

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 18/09/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

The Language Centre

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Academic English for Undergraduate Students (AEUS)

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

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

Points of innovation and/or good practice

One of many highly commendable aspects of the course is the inclusion of an Exploratory Practice module influenced by an educational researcher from the University of Leeds. Another key strength of the programme is the nature of detailed feedback given to students on all formative and summative work. Social programmes are provided for students and there is a good pastoral and academic support through a system of personal tutoring. A wide range of extra learning resources are available on the VLE and The Language Zone provides a range of extra-curricular activities and chances to practice valuable communication skills and integrate in UK and Leeds life and culture.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Because the course has been under- review, upon discussions with the course leaders, it was deemed unproductive to make changes for 2017/18.

Matters for Urgent Attention

As the programme is being reviewed over the forthcoming academic year, there is nothing I can comment on that would be considered urgent beyond general recommendations.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

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

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

As above, there has been no development or enhancement of the programme given the decision to review the programme under new leadership from 2018/19.

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)?	NA
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y

As the course is intended as an English Language pathway to undergraduate programmes at Leeds, the Aims and ILOs are appropriate in terms of structure and content. There is clear progression from basic to more complex tasks and language skills over the three semesters and components which are designed to help students to meet their future needs of their degree programmes. The programme focuses on core English macro skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking with study skills elements which are benchmarked to UKVI SELT requirements for university admissions. There is a pedagogic focus on integration of language skills with content appropriate for academic study. Intercultural competence is a key component of the course, with a focus on living and studying in the UK, and on the local culture and history of Leeds.

A range of students are being catered for in terms of future disciplines and language levels. Optional components are designed in addition to the core components mentioned above to suit these students' interests and needs.

The course focuses on processes in addition to products of learning and tasks are clearly designed with graduate attributes of independence in research skills and collaboration in group work in mind. Tasks are authentic in terms of fostering these attributes and skills.

However, there is perhaps less focus on academic disciplinary discourse conventions and more on 'generic EAP', particularly in the writing module. The rhetorical functions of essays are generally appropriate to most disciplines, but the topics are generic throughout in attempt to a) cater for a wide range of students' subjects and b) meet the needs of students who are taking the IELTS. Hence, there is a slight lack of focus on criticality of argument and thought, and complexity of ideas. As such the **core** components of the course may not always be meeting the needs and interests of the higher level students or those who have already acquired the requisite IELTS score for acceptance to a degree programme.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
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Much of the curriculum is explicitly influenced by research in ELT and EAP and general HE pedagogy. One of many highly commendable aspects of the course is the inclusion of an Exploratory Practice module influenced by an educational researcher from the University of Leeds. Students undertake a number of independent research projects throughout the course, designed to prepare them for the nature of research inquiry at undergrad level.

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

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
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NA		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
NA		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<p>There are a range of formative and summative tasks, all of which are appropriate to the aims and ILOs of the course. The focus on timed essays and examinations is necessary because of the large numbers of students required to sit the IELTS. This restricts somewhat the ability of the course to have a more disciplinary focus.</p> <p>Standardisation and moderation procedures are rigorous and a selection of the cohort are double marked in accordance with university policies. All speaking exams are double marked and recorded, which is to be commended. Arrangements for resits are clear to students.</p> <p>The criteria are clear and fair, benchmarked to both IELTS to meet UKVI and admissions requirements and to the university's 20-90 system.</p> <p>There is some restriction in the writing assessments for term 3 on what students can do with criticality due to the restrictions on sources. While this is designed to simulate undergrad reading lists, some of the sources provided could be more academic in nature to allow students to demonstrate critical thought and become more familiar with disciplinary discourses. As the questions for the extended coursework essay and timed exam are the same, and therefore students know or can accurately guess the exam question, I would enquire as to what procedures are in place preventing students from memorising an answer.</p> <p>Assessments for reading did not seem to test a sufficient range of subskills (expeditious reading, guessing vocab from context, inference etc). I would query as to why reading and listening exams award marks for a subjective process of note-taking, particularly when the notes are also being used to answer questions, so in effect being tested twice.</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>Students are, through a wide range of appropriate and domain-authentic tasks throughout the three semesters, given opportunity to demonstrate their acquisition of skills and language use in a generic academic context. Those taking the IELTS are highly supported with exam preparation classes. Higher level students are catered for in optional modules.</p> <p>As recommended in my previous year's report, I would advise a revision of the reading and listening exams to better reflect authentic tasks and include a range of subskills. I was concerned to see that last year's tests had been used again this year which potentially breaches test security. While I appreciate the low stakes nature of the exams for the majority of the students, it is recommended good practice to build a bank of tests to rotate. Again, I appreciate why this might have not been done this year in light of the course review. Therefore, going forward, I strongly recommend the implementation of a test production cycle in order to prevent tests having to be reused year on year. New tests can be trialled as mocks for a new cohort.</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
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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?	N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	N
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	N
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	N
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	NA
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?	NA
<p>As recorded at the Progression Board, I would need to receive documentation much further in advance than I did this year in order to make more than a cursory examination of the students' work and check procedures and standards. I was able to make some comment on the writing and speaking, but no sample scripts were available to me (of reading and listening) on the VLE. I also would recommend that exam drafts are sent to the External Examiner for comments and suggestions in advance.</p>		

Other comments

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

As nothing has changed from 2016/17 given the upcoming review, many of my comments and recommendations are the same as on my report from that year. Significant changes would improve the course, but given the constraints of its current cohorts and the university requirement to focus heavily on IELTS for medical students, I feel that such changes may be difficult, and potentially disheartening for the development team to make such wholesale effort if these current restrictions remain the same. I have discussed these issues with outgoing and incoming course leaders and we feel incremental changes might be more suitable for 2018/19 while the HE sector market undergoes a shift.

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):

AEUS

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

Pre-sessional

Title and Name of Responder:

Position:*

Director of Student Education

Faculty / School of:

Languages, Cultures and Societies

Address for communication:

11-14 Blenheim Terrace. Room 2.03

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

Comments were gratefully received. The aim of the programme has always been to the best experience for the students based on current pedagogical theories and best practice

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

As stated, the programme is to undergo changes during the next academic year.

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:

There were no matters for urgent attention highlighted in the report. General recommendations will be considered in the ongoing course review.

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:

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:

There is only a small minority of students who apply directly to undergraduate programmes with the vast majority progressing onto IFY or returning to their home universities. The cohort typically cover a range of future disciplines so it is therefore difficult to focus on more specific disciplinary discourse. (These are catered for on the IFY programme) and a more generic EAP focus is deemed more appropriate for the students. The topics are chosen to be stimulating and to encourage student engagement at all levels. Materials and approaches are designed to broaden the students experience and understanding of contemporary issues in a wider context and help critically evaluate information in order to develop their own viewpoint and express their own opinions and voice and facilitate the transition from high school to university study. *Going forwards we will explore ways of enabling students to connect topics with their future disciplines.*

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 exams will be reviewed over the coming year as part of the evolution of the course:

- *Plans are in place to share best practice with another programme (AEPS) in terms of listening assessment so that it becomes more authentic.*
- *The reading exam will likely no longer include marks for notemaking.*
- *The writing assessment may alter if course content is altered thus negating the ability for students to memorize answers.*

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:

Exam scripts will be made available in good time for the external examiner in future. Any significant changes to assessments will be passed to the external examiner ahead of time for comments and suggestions which will be most welcome.

Other comments

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

Incremental changes are planned but, as noted above, this will be a lengthy process over a number of years.