

# 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):*

Academic English for Undergraduate Students (AEUS)

*Programme(s) / Module(s):*

10 and 6 week pre-sessionals

*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

See below

Feedback forms are a clear example of good practice.

#### Enhancements made from the previous year

Substantial revisions have been made to the course this year. It is clear that a lot of time and thought has gone into the design of the course and the materials. The course structure and topics now seems more relevant to UG study. Elements which have been added such as allowing the students to choose their own genre of assessment and to source their own reading for the essays, add authenticity and academic rigour to the course. Elements of metacognitive learning evidenced by learning logs were useful for students at this level. The learning outcome of helping students build a learning community and to participate as a member of the University of Leeds was clearly met through aspects such as the centre's excellent Language Zone, the culture week, and the materials and the presentation assessment.

#### Matters for Urgent Attention

There is nothing that needs to be attended to urgently. All comments below are suggestions for future development only.

#### *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 an 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

This is my second year as external on this course.

## 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

The course is broken down into topics (which deal with the four language skills of reading, listening speaking and writing) and plenaries (interactive lectures on a theme). This simulates the structure of many UG courses so helps students to transition from a more traditional EFL classroom based course towards a higher education course structure.

The 10 week courses mainly focuses on the language required for academic study rather than skills. Students who take the 10 week course feed into the 6 week course fairly seamlessly, where they practice more research skills and academic writing. The learning outcomes in the materials link directly to future learning contexts and are constructively aligned with the assessments while benchmarking well to IELTS.

The content and topics of the course that students will use to demonstrate their understanding of essay writing are both generic enough to allow students to narrow to their own discipline but are specific enough to be relevant to all students who will undertake study in the UK He sector.

The progression of skills is generally good, however may have always not quite built up as well as it could. Academic language that is key to writing successful essays appears on the scheme of work after the essay deadline. For those who take the 6 week only course, there is a tight deadline to hand in a formative draft only one week after arrival. Although I do understand the need to allow time for marking turnaround, because the course finishes on 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> September, I was unsure why writing had to be completed in such a short time. There was a data project in week 7 which while potentially valuable for students in some disciplines, it did not align with the high stake summative assessment of the essay, and seemed distracting.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
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In addition to the usual research base of EAP and language teaching, there were some excellent examples of a research informed curriculum. The 10 week courses mainly focuses on the language required for academic study rather than skills. This course is focused around culture and culture shock which has a strong research base from intercultural communication and its learning logs facilitates metacognition around learning to learn. This is sustained throughout the 6 week course; for example, students are required to come prepared to feedback tutorials prepared to engage actively with their own learning rather than be passive recipients of education.

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
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>The three formative assignments in 10 weeks aligned well not only with the LOs but also clearly aligned with providing opportunities for practice in order to enhance success on the summative assessments.</p> <p>Writing assignment: In the 6 week course, students submit a draft of their summative essay for formative feedback, which is supplemented with consultations. These consultations aligned with learning outcome of becoming a self-regulated learner. Students are provided with a choice of genre and topic depending on disciplinary relevance.</p> <p>Speaking assessment (a presentation) aligns with the learning outcome of becoming a member of Leeds community because they have to do extensive research on their own discipline and how it is taught in their department. Critical thinking is also developed here by reflecting on future goal setting. The course leader expressed some concern that students who will not progress to Leeds might not receive the same experience as this assessment is less relevant. I do not feel this is a huge concern but am aware this is something to develop by providing this small number of students an alternative.</p> <p>Reading and listening: both are comprehension exams which simulate the IELTS model. The reading exam had a high spread of marks but the listening scores were overall higher and more consistent. There seems to be more direct time on the curriculum for listening skills teaching on the curriculum but little for reading. Reading is a difficult skill to teach and often reading skills are developed implicitly through the writing assignment; however, perhaps more explicit exam skills practice might be helpful. I have made some suggestions to the course leaders on how to improve the reading test, and suggested that draft exams be made available to the external examiner.</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>As already mentioned in section 8-12, I think the quality of written work might be better if students had been able to submit both formative drafts and summative essays a week later. There was a data project in week 7 which while potentially valuable for students in some disciplines, it did not align with the high stake summative assessment of the essay, and seemed distracting.</p> <p>The feedback forms are clear and written in student- friendly language and actually match official criteria directly.</p> <p>I would recommend consider the use of Turnitin feedback studio for summative assessment ( the amount of close marking of linguistic features means that it is less useful at draft stage). There may be pragmatic reasons not to use it, but research has shown that students prefer it; it reduces inconsistency between markers, allows for innovation such as audio feedback, and prepares them for the common practice of using feedback studio on disciplinary modules.</p>		

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### 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?	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?	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?	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

Of a 75 student cohort, 32 were conditional, progressing to a variety of Faculties. Only one student did not meet the required grade in reading. This student was offered a resit.

