

# The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT Received 12/12/2019

### Part A: General Information

#### Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Design
Graphic and Communication Design
DESN1250 Fundamentals of Imaging
DESN1415 Intro to Photography (Digital)
DESN1415 Intro to Photography (Digital)
DESN1989 Graphic & Comm Media A
DESN1999 Communication & Design Process
DESN2145 Video Editing
DESN2150 Contemporary Digital Media
DESN2155 Illustration
DESN2415 Photography (Digital)
DESN2415 Photography (Digital)
DESN2721 Book Arts
DESN2730 Principles of Typography
DESN2980 Design Application
DESN2989 Graphic & Comm Media B
DESN3150 Contemporary Moving Image
DESN3660 Ind Study Dissertation
DESN3725 Information Design
DESN3765 Brand Communications
DESN3770 Contemporary Advertising
DESN3989 Graphic & Comm Media C
DESN3994 Independent Project
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc): BA Hons

### 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.

As stated in all my previous reports (2016-17 and 2017-18) the option of a year in industry benefits those who opt to undertake it or are in a position to take advantage. Students return with a wealth of experience that both enhances their employability and feeds into final year study. Speaking to returning students and looking at their work of reveals a good balance of academic and professional skills and knowledge. To further develop this the programme and students (especially those from less connected backgrounds) could benefit from introducing an industry mentorship scheme (with alumni) to help students build networks and possible opportunities. This could help address the challenges both females and students from BAME or lower income backgrounds may face entering an industry where this is repeatedly reported as a serious issue.

The range of appropriately challenging assignments spread across the programme continue to cover a broad spectrum of design practice and allow for individuals to discover and develop their own particular practices and approaches to the subject. There is no 'house style' or enforced approach to the subject apart from an appropriate expectation of rigour. The majority of assignments require the submission of an evaluative element where students have to reflect upon and show how their proposals work and what

could be improved in future projects. This focus on the potential impact of designed artefacts is commendable and should be maintained and developed as it is quite unique in my experience.

The balance/make-up of course team has undergone some significant changes in the last year but the student experience does not seem to have been negatively affected and remains one that I think excellent. My points from my previous report regards adding more female staff and the benefits of representing the make up of the student body still stand.

### **Enhancements made from the previous year**

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

The introduction of learning opportunities such as the DESN2721 Book Arts module has added significantly to the student learning experience and enabled staff expertise to be shared effectively – helping the students develop, sometimes in our digital times, overlooked or underestimated practical skills relating to the production of physical artefacts.

### **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*

The DESN1250 Fundamentals of Imaging module needs updating. Compared to other programmes I am aware of the module focuses too much on declared 'know-how' of technical facts. I question the validity of an exam-based assessment for what should be core technical skills embedded throughout the course and delivered by technical demonstrators. Also students would be better served by allowing them to learn and develop technical skills relating to software and image processing through more experiential means such as LinkedIn Learning. I would remove or rewrite this module and replace it with one where practical outcomes are assessed.

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

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 only**

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

*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*

It has been a pleasure working with the team at Leeds these past 4 x years. I have seen the modules delivered over several iterations and seen how the team continually adapt and respond to the needs of the students whilst facilitating and maintaining high academic standards. There have not been any significant changes to the programme during my tenure.

The programme team have worked on assessment process and have striven to make feedback positive, clear and useful. A process I saw introduced in my first year has matured and comments from students at my visit show it is working well and valued by the students.

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**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 programme structure, design, aims and ILOs are what one would expect from a large and successful graphic design BA Hons. Given the somewhat unique nature of being a graphic design course in a Russell Group University adds a difference than the majority of courses which operate out of post-92 institutions. There are opportunities for students to engage in modules and learning opportunities the University of Leeds offers which are unique to the institution.

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)*

I will recount my comments from the 2017-18 report - All the practical projects and assignments require the students to undertake applied research and engage with research methods appropriate to design practice – this varies from project to project but includes research into the project’s context, research into the various stakeholders, research into the message and point of the visual communication and research into materials and formats to deliver the message. Turning research findings and data quickly into applied design artefacts is something that is a strength of the discipline/subject area.

However, graphic design is a relatively young and untraditional academic discipline. It has its roots firmly within vocation and professional practice. Research is, largely, more action-based and applied and students need to focus on learning experientially through project based assignments to mirror industry practice. Graphic Designers who study for a BA Hons, on the whole, rarely seek to enter academia and publish in journals. This requires the teaching staff to be more professionally aware and to keep up with cutting edge industry discourse and practice to ensure the programme assignments are relevant. This team do this very well and it should be encouraged rather than falling into line with traditional academic research agendas and paths.

When appropriate, I have found the curriculum to be informed by the team members’ ongoing research, scholarly activity and professional practice of the academic team. It seems all the academic team are involved in some kind of research, some traditional, some applied – the breadth of which is useful for the students to experience and know about.

