

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 09/10/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Faculty of Arts, Language Centre

Subject(s):

Preessional English for Academic Purposes.

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Academic English for Economics and Finance; Academic English for Marketing.

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

NA

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 is closely aligned with the content and assessment methods of the destination degree courses in the fields of Economics, Finance and Marketing.
- The ILOs of both courses really reflect the specific academic and language skills students will need in their Masters programmes. The aims of both courses also show a good balance between the need to help students develop their English language and academic skills and the importance of introducing them to academic culture and typical learning environments in Leeds University. The ILOs are very clearly communicated to students through the Student Handbook
- The programme uses a variety of assessment methods which link closely to the learning outcomes. There is a good mix of formative and summative assessment and of assessment types.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

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

The higher than anticipated student numbers led to class sizes of 25-26 students for both courses. Although the preessional managers, strand leaders and teachers are to be commended for responding to this unexpected situation so positively and managing to ensure a good student experience, such large classes are clearly not desirable for language teaching. The fact that student results do not indicate a decline in attainability and that student motivation and engagement appears to have remained good is a testament to the hard work and adaptability of the teachers and strand leaders and should not be interpreted as a 'green light' for larger classes. Discussions with strand leaders revealed that the large class sizes put teachers under some pressure and significantly reduced the amount of time they could spend on providing individual oral and written feedback to students. It is also likely that it led to students having less individual talking time and attention from the teacher in class. If similar numbers are expected next year I hope that the Language Centre receives early notification of this so that sufficient suitably qualified and experienced teachers can be recruited to allow more reasonable class sizes.

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
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	Y

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

My tenure as EE began in the first year of the reorganised preessional courses and it has been encouraging to see how well the new approach has worked. Links between the preessional strands and the degree courses appear well established and this has enabled the strand leaders to align their course content more closely with the academic language, text genre and assessment methods typical of the destination courses. The care and attention given to the design and implementation of the assessments has been consistently impressive. The assessment briefs and marking criteria have always been clear and transparent and made available to students from the beginning of the courses.

In terms of Language Centre procedure, although I appreciate the difficulties of fitting everything in towards the end of the programme I do feel that the EE requires rather more time to scrutinise papers and meet teachers/strand leaders ahead of the Board.

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 mentioned above, I find the design of the courses very impressive particularly the way they try to align their ILOs, pedagogy and assessment practice with their respective destination degrees. This alignment depends on effective communication and cooperation between the preessional course leaders and the academic leads in LUBS. It seems that this cooperation is stronger in Economics and Finance than in Marketing, where the academic lead has not communicated regularly or advised on course content.

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 alignment of the preessional courses with the needs of their respective disciplines is very much in line with current research and scholarship in the field of EAP, which suggests that EAP instruction is most effective when it is discipline specific rather than generic in nature.

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
<i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y / N
<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i>		
<p>I believe the preessional programme is accredited by both the British Council and BALEAP. Both accreditations are very valuable since they are widely recognised indicators of the quality of a programme's academic content and pedagogy as well as the overall student experience it provides. This summer the class sizes on both strands I examined will have exceeded the recommended maximum of both accrediting bodies but I am confident that the Language Centre can put measures in place to rectify this in time for next summer.</p>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<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>Assessments are well designed to allow students to learn from the assessment process itself, which is particularly important on preessional courses. All assessments have clearly specified grading matrices, which are available to the students via the VLE and carefully communicated to staff at induction and through standardisation meetings. The marking of the assessments I looked at was of a good standard and a fair reflection of students' ability to function effectively in a university environment. The scoring system was transparent and this together with feedback comments from the marker showed students which areas they might need to concentrate on in future assignments.</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
<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>Overall, students were able to demonstrate their progress in the key skills they will need on their postgraduate courses. Assessment results indicate that the performance of the cohort is comparable to that of students on preessional courses in other universities.</p>		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i>		
<p>Feedback provided to students on their written work was generally high in quality. The tone of the feedback and the explicit guidance given made the feedback genuinely helpful. However, there was some variation in quantity and the level of detail. This may have been due to the fact that teachers had a heavier marking load that is usual and probably less time to devote to reading and producing feedback on individual drafts.</p> <p>It was disappointing to hear that the detailed information on the performance of individual students obtained through the preessional assessments is not utilised by LUBS to determine which students should be encouraged/required to attend insessional Academic English classes. Apparently, all PG students who enter LUBS must sit the Password English test regardless of whether or not they have studied preessional EAP. This would seem to be an area where the Language Centre and LUBS could cooperate more effectively.</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?	NA
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	NA
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?	NA
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>Due to the extra marking load caused by the large class sizes, teachers had not completed all marking by the time the Board sat. This meant that only a percentage of results could be considered. If this situation arises again perhaps it would be better to delay the Board until all marking has been completed.</p>		

