

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 17/09/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Language Centre

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Academic English of for Postgraduate Studies

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

N/A

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.

This programme works with students preparing for postgraduate study in a broad range of disciplines and effectively manages the challenges this can present. The themed writing task and mini conference at level 3, for example, show an innovative approach to creating a curriculum and assessments that are relevant to the wide range of academic disciplines represented on the programme. Offering a PhD-focused writing task in level 4 is another approach to ensuring the students receive the most relevant preparation.

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 previous report, I noted that levels 3 and 4 were significantly more demanding than levels 1 and 2 in terms of the sophistication and complexity of the assessment tasks. The emphasis on group work in levels 1 and 2, although valuable in some respects, resulted in limited individual work for assessment. For 2017/18 the team have restructured the assessments in levels 1 and 2 to ensure that students produce individual written work. This also helps to close the gap between the levels, and helps students progress through the programme more smoothly.

The PhD writing task has also been reconsidered, as it was generally agreed that last year's task was very challenging and led to descriptive rather than analytical writing. The new literature review task is more appropriate and worked well for students at this level.

I also note that, as I suggested in my last report, summative reflective writing tasks have been removed from level 1 and form only a minor element of summative assessment in levels 2, 3 and 4.

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

N/A

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 / 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 / N
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y / N
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y / N
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y / N
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y / N

Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.

The intended learning outcomes are appropriate for the level of the programme. The programme is focused on the academic language and literacy skills students will need to function effectively on their postgraduate programmes, and asks students to complete a range of appropriate and demanding tasks that include extensive reading and extended writing.

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

The programme and assessments are clearly informed by understanding of EAP scholarship and research. All levels (1,2, 3 and 4) ground their materials and themes in the University context, and the Level 3 focus on the theme of 'time' which leads to an essay and a multidisciplinary conference, is creative and university-embedded approach to the problem of having students from a broad range of disciplines in a single class. Students in this level have the opportunity to really engage with language, literature and ideas in their particular discipline which offers the best preparation for their future academic programmes.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	Y / 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?	Y / 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)?	Y / 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 / N
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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.

Overall, the range of assessment methods used on the programme are appropriate and produce work that demonstrates clear understanding of academic language and academic conventions. Marking is in line with the assessment criteria with clear evidence that appropriate processes have been followed.

I made similar comments to the ones below in my previous report, but I think they are still relevant and are something the team could consider for the 2018/19 academic year:

I endorse the strong process approach taken in the reading and listening assessments on the programme, as this creates authentic, challenging tasks that reflect the academic context. However, in levels 1 and 2 the writing tasks require no significant academic reading, and as there is no other reading assessment, the opportunity to start developing the reading skills essential to academic success is lost.

I note there is no writing (or any other task) under timed/exam conditions as part of assessment. This is not necessarily a problem, but given that many students will be required to sit exams on their programmes and that writing under timed conditions can offer a useful 'backstop' in plagiarism cases, this may be something the team want to consider adding to the programme. Process-based timed-writing assessments that draw on significant reading and writing are something that can work well and are far removed from an IELTS-style writing exam.

18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y / N
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19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y / N
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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:

The students generally performed well, with students at the top end of the scale producing academic writing that suggests they would cope very well on Postgraduate programmes. In particular, there was lots of evidence of detailed, effective instruction in academic writing and presentation giving. Even students at the lower end of the mark scale demonstrated an awareness of academic style, structure and conventions that indicates the programme is offering effective preparation

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:

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 / N
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y / N
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y / N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y / N
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y / N
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y / N
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y / N
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y / N
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y / N
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y / N
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p> <p>A minor point, I had not concerns about the progression board, but it was very informal and there was much discussion of general course issues related to CAS etc. that did not seem appropriate for the context.</p>		

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)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

EAP

Programme(s) / Module(s):

AEPS Levels 1-4 + PGR

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

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Director of Student Education

Faculty / School of:

Language Centre; School of Languages, Cultures and Societies

Address for communication:

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

We agree with the comments made. The changes have been in dialogue with the external examiner over tenure. The only small issue to the change in PGR provision from being integrated into Level in Term 3 of 2016/17 to a separate PGR course for students at Levels 3 and 4 isn't made clear.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

No additional comments

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 additional comments

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:

No additional comments

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:

No additional comments

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:

‘However, in levels 1 and 2 the writing tasks require no significant academic reading, and as there is no other reading assessment, the opportunity to start developing the reading skills essential to academic success is lost.’

While academic reading on Level 2 is not extensive it is intensive. Students read 7-8 academic articles. The choice to go ‘narrow and deep’ was made with the rationale that students at this level benefit

‘I note there is no writing (or any other task) under timed/exam conditions as part of assessment. This is not necessarily a problem, but given that many students will be required to sit exams on their programmes and that writing under timed conditions can offer a useful ‘backstop’ in plagiarism cases, this may be something the team want to consider adding to the programme. Process-based timed-writing assessments that draw on significant reading and writing are something that can work well and are far removed from an IELTS-style writing exam.’

We very much agree with this comment. We are considering methods for increasing security around issues of academic integrity for 2018/19. We are trialing a timed writing task across all levels in term 1. This will be formative initially, however the task will be reviewed at the end of the term to consider making it summative.

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:

No comments

Other comments

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

No comments