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:*

N/a

## Other comments

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

The consistency of difference in performance on the Level 3 studio module between third and fourth students was alarming to us. Like our EEs, I have complete faith in our marking and moderation processes, so am happy that students received appropriate grades, however the spread of marks is striking. To some extent, this performance difference has always been the case, plus undertaking the extra year does not guarantee the student better grades. My initial response is that we need to acknowledge the performance difference, make sure we explain it as a trend to the first and second years so they can make informed decisions about whether or not to apply for it, but also to make sure that students at the start of Level 3 are all equally confident in their understanding of what the module expects of them. Tutoring Level 1 students more directly at the start of the year about how they'll learn during the course could be an important part of the package of changes to help all students find an equal starting point (in

terms of their understanding of what an art practice might be and how that shapes their learning aims and outcomes) more quickly.

In echo of my response to Q13, channelling more contact time at the start of both semester 1 for both Level 1 and 2 would require more staff and more availability. We currently put a lot of resource into the Level 1 studio sessions, but it would be good to offer something similar for the Level 2s. The interdisciplinarity at the core of the 'with' programmes is, at the moment, both a challenge to programme and also the courses' unique potential. It will require on-going refinement as the programme bed in.