

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

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT Received 01/07/2019

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

English

*Subject(s):*

English Language & Literature

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

various modules taken by 2<sup>nd</sup> and final year BA English Language & Literature students, including: Language in Society; Keywords; Language of the Media; Prose Fiction: Stylistics and the Mind; Power of Language; Children, Talk and Learning; Forensic Approaches to Language; and English Language Dissertation.

*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.* As in past years, the final year dissertation work was particularly noteworthy. A great variety of interesting topics were attempted, and some really strong projects emerged: well-conceived and pursued with considerable industry. Students and their tutors are to be commended; work of this calibre suggests that staff are delivering, and students responding to, a well-designed regimen of modules in the first two years, to enable this final year work.

In at least one of the modules (Children, Talk and Learning ENGL32763), an assessment instrument was used which I believe merits consideration for wider use. This was a 1600-word Exam Essay, worth 50% of the final grade for the module, where students were allowed 8 hrs in which to prepare and write their essay from the point at which they were given a choice of questions. The questions were posted in the Minerva module site at 9 a.m. on May 20<sup>th</sup>, with essay to be submitted by uploading by 5pm; the convenor, \_\_\_\_\_, sensibly was available online for the first 30 minutes, in case of student questions (in fact preparation for this assessment over the last few classes of the module seems to have been very careful). Performance on this task was generally very satisfactory, and the essay writing was quite comparable with that produced by students on modules where the 'lead time' between disclosure to the students of the set questions and the deadline for submission was many weeks. I would also record here my own reservations with regard to the standard imposed practice at my own university, of giving students sight of essay questions in week 4 of the semester, where the due date is typically at the end of the following vacation, approximately 10 weeks later. Given the desirability of returning to something closer to exam conditions for some modules where so much online digital information tempts the student to let others do their thinking for them, the middle way of the 8-hr (one full working day) essay preparation period looks to me an attractive blend of constraints and enablements.

Another good practice feature I would like to commend is the use of the Announcements function, among the Module Tools: in most modules I have examined, module convenors and tutors have used this resource to supplement information communicated in lectures and seminars/tutorials. This can be a useful route to feed back to students more general observations about how the module is progressing, student attendance, any particularly relevant recent publications or items posted on social media sites, and so on. As we know, students need a lot of reminding, about everything, and Announcements is an attractively targeted and efficient means of doing so, where the reminding relates specifically to one or another module.

**Enhancements made from the previous year**

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

No new enhancements that I'm aware of, but see my comments on Innovations in section B below.

### 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 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?	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.

As in past years, I can confirm that the programme structure etc. is very much of the kind to be expected in English (Language & Literature) degrees at RG universities.

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)

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
<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>		
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>As in previous years, I was impressed by the work I saw, from a range of students in these different modules. The work is on a par with the standard of work produced by undergraduates at most of the other strong English departments (Language and Literature integrated) in the UK.</p> <p>As in the past there were some outstanding essays and dissertations and exam script answers among the items I looked at, which must give staff heart at the prospect of a few of these students proceeding to graduate work at Leeds. In the best of this student work, a clear sense of enthusiasm for the subject, or the topic addressed, shines through. That speaks volumes for the quality of the teaching.</p> <p>Feedback was again copious on most modules, and scrupulous, pinpointing areas where the student might realistically do more, go further and produce better work in future. I have suggested in the past that some comments were too vague and general ("be more ambitious") and I was pleased to see very little of this, and overwhelmingly an emphasis on helpfully specific injunctions this year.</p> <p>This year I did not see as many exam scripts as in past years, so cannot comment specifically on how students wrote under a very constrained time pressure. But my impression—from the essays and dissertations I read—is that writing standards are something that staff at Leeds (as at _____, and no doubt most UK universities) have to grapple with to a greater extent than, say, 20 years ago. Incoming 18-year-olds are surrounded by written information at all hours, but I believe they are not reading as extensively, or not reading the kind of material that provides them with models for formal writing to the same extent as in past decades. This becomes a kind of 'deficit' that English Dept staff have to grapple with—alongside specialist units that advise and coach students on their academic writing—rightly being intolerant of sub-standard writing. Staff at Leeds are clearly doing what they can to address this problem.</p>		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i>		

### 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
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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?	NA
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	NA
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i>  Unfortunately I had a prior commitment, giving a plenary talk at a conference in Brighton on the day of the Board meeting, so this final year of my EE duties at Leeds I was unable to attend in person, but sent a lengthy report with comments on individual papers prior to that meeting taking place.</p>		

#### Other comments

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

This is my last year of examining at Leeds, and I would like to thank everyone in the School of English and beyond who has made this work enjoyable rather than burdensome: my academic colleagues in the School, a good number of the students who have produced work that one was heartened to read, but most of all the administrative staff who have been unfailingly efficient and helpful, even in sometimes challenging and stressful conditions.

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

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

*English Language & Literature*

Programme(s) / Module(s):

See above (Part A)

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

BA (Hons)

Title and Name of Responder:

Position\*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

*Faculty AHC/ School of English*

Address for communication:

School of English

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**

It is extremely helpful to read that the assessment model for ENGL32763 (Children, Talk and Learning) has been identified in this report for consideration of its merits, by the School, as good practice. **The DSE will lead this discussion in the School, via STSEC.**

It is also helpful to read here of the value of the use of the Announcements function in the Module Tools, as an efficient vehicle for augmenting student learning. **The DSE will lead this discussion in the School, via STSEC.**

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

None – but see section 19 for confirmation of advice on feedback have been taken.

**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:

None.

**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:

It is gratifying to receive positive responses to questions 4-6 with respect to programme improvements; School response to recommendations and advice. I would like to thank \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ commitment to the role of external examiner, and for bringing \_\_\_\_\_ expertise in student education to bear on our practice.

**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:*

The School is pleased to have confirmation of programme structure and coherence between structure and learning outcomes. Further, that the programme meets the expectations of the national subject benchmark and is comparable to cognate programmes at other Russell Group institutions, not least in its demonstration of teaching informed by research.

**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:*

It is extremely helpful to have the specificity of effective feedback highlighted in this final examiner's report, as is the comparison with previous years' feedback. Curriculum 'refresh' discussions in the School involve debates about module design and students' writing, and so the observations in this report are also valuable in that context. The School DSE is also cognisant of best practice elsewhere in the Faculty and dedicated 'Assessment' staff discussions are in the diary for semester 2 2019-20.

**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:*

Although \_\_\_\_\_ could not attend the Awards Board this year (June 2019) \_\_\_\_\_ provided a detailed report which was shared with the Board. No procedural points were raised.

**Other comments**

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

The School would like to extend its thanks to \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ committed and conscientious approach to the vital role of External Examiner. We have benefitted from \_\_\_\_\_ insights and observations, and \_\_\_\_\_ sense of the high standards reached by our students and academic staff.