

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT Received 21/06/2019

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies

Subject(s):

Fine Art

Programme(s) / Module(s):

ARTF2001 Studio Practice-Study Abroad
ARTF2001 Studio Practice-Study Abroad
ARTF2040 Studio Work
ARTF3020 Professional Practice
ARTF3205 Studio Work
ARTF3060 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. Key highlights are discussed in the questions below in more detail - summarising here:

ARTF3020 Professional Practice: Bringing graduates into the seminars, creating links for students with life beyond the course; ensuring a wide range of different kinds of knowledge/expertise are brought into the seminars.

ARTF3205 Studio Work: The development of the research clusters and how they enrich teaching/learning; the insistence on students fully producing their own degree show (with all the groundwork laid for this in the preceding years, in which student autonomy is interwoven with strong moments of collaboration); bringing graduates in to work as technicians; the high level of art history and cultural studies which is a key quality of this course, marking it out from others fine art courses in the UK - students are very aware of how this expands and pushes their thinking, and the transferable skills it brings to their practice; the Study Abroad programme, which clearly has a very important impact on every student who participates in it.

ARTF3060 Dissertation: Maintaining the independence of the dissertation from the concerns of the artistic practice – an unusual approach to the dissertation compared to other schools, but the (overall, more academically able) students in Leeds are able to manage the additional work this involves, and therefore really benefit from the enriching of their learning experience and additional fields of research it involves them in.

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 new format for supporting material for ARTF3205 Studio Work module is an excellent development. For staff it transforms the process of assessment making it much clearer and more efficient, and it opens out new possibilities for different kinds of comparison between submissions. The concise format forces students to make difficult choices; this means that not only the works presented but the choices themselves speak volumes about the degree to which students have developed critical reflection and understanding of their practice. Students were very enthusiastic about the new format. Though initially anxious about it, they found it very clear in terms of what and how to submit; and spoke of how it forced them to think more stringently about their work than more open formats; pushed them to grasp more clearly which of their works are stronger and which weaker; and they valued how the process brought them to engage in each others work in new ways (discussing their choices together, etc). Students describe the document as being 'like a passport' which they can now use for making applications, and also said they felt that making it has

helped them talk more eloquently about their work for 'whatever comes after' the course. This is clearly a very useful innovation with many benefits for staff and students.

Students pointed to the meeting in May in preparation for their degree show, in when they each had to present their work in Pecha Kuchi style, as particularly helpful in getting them in touch with each other's work and laying important ground for working together later on the degree show. It seems very good practice to insert these kinds of focused moments into the final year keep, to bring the whole year group together through lively discussion around work.

Students place a great deal of value on anything that will help them to connect their life outside the course as young artists, in Leeds or elsewhere. They especially value graduates coming into the school in different roles, creating a sense of connection between student and post-student life. For example several agreed said the lectures given by graduates as part of ARTF3020 Professional Practice, were a highlight of the module; also notable regarding Professional Practice module is that by bringing together very different kinds of knowledge and learning experience, from museum label writing workshop to PhD graduates sharing their research, students were able to appreciate learning some skills which might otherwise seem rather niche (museum label writing), but which undoubtedly broaden their professional knowledge base.

Students were very enthusiastic about the recruitment of two fine art graduates to work as technicians in the art school, in terms of valuable connections they bring: the technicians 'fill a gap' between the older and more experienced / established (artistic) level of staff, and young artists/peer level; and they bring students in touch with their art-related networks outside the school. It would be good to continue to grow this practice of bringing in graduates, whether as VL's, to join or run crits, to participate in curating exhibitions and so on.

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 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 N/A
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y / N N/A
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y / N N/A
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.

Talking with staff and students I was struck by the degree to which staff are monitoring and fine-tuning or re-working aspects of the course, throughout the year, to make sure they are working in the best ways for students. There is a real openness to make changes. This is all the more impressive given that staffing was quite reduced this year, so there has been considerable additional workload for those remaining.

During discussions with students in February, among changes they had found important during the course was the change to how the first year is structured. These changes haven't effected them directly, but was important to them since many felt they hadn't been ready for the degree of autonomy they were given when they arrived. They had also struggled with the art history workload which dominated the first term. They were happy to see that their concerns have been listened to and acted on, and that the first year is working very well now. It's interesting to consider this point in light of another major positive students

highlighted, which was about how much they value the autonomy they have now - being able to book their own tutorials and structure their individual timetables. Getting the balance between structure and autonomy right, is not easy, and students sometimes have conflicting desires. It is especially tricky to get this balance right for second year students (in many other art schools, not only in Leeds). Bringing in the right degree of direction through opt-in projects, or by working through the research clusters to bring certain lines of focus for students (alongside their more autonomous studio work), would help them keep up the momentum of the first year and prepare them for the intensity of Level Three.

Students on this course are particularly strong in terms of their ability to work productively together to create their own opportunities (they told me many students are having many shows outside the school) by comparison with other courses. The independence and responsibility they have combined with moments of demanding group work are key to producing this; as is having 24/7 opening hours.

Students mentioned that the mid-year review in the second year had been confusing. They were not sure what the marking criteria were and felt more concrete guidance about how to improve their work would have been helpful. They understood this may have been a strategy related to that stage of the course, but felt more critical feedback would have been more helpful. They were all very positive about the level of critical feedback now in level 3, which they said has been very beneficial to the development of their practice, and raised the level of debate among them, as well as with tutors.

Some students noted that they sometimes have difficulty accessing technical facilities – though they are very happy with the technical support. They don't seem to take up the offer to work on an individual basis with the facilities of the Art and Design course, perhaps this offer can be made more explicit.

Standards

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

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

The programme seems to have a very good balance between the theoretical input from art history and cultural studies; critical reflection and conceptual thinking in relation to practice; and attention to material and form of work. This comes through in how students describe their experience of the course and in their work, as well as in the overall curating of the degree show. Many works presented in the degree show showed a real engagement with materials and a very considered attention to form. The precision of installation was impressive; and students often managed to make presentation / display speak as part of the work - more than just a practical or technical solution.

A lot of work has gone into balancing the relationship between art history and cultural studies and working in the studio. There continue to be some tensions in relation to deadlines. The March deadline for the dissertation means students, as they told me, did no work at all on their studio work from January until that March deadline. In the past the deadline was in January and students worked on it over the long summer break beforehand, minimising time taken away from the studio - apparently this worked much better. It would make a big difference to the development of their work for final assessment of Studio Work if the January deadline could be brought back. Students doing Cultural Studies this year had an exam on the day of their Studio Work assessment; this was a great additional stress which students were very vocal about in our meeting; it made it hard to focus properly on both module assessments. It would of real benefit to students and the attention they can give to their work if these deadline clashes could be eased.

Thursday sessions with _____ are clearly very important, students spoke a lot about the benefits they bring to their practice; for example, that the sessions give them a language / terminology with which to talk about their work; it makes them aware of themes and urgencies in wider socio-cultural settings, while also responded to the preoccupations of their work and thinking. These sessions are an important channel for students to think for themselves between theory and their own practice.

An unusual aspect of this course is that the dissertation is not connected with the themes of the students' practice (in most fine art BA courses students are encouraged to make the one support and inform the other (partly to ease the workload for less academically able students). The students in Leeds see this disconnect as a good thing and indeed - perhaps because they have a high academic level – they value the possibility to research a subject which is interesting for its own sake because it expands the scope of the course and of the knowledge students leave it with. The link between dissertation and practice, as one student explained, is not thematic, but is about 'transferable skills' - art history and cultural studies modules teach them to bring historical and cultural perspectives to their writing; this brings them to do so also in relation to their art work, opening up new levels of reflection in the work which they would not otherwise have come to.

<p>Students were especially positive about the benefits of many exhibition opportunities during the course, both for their practice and for the bonding of the group. The second year exhibition organised by the students was a highlight of the course for them. Making exhibitions, especially when student-led, seems a really key element for helping students develop initiative, confidence and a sense of agency to make things happen for themselves as young artists, once they've left the course. Students also emphasised how the opportunities they have had to curate each others work throughout the course, has developed their understanding of their own work. These conditions culminate in the student-organised degree show, which is a particular strength of this course. It adds greatly to the students' learning outcomes and helps them develop valuable tools for working professionally as young artists when they leave. This year the group process went particularly well as the students explained, and as can be seen in the curatorial strength of some of the rooms. An important aspect of this has been the subtle ways in which staff managed to support the process in a subtle way, helping students to avoid negative pressured which have arisen between some students in the past. Students have clearly learned a huge amount from this process, and leave with a real sense of achievement. They have developed a very strong peer group; they spoke of looking forward to helping each other and working together after the course. This will really help them in navigating the challenges of life as young artists, creating their own opportunities.</p> <p>A key highlight of the course which students emphasised is the level of support by tutors, who are always very present and engaged.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y / N *
<p><i>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></p> <p>The research which is driven by and developing in the two research clusters, Centre for Artists Writing and Centre for Audio Visual Experimentation, can be seen in the degree show and supporting material. There was a lot of strong work from students involving written and spoken language, and sound pieces working with voice and other kinds of recording, and / or using audio technology and apparatus in inventive ways. The research clusters are an excellent way to bring the artistic research, expertise and knowledge of staff into teaching, and develop special strengths in research areas which enrich and deepen students learning. They can bring galvanizing dynamics to the overall rhythm of teaching and learning. There are possibilities of course for rich and productive dialogues between research clusters. They also have a real potential to become selling points for the course.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	Y / N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	Y / N N/A
<p><i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i></p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y / N *
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y / N
<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>The structure and process for marking the final assessments is well structured, each student's work is given three independent marks, and ample time is given to staff to discuss marks, especially where bigger differences between marks emerge. The balance of marks is well spread out without any undue clustering, and the levels sit well in relation to the wider context of those at other art schools. The new format for supporting material has made the marking process clearer and more efficient, this is a very good innovation which produces many benefits beyond the improvements to the marking process, as noted above.</p>		

<p>A note on what is being rewarded in the marking: a lot of work has gone into getting students to refine the presentation of their work, paying great attention to detail and producing professional, precise work. This has really paid off and raised the professionalism of presentation of individual works and the whole exhibition to a high level, which students and staff can be really proud of. However it's important to be attentive to work which may be less 'well packaged', but may have a stronger sense of the student really tussling with ideas or artistic language in and through the work; or have greater potential to continue to develop in interesting and exciting ways beyond the end of the course.</p>		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y / N
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y / N
<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>The academic standards are unusually high due to the entrance requirements, the type of students the course attracts, the strong input from Art History and Cultural Studies (which continues to be a strong selling point of the course). Also due to the course structure and research interests of staff, which create a high level of reflection between theory and practice in/for students. This can be seen in the level of work in the dissertations and the statements included in the supporting material, and heard in the sophistication of their thinking during discussions I had with students, as a group and individually, with their work in the degree show.</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> <p>A particularly strong aspect of this cohort of students is the degree to which they are connected as a group. This stands out when compared with level three students on other courses in Leeds and, for example, at LJMU (where I'm currently teaching) and other art schools I've visited. Through the different formats and elements of the course which give students real autonomy, and then intensive working together, they have developed a high level of peer-led support. They know each others work, engage with and discuss it together. There is a high level of trust between them. They are able to handle the complex and challenging process of working collaboratively even under assessment stress, with no major fallout. The benefits to the level of work produced by individual students is clear - the group dynamic has produced a momentum which helps both stronger and weaker students. Altogether this sets students up with very good ground to work on as young artists after the course, benefitting from the agency they gain in knowing how to collaborate and cooperate as well as to initiate. Real credit is due to the teaching staff for managing the conditions which have made this possible; as well to the students for their openness to engage and take risks as a group.</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 / N
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y / N
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y / N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y / N
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y / N
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y / N
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y / N
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y / N

31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y / N
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board? <i>(I have not experienced the Progression and Awards Board).</i>	Y / N N/A
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting? <i>I was not required to.</i>	Y / N N/A
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board? N/A	Y / N N/A
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N N/A
<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

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Fine Art

Programme(s) / Module(s):

ARTF2001 Studio Practice-Study Abroad
ARTF2001 Studio Practice-Study Abroad
ARTF2040 Studio Work
ARTF3020 Professional Practice
ARTF3205 Studio Work
ARTF3060 Dissertation

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

BA Hons

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Programme Leader for Fine Art

Faculty / School of:

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 acknowledge the innovative aspects to the programme:

- Bringing recent graduates into the School in differing roles – connecting students with post student life [especially in relation to Professional Practice and technical support]
- The development of research clusters where students produce their own degree show, and we pleased that this is acknowledged as a particularly strength of the programme. As is the Study Abroad programme.
- Maintaining the independence of the dissertation from practice, in relation to subject matter

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

The new format for supporting material, which was received by students, initially with scepticism, as a very positive initiative to enhance the assessment process and provide students with an invaluable aid in their post university life.

We acknowledge the positive insertion of good practice in the introduction of ‘focussed moments’ which helped to establish a strong sense of community within the group. This was further enhanced by the recruitment of recent graduates to work as technicians [something we are really keen to continue].

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 were no areas that required urgent attention

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:

We acknowledge, and thank the external for highlighting the openness of the FA Team to initiate aspects that work for the benefit of the student experience.

It was also noted that changes to Level 1 were seen as a positive initiative from Level 3 students, as was the autonomy that they now have to help their abilities to 'work productively together'.

We note the response to Level 2 confusions [which we have addressed for next session], and acknowledge the very positive response to the level of critical feedback in Level 3

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 balance between theoretical input from art history and cultural studies, critical and conceptual thinking in relation to practice, was noted, and also, in particular the 'attention to material and form of work' was welcomed.

We acknowledge the external's concern relating to deadline and examination clashes. This is something we have been concerned with and will continue to discuss this concern within the wider School to resolve these issues.

It is noted that the independence of the dissertation subjects in relation to practice is seen by students as a positive aspect to their programme. We will bear this in mind when discussing whether to open up the possibility of allowing students [taking the 40 credit dissertation] to broaden the scope of their subject matter.

We thank the external's endorsement of the central core aspect to this programme of developing the students' skills in initiating and producing opportunities to exhibit their work as an important aspect to their learning.

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 acknowledge the process for marking and feedback is well structured and reflective of student achievement.

We note the observation that we must be mindful of the need to be attentive to work which may be less 'well packaged', to ensure that students are not unduly penalised for those possibly tussling with ideas or artistic language. We will consider this and discuss within our team.

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:

No issues raised

Other comments

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

We have already put in place a more structured and supportive package for Level 2, to help them adapt to the transition from Level 1, and provide guidance to ensure that they rate well equipped to gain the most from Level 3