

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 05/11/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Philosophy

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MA Philosophy

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

MA

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 quality of the written feedback provided is generally excellent. Staff are to be congratulated for this.

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

Matters for Urgent Attention

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box

N/A

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y / N
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	Y / N
3.	Were you provided with an 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
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	N

On commencement of my term as external examiner, the standard of feedback provided on students' written work was very variable. Some of it was excellent, but some poor – both insufficiently detailed and predominantly negative in tone. It is now much more consistent in quality and much more encouraging in tone. Moreover, at the beginning of my term, it was unclear how disparities in the marks awarded by first and second internal markers (often large – sometimes over 20 marks/100) were resolved. There is now a space on the marksheet for recording this and this section of the marksheet is (usually!) completed.

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
<i>The programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes are of high quality and commensurate with those of comparable programmes at other UK institutions.</i>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
The curriculum design is clearly informed by staff research interests, and this is clearly beneficial to students' understanding and research.		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i>		
The programme provides appropriate preparation for those students intending to go on to a PhD.		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i>		
N/A		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i>		
N/A		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<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>		
These are all generally good and appropriate,		
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><i>The academic standards demonstrated by students are, in my experience, similar to those of students on comparable courses at other UK institutions. As with many taught postgraduate programmes in Philosophy, they demonstrate a range of abilities.</i></p>		
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i></p> <p>There was one issue with dissertation marking, in which there was an enormous disparity between the marks awarded by first and second internal markers (58 and 81). The mark eventually awarded after consulting a third internal marker was 63. I endorse this mark. However, I note that the supervisor who awarded the (in my mind unreasonably) high mark of 81 was the student's MA dissertation supervisor. This makes me worry that the student may have received misleading feedback about the appropriateness of the work produced at supervisions. Leeds is a very big Department by UK standards, yet has a small master's degree programme. It is therefore likely that, fairly frequently, those who supervise master's dissertations are unfamiliar with the norms relevant to their assessment because they don't supervise them very often. This may or may not be what has happened here. Nevertheless, I think it's important to ensure that, each year, the expected standards of achievement for each degree classification (especially in terms of specifically philosophical content) are made explicit to all those engaged in master's dissertation supervision that year. It is worth reflecting on whether this currently happens and, if it does, what was responsible for the inconsistent beliefs among internal markers regarding the academic standards that MA dissertations must meet to warrant awards in the various classifications.</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
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?	Don't know
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?	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?	YI
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
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p> <p>I was not provided with draft exam papers/ assessments. I assume that this is because this is not appropriate at MA level because students are able to select their own questions.</p>		

Other comments

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

Last year was to have been my last year as external examiner for the Leeds MA Philosophy, but it appears that no replacement had been appointed. Can you please ensure that a replacement is appointed for next year?

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Philosophy

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MA Philosophy

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

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Director of Student Education

Faculty / School of:

Philosophy, Religion and History of Science

Address for communication:

University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT

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 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

We are grateful for the commendation for the quality of feedback. We aim to provide extensive and detailed feedback on assessment at this level, and expectations on feedback are made clear to markers.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

n/a

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:

n/a

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:

We are grateful for confirmation that improvements have been made to the assessment process.

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:

We are glad to have confirmation that the programme structure, aims and learning outcomes are appropriate, and comparable to those of similar programmes at other institutions.

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 point is well taken that some discrepancies among internal markers are cause for concern and that this ought to be addressed by a reinforcement of marking criteria through internal communication. We note further that discrepancies have been most notable when one of the internal markers is a specialist in inter-disciplinary or applied ethics specialist and that specific briefing by the Programme director is in order when such colleagues are recruited as markers on PHIL MA modules. Explicit TPG assessment criteria are set out in the School's Code of Practice on Assessment.

Perhaps I could take this opportunity to respond to [redacted] pre-Exam Board comment, received by e-mail, that 'the feedback given to [x -student name omitted for the purposes of this report] for [redacted] dissertation was very brief and schematic compared with that provided to other students. The issue of inconsistent standards of feedback arose in my first year as external and had, I thought, been rectified. I think it is reasonable for a master's degree student to expect more detailed feedback than [x] has been provided with here.' We entirely concur with this observation, and the source of the discrepancy in this case was the same as that for the discrepancy in marks noted above, and will be dealt with in the same way.

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:

A very brief comment on Qs 25 - 27: these are n/a as all assessments are essay based.

Other comments

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

We confirm that we have in place an external examiner for the programme next year, and would like to thank [redacted] very much for [redacted] contribution during [redacted] occupancy of the role.