

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 07/08/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Social Sciences

Subject(s):

Sociology/Social Policy

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Sociology, Social Policy, various modules

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.

Students are able to study a variety of subjects covering traditional and current sociological and social policy issues. A variety of assessments enable students to broaden their transferrable as well as academic skills. Teaching is delivered and managed by an enthusiastic and dedicated team of professionals.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

Amendments to the moderation/second marking process has made that process more transparent

The response of the programme team, including the teaching & learning leadership team, to Industrial Action earlier in the year was outstanding. In my view their professionalism ensured that important issues around HE employment conditions were aired while avoiding any detrimental impact on student learning.

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?	NA
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2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	NA
3.	Were you provided with an 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?	NA
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	NA
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?	NA

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

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.

Based on the materials I have reviewed I think this is an excellent programme. Students study a variety of topics aligned to sociological and social-policy concerns and interests. The modules I assessed are well designed, interesting, relevant and fairly (and on the whole, robustly) assessed. Student performance, feedback, marking, programme structure, teaching management, and administrative systems and support are all very good. All standards are appropriate for the awards under consideration and meet the AQA benchmark requirements.

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 content of all modules I looked at indicate a research active teaching team able to translate that activity into different learning contexts. This is evident in the breadth and depth of issues covered and the abilities of the better-performing students to present a solid understanding of frequently complex issues. Many modules introduce students to 'real world research' through some creative assignments such as research projects, data analysis, research proposals, reviews and blogs.

The Dissertation module provides excellent opportunity for students to engage in research themselves. This is well designed and delivered. The provision of specific workshops on developing specific research skills is excellent and, in my view, places the programme ahead of competitor institutions.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
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Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

NA

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
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Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:

NA

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

N

Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

Assessment and Feedback

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

Y

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.

Teaching and learning materials are well developed; marking and feedback transparent, justified and fair.

The programme offers a good quality teaching and learning experience for students. In all modules the assessments aligned with the learning outcomes without restricting students to pursue their own interests.

Students have opportunity to demonstrate the full extent of their learning and understanding. It was good to see the full range of marks and marking criteria being applied.

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

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 saw many excellent work. The well-attended exam board awarded many very good degrees. Students and staff on the programmes should be proud of their collective achievements.

Students' work is comparable to (and often better than) that produced by students on other programmes I am familiar with. Weaker students receive constructive feedback and are encouraged to perform as well as possible.

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

Almost without exception, feedback and assessment of assignments was appropriate, individually tailored and detailed. Instances of brief and or more generic feedback were only notable by their rare occurrences. Nonetheless, I think staff should be reminded of the importance students place on feedback and so aim to provide more than a couple of sentences of written feedback on student work.

In places the terms 'good', 'very good', and 'excellent' were being used in the feedback for scripts in different grade-boundaries. For example, assignments marked in the low 60s being described as either 'good' or 'very good', while work graded in the 70s was occasionally described as 'very good' and 'excellent'. This could lead to some muddled thinking among students about what constitutes the difference between the terms 'good', 'very good' and 'excellent'. I raised this same issue in last year's report and would prefer not to raise it again next year.

There had been some modification to the second marking process that has made this more transparent. This is good to see. Following second marking some scripts were re-marked and it was good to see the written rationale for this. However, it is unclear whether in those circumstances any action would be taken to consider further work that had not been subject to second marking:- would other work consequently be looked at? I would welcome further information about this process.

On an isolated occasion second marking appeared to have taken place in a somewhat piecemeal fashion rather than in one block at the end of the marking period. Although on this occasion this does not appear to have affected the feedback or marks, I think it would be more useful if second marking on a module was undertaken in one block.

It is not uncommon in HEIs to employ less experienced staff (such as postgraduate researchers) as teaching assistants. This is also the case on this programme and does not concern me per se. However, it is important that any individuals employed in this capacity have the confidence to provide appropriate feedback on assignments.

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?	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 Progression and Awards Board was well attended, administered effectively, and professionally chaired.

Other comments

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

It is my opinion that these are very good programmes. Staff involved in teaching delivery, management, and administration should be justifiably proud of the student experience they contribute towards.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Sociology and social policy programmes

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Various

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

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Outgoing DSE (on behalf of Head of School)

Faculty / School of:

SSP

Address for communication:

SSP

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. 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 pleased to acknowledge the very positive comments here

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

We are pleased to acknowledge the very positive comments here and please that the second marking process is more transparent throughout

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 issues arising

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:

No issues arising

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:

No issues arising

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 gratified by _____ extensive positive comments throughout. In response to the additional comments notes some issues which I respond to below:

We will seek to maintain the consistency with which we provide detailed feedback to students; this will be aired at STSEC and all staff will be reminded of this norm.

Regarding the terms ‘good’, ‘very good’, and ‘excellent’ in the feedback as relating to class categories: We will air this at STSEC and remind all academic staff and module convenors to use the terms consistently

Regarding the question about re-marking scripts. I think this references instances where we use a third marker (when agreement is not reached between first and second markers). The third marker opinion, and rationale for the final given mark should be clear on the documentation sent to the external.

Any systematic differences across marks is reviewed by the convenor and the DSE (we have looked across all module grade distributions this session). However we believe grading is mostly consistent across modules. Please let me know, _____, if I have misunderstood.