All marking procedures were clear and rigorous and followed policy. All presentations are recorded and double marked. Criteria is benchmarked to IELTS.

Everything was clearly available for me on the VLE and upon my arrival.

**See above for specific comments on the assessments**

### Other comments

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

The level of pastoral care is exemplary. Students are given information regarding culture, health and safety in Leeds. MCs and resits policies are clearly set out. Students are given the option of a resit if they do not meet the required grade for progression in one skill.

The use of learning technology at the centre level is excellent. This could perhaps be made more use of on the course.

**Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)**

Title and Name of Responder:

Position\*:

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

LCS Assessment Lead

Faculty of Arts and Humanities, School of Languages Cultures and Societies

University of Leeds  
Leeds LS2 9JT

\*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****LCS collective response:**

We are grateful to all those External Examiners who identified evidence of innovation and/or good practice in their reports. It is clear that the School's programmes are regarded very positively and are identified as being of high quality with both excellent teaching and student performance.

It is most gratifying to receive positive feedback given the energy invested by staff in this respect. The reports suggest that there is ample evidence of good practice in a number of areas: high quality research-led teaching; dynamic programmes offering a diverse curriculum underpinned by research; impressive levels of student attainment particularly at the upper end of the spectrum; an excellent range of resources and support materials. The variety of assessment styles was noted and the fact that students were stretched and challenged. The variety of skills developed was praised both in terms of transferability of skills and in directly enhancing employability. The research training, often from Level 1 but certainly from Level 2, was seen as yielding rewards for the Final Year Project.

In language modules, the student work provided strong evidence of students' independent learning and the development of intercultural awareness. Several Examiners commented on excellent student performance in speaking and writing. The high level of attainment in some translation modules was also noted.

Staff were commended for their expertise, their excellent teaching and the quality of their detailed feedback. Marking was described as 'clear', 'rigorous', 'robust' and 'thorough' and the moderation process was also identified as 'rigorous'.

In terms of innovation, Examiners highlighted new modules which were perceived as 'vibrant' and 'fresh', cross-disciplinary comparative literature modules which were described as 'pioneering' and an impressive range of modules which were seen as 'engaging' and reflecting current research.

The Examiners also commented on the excellent level of support they had received in carrying out their role. Effective use of Minerva had enabled them to scrutinise coursework in advance of the Board of Examiners' meeting, making efficient use of their time in terms of sampling both student performance and tutor feedback.

**Subject area individual response:****Response to Enhancements made from the previous year****LCS collective response:**

Regarding enhancements from the previous year, it was encouraging to see evidence of subject areas responding to previous comments.

Two key areas were identified: the Final Year Project (FYP) and the use of Minerva. The FYPs were described as 'outstanding' and 'original' in terms of the students' work. The range of projects and approaches was seen as commendable, including the opportunity for students to undertake translation-based projects. The moderation process was identified as producing detailed, insightful comments and the quality of the feedback was commented on very favourably. There was also very pleasing feedback on the support and supervision for students and for the oversight and coordination at School level. Interestingly while some commented favourably on the cross-School moderation of FYPs, two commented less favourably so this will be reviewed and further discussed in 2018-19.

The use of Minerva received very positive feedback. Being able to see samples of student work and/or being able to select samples was seen as hugely beneficial to Examiners in advance of their visit to Leeds. This enabled them to have a comprehensive view of the student performance ahead of the Board of Examiners' meeting and to focus on scrutinising the FYPs during their visit.

**Subject area individual response:**

**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:*

**LCS collective response:**

Four matters for urgent attention were raised:

1. One External Examiner raised concerns regarding the University's inclusive marking policy which means that the marker focusses on the content and not the use of language in awarding marks and providing feedback. The concern was that "the University risks lowering its standards compared to other Russell Group Universities". The University is committed to inclusive marking practices for students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Flagging this to the marker is considered a reasonable adjustment under the 2010 Equality Act. To clarify, the policy states that "Where accuracy in written expression is a competence standard, and therefore forms an explicit element of the marking criteria, students should expect to receive marks which reflect this element and clear advice on how to develop any areas of weakness." It is not felt that this approach means lowering standards; rather it is intended to meet the requirements of the Equality Act and to support students in a reasonable and appropriate way. Please see the institutional response.

2. Two External Examiners commented on the need for a clear rationale regarding moderation at School level of FYPs given the robust marking which is in place at subject level. We will review the outcomes of School moderation in 2017-18 and continue to discuss the need for - and impact of - moderation at this level, including discussion of the practice in other Schools. We will clarify when changes may be made following School-level moderation. Please see the institutional response.

3. One External Examiner commented on the extent of feedback on coursework. While the quality of feedback was identified as very good practice, it is acknowledged that a balance needs to be sought and there needs to be consistency across modules and programmes. The suggestion of a minimum and maximum number of words is very useful and will be discussed in the relevant forum.

4. The fourth matter concerned clarifying what constitutes a fail in speaking and clarification of the term 'unacceptable performance'. This will be addressed in the subject area concerned.

