

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:

The Language Centre

Subject(s):

Academic English for Undergraduate students

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Academic English for Undergraduate Students

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.

The receptive skills of readings and listening are tested through examinations.

Both exams utilise a good range of accessible topics for tests. The external examiner was made aware of the new formats for reading exams in a timely manner to allow for comments.

Only three students from this cohort required the exams and other assessments in order to progress to their chosen level 4 programme, as many took IELTS. Resits are allowed and a clear mitigating circumstances policy which is made clear to all students.

The course follows rigorous QA procedures, employing pre-marking standardisation of assessments and a model of double marking for post-marking moderation. All exams are checked for accuracy of marking and to increase reliability of grading more short answer-type questions.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

Please see above. My comments duplicate this box as formats of the exams are new for this academic year.

Matters for Urgent Attention

No matters requiring attention

For Examiners in the first year of appointment only

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

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

For Examiners completing their term of appointment only

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

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

This is my third year of appointment

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 AEUS course has made significant changes this year to produce a more coherent and authentic 3 semester programme which simulates the academic environments that these level 3 students will progress onto.

The learning outcomes are well designed and communicated to staff and students, and clearly align with assessments and teaching materials. Materials are engaging and the use of them within the syllabus creates some parity for the cohort using core texts, while allowing teachers to adjust their lessons to their students' needs.

The course had made more use of multimodal materials this year, which reflects a growing engagement with digital technology.

The curriculum is well organised, with a range of core and option modules. There is a clear progression of skills throughout the three terms, moving from more generic English communication to more academic focus and study skills.

There does not seem to be much focus on critical thinking as comparative foundation courses in the curriculum expect in the learning outcomes of *evaluating sources*. However, this is not a QA requirement at a level 3 curriculum and the speaking and writing assessments allows students to demonstrate this through how they organise their points.

The course caters well for differentiation by the nature of the discipline and it is very bespoke to individual learners with different goals and end points. Students are streamed by approximate level, factoring in diversity of the group. Individual feedback, both written and verbal are provided, and the students can choose optional workshops, take extra language classes (and see below for innovative elements which foster self directed learning and cultural competence in addition to language skills).

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<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 design of the course from learning outcomes to assessment and feedback is clearly influence by research into communicative language teaching, systemic functional linguistics and EAP. I was struck by two innovative additions – 1. Students undertake a teaching project in the first week of term three, which fosters confidence in speaking, metacognition, reflection and responsibility for their own learning. They also have to think about communicating info to an audience in different ways. 2. LinC- workshops which focus on elements of UK culture and other focused topics of interest, such as music and creative writing. Not only does this provide an opportunity to use language in authentic situations and build confidence in meeting other people, but it provides an interdisciplinary focus for students which aligns with the ethos of the HE sector.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p> <p>N/A</p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i></p> <p>N/A</p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p> <p>N/A</p>		

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>Assessments are provided for all four skills and in line with learning outcomes as stipulated by external agencies. However, there is evidence of integrated skills in line with research into EAP pedagogy.</p> <p>The introduction of the listening exam is very positive development, which teachers' comments has had positive washback on student engagement with listening as vital for participation within seminars and lectures. Listening is notoriously hard to test and the course leaders have tried to simulate a real university style lecture experience with pre-reading materials and a range of item types designed to evaluate types designed to evaluate students' competence in the micro skills which underlie the construct of listening at different CEFR levels.</p> <p>Assessments for writing and speaking are framed around a series of topics which allows for core readings but also some level of flexibility for those who want to make relevant to their own discipline. However, the essay question seems hard to unpack, and have spoken informally to the course leader about this, who agrees, although with the caveat that unpacking assignment titles is a course learning outcome and that early sessions work on this. I also felt that 1000-1500 words was too wide a range, as,</p>		

when factoring in the 10% over or under allowance, students can in theory write between 900 and 1600 which is not allowing the same rigour or stretch for all students.

There is a good balance of formative and summative assessment, reflecting a focus on assessment for learning. I feel students are supported with individualised feedback, opportunities to talk to their tutors and extensive use of peer learning and feedback. There are opportunities for informal and more formal formative feedback built into the curriculum. Practice tests are also built into the curriculum in later stages so students have the opportunity to hone exam skills.

