

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT Received 25/06/2019

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies

Subject(s):

BA Fine Art (With) Programmes

Programme(s) / Module(s):

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 programme has introduced a number of areas of good practice that have served to galvanise the students and support their academic development. These have included the Wednesday seminar, a weekly event that deals with house-keeping issues as well as the academic developments of the students. Students indicated that this meeting had been really helpful also in establishing an all-important social dynamic in the programme, which they had found somewhat lacking in previous years.

A similarly positive response arose from the introduction of the TV programme project, which helped students to get to know each other and work collaboratively.

The students are very well supported to show their work in group contexts outside the university, and this seems to have provided them with great skills and confidence that helped them to enhance their performance in the show as well as preparing them well for later life.

The students also seem really to have benefitted from Thursday seminars, which I understand to have been sessions adapted to responding to the students' concerns, artistic, social and political.

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 a more prescriptive portfolio of supporting material is a really welcome move as it facilitates the task of reviewing important material and supports the students in producing a document that will be of use to them beyond graduation. While I understand that some of the students had some concerns about the arrangements when announced, the feedback post show and assessment is that it was a very positive exercise and that they were left with a useful document on which to base future professional portfolios and articulations of research for further study.

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

There are no matters requiring urgent action but I would say that it would be important to stabilise the staff team as the experience of the students does seem to vary depending on the staff teams and leadership involved. Fortunately this has been moving in an improving trajectory with great staff joining the team, but it would really benefit the programme to achieve some consistency in its staffing.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment only

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	Y
3.	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	N

For Examiners completing their term of appointment only

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	NA
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	NA
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	NA
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	NA

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 overall programme structure is coherent and does facilitate the achievement of the learning outcomes. Some students can struggle a bit to reconcile the highly structured and more prescribed approach of their studies in History of Art and Cultural Studies with the rather looser structure they encounter in Fine Art, and this seems to be a particular challenge in the early years of the programme. However, they do value the two approaches and find that with a modicum of regularity in terms of scheduling the Fine Art component works very well.

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)

Yes, and I would say that this is a real strength of the programme. Many of the staff are researching at a high level and reflect carefully on how the students might benefit from their expertise without over-determining the nature of their work. I would say that this anxiety is quite particular to Fine Art, where staff are often concerned not to teach from their research but instead to support the student in their own development. I think this programme has the opportunity to challenge those assumptions somewhat.

I certainly don't think the outcomes were overdetermined, and there was a great variety of work on display; it was good to see that work that overlapped with tutor's research interests was really well supported, which was especially the case for work using sound – we were treated to a wonderful performance involving spatial choral singing by one of the students.

I would also point to the new additional material portfolios/PDFs as evidencing the role of research in the students' work, as well as to the deep and implicit evidence of contextual awareness in the students' work.

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 method seemed sound and robustly evaluated the students' performance. Again I would mention here the more prescriptive requirement for students to produce an edited and formatted version of their additional material as being really helpful with regard to assessment as it provided a standardised document that meant one had less reliance on the tutor's undocumented experience of the student. The document also enabled the shows to be assessed without reference to previous work or performance as this was captured in the PDFs</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>Student performance was comparable to those on similar programmes in other institutions and demonstrated marked strengths in a number of areas. Clearly the students research and discursive ability is very good, and really demonstrates the effectiveness of them carrying out what might be paralleled to a joint degree. Less predictable but equally impressive are the students professional practice skills, evident in the high quality of the installation of their shows as well as in all the other external projects that they carry out through the programme.</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
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?	NA
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?	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> <p>The programme team provided all the information I needed and were keen to talk about the programme in an open way and in a spirit of continuous improvement. I was not able to attend the Progression and Awards board but have every confidence that the programme team will represent my views accurately.</p>		

Other comments

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

It was really interesting in speaking to the students to understand the overall academic experience they had on the programme. Especially impressive was the way in which the students were able to speak so eloquently not just about their own but also each others' work. I think this is really important and something that perhaps mark out the programme for the way in which it facilitates a spirit of intellectual exchange and discourse, and which to some extent privileges an idea of the curatorial though the locatedness of the work and its evolution through critical exchange and mutual support.

The key aspect that sticks in mind from my visit is the need to stabilise the staff team and build continuity into the programme, so that some of the very good processes and approaches that have been put in place can stabilise and have the opportunity to grow and develop to enhance even further the student experience and their satisfaction.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

BA Fine Art (With) Programmes

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA Fine Art with History of Art
BA Fine Art with Contemporary Cultural Theory
BA Fine Art with Museum and Gallery Studies

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

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies

Address for communication:

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

We're really pleased with the impact of the introduction of weekly group activities, including the Level 3 seminars and the open seminars with . A similarly positive impact has been noted with the Level 1 activities, especially group tutorials, and will be introduced for two clear periods in Level 2 next year.

We're working hard to continue to facilitate group-working situations, like the TV project, and offsite exhibitions, like the Level 1 and Level 2 shows. The pressure they bring on resources (space, equipment, staff time) is being mitigated by shuffling around the phases in the second semester when they take place, turning them into a stage of the module rather than its culmination.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

It has taken some time to be able to agree on a refined a prescriptive format for the submission of supporting material, but the methods used at Level 1 and 3 this year seem to have worked well and will be applied to Level 2 next year, establishing a norm across the programmes.

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:

There are a number of contributing factors to the instability of the staffing situation this year. It is the hope of us all, especially those of us in the teaching team, that they been stabilised ASAP and additional support be contracted wherever necessary. A new permanent colleague, , and an incoming Teaching Fellow, , will a positive impact, I'm sure.

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:

The contrast of delivery structures between our academic modules and studio modules is felt most acutely by students on our 'with' programmes, so I'm relieved to hear that the contrast eventually makes sense to them (as a model that embraces breadth of experience and a stretch of pedagogic methods) though we evidently need to do more work to help them understand the benefit earlier on so that it doesn't become a stress factor.

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:

17. The capacity for the submission to be more and more 'standalone' from staff's experience of the student and their work is increasingly important as our numbers grow beyond the possibility of matching teaching staff to students during assessments.

19. That balance is, we hope, a central strength of the 'with' programmes. As we discussed informally during your visit, and was emphasised during the P&A Board, we do need to keep an eye on the risks of creeping grade inflation, which is an industry-wide problem.

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:

We're very grateful that you turned round your report so quickly and endeavoured to give a useful summary of the headline points during the E&A Board.

There were a number of logistical problems this year given the illness of key administration staff, which meant that module samples were provided in good time for our EEs. Again, we're very grateful that reviewed the additional material so speedily after the fact. We'll also have an internal meeting the autumn to improve our planning processes for the EE visits, the results of which I'll be sure to feedback in good time for the next interim session.

Other comments

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

An important outcome of our programme designs is the instance it places on the students learning how to talk about other people's art, and the subject's histories and theories, with a good level of competence and informed opinion. It's the bedrock of our co-learning situations, like group crits, group projects, etc. The sense of a collective undertaking, and that the students are together imagining the future of their discipline, are things we try to stress. It is a challenge to do so without the traditional anchors for a cohort-studio culture, like designated studio spaces for everyone, and we intend to keep improving the quality and quantity of group learning situations we set up.

To the matter of staff, as mentioned above, we are all dearly hoping for a more steady year and a future-focussed plan for reducing the numbers of studio students so our limited resources can match our pedagogic ambitions.