

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 14/06/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Faculty of Arts/School of Modern Languages and Cultures

Subject(s):

Linguistics and phonetics

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA in Linguistics and Phonetics (and combined honours programmes)

LING	1100	Language: Meaning and Use
LING	1060	Language Projects
LING	1500	Key Skills in Linguistics
LING	2005	Languages in Contact
LING	2131	Psycholinguistics
LING	2340	Syntax
LING	2390	Language Acquisition
LING	2430	Experimental Pragmatics
LING	3005	Languages in Contact
LING	3030	Syntactic Theory
LING	3190	Language Acquisition
LING	3350	Language Processing
LING	3370	Experimental Pragmatics

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

BA

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 school runs a very strong linguistics programme; standards are very high. I was impressed by the commitment shown by staff and by the range of resources made available to students. Students receive extremely detailed feedback (see below for my recommendations regarding feedback). Student performance is appropriate, and this includes some student work of exceptionally high quality, which is evidence of high quality teaching. There is ample evidence of good practice and high standards throughout the programme and in all the modules I examined. Minerva sites for all modules are well developed, and module moderation is effective. Exam board processes were followed with great care and efficiency.

I understand that a number of changes have been made in the last few years, and thanks to the efforts of staff and the input of my predecessors the programme is outstanding; the recommendations for improvement one can make are only minimal.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

N/A This is my first year as external examiner at Leeds.

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

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	N/A
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	N/A
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	N/A
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	N/A

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

N/A

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.

The department runs a solid, well structured programme. Aims and learning outcomes are appropriate for the level of study. Modules build onto each other nicely so students develop relevant knowledge and skills gradually from their first year to graduation. This is particularly clear in the 3rd year advanced modules LING3350 Language Processing which builds well on 2nd year LING2131 Psycholinguistics, and LING3030 Syntactic Theory, which builds well on LING2340 Syntax.

I think that the year 2/3 module pairs would benefit from a better differentiation between the second and third year version. The differentiation could be made clearer both in terms of learning outcomes, input and resources as well as assessment. Pairing modules is a good way of offering more choice to students when resources are limited, so I understand why these pairs were set up. I understand that the department has been working on these pairs in the last couple of years, so this is in progress, and steps have already been taken in the right direction. I would also encourage the school to consider whether it is essential to run shared modules at 3 levels (year 2, 3, and Masters), as is currently the case with the Languages in Contact module. The instructor is faced with the very difficult task of achieving a three way differentiation in the same class. I would advise against this set up if other suitable solutions can be found (a year 3/ Masters pair would also work for example).

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 influence of research on the curriculum and learning is clear.

<p>Recent cutting edge research is part of module content, especially in years 2 and 3. I particularly liked the fact that students receive training on research methods early on, starting with the year one module LING1500 Key skills in Linguistics. They then build on these skills in following years: the research training element was exceptionally strong in LING3370 Experimental Pragmatics and LING3190Language Acquisition, but was evident throughout. Students are asked to develop research projects as part of their assessment in LING3350Language processing and LING3190Language Acquisition. I believe that the school has done a very good job in integrating training in quantitative methods/statistics in content modules, which is very important, given that in our discipline we do not have the luxury of offering specialised modules in statistics. I did not have access to the dissertation module to see the kind of training provided there, and student skills; I would welcome access to that module in future.</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> N/A</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> N/A</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> N/A</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>Learning outcomes and assessment are well aligned. Most modules have two assessments, typically an essay and an exam. The exams are not limited to asking for definitions, but include a variety different tasks, ranging from data analysis to critical evaluation of literature. This allows students to show and develop a range of skills relevant to their degree programme.</p> <p>In module LING1060 Language projects I particularly liked how formative and summative assignments build on each other to support the gradual development of skills.</p> <p>Student performance reveals high quality teaching. Commitment to teaching excellence is also clear in the module content on Minerva. I was impressed by the quality of teaching material as well as by the range of teaching and learning methods and resources, which included blogs in LING3005Languages in Contact, discussion board in LING3350Language processing, online reading lists, plenty of formative assessment and external resources in several modules amongst many others.</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>High academic standards throughout. Student performance was entirely in line with that of students on comparable courses in other UK institutions.</p> <p>I think that psycholinguistics and syntax are areas of particular strength within the programme; the quality of the relevant modules, in conjunction with the programme structure that builds up skills and knowledge in these areas from the first to the second and then third year, as mentioned earlier, result in exceptionally advanced learning.</p>		

In some cases in year 2/3 module pairs, student performance was perhaps a bit lower than I would have expected, especially for the second year students (for example there were no marks in the higher range for some of these modules). There is the possibility that some of this is an effect of the transition to a new marking scheme: I understand that the change happened this year, and it will probably take a while for staff to be fully comfortable with the new marking scale. However based on the student work I saw, marking was appropriate for these second year modules. Staff currently take good ad hoc measures to deal with this issue (e.g. scaling up of marks, other solutions at moderation stage), so this is not an urgent issue, but I do think that a gradual move towards a better differentiation between the levels in the paired modules would be beneficial. This was not specific to a subject or skill, nor did I observe this in any non paired modules, so I am quite confident that it is due to the (limited differentiation in the) pairings.

