

**The University of Leeds**  
**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18      QAT Received 24/07/2018

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

Faculty of Education, Social Sciences and Law, School of Politics and International Studies

*Subject(s):*

*Political Theory*

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

BA Politics  
BA Politics and Parliamentary Studies  
MA Politics (Political Theory)

(Modules – indicative list only)

PIED1601	Freedom, Power and Resistance
PIED2601	Revolution and Reaction: Political Problems in the 20th Century
PIED2602	Justice, Community and Conflict
PIED3604	Culture and Community: Theoretical Perspectives
PIED3609	Radical Political Ideas: Marx, Nietzsche, Schmitt, Foucault, Kristeva
PIED3610	Feminist Challenges to Political Theory
PIED3750	UG Dissertation
PIED3760	Dissertation-Joint Honours
PIED5601M	Political Theory in Action
PIED5626M	Global Justice
PIED5777M	POLIS MA Dissertation

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

**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.*

Marking was fair and in line with standards applied in other institutions. I was, once again, very impressed by the high quality of the feedback provided on students' work. Feedback need not be exhaustive nor especially lengthy to be of a high quality - it is much more important to identify areas for improvement and, in the case of the very best work, to indicate which features of the work contributed to the high mark awarded. The feedback I looked at was exemplary in these respects and speaks volumes about the care and dedication which POLIS staff approach the business of assessment.

**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 noticed that one module convenor had experimented with the form of the formative assessment for his module, requiring students to write up outlines of their essays in the form of blogposts. This struck me as an interesting idea and the blogposts I looked at suggested that this experiment had been very successful, the best of them being extremely well written indeed. I very much liked the way this model encouraged students to work on the outlines for their longer pieces of work, while at the same time giving them experience of presenting their ideas in different forms.

### 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 haven't encountered any issues during the course of the year which merited urgent attention. In my remarks at the exam board, I did indicate that it was important to remember to keep an eye on Turnitin reports regarding text matches, as I had the impression with respect to some semester one material that these were not always being investigated for possible instances of plagiarism (obviously, high text match scores do not necessarily constitute evidence of plagiarism). It was clear to me, however, that markers were monitoring text match scores closely in semester two coursework, and that in at least one of the semester one cases that I had noticed, the coursework in question had in fact been investigated for possible plagiarism, suggesting that the impression I had formed regarding semester one coursework was not wholly accurate. It was suggested to me in relation to this case that the practice within the School was to mark first then investigate - if that is indeed the case, then I think this policy should probably be reviewed. I do not, however, think that there is a significant plagiarism problem affecting the work I have looked at, and I am satisfied overall that markers are monitoring work appropriately.

### 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 a 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 / 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.*

The modules I have reviewed were excellent: interesting and well designed, taken together they add up to an excellent education in contemporary political theory. There is a nice mix of approaches in evidence here, some modules arranged primarily in terms of thinkers, while others start with issues. I liked the way some modules particularly encouraged students to compare and contrast the ideas of different thinkers, and also the way that students on one module were encouraged to interpret artifacts in popular culture. Overall, an excellent suite of

modules that complement each other very well, and which succeed in both introducing and exploring complex ideas. The political theorists at POLIS are clearly doing an excellent job.		
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>		
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>		
<p>The assessment methods adopted in the courses I reviewed, primarily took the form of essays, sometimes a single essay, sometimes two, and in one case (noted above) there was a formative piece of assessment which took the form of a short comment piece. These forms of assessment seemed to me to work very well insofar as there was a good fit with the learning outcomes of the modules concerned and the high quality of students' work suggests that these forms of assessment allow students ample opportunity to display their knowledge, understanding, and presentation skills. While I am supportive of convenors experimenting with assessment methods when they have clear aims in doing so, contemporary universities often appear to value innovation for innovation's sake, sometimes at the expense of valuing good practice. The assessment practices employed in the modules I have reviewed appear to be working very well and while convenors will, of course, always be alert to the possibility of improvement, we should be prepared to acknowledge good work when we see it, as we do here.</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
<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>The standard of students' work was very high overall. The best work was really excellent (and I was happy to see markers reaching for higher marks in the first class band to appropriately recognize the very best work) and would be judged as such anywhere. As before, I was struck by the concentration of marks in the first and upper second bands with very few pieces of work falling into lower bands. This accurately reflects the very high quality of the students' work and is a testament to the excellent learning opportunities which they are being afforded within the School.</p>		

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

### 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?	n/a
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:

As before, I was very impressed by the way the exam board meeting was conducted – procedures were clearly explained as was the rationale for decisions made in individual cases. and the exams team evidently run a tight ship and their handling of the exam process was admirably fair, open, and efficient.

### Other comments

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

**Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)**

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

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

Title and Name of Responder:

Position\*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

Address for communication:

POLI, University of Leeds.

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**

These were noted.

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

These were noted.

**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:

These were noted. Reminders will be sent to all staff on these modules reminding them of Turnitin procedures.

**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:

N/A

**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:

Excellence noted with thanks.

### 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 the point about the pressures to innovate and will monitor that through the Learning and Teaching Committee and other forums.

### 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:*

Noted with thanks.

### Other comments

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