

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

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18    QAT Received 26/06/2018

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

Faculty of Arts, School of Languages, Cultures and Societies

*Subject(s):*

Classics

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

Latin and Roman History

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

BA in Classical Civilization, BA in Ancient History and History, BA in Ancient History and English

**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.*

I have had a chance to look at the whole cohort of exam scripts and coursework that fell within my remit. The material was arranged with admirable clarity and efficiency by colleagues at SLCS, and my task during my visit could not have been better supported. Colleagues were very forthcoming in making time to discuss their marking and specific cases that required extra scrutiny. I was presented, on the whole, with consistently reliable marking and impressively thorough feedback, which are a great credit to the programme and a strong testimony to the quality of the provision across the board. Some cases flagged up by individual students (sometimes on rather elusive grounds) were brought to my attention: I unfailingly found myself in close alignment with the views reached by the markers.

It was very good to have the chance to look at a diverse and on the whole very successful batch of dissertations, in which some pieces stood out for their originality and creativity. It was interesting to see a number of projects on firmly comparative topics, several of which clearly stem from the AH and History BA: they all performed in the mid-2:1 range, and it would be interesting to see whether this pattern is confirmed in the years to come. – The second year research preparation module remains a great strength of the programme, which yields significant rewards at dissertation level.

I was impressed by the choice of a module leader to upload on Blackboard anonymised examples of first class essay work, with the relevant set of feedback.

A welcome pattern that I saw last year was confirmed: it is not infrequent to see different exam answers in the same script receiving very different marks – that is clear evidence that each exam component has been strictly assessed on its own merits.

The moderating process remains rigorous and meaningful, and provides the opportunity for a substantial reflective exercise, which is recorded (arguably at excessive length, in some cases) in the moderation sheet. (On a related note, an unintended effect of very lengthy feedback is to complicate the task of an external examiner who is interested in getting an overview of how the assessment process has been conducted).

I am genuinely interested in how the full range of the first class is often used, both in exams and coursework: there is often a tendency to err on the side of generosity and reward firmly first-class work with marks in the high seventies that at my institution would be rather rare. At any rate, the compliance with the marking criteria has struck as consistently strong: this is more a point I wish to reflect on for the sake of my own practice than a matter for discussion for colleagues at Leeds.

A number of pressures, partly caused by the industrial action and partly by staffing factors, have been addressed very effectively and have not significantly impacted on the smooth and effective running of the assessment process.

### Enhancements made from the previous year

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

Much of the practice I have seen evidence of remains closely in line with what I saw last year. There is a clearer shift towards typed exam feedback, which is now applied across the board, with the exception of one module. The relevant coversheet provides a helpful framework and secures valuable consistency in an important respect.

I have noticed a much more sparing use of the adjective 'satisfactory' in the feedback, and that might be a response to some comments I made last year. I have noticed, though, a growing tendency to apply the label 'good' to work across a very broad range of performance levels: I think there is scope for refining that aspect of the feedback. In some cases, the discursive feedback on an essay does not clearly point to a mark or even to a generic classification: one has to turn to the second sheet, where the relevant sections of the marking criteria are underlined, to get a sense of the likely mark that a piece might have commanded.

### 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*

I am making this comment against the background of a very healthy and indeed admirable picture, in which students are provided with extraordinarily detailed and thoughtful feedback and my confidence in the consistency, rigour and helpfulness of the assessment across the board is very high indeed. I have been left wondering, though, about the sheer extent of feedback that is provided, especially – though not exclusively – on coursework, in several modules: that is not in line with the practice at my own institution and at any other institution I am familiar with. Moreover, there is a degree of inconsistency in the extent of the feedback that is provided across your programme: on some modules the feedback, while perfectly fit for purpose in my view, is shorter than for others. It would be in the interest of an appropriate management of student expectations and of the implementation of a consistent practice across the programme to reach a shared view across the Section on what the lowest and highest word count for coursework and exam feedback ought to be. At a minimum, I would suggest having a collective conversation on how best to streamline the format of comments and feedback early in the new academic year.

### 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 /
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 /
<p><i>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</i></p> <p>My views on the scope and range of the degree programme and on its overall structure are in line with those I set out in last year's report. The structure of the programme has not changed over the last twelve months, and some welcome, albeit rather minor changes in the format of the feedback are in line with the prevailing earlier practice.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y /
<p><i>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></p> <p>A strong link between research and teaching is apparent from Year 2 onwards, while the first year retains a rather general focus, and rightly so. Arguably there is scope for more modules on major topics (at least in Ancient History) that do not fall into the research interests and expertise of colleagues in what remains a relatively small unit – but this is a debate that would exceed the scope of this report.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	/ N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	/ N
<p><i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i></p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	/ N
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p>		

## 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>I have no substantive comment to add on this point to those I made in my previous report.</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>See my comments in section 1 on the use of high first-class marks, which reflects well on the overall quality of the students' work. Since I did not take part in the Classification Board I am not in a position to comment on the overall performance range of your students, but I have seen a range of achievement in the modules I have assessed that is in line with what I have usually experienced at my institutions or in comparable ones.</p>		

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

The VLE remains a cumbersome tool, which yields no added value whatsoever beyond reducing the consumption of paper during the assessment period. So far it has unfailingly proved an unwelcome complication to my work, which I am trying to negotiate to the best of my ability.

It would at least be helpful if the names of the uploaded files could be changed by an administrator after submission, so that all the student numbers can appear right at the forefront and the whole cohort can become more easily searchable.

### 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?	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?	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?	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 /

*Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:*

I would like to restate my admiration for the work that colleagues at Classics both in teaching and assessment. Students are very well looked after indeed.

### Other comments

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

N/a.

**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:**