Criteria is well designed and weighted to facilitate reliability of marking. Turnitin technology facilitates this.

The level and amount of feedback is commendable across a sample of scripts and assignments. Academic staff utilise Turnitin feedback and quick marks for draft stage to give extensive and comprehensive advice which feeds forward for improvement in the final submission. This reduces the need for such feedback at the summative stage when turnaround time is high.

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

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:

Student performance on all assessments is commensurate with the expected level of English as benchmarked to IELTS.

Across the cohort within the listening exam, there is quite a big disparity between the two parts, which would make sense in the design of the test to discriminate at the higher levels. The results DO indicate that the test is discriminating between higher and lower level students upon comparison of IELTS scores on entry, but my opinion is that this is not because the level of the text difficulty increases but because of the item types/design of the two parts. I felt the prep materials/overview give too many of the answers, in effect testing reading. Part 2 has a lot of written paraphrasing for large numbers of marks, which is testing writing. Also this could be a concern for reliability if the test is marked at scale. The test does not penalise spelling and so designs out issues of literacy; however, the items types still require a lot of writing so as with part 1, there is construct irrelevant variance.

I would recommend that item types are more varied in part 2 to test a greater range of skills. The authentic note-taking element should remain but students can DO more with the notes e.g. MCQs, fill in the gaps, etc.

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

Consider trialling exams for the following year as mocks/practice on the current course, bearing in mind procedures to ensure test security.

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?	N/A
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

I very much appreciated the opportunity to talk with student representatives this year. This is another example of how students have a voice in addition to module feedback and student council meetings.

The student representatives commented that they felt the topics in term 3 were less accessible. I agree in that the focus does seem to be largely on science, perhaps a leftover from the previous course where cohorts tended to be from more medical disciplines. However, the progression from more generic societal topics (crime etc) to recognisably more academic topics was appreciated by the students.

The course and the centre in general makes a large effort to provide an inclusive learning environment which fosters belonging. There is a good range of activities, trips (free) and opportunities for language exchanges; staff have managed to maintain the lang zone and resources despite the move to Blenheim Terrace; there is a robust welfare and pastoral care policy evident in accommodation help, tutorials etc . Students said they felt a sense of belonging in the city and in the language centre, because of the course, teachers, and activities which meant they could meet new people :) But they did suggest that more engagement with the wider uni might be helpful, I would recommend activities could be embedded into the terms such as library trip, introduction to union or language centre alumni might come to talk to current students.

In terms of fostering belonging for those who live off campus, the course leaders made me aware that they are using Trello for staff communications which could also be used with students.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

English for Academic Purposes

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Academic English for Undergraduate Studies

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

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

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 qat@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 thank _____ for _____ positive comments regarding assessment. The course assessment continues to move away from mirroring IELTS to more closely reflecting undergraduate assessments.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

We appreciate the input the External Examiner has made as a consultant on various aspects of assessment design, and hope to make use of _____ knowledge and ideas in this area going forward.

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:

The course continues to evolve and greater coherence is one of the key aims. Taking on board the comment about critical thinking, this should be more explicitly part of lessons going forward.

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:

As previously noted, the assessments are in a process of development. The comments about the listening assessment will be taken up with the AEPS module leader with whom AEUS are sharing materials and resources.

Comment from Director of Student Education:

We are grateful to [redacted] for [redacted] advice regarding the listening assessment and the comments made here. These comments will be passed to the team involved in the design and writing of the listening exam for consideration of how they could be applied.

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 comment

Other comments

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

The complexity of topics for term 3 has been noted, and it is intended to simplify input and tasks in this regard going forward. Greater university embeddedness for students is another aim of course development for the next few years.

Comment from Director of Student Education:

We are very grateful to [redacted] for [redacted] continued support of the development of the AEUS programme over the last three years and [redacted] positive comments regarding the changes that she has seen put in place, particularly during this academic year. I am aware that [redacted] had meetings with the AEUS programme leaders when [redacted] visited Leeds this year and, as mentioned above, guidance given and comments made on areas for consideration are being taken on board.