We will mention the issue about the timing of second marking to ensure it occurs in one block – I am unsure what happened in the example you cite, this is not usual practice.

We will remind convenors that TA feedback requires convenor oversight and that TAs should be given appropriate guidance regarding tone, detail etc.

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:

Other comments

Response to items included in the ‘Other Comments’ section of the report

Nothing further other than to say – thank you again _____ for your work and support this year, it is hugely appreciated.

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 26/06/2018

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):

Sociology and Social Policy

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA Sociology, BA Sociology and Social Policy, BA Social Policy, BA Social Policy and Crime, Joint Honours BA Politics and Sociology/Social Policy, BA Sociology and International Relations

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.

I would like to thank the department for the opportunity, and the administrative and lecturing staff for the examining samples with all the material clearly laid out and the very helpful and informative letters and supporting information. It made it easy to review and turn them around in time. I would particularly like to thank _____ for assistance addressing queries regarding second marking practices. Staff provided information concerning the measures taken and procedures in place to review module marks and classifications in relation to the recent strike action. I was impressed by the care taken to assure that students were adequately supported.

I would also like to commend the staff on both essay feedback and second marker comments which, in most cases, was detailed and engaged with students' writing and arguments. It showed a commitment to feedback, student development and engaging with them intellectually. The course content and assessments for the modules I examined are innovative and engaging for students, always seeking to involve them in the applied aspects of sociology and social policy.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

This is my first year as external examiner however having consulted the report of the previous external I see no suggestions for enhancements to be made to the programmes or processes over the past year.

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

In terms of next years' external examining, I was wondering if it would be possible to send examiners a map of the programmes and how each module fits in?

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

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

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

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.

I found the Sociology and Social Policy Levels 2 and 3 programmes and course structure and content to be well designed and it meets the disciplinary benchmarks, national standards and needs of the students. The aims and ILOS are appropriate and clear. The courses that I examined were all of a very high quality and to varying extents provided an excellent mix of theory, empirical research, contemporary debates, political and social engagement, historical context, and global, national and local contexts.

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 courses that I examined to varying extents provided an excellent mix of theory, empirical research, contemporary debates, political and social engagement, historical context, and global, national and local contexts. Teaching was clearly research led with engagement with current research in the subjects, practice informed by research, and students undertaking their own research (i.e. group presentations and analysing the city in SLSP2953 Urban Disorders).

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
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Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

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

Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:

16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

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>The material and assignments were appropriate for the courses and levels, national benchmarks and all other standards. They were challenging and assessed a range of skills and abilities. There was also a good mix of varying assessment styles – i.e. group presentations, essays, and exams. From the quality and content of the work I saw, the students seemed to be very engaged in their modules. I thought that the assessment process and administration of modules was excellent. The standard of work and marking fit with other institutions I have experienced. The marking is fair, good practice have been followed and I agreed with the banding in almost every case. Where I differed it was only slightly and on borderline cases.</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>This appears to be a strong cohort, with performance in the range of what is expected on comparable courses. I was particularly impressed with the range/mix of grades in SLSP2953 Urban Disorders, and also of the high quality of work in modules including particularly SLSP3230 Global Terrorism and Violence. The work of a higher standard demonstrated a strong grasp of sociological theories and concepts, and drew on a wide range of literature and empirical examples.</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>With regards to Undergraduate dissertations: I examined a sample from across the grades including some weaker low 2.2s and some extremely well written, engaging dissertations which were high 2.2s and Firsts. The weaker dissertations were more like long essays and were based on secondary literature reviews. However, I agree that they merit a pass. There wasn't always details of how the agreement between first marker and second marker was reached on the feedback form. It would be helpful for this to be consistently included on forms in future. However, overall, there was detailed feedback from both markers on the dissertations.</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
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i> Unable to attend the Exam Board due to ill health.</p>		

Other comments

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

I would also like to commend teaching and admin staff for the support offered to students as a result of the strike action. The procedure for dealing with this in relation to assessment and appeals was also very clearly communicated to External Examiners, and made the process much more straightforward. It was useful to have details of previous cohort performance in order to compare the results of this year's cohort.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

School of Sociology and Social Policy
Sociology and Social Policy

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA Sociology, BA Sociology and Social Policy, BA Social Policy, BA Social Policy and Crime, Joint Honours BA Politics and Sociology/Social Policy, BA Sociology and International Relations; various modules

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

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Outgoing DSE on behalf of the Head of School

Faculty / School of:

SSP

Address for communication:

SSP

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

No issues arising

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

No issues arising

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 will ensure we send a picture of the programmes and how the modules fit, as requested

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:

No issues arising

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:

No issues arising

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:

Regarding the issue of transparency on marker reconciliation of dissertation marks – we have sought to structure this into the form filling process and will ensure consistency in completion of this – reminding colleagues of the importance of clarifying how they arrived at a final mark if there was an original discrepancy between them.

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 issues arising

Other comments

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

We are pleased with the very positive comments throughout. We also note the positive commendation of how we managed the strike action and supported students throughout, and communicated clearly with you as external. May I also take this opportunity, o thank you so much for all your work and your support through the year; it is greatly appreciated. I am sorry you had to miss the Board but we will look forward to welcoming you here next time.