**Subject area individual response:**

**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:*

**LCS collective response:**

We are extremely grateful to those External Examiners who have reached the end of their term of appointment. We thank you for your support, feedback and collegiality during your tenure. We are also very grateful to those of you who acted as mentors for External Examiners who are new to the role.

## Subject area individual response:

### 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:*

#### **LCS collective response:**

It is very pleasing to have confirmation of the strong presence of Research-led teaching throughout all levels of our programmes and for our approaches to Learning and Teaching to be recognised as inspiring students to engage in their own research. Our programmes are seen as well-structured and well designed, informed by current research, with the ILOs covering an appropriate range of knowledge and understanding, developing appropriate skills and supporting clear progression. There was praise for the blend of research specialisms across a range of disciplines and this too was felt to have inspired our students, leading to some very strong performances and impressive instances of student research. One Examiner commented positively on the absence of any grade inflation as a result of moving to the 0-100 marking scale.

#### **Subject area individual response:**

### 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:*

#### **LCS collective response:**

It is encouraging to note that our assessment and feedback processes together with the quality of marking are deemed robust. The variety of assessment methods was praised with some described as innovative and challenging. Others were perceived as standardised but allowing for innovation within individual subject areas. Module moderation and evaluation procedures were seen as robust, clear, well documented and thorough. The high quality of the feedback to students received several mentions. Similarly marking was felt to be fair and transparent.

Regarding the amount of assessment, while one Examiner commented on the overall comparability between the amount of assessment and the rigour of the marking across different modules, another commented less favourably on the large amount of assessment and another mentioned that on occasion there seemed an inconsistency with one module assessed only by an essay task. This will be addressed by individual subject areas but it suggests that the School could identify a minimum and a maximum number of summative tasks with a view to achieving greater parity and moving to a reduction in the amount of assessment.

We welcome the Examiners' suggestions which included greater use of podcasts to increase the variety of assessment methods and the opportunity for students to express their creative freedom; reducing the number of exams and increasing the range of assessment types; making more use of Turnitin to provide feedback online saving staff time, enhancing the feedback experience for students and avoiding the need to transfer marks. We will discuss these suggestions to see how they could benefit both staff and students.

There seemed to be some concern for the amount of time colleagues spend on providing detailed feedback which, while highly commendable, could be reduced by adopting a 'feed forward' section which identifies two key points for the student to focus on and encourages more reflection. This could be trialled in 2018-19.

One Examiner mentioned that accessing Minerva had been problematic and time-consuming so we will compare practice across the different subject areas with a view to finding out what works best.

#### **Subject area individual response:**



### **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:*

#### **LCS collective response:**

It was very pleasing to have feedback on our exam boards confirming “scrupulous application of the classification process, good and robust discussion of how and where rules should and should not be applied”.

Again the use of Minerva was identified as having facilitated the role with Examiners able to look at materials and student work ahead of their visit. One suggestion was that making more use of online marking would be a useful enhancement allowing the External to see the feedback and marks on Turnitin submissions.

A concern raised by one Examiner was the School-level moderation of FYPs following an already robust and thorough process of double-marking. The suggestion was to clarify the process regarding cases where changes may be made following School-level moderation. As mentioned earlier, this will be reviewed and discussed in the relevant forum.

Another concern centred on clarification regarding when a Board might be able to make “extraordinary decisions” in awarding candidates a higher degree grading where severe mitigating circumstances have been declared.

One External would appreciate the opportunity to attend the Progression and Awards Board and this will be followed up. We aim to invite each External Examiner to attend the Classification Board once during their tenure and we are always pleased to hear from individuals who would like to put themselves forward for this additional duty.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our External Examiners for the vital role they play in subject exam boards in terms of ratifying module marks and where necessary moderating them, and discussing matters of comparability of student performance at module level with national benchmarks and other UK institutions.

#### **Subject area individual response:**

## Other comments

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

#### **LCS collective response:**

We regret the difficulty which some of our Examiners experienced in accessing Minerva. We are now aware of the need for each individual to complete the University's online security training – on an annual basis - within a very short time in order to be able to access the system. We will endeavour to remind our Examiners of this short deadline to avoid having to request new login details.

A couple of Examiners mentioned that it would be useful to access samples of student work via Minerva ahead of their visit to Leeds so this will be followed up by the relevant subject areas. One particular comment concerned being able to access FYPs ahead on the exam board to allow more time to view them.

One Examiner questioned the role of the External at the Board of Examiners' meeting, suggesting that it might be more useful to attend the Progression Board. As explained, this is not the School's policy but we will readily issue an invitation to the Classification Board for 2018-19.

One Examiner who is completing their term of office recommended greater harmonisation and rationalisation of assessment and a review of the volume of assessment. While this will be addressed by the relevant subject area, it will also be considered by the School.

**Subject area individual response:**