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:*

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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>As stated, the majority of the assessments on the programme are project based assignments that require the submission of bodies of work including research and development, written assignments and proposals for communication design outcomes. This suits the discipline and prepares the learners well for life after graduation if they chose to go into professional practice. I am confident the programme is constructively aligned so assignments articulate well with modules and module structures with assessment practices.</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>I would repeat my comments from last year's report and say that given the high tariff points and previous educational experiences of the cohort that I would expect slightly more first class honours. Perhaps there is too much writing as part of the modules and other ways of challenging and assessing academic rigour more suited to the aims of the course could be explored? Many of the students achieving grades in the high 60s might receive grades in a higher band at other institutions for similar work. Sector averages for 1st class honours fluctuate between 25-30%.</p> <p>It was good to see a few more 1<sup>st</sup> class honours this academic year but I can't help feeling that there should be more given the nature of the cohort a Russell Group University attracts.</p> <p>The sample of work I had the pleasure of looking through on each module was fairly graded within the context of the programme and feedback was clear and consistent. The work, especially those achieving above 70%, was impressive and demonstrated high levels of engagement and commitment.</p>		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i>		
<p>During my visits and meeting with the students it is clear they appreciate the efforts by the programme team to provide, useful, timely and appropriate feedback on their work. It is clearly an area the team have worked hard to improve and enhance. From the module samples I can see a progression in quality of work and understanding of expectation as the students progress through the programme.</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?	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>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**

During my time as external at Leeds the programme team have been welcoming, open to sharing and eager to engage in discussion regards the practice and pedagogy of the discipline. I feel I have both been helpful and learned during the 4 x years and I would like my thanks to be shared with the team and other people at Leeds who have facilitated my visits and helped in carrying out my duties.

I would reiterate my comments regards the team striving to improve the diversity in terms of gender and ethnicity the teaching team as this will better represent the student body and strengthen the programme.

Whilst this does not impact on the quality of the programme and is nothing to do with the course team arrangement for payment for my engagement have consistently been slow and late. I have had to make several enquiries each year to chase payment which should be a simple and basic process. It was so late last academic year I had to suggest I would resign from the post if things weren't sorted. I would suggest this is an area to look at improving or identify blocks or issues if good will between external examiner and the institution is to be facilitated.

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

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Design

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA Graphic and Communications Design  
BA Graphic and Communications Design (IND)  
BA Graphic and Communications Design (INT)

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

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position\*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

AHC, School of Design

Address for communication:

Clothworkers Central Building  
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) must be sent 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**

Thank you for your comments about the value added to students by the Year in Industry option.

Your suggestion of an alumni mentorship scheme would definitely be of benefit so as a course team we will have a discussion of the best way to implement such a scheme. My initial thoughts would be to gather interest from alumni and open a discussion with these to plan a programme for the future. We were delighted to read your comments about the challenging and rigorous nature of our assignments. Your comments about the make-up of the course team is something we have discussed on a number of occasions. My personal view is we shouldn't have more or less staff diversity for the sake of diversity. It has to be the right thing for the course and the students but I'd agree our balance isn't quite right at the minute however it's difficult to recruit the right people with the right skills. We are currently as a team discussing the best way forward with this issue and our VL provision seems to be the best place to make changes so we are looking to address this in the near future.

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

We were pleased to read your comments about the new modules relating to physical skills as this is something we are addressing across all the core modules also. As you know it's difficult to get students out of their comfort zones so it's been testing at times.

**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:

Thank you for your feedback regarding the DESN1250 module. As the review this year we are looking to overhaul this module and change it into something much more significant and relevant to all the students. This year we have used LinkedIn Learning as a way of teaching the software titles so we have taken some steps to make the changes you have suggested. We aren't there yet with the entire module however the next time it runs I believe we will be.

**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:*

Thank you for your kind comments about the team. We are delighted that you noticed the impact of the changes made to the feedback and assessment process.

**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:*

Thank you for your comments about the use of research methods and the influence of the team's research on teaching.

We were interested to read your comments about the role of research in Graphic Design as a discipline and happy to see you understand what we are trying to achieve here. As you say all the staff are actively engaged in 'research' in one form or another which definitely informs the teaching and graduates of the programme.

**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 were pleased to read that you feel the programme assessments prepare students for professional practice.

You commented that you felt there could be more students achieving 1<sup>st</sup> class honours however due to the nature of the course we don't see all the details of each student. We are also trying to take students through a research and practice experience so the writing is a key element for us in this process so we are very hesitant to take it away. The balance maybe off a little based on the students' selections of modules however this is something we are currently looking at this year with the re-write of the core graphics modules.

I was pleased to read that you felt our grading is fair and that you found the performance of the students impressive.

I was delighted to read that students had given positive comments on the feedback they receive.

**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**

On behalf of the team I would like to thank you for your support and guidance throughout your tenure as External Examiner.

I am sorry that you experienced delays with your payments. The School is aware that there have been significant issues and apologise that you have been affected and impacted by them. We have recognised that this is a problem and is being looked into as a priority on an institutional level.