Other comments

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

There has clearly been a significant growth in international students wishing to enter LUBS (and I presume the University as a whole). While this indicates the high standing of LU internationally it does present the Language Centre with a considerable challenge in maintaining the current high quality of its preessional courses.

I am very grateful to the Language Centre for giving me the opportunity to scrutinise these preessional courses and have so many interesting conversations with teachers and managers. I have enjoyed my visits and learnt a great deal from the good EAP practice I have observed.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

English language pre-sessional

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Language for Economics and Finance

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Programme Leader

Faculty / School of:

Arts, Humanities and Cultures; LCS; Language Centre

Address for communication:

Language Centre Reception
15 Blenheim Terrace
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 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

Thank you for the comments.

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:

With regard student numbers, a working group has been set up to address issues from this year and try to anticipate any issues next year if student numbers are again high. This should make next year flow more smoothly. The time that teachers have, as a result of larger class sizes, to give feedback (oral and written) will be addressed in the working group with a view to reducing pressure.

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:

I'd like to thank for comments and feedback over the last three years.

In terms of EE time, I will recommend that procedures are reviewed by SESM and DSE.

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:

Thank you for your comments.
I will raise your comment regarding class sizes with the DSE in the module review meeting.

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:

Teachers were faced with less time to mark drafts and give feedback as a result of increased student numbers. This is seen as a key area for review and with more time for future planning until next summer the course will be re-structured to allow for more work at the draft stage of the essay. In order to continue aligning more closely quantity and level of detail in feedback, an extra session (in addition to induction week) will be organised before essay marking starts (in week 6). Recommendations will be made to the DSE team about coordinating further with LUBS in light of possible extra English Language tests that may be required at LUBS.

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 Board will now take place after assessment has finished.

Other comments

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

Thank you for your time.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

ESAP

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Language for Marketing

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Programme Leader

Faculty / School of:

Arts, Humanities and Cultures; Language Centre

Address for communication:

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Response to Points of innovation and/or good practice

These comments are fair and reflect our approach to course design.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

No comment was made here although changes had been made to enhance the course, such as the inclusion of an Academic Skills component.

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:

These comments are a fair reflection of our experience dealing with increased group sizes. We have received notification to expect similar numbers for 2019 and a working group with Business strand leaders has been set up to discuss ways of addressing the potential impact of high student class sizes on student education. More FTE's contracts have been agreed and recruitment is commencing soon, though this will remain challenging due to UK wide demands within the profession at this time of the year.

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:

Given the short turn around at the end of the course, submitting sample papers and meeting the EE is a challenge. However, we take these comments on board and improvements will be made for 2019. A review of procedures is now underway to ensure that there is clearer communication ensures smoother procedures for external examiners in 2019.

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 are pleased to see the external examiner is happy with the course but recognise the lack of communication with the academic lead. I would like to request a review on this arrangement so that more support can be provided in collaborating on the course going forward. Regarding class size, despite the increase numbers, the course still ran smoothly and both British Council and BALEAP accreditation were awarded with all areas of Teaching and Learning met.

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:

These are fair comments which reflect the approach we have taken to assessment. We were able to give tutors the same amount of time per script as they have had in previous years and standardisation of marking and feedback took place so this variation may be a result of the experience and expectations of tutors.

Regarding the LUBS use of the Password English test, it is recommended that this is reviewed at the module review meeting and cooperation between the LC and LUBS is sought out.

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:

We agree with the comment here and would prefer to have delayed the exam. board but recognise that this was not possible last summer. However, next year the board will take place at the end of assessment (1 week later).

Other comments

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

These comments reiterate the issues associated with increased numbers but it would also be helpful to get feedback on how the efficacy of the changes we implemented to tackle this were.