

# The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 06/11/2018

### Part A: General Information

#### Subject area and awards being examined

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

Institute for Transport Studies

*Subject(s):*

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

MSc Transport Economics  
MSc Sustainability in Transport  
MSc Transport Planning  
MSc (Eng) Transport Planning and Engineering  
MSc Transport Planning and Environment  
MSc Mathematical Modelling for Transport

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

As above.

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

#### Points of innovation and/or good practice

Good use continues to be made of electronic submission and feedback and arrangements for double marking are clearly enforced.

#### Enhancements made from the previous year

Moderation of dissertations was more clearly evident this year in the way the marks are presented. Instructions for the Transport Integrated Project module (TRAN5912M) have been clarified and this module did not seem to experience the teething and related problems that it faced this year. Nonetheless, the work load seems to be in issue for part-time students.

#### Matters for Urgent Attention

There is a range of feedback forms, which is understandable given the relatively large teaching team, and some standardisation of the assessment templates might be beneficial.

Both of the External Examiners sensed that the dissertation marks (TRAN5911M) were slightly 'toppy', resulting in a high level of distinction standard marks and very few marks in the low 50s. These relatively high dissertation marks were also commented on by the External Examiners in 2017. It is suggested that the assessment criteria and processes (including staff training) are reviewed to ensure there is no systematic upward bias. It is also suggested that summary descriptive statistics are produced for all modules as this can, to some extent, help in checking consistency (or otherwise) of assessment.

#### For Examiners in the first year of appointment

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

#### For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	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?	Y
----	--	---

New courses and modules have been added that have enhanced the diverse offer of the Transport courses. Providing a clear audit of second marking has been strengthened, particularly with respect to the dissertation. However, there is some scope for further standardisation of assessment practice, not least with respect to student feedback.

The peculiar 20:90 marking schema seems to have been dispensed with – and about time too.

Acted as a mentor to – but this didn't involve a lot of work.

## 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

The Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes of the Programmes continue to be appropriate for the awards under consideration, as are the structure and content. They are comparable with those of similar programmes at other leading institutions and meet (or exceed) national benchmarks.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
-----	---	---

Research-led education permeates through all of the Programmes.

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

However, many of the modules would form an excellent basis for an iPhD scheme.

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
-----	--	---

16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y
-----	--	---

The programmes have appropriate accreditation from a variety of bodies such as CILT, CIHT, TPP and JBM but it is not clear how much value students place on accreditation, with the exception of those aiming at CEng status.

## Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
-----	---	---

There is a clear code of practice on assessment that is evidently implemented. The quality of teaching and learning is reflected in the range of modules and assessments offered and in the good student performance.

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
-----	---	---

The students exhibited good academic standards. My impression is that there are appropriate proportions at Distinction and Merit level overall (but note my comment concerning dissertations above). However, it would be useful to have summary statistics on this, by Programme and over a reasonable number of years.

The student body is very diverse but with the best students performing at the level you would expect from a world-leading institution.

There seems to be limited evidence of the use of formative assessment and possibly too much summative assessment. I understand that this is under review but I saw little evidence of more formative assessment (and less summative) this academic year.

### 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?	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

I did receive the External Examiner Handbook for AY 2017/1 but not the Student Handbooks for the relevant Programmes (if such things still exist).

I was not provided with coursework assessments in advance – but would not expect this and was able to inspect them at my visits in June and October. I did see (and comment upon) all exams, including referrals.

I remain concerned about the lack of a harmonised exam grid system and the potential problems of data transfer between the Faculty Excel spreadsheets and the University's Banner system.

I continue to think it would be useful if a short guide to the assessment recording system(s) was produced and made available to Examiners (internal and external).

A report from the School Special Circumstances meeting is now added as a standard agenda item for the Progression and Awards Board. I believe this to be good practice.

### Other comments

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

The administration of the programme continues to be affected by the high rate of staff turnover in the Student Office.

Delivery of the programme was affected by an industrial dispute but reasonable adjustments were made and the adverse effects on students were limited.

A lot of administration has been reduced to dumping material in Sharepoint sites, web links and similar and leaving the academic to sort the material. It is not clear that external examiners are being paid for these administrative duties.

This year a web link to a sample of dissertations was only made available around two hours before the Board meeting. Ideally, this should have been made available several days in advance.

I have found it very helpful to meet the students at the June meetings. However, the attendance this year was relatively low. Measures to encourage a good attendance should be considered.

**Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report****Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)***Title and Name of Examiner:*

<i>Subject(s):</i>	Various modules across the following Masters programmes;
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	MSc Transport Economics MSc Sustainability in Transport MSc Transport Planning MSc (Eng) Transport Planning and Engineering MSc Transport Planning and Environment MSc Mathematical Modelling for Transport
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	MSc

*Title and Name of Responder:**Position\*:* Deputy Director of Student Education*Faculty / School of:* Environment /ITS*Address for communication:* Institute for Transport Studies  
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 [gat@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:gat@leeds.ac.uk). External Examiners should receive a formal response no later than six weeks after receipt of the original report.

**Response to Points of innovation and/or good practice**

We note your positive comments on the extensive use of electronic coursework submission in ITS. Whilst most assessment and feedback is still undertaken offline, the use of electronic means is now increasing and we anticipate further increases as the university continues to invest in appropriate systems and as staff become more confident in their use.

**Response to Enhancements made from the previous year**

We note the issue you raise about the need to reflect on the arrangements for part-time students to undertake the groupwork for the Transport Integrated Project module. In fact the part-time group did well in this module in the academic session in question, despite some delay and uncertainty essentially resulting from unanticipated personal circumstances of some of the students concerned. For the present session, we will again provide a longer timescale for the part-time group to undertake the module, we will monitor the situation carefully during the session, and ensure that as before, a highly experienced member of academic staff is allocated to mentor this group.

**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:*

We note that, along with our other external examiner, you consider that there may be a disproportionate number of top-grade marks for our Masters students' dissertations. Whilst we do believe that a significant proportion of our Masters students produce excellent work for their dissertations, we accept that is beneficial to reflect on our marking processes for this module and we have already embarked on this in the current academic year. To get this work under way, we have obtained and discussed a range of marking schemes and guidance notes used by other institutions, particularly where these schemes set out in a formal way what might constitute work at a level commensurate to a particular award classification. We have short-listed a selection of these that we feel are the

most informative and helpful for our purposes, and will use these to develop and improve our own existing marking forms to provide clearer guidance to staff when assessing dissertation reports. We anticipate that such enhanced guidance will be available to staff in time for marking dissertation reports for the current cohort.

We note your suggestion that a table of summary statistics for outcomes across the full range of modules would help to promote greater consistency of marking standards. We will aim to introduce such a table for our next Summer assessment board.

We also note your suggestion that templates used for assessment and feedback to students could be standardised to some extent. We feel that full standardisation is not possible due to the diversity of the coursework tasks that we use, but we will continue to consider how to build on best practice in this area as part of our Teaching Enhancement activities, and will seek to embed identified good practice wherever possible in our feedback proformas.

**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:*

Your comment on standardising procedures for assessment and feedback has been addressed above. Otherwise, we thank you for your positive comments in this area.

## 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 grateful for your positive comments in this area. Whilst we would agree generally that accreditation towards Chartered Engineer status is the most obvious and visible attraction of our arrangements for professional accreditation, feedback from our students via our Student-Staff Forum suggests that some overseas students value accreditation towards MCILT, particularly those students from countries where CILT is most active.

## 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:*

We are grateful for your positive comments in this area. Degree classifications for each session are reported in our annual programme reviews, so we will aim to compile and maintain a summary table of degree classification outcomes by programme and monitor this over time.

As you note, the university has an exercise under way to review the amounts and types of assessment across modules and programmes. ITS is engaging with this exercise and will review both the overall amount of assessment and the balance between summative and formative assessment in line with any university guidelines that may emerge.

## 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:*

We are grateful for your positive comments in this area. The university is working towards implementation of much more integrated systems for student records, which we anticipate will eliminate the current need for manual data transfers between systems. The timescale for full implementation is not currently known. I would expect external examiners to receive guidance on such developments in due course.

## Other comments

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

We note your comment that you would have welcomed earlier access to a sample of dissertations ahead of the final assessment and award boards. We will ensure that access is arranged further ahead for external examiners in future sessions.

We share your concern that relatively few students attended the meeting with the external examiners in June. We do not fully understand why that was the case, because we followed the usual procedures for advising students of the meeting and moreover attendance at the group photoshoot immediately afterwards was very much higher. The cohort concerned had raised relatively few concerns during the academic session, which we feel reflects our success in addressing the teething problems encountered during the first run through our refreshed programmes in the previous session.

Finally, on behalf of the Director and the entire ITS team, I would like to take this opportunity to record our thanks for your work and guidance as one of our External Examiners over the last four academic sessions. Your suggestions over this period have made a strong contribution to the continued high levels of student satisfaction recorded over what has been a period of significant development and change in our Masters programme offering.