

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT Received 22/06/2019

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:	English
Subject(s):	<i>Theatre Studies</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Performing the Past Practical Essays Surrealism and the French Stage Theatre, Society and Self Theatricalities
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 commend the following features of the programme:

Across all courses, the feedback from tutors offered helpful and detailed reflection on student assessment, acknowledging the strengths of the work while identifying areas for improvement.

The varied modes of assessment, including forms of practical assessment, on the programme.

The use of Minerva to provide innovative course content: for example, YouTube video lecture introducing students to Harold Pinter's play *Old Times* on the module 'Performing the Past', and the Spotify playlist for 'Surrealism and the French Stage'.

The dedication and commitment of the teaching team and production staff.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

Not applicable.

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

Not applicable.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment only

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y / N
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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 an 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

Not applicable.

Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Yes
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Yes
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Yes
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Yes
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Yes

Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.

This year, I've looked at samples of work from 'Performing the Past', the 'Practical Essay', 'Surrealism and the French Stage', 'Theatre, Society and Self', and 'Theatricalities: Beckett, Pinter and Kane'. The sample of material included written assessments, tutor feedback, moderation forms, and selected video recordings of student assessed presentations and performances. I also attended in person the Practical Essay performances in March.

From this comprehensive engagement with the course, I am confident that the programme has a coherent and appropriate structure for the level of study, with appropriate aims and intended learning outcomes that are comparable with similar programmes at other institutions.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Yes
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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 influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching is very clear. Staff research expertise informs curriculum design so that students engage with cutting-edge thinking in their work on modules. The students are also expected to identify research questions shaping their approaches to practical as well as written assessment.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	No
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Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

Not applicable.		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	No
<i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i>		
Not applicable.		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	No
<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i>		
Not applicable.		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Yes
<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>One of the strengths of the programme is the variety of assessment methods – from essays and ‘practical essays’ to assessed critical reflections and performances – which enable students to acquire and practise a range of subject-specific and transferable skills. The moderation process is documented on a special form and this helps to make the marking process transparent. The marks achieved by students reflect the high quality of teaching, learning and assessment on the programme.</p>		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Yes
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Yes
<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 sampled work from the following courses this year:</p> <p>I sampled two performances on video from ‘Performing the Past’. Both were memorable and grounded in strong theatrical images with a confident handling of space, objects, and text. There was also evident criticality in the theatrical interpretation of scenes from Pinter’s play <i>Old Times</i>.</p> <p>For ‘Surrealism and the French Stage’, I sampled two practical workshop assessments on video. These were very enjoyable to watch: thoughtful, playful and exploratory, working with text and improvisation to engage and ‘test’ some of the key concerns of surrealism.</p> <p>‘Theatre, Society and Self’ is a very engaging course, with theatre visits, guest practitioners, and an excellent ‘blueprint’ assessment that prompts students to think carefully about creating a roadmap for a performance.</p> <p>For ‘Theatricalities’, I sampled two of the assessed presentations on video. I was impressed by the attentiveness and concentration of the students, and their ability to support each other’s group work through interactive questioning and enthusiastic participation.</p>		

I also sampled a broad range of essays and critical reflections on Minerva, which – in the best examples – demonstrated a clear engagement with research and capacity for critical self-appraisal.

The ‘Practical Essay’ performances in March offered a varied selection of research-informed practice. I also spoke to students after the showings. The module clearly fosters a sense of community, and, for many, it seemed to be their favourite course on the degree. They particularly appreciated the creative freedom and the opportunity to apply research skills acquired earlier in the programme.

The levels of student achievement on the course seem to me comparable with students on similar courses elsewhere.

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

One student attained a component essay mark of 90% in ‘Theatre, Society and Self’, and several students on this course attained marks of 80% or above. I wondered if this pointed to some inconsistency in the use of the full spread of marks in the higher or lower bands across courses? Could the course team give this consideration?

In some courses, such as ‘Surrealism and the French Stage’, essay feedback is divided into three sections: ‘strengths,’ ‘areas for improvement’, and ‘recommendations for the future’. This is a very helpful template structure for feedback that I recommend is adopted across all modules to ensure consistent practice.

On some assessment briefings, the time duration of practical assessments is open to misinterpretation by students: the phrase ‘not significantly shorter or longer than 20 mins’ should be avoided.

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?	Yes
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Yes
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Yes
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Yes
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Yes
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	No
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Yes
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Yes
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Yes
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Yes
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Yes

31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Yes
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Yes
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Yes
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Yes
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Yes
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p> <p>My thanks to _____ for their help in organising course materials for sampling and their assistance in helping me to access Minerva.</p>		

Other comments

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

One of the Practical Essays, on the subject of suicide, included video material that was ethically questionable. I have looked through a sample of proposals for the Practical Essays on Minerva and note that the proposal document is scrupulous in requiring students to complete an ethical self-evaluation of their projects at the planning stage – this is excellent practice. However, I wonder if discussion of ethics could in some way be foregrounded in an ongoing way as part of the teaching or supervision of the course?

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Theatre Studies

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Performing the Past
Practical Essays
Surrealism and the French Stage
Theatre, Society and Self
Theatricalities

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

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / 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. 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 hear that tutor feedback was universally helpful and detailed, celebrating positive achievement in students' work and giving clear guidelines about areas for improvement. The variety of assessment modes is acknowledged and praised, which is extremely helpful as the School continues to put into practice the university expectation of 'less assessment, done better'. Forms of practical assessment in a Theatre Studies context have inflected discussions with the Creative Writing programme team.

Acknowledgement of the positive use of Minerva as an area of good practice is something that the whole School will continue to reflect on.

Thank you for acknowledging the dedication and commitment of the teaching and production staff.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

N/A

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:

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:

Questions 8 – 12 on standards received positive responses.

The programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes are found to be unproblematic and comparable to cognate programmes in other institutions. The School thanks _____ for attending the Practical Essay performances in March 2019; and for responding positively to the recordings, records and feedback made available to students.

It is gratifying to hear that students consistently experience research-led modules of a high quality; and to receive acknowledgement of the importance and effectiveness of students developing their own research questions in practical and written contexts.

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:

The variety of assessment methods on this programme is highlighted as a strength and is helpfully linked by _____ to the development of a range of skills and competencies in students. This good practice will inflect future School discussions on assessment and programme learning outcomes.

It is helpful to receive praise for the newly introduced moderation form; and to have an acknowledgement that student achievement reflects the high quality teaching, learning & assessment on this programme.

The academic standards demonstrated in the course of the modules received are judged to be high, with students demonstrating individual strengths and an ethos of supporting the cohort in creative enterprises. The design of modules e.g. Theatre, Society and Self, is considered engaging with an excellent assessment mode. Materials available on Minerva seemed to be challenging students in the appropriate direction research-led modules. The creative freedom of the Practical Essay is praised, and its significance for students on the programme is underlined as positive and distinctive. The School will reflect further on these careful and helpful comments regarding academic standards, module design and assessment design.

Additional comments for attention:

Request for the programme team to examine potential inconsistencies in the higher or lower grade bands:
ACTION team + DSE.

Request for consistent use of the new feedback form ACTION: team + DSE

Avoid the phrase ‘not significantly shorter or longer than 20 mins’ as an instruction for practical assessments as it is open to misinterpretation by students. ACTION: team + DSE

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:

All categories were responded to positively apart from the provision of draft exam papers/assessments – to be remedied.

Thanks are recorded to

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

The ethical self-evaluation of practical essay projects is noted as excellent practice. However the suggestion is that a discussion of ethics is foregrounded continuously as part of the teaching and supervision of this module.

ACTION: team + DSE.