

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 04/07/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Institute for Transport Studies

Subject(s):

Transport Studies

Programme(s) / Module(s):

TRAN1011 Challenges in Transport and Mobility
TRAN1030 Introduction to Surface and Air Transport
TRAN2010 Transport Economics
TRAN2041 Transport, Energy and Environment
TRAN2063 Key Challenges in Transport and Society
TRAN3031 Public Transport Policy and Practice
TRAN3070 Healthy Cities: Transport and Health
TRAN1021 Transport Policy in Action
TRAN1040 Global to Local: Challenges in Transport and Mobility
TRAN2020 Transport Land Use and Development
TRAN2030 Project Appraisal
TRAN2062 Transport and Society
TRAN2064 Exploring Transport and Society
TRAN2070 Transport, Mobility and Safety
TRAN3040 Physical Distribution and Logistics
TRAN3052 Case Studies in Sustainable Transport
TRAN3060 Travel Activity and Social Analysis
TRAN3011 Transport Dissertation

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

BSc

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.
Exam and coursework second marking sheets are extremely clear in identifying the scripts read through and the views of the second marker on how those scripts were marked.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.
I think the continuing changes towards standardising the exam paper formats, amount of assessment per module and the layout of the module handbooks are positive steps, because they make things clearer and easier to understand for students. However, there is still a little room for improvement in each of these regards.

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
None

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 a External Examiner Mentor?	N/A

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

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

I was initially concerned about 4 aspects of the programme, namely:

- 1) Amount of assessment
- 2) Marking levels of assessment
- 3) Consistency of assessment between modules
- 4) Consistency of formatting in presenting assessments

Amount of assessment: Here I felt that coursework and project assessments were significantly less onerous than at my institution (typically 1,000 word essays would be 1500 or 2000 in _____ and the final year project length was 10,000 words compared with 17,500 at _____), and that examinations were generally shorter (90 minutes instead of 120 minutes at _____). Interestingly, _____ is now moving closer to the Leeds model in this respect.

Marking levels of assessment: In this aspect, my initial thoughts were that marks awarded were often 5-10% more generous at Leeds compared to _____, and that there was a significant degree of squeezing such that most students seemed to secure marks in the 2(1) grade boundaries. Over the last two years particularly I have felt that this is less of an issue – indeed marks seem to have become more spread out in several modules, which is pleasing from a marking perspective. That said, more could probably be done in this aspect, perhaps by shifting to a grid-based marking structure.

Consistency of assessment between modules: Progress has been made in this area over the last three years, with there typically now being only 2 assessments per 10 credit module. Moreover the remaining outliers are apparently being modified in this coming year – all good. Some challenges remain due to different schools having different norms, but overall this aspect has improved over time.

Consistency of formatting in presenting assessments: On arrival here, I found that marking rubric for exams and courseworks was generally presented in a whole range of different formats, and this was not helpful for students. Pleasingly, consistency in this area is now much better, particularly with exam papers. However, there are still cases where coursework briefs are rather vague and unclear, and somehow processes need to be improved to pick up these before they are released to students.

Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	N/A
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	N/A
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	N/A
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	N/A

12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	N/A
<i>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</i>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<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>		
Teaching is clearly informed by the research of the staff in many cases, with some interesting and innovative assessments being set as a result (on SATURN for example). That said, the student feedback exercise revealed that students did not always pick up the link to the researches of staff members, and this suggests that more effort needs to be made to highlight research informed teaching when it occurs in some instances.		
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>		
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>		
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>		

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>		
Certainly at the module level this is true. I continue to be impressed by the range of assessment formats offered by the staff.		
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
<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>		
This year I felt that marking levels across the board were about right.		
The point made last year about students not being able to differentiate between essays and reports seemed less of an issue this year in some modules, though more could likely still be done at the programme level to make sure this improvement is seen across the board.		

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

From my perspective the feedback was helpful and comprehensive. However, the student consultation exercise I held revealed that students would like more developmental feedback as to how to improve and get better marks. This suggests to me that the staff perhaps need to consider adopting new techniques to provide this – one option being more prescriptive grid-based grading frameworks as suggested in previous years.

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?	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?	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:

The process was clear and robust.

Other comments

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

Student comments

Once again I spoke to a sample of final year students, and this was most helpful. Overall they were grumpy, perhaps as a result of the strike, but also had no regrets about doing the course.

Interest: Students wanted more choice in the modules they took, and tended to find the compulsory modules less interesting than the electives.

Staff: The staff were felt to be fair, approachable, helpful and quick to respond.

ITS-Geography: Again there were comments about overlap in introductory elements across modules, and about the liaison between ITS and Geography over coursework deadlines and reading weeks particularly.

Content and assessment: There was a feeling that transport modules were easier than geography – none were too hard. The level and type of assessment/workload was agreed to be fine. Students would also like more trips and social events to be arranged.

Conclusion

Following my looking through all of the coursework and exam assessments for all of the undergraduate transport modules I am satisfied that academic standards are commensurate with other universities where I have experience of teaching practices.

Lastly I would like to state that the administrative support for my visit was excellent in all respects and to thank the programme director and his team for their efforts over the past 3 years.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Transport Studies undergraduate modules, covering the following modules

Programme(s) / Module(s):

TRAN1011 Challenges in Transport and Mobility
 TRAN1030 Introduction to Surface and Air Transport
 TRAN2010 Transport Economics
 TRAN2041 Transport, Energy and Environment
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 TRAN3052 Case Studies in Sustainable Transport
 TRAN3060 Travel Activity and Social Analysis
 TRAN3011 Transport Dissertation

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

none

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 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 note your positive comments on the standard and clarity of our processes for undertaking exam and coursework moderation and recording the outcomes of such moderation

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

We note your positive feedback on our progress towards greater standardisation of exam paper formats, the amount of assessment per module and the layout of the module handbooks. We will continue to progress these, and in particular point to our use of a new standardised exam paper template introduced across the university during the current academic session.

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:

No urgent matters were raised in your report

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 note your positive responses to these questions, along with your commentary of the positive progress we have made in a number of areas over your period of tenure. We are currently looking at how we can improve the guidance we provide to staff in how to determine appropriate marks for submitted work and how to justify those marks in our feedback. We have assembled a selection of templates (along similar lines to the one you suggest) from by various institutions, and are now pulling together best practice from these with a view to incorporating this into our own systems.

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:

These questions relate to programme curriculum and assessment rather than to individual modules, and as such are not directly applicable. We note your comment that we do not always succeed in conveying to students the full extent to which our teaching is informed by our research, and we will reflect on the best ways to address this.

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 note your positive responses to these questions, though please refer to my earlier response to Q1-Q7 about our initiatives to improve our feedback and justifications for marks awarded to students, as a key aim in this is to better inform students on how to improve their future work.

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 note your positive responses to these questions.

Other comments

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

We are now in the final stages of the refreshment exercise for our undergraduate modules, paying particular attention to the final-year modules, where we will again address the issues identified during your discussions with our students. Changes will reflect the improved recruitment onto the BA(Hons) Geography and Transport Studies programme as well as the significant numbers of Environment/Sustainability undergraduates enrolling on our modules. As one example, we will re-orient the Physical Distribution and Logistics module away from a business/management focus more towards an environmental focus, increasing its attractiveness as an option for these students and hence given them a perceived wider choice of modules to choose from.

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 our External Examiner over the last four academic sessions. Your suggestions over this period have proved extremely helpful in what has been a period of significant development and change in our undergraduate module offering. This change is now being reflected in both increased student numbers and high levels of student satisfaction on our modules and your guidance has made a strong contribution to this success.