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

Staff currently give very detailed, high quality feedback. My feeling is that the current system makes marking and feedback a very time consuming process for staff. I understand that the school moved to online submissions via Turnitin very recently. I would strongly encourage the School to consider taking a further step and start giving feedback via Turnitin. I believe that this would save time for staff and would further enhance the feedback experience for students. I am also concerned that currently students see everyone else's feedbacks and marks for most modules (to clarify, feedback is anonymised: the school follows very good practices in terms of marking anonymously and preserving student anonymity). But students do not need to see everyone else's individual feedback.

Online marking via Turnitin would solve this issue. There are a number of facilities available via Turnitin which would make marking less time consuming and feedback more effective. This includes, among others, bubble comments within the script, preset comments (quickmarks), feedback summaries, voice recorded feedback; also Rubrics, which can incorporate the existing marking criteria in the school feedback sheet and/or weighting for different parts or aspects of the assessment. In addition, by using online marking, staff would be able to see whether students have seen their feedback or not.

I would also encourage the university to consider the processing of marks: if markers input marks via Turnitin, then transferring marks from Grade centre would eliminate the need for markers to input marks in several places (as I understand this, markers currently input marks in individual feedback sheets/minerva mark lists/admin forms).

Overall, I think that the extraordinary amount of time and effort staff put into marking and giving feedback is not necessarily reflected in the outcome. I think that a move to online marking would significantly reduce marking time, while enhancing the feedback experience for students. I understand that online marking has just been piloted within the subject area (linguistics) at the postgraduate level by _____; I would encourage the school to consider extending that to the undergraduate level.

I would also welcome a possible move to reduce the number of exams taken by students, and to introduce a range of different assessment types, if the university is moving in this direction. There are several options, for example data analysis exercises, posters, essay drafts, online tests via Turnitin, take home exams/exercises. Having said that, the existing exams do not just include definitions, but test a range of different skills (including critical/analytical) as I mentioned earlier; so, in conjunction with the second assessment for each module, they cover learning outcomes well.

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 / N
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?	N/A
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	N/A
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?	N
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	N/A
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	N/A

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

The process was very smooth despite some technical issues which delayed things somewhat when I first started in this role. The academic and admin team were fantastic in providing me with all the relevant information, and responding to any questions immediately. The use of Minerva/Turnitin greatly facilitated my work as I was able to look at material and student work before physically coming to Leeds. The use of online marking in future, if the School decides to implement that, would make things even easier for me as I would be able to see feedback (and marks) directly on Turnitin submissions. I also found the module moderation sheet very useful, as it includes comments and requests directed to the External examiner.

In the future, I would enjoy the opportunity to attend the Progression and Awards Board so as to get a more complete picture of the whole process. For example, I would be interested in learning more about the School special circumstances process and how the recommendations of the School Special circumstances meeting are communicated to and considered by the Progression and Awards Board. I was asked, in a module moderation document, whether I would be happy to allow a student to resubmit an assignment due to special circumstances, which I thought was an unusual request; this, for me, should be a special circumstances committee decision. At the Exam Board I was very pleased to hear that the Special circumstances committee had in fact discussed the case and had made relevant recommendations.

Also, I would have liked to see at least some dissertations, to get an idea of the type of topics covered and skills shown in the most important piece of work produced by the students during their studies. This would have put me in a better position to judge if the other modules have enabled students to develop the theoretical and methodological skills expected by students in their dissertations. In future, I would encourage the school to consider giving both examiners access to the dissertations/dissertation module, even if the module is officially allocated to only one of the examiners.

Other comments

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

I would like to thank the academic and admin team for making the process so smooth. It has been a pleasure to get to know everyone, the school, the staff as well as the students via their work. I immediately felt at home in your linguistics programme and I look forward to continuing to work with the school in the next few years. I hope that you find some of my feedback useful, although the programme is already very strong so there is very little I could possibly contribute. I would be happy to further discuss my recommendations and comments with staff and students.

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. 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: