

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT Received 28/06/2019

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Language Centre

Subject(s):

English for Academic Purposes

Programme(s) / Module(s):

AEPS

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

N/A

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.

This is a coherent programme that offers effective preparation to students progressing to both taught and research postgraduate programmes in the University. At each level, the students are pushed to engage with authentic academic processes and practices, which enables them to develop both their academic language skills, their research skills and their awareness of the UK and Leeds University academic context

The PGR programme is notable for its effective exploitation of students' expertise in their subject area and asks students to engage critically with relevant content in reading, writing and speaking.

Across the levels, there is good use of formative assessment to offer students feedback and to offer opportunities for students to engage with a range of spoken and written genres.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

This year there have been a number positive develops on the programme. The introduction of a well-designed formative 'reading into writing' task completed under timed conditions provided a good challenge to students and gave teachers a 'snapshot' of students' progress, and a useful point of reference for any instances of plagiarism. The addition of a listening test is also a positive development. The test itself was well designed, reflected an authentic academic listening context and was successful in distinguishing between students in terms of level.

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

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 / 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 structure and aims of the programme are comparable with similar programmes at my own institution, . As is appropriate for a programme that prepares students for postgraduate study, the course offers a strong focus on developing autonomy and research skills.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y / N
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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 programme and assessments are clearly informed by understanding of EAP scholarship and research. All levels (1, 2, 3 and 4) ground their materials and themes in the University context. Students in level 3 are required to write an essay that considers how a particular theme (e.g. 'risk') can be understood in their discipline. Although challenging, this is a creative approach to ensuring that students in mixed discipline groups are able to engage meaningfully with language and ideas in their field.

The assessments offered to students in level 4 (PGR) give them the opportunity to engage with language, literature and ideas in their particular discipline, which offers excellent preparation for their future academic programmes.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	Y / 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?	Y / 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)?	Y / 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 / 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>Overall, the range of assessment methods used on the programme are appropriate and produce work that demonstrates clear understanding of academic language and academic conventions. Marking is in line with the assessment criteria with clear evidence that appropriate processes have been followed.</p> <p>I have made comments about the need for a more focus on academic reading in my previous reports, and although there is now more reading included in earlier levels, it could be argued that assessment of reading is still somewhat limited. Overall, the course has a clear focus on reading skills, and the essays required in level 3 certainly require significant research and reading. However, as the teachers have not read the texts students are accessing, they have limited ability to assess how effectively students are able to engage with the content or to gauge the success of their reading strategies. These are vital skills for successful postgraduate study, and it may be useful to consider how assessment tasks could be adapted to make explicit assessment of this possible.</p> <p>In addition, given the current UKVI requirement that all students who come in below B2 must demonstrate they have achieved B2 in the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), a change in approach may be unavoidable to ensure the programme remains compliant.</p> <p>With this in mind, I wonder if the adapting the formative timed writing task into a summative assessment could be effective approach to assessing reading more directly? Alternatively, a more 'closed' research essay task that required students to use specific texts could be an option.</p> <p>It should be noted that the level 4 PGR course has a writing task that requires students to consider two articles from their field as a starting point; this does enable the teacher to gather more information about their ability to engage with reading and therefore assess their proficiency.</p> <p>Something the team might also want to consider is de-coupling the presentation assessment task from the research essay. Asking students to present their essays can result in presentations where students essentially read aloud their work. Perhaps providing a different topic, (maybe something reflective?) would allow more focus on presentation skills and encourage more varied, interesting work.</p> <p>Finally, I had some useful discussion with the team about the 'open' nature of their assignment questions (e.g. "What does risk mean in your discipline?"). Although there are real benefits to this approach as I mentioned above, it is also the case that such questions are very challenging to students and require real skill from the teacher. These sorts of questions are also vulnerable to contract cheating (although the drafting process and the close relationship between students and teachers makes this unlikely on this</p>		

course). As student and teacher numbers increase, it is interesting to consider if such an approach can be maintained, or if a more 'scaffolded' task may be required.		
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 students generally performed well, with students at the top end of the scale producing academic writing that suggests they would cope very well on Postgraduate programmes. In particular, there was lots of evidence of detailed, effective instruction in academic writing and presentation giving. Even students at the lower end of the mark scale demonstrated an awareness of academic style, structure and conventions that indicates the programme is offering effective preparation</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 / 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?	Y / N
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y / N
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N

35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p> <p>I made a comment last year that the exam board had felt a little informal. This year the exam board was highly organised and entirely focused on the task in hand.</p>		

Other comments

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

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Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report**Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)***Title and Name of Examiner:*

Subject(s):

English for Academic Purposes

Programme(s) / Module(s):

AEPS (Levels 1, 2, 3, 4 & PGR)

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

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

AEPS Programme Leader

Faculty / School of:

Language Centre, School of LCS, AHC

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

AEPS has five components each with its own autonomous leader. This organisational structure has led to a more responsive and dynamic programme than the former monolithic structure. These changes were introduced in 2015/16. However a concern has always been that, as levels forge their own paths and identities, the overall coherence of the programme could be weakened. We have worked hard to avoid this, so it is very pleasing that the external examiner has commented on the coherence between the levels.

We have also made many amendments and developments to formative and summative assessments that the external examiner has endorsed.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

We are happy with the comments here. The innovations mentioned (listening test and timed-writing task) were introduced partly in response to previous comments from . It is reassuring to see that these innovations have met with approval.

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:

No matters were raised

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 comments and checked boxes are positive here, we think this is a fair reflection of the high standards of the AEPS Programme.

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 external examiner makes two points we would like to respond to below.

- 1. Improvements could be made in how we assess reading. We currently assess reading on Levels 3 and 4 through essays, however tutors do not have a deep understanding of the texts cited by students. We could do this through the timed writing task.*

We agree with the external examiner that the way we assess reading on some levels needs further attention. We need to revisit exactly what UKVI requirements are with regards to this. That way we assess reading currently is, we believe, sufficient. However, we will consider whether we can make improvements here that lead to positive learning outcomes. In the next academic year we will investigate the ways in which we assess reading, with any changes being introduced in the following academic year.

- 2. There is an issue with the relationship between the essay and the presentation on some AEPS Levels. If essays are weak in content and organisation the presentation is likely to be weak too. The external examiner has suggested decoupling the two tasks, perhaps with a more reflective task.*

We agree with this comment and will look to refocus the presentation tasks of the relevant levels in the next academic year.

We would like to thank _____ for _____ constructive comments and guidance on the AEPS pre-session programme over the last three years. This has been invaluable to the development of a strong suite of programming for students.

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 comments

Other comments

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

No comments made