

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT Received 20/06/2019

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

School of English

Subject(s):

English Literature

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA English Literature and associated joint honours programmes

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.

The School continues to display good practice across its programmes and processes. While not necessarily innovations particular to this year, the variety of modes and forms of assessment offered by the School remains innovative in the context of the English Literature subject area across the sector. One welcome innovation this year relates to moderation practices (see below).

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

In my report last year, I questioned the occasional practice of moderators suggesting amendments to first markers' marks – my primary objection being that such a practice potentially introduces inequities into the process (since under a moderation system only a selection of scripts will be examined by the moderator). This year, I was very pleased to see the use of moderation report forms to record what I consider the core purpose of moderation: i.e. confirming that first markers have marked consistently across a batch of exams/assignments and in line with marking criteria. In the examples I saw, moderators were not seeking to intervene in marks. These are very welcome developments in my view. I gather that _____ and other colleagues have made concerted efforts to amend practice in this area, and I commend them for this. While such a shift necessarily takes time, the movement is very clearly and significantly in the right direction.

While I'm aware that there has continued to be some disruption to administrative provision in the School this year, this has had no knock on effects on my access to information and materials. My thanks to _____, _____ and other colleagues involved in the administration of exams for their efficiency and professionalism in communicating with me and providing students' work.

I also appreciated being able to take a more focused approach to examining this year, with the invitation from the School to look in detail at a selection of modules within my field of expertise.

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 / 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 continue to be entirely positive about the programme. Its capacity to combine a strong grounding in core literary-historical traditions with exciting theoretically- and conceptually-led options that are at the forefront of intellectual developments in the discipline strikes me as exemplary. In each module, all elements of learning and assessment are carefully aligned, and the programme as a whole is logically and coherently structured so as to allow students to build on established knowledge and skills and make clear connections between modules.

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)

As suggested above (and in my previous reports), the opportunities that colleagues have to offer cutting-edge, research-led option modules is a particular strength of the programme. It continues to be the Final Year Project that offers the clearest opportunity for students to pursue independent research in the strict sense – something that, almost without exception, they do with passion and commitment (though it's also worth noting that many module assignments are markedly well researched in the sense that they display extensive evidence of students' reading of relevant monographs, journal articles, etc.).

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
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<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
<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>I again wish to praise the careful tailoring of assessment to learning outcomes. Rather than taking a “one size fits all” approach, colleagues evidently reflect carefully on what knowledge and skills they wish students to be able to demonstrate, and on the assessment formats best able to foster this. The resulting range of modes of assessment is a real asset in permitting students to express and display their abilities and interests in a variety of ways.</p> <p>I was particularly struck this year by the extent to which colleagues in the School are able to get the best out of students under exam conditions. I especially commend the fact that in core modules, where students are rightly expected to show significant coverage of material in their answers, they're given an hour and a half per question, rather than the more customary hour. While students don't necessarily write more than for one-hour answers (though some do), their answers are invariably more composed and coherent, which allows the stronger students to display the high first class-type work of which they're capable. As examples, one Postcolonial Literature script received marks of 90 and 84 for each component, and another 90 and 90. I thought that these marks were thoroughly justified, and also noted how the careful design of the assessment had provided an opportunity for these students to operate at their full potential.</p> <p>Feedback remains very helpful, with much direct reference to marking criteria and continued strong use of “feeding forward” with a view to students developing their skills in future pieces of work.</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>I was again pleased to read some exceptional work this year, especially in the Final Year Projects. However, for me the clearest measure of the high academic standards in the School (and a clear reflection of the excellence of teaching) is the strength in depth of the cohort. Even work at the lower end of the grade scale shows genuine substance and real efforts to engage with the material, even if the execution of the argument sometimes falls short. The Modernist Sexualities assignment was a particularly clear example: there were some exceptionally impressive bibliographies and levels of scholarly engagement among the first-class submissions, but a very good research base was also evident even down to 2.2 level.</p> <p>The standard of work continues to strike me as thoroughly in line with the other English Literature programmes (mainly at Russell Group institutions) with which I'm familiar.</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>		

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
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p>		

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):

English Literature

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA (Hons) English Literature, and Joint Hons.

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

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

AHC

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. 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 gratifying to see that colleagues' efforts to introduce a variety of modes and forms of assessment into modules has been recognised. We are scrutinising the programme with respect to the university expectation of having 'less assessment, done better', so that students consistently experience a range of assessment modes linked to academic excellence and enabling students to achieve their potential, but linked also to skills development and employability.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Thank you for commenting on the efforts of _____ and other colleagues who have progressed the use of moderation report forms to make the process visible, indeed, transparent and to ensure consistency of practice; and to ensure that feedback and marking are aligned to the marking criteria.

It is also pleasing to have acknowledgement of an efficient administration of communications and delivery of materials and information despite some continued disruption to the SES service; and that module selection this year was properly aligned to _____ field of expertise.

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:

N/A

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:

It is gratifying to have positive responses for all the questions in this category. In particular, the judgement that the programme, with its combination of a literary-historical education with conceptually-led options at the cutting edge of the discipline, is exemplary is one which will please and encourage colleagues greatly. The maintenance of a broad core of literary-historical traditions combined with conceptually exciting learning is something to which the School is committed, not least as we examine our curriculum and strive to keep it fresh, innovative and appealing. The relationship of assessment and learning is also a feature that we will preserve, as is the coherence of our programme(s).

It is excellent to have it confirmed that the option modules in particular demonstrate high-quality research-led teaching, and that the influence of research on the curriculum and learning & teaching is clear, not only in the assessments that are produced for option modules, but also – perhaps especially – in the work produced by students for the Final Year Project. As we refresh the curriculum we will develop this characteristic throughout the degree programme(s).

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 important to colleagues to hear that their work in tailoring modes of assessment to learning outcomes is recognised, and that the longer exam (compared with other institutions) enables students to produce solid work in response to carefully considered exam topics. It would be helpful to have the external examiners' perspectives on our current discussions aimed at introducing great varieties of assessment for all students on the programme(s).

The recognition of colleagues' attempts to 'feed forward' in the feedback context is extremely helpful. The School is striving to get its Assessment & Feedback NSS responses above 85% and so advice from external examiners is welcome.

The observation that the academic standards demonstrated by students is of a high quality, especially but not exclusively in the Final Year Project, is also very welcome. It is also important for the School to hear that work of a less exceptional nature nevertheless bears the hallmarks of well-researched and well-informed study.

It is heartening to hear that our programme is thoroughly in line with other Russell Group institutions that teach English Literature.

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:

It is gratifying that all the categories in this section received positive responses.

Other comments

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

N/A