

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:

School of Sociology and Social Policy

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MA International Social Transformation
MA Social Research
MA Social and Political Thought
MA Social and Public Policy
MA Global Racism Studies

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.

NA

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

A new module was introduced in 2017/18 called SLSP5352M MPA Project Labs. It is a core module for the MPA Public Administration programme. This is an innovative module where students have to analyse policy instruments in terms of challenges and impacts upon society.

Another new module JUSY5555M Working Beyond Disciplines was introduced which provides an introduction to interdisciplinary studies.

Both of these modules were well designed and provide an excellent addition to what is already a very strong and coherent programme.

Marks for these modules were also generally high on average which is very encouraging.

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 had two general concerns.

1. The marks for the module SLSP5370M (Reality TV) revealed many fails. This seemed out of step with other modules which is unusual. Judging by the names of the fails it would appear that these are mainly Chinese students. Perhaps more support could be given. It appeared from the comments on the fail marks that this was due to a lack of application of theory and essays being too descriptive. Perhaps the importance of these factors could be emphasised at the start of the course. Language difficulties were also mentioned which I raised in my comments last year. This seems to have improved, but obviously it was more of a problem for this particular module.

2. The module on quantitative methods covers multivariate statistics which I think is appropriate at MA level, but the assessment does not have to include such methods. I think this might be worth consideration.

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?	N
3.	Were you provided with a 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?	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?	NA
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

As last year I was very impressed with the programme as a whole. The modules were all well thought out and well designed. There was a good balance of theoretical and methods oriented modules. Methods modules were of very high quality enabling students to undertake serious empirical work. Feedback given was detailed and appropriate. The new modules are also very well designed and I particularly welcomed the increased focus on interdisciplinary study. The module handbooks were extremely good and provided detailed information about all the courses and assessments. Marks were well spread and feedback excellent. Some of the dissertations were of publishable quality and the department should be commended for producing such excellent postgraduates.

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 MAs are coherent and provide a solid foundation in social research at this level. The learning outcomes are achieved to a satisfactory level.

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)

Students benefit from staff expertise and current research projects. They are offered a wide range of research training, and have a number of opportunities to pursue empirically-based projects. There was significant preparation and explanation of independent research based assessment from suitable research active staff.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p> <p>The MA in social research conforms to the ESRC standards as good preparation for a PhD. I assume that this is part of a 1+3 programme where ESRC funded students undertake this MA before going on to the PhD proper. The training that the students receive on this is exemplary and should provide them with adequate knowledge to progress quickly during their time doing PhD research.</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>Assessment methods are appropriate and assessment criteria are consistently applied. Students benefit from imaginative and rigorous assessment and detailed and informative feedback. As much detailed feedback is given generally to exceptional students as to those who need more support and guidance. The assessment handbooks are very well done and include more than enough information for students to complete their tasks to a high standard. ILOs are commensurate with similar programmes at other institutions and meet national benchmarking.</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>Some of the work, especially the dissertations, was of a very high standard (some of the assignments were of a publishable standard). This applied to both more theoretical pieces as well as more empirical work. The methods modules in particular are very well designed and thought out and provide students with high level skills in undertaking social scientific enquiry.</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>Feedback was very detailed and exemplary in almost all cases.</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?	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?	N
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>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i>		

Other comments

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

I did not see drafts of the assessment questions. There were no examinations. The strike by UCU also meant that I did not assess the earlier modules.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)*Title and Name of Examiner:*

Subject(s):

Sociology & Social Policy

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MA International Social Transformation
MA Social Research
MA Social and Political Thought
MA Social and Public Policy
MA Global Racism Studies

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

MA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

MA/PGT Tutor

Faculty / School of:

SSP

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 thank you for your comments within this form/feedback which suggest good practice across the assessed criteria.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Thank you for your positive comments on the new modules that have been introduced. We are encouraged that you feel these contribute value to our programmes and that the students have performed well on these new courses.

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 share your concerns about the high number of fails on the Reality TV module and agree your diagnosis of the problem here. We will be doing exactly as you suggest – providing even more support for the Chinese students taking this module to ensure that they understand the requirement to be critical and that they take every opportunity available to them e.g. via the Language Centre to enhance their language skills.

We are not entirely clear on your point regarding multivariate statistics – do you believe it is important that students apply this technique in their assessed work? Or are you suggesting that it is more important that they learn about it, but do not need to be assessed on it? We would appreciate your advice on this matter.

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 encouraged by your positive feedback and, in particular, we note your comment that many student dissertations are of publishable quality. That is wonderful to hear and we will be looking into ways to make the best dissertations publicly available and/or to support students to publish in various formats from their dissertations.

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:

Again we thank you for your positive feedback, but are particularly pleased that you consider the research methods training provided in the School to be of such high standard, providing an excellent grounding for PhD studies in the Social Sciences.

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:

No specific points to address.

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:

No specific points to address.

Other comments

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

We will be ensuring you see draft questions or assessment instructions in future years and thank you for raising this important issue.