

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT Received 20/06/2019

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

PRHS

Subject(s):

Religious Studies and Theology

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA RS and Theology

THEO1760(*) – Studying Christianity (10 credits)
 THEO1920(*) – Religion, Politics and Society in the Modern World (10 credits)
 THEO1930(*) – Introduction to the Study of Religion/s (10 credits)
 THEO2040 – Modern Theologians (20 credits)
 THEO2251 – Sociology of Religion (20 credits)
 THEO2286 – God, Sex and Gender in Africa (20 credits)
 THEO3170 – Religion, Belief and Ethics (20 credits)
 THEO3190 – Religions and Global Development (20 credits)
 THEO3215 – Modern Theologians (20 credits)
 THEO3280 – Religion, Politics and the Future (20 credits)
 THEO3286 – God, Sex and Gender in Africa (20 credits)

Semester 2

PHIL2532 – Philosophy of Religion (20 credits)
 PRHS2000 – Human Rights and Religion (20 credits)
 THEO1015(*) – Introduction to the Study of Islam (10 credits)
 THEO1350(*) – Introduction to the Bible (10 credits)
 THEO1900(*) – Introduction to South Asian Religions (10 credits)
 THEO1910(*) – Religion in Modern Africa (10 credits)
 THEO1960(*) – Religion in Modern Britain (10 credits)
 THEO1970(*) – Introducing Theology (10 credits)
 THEO2000 – Theology and Religious Studies Students into Schools (20 credits)
 THEO2220 – Buddhism (20 credits)
 THEO2300 – Studying Religion in Context (20 credits)
 THEO2720 – Religion, Gender and Society (20 credits)
 THEO3021 – Muslims in Britain: Transnational Communities and Multicultural Politics (20 credits)
 THEO3040 – Ideologies of Hebrew Bible Texts and Readers (20 credits)
 THEO3220 – Sin (20 credits)
 PRHS3000 – Independent Research Project

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

BA in TRS and related subjects

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 most significant area of innovation in the external examiner process has been the decision by the school, informed by current EEs, to move to a managed risk based approach to external examining. EEs continue to have access and oversight of all relevant student work and module material, but provide focused feedback on specific modules based on carefully selected modules representative of assessment, marking and teaching across the programme.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

In addition to the innovative approach to external examining above, the team have ensured that ongoing systems of assessment quality oversight in the Monitor's Forms are more robust, and have provided fuller data to external examiners relating to assessment profiles for the modules and student module reviews.

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 for urgent attention.

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
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	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

The most significant development in my period as EE has been the shift from EEs being required to look at samples of all modules in levels 5 and 6, to a more risk-based approach, as I (and other EEs) have advised in previous reports.

Other notable enhancements have been on the consistency and quality of information provided to external examiners.

There has been evidence of greater consistency in the use of the VLE for all modules and student facing documentation.

Equally, there has been greater use of, and improved consistency in, the marking of electronic assignments on Grademark

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.

It is worthy of note that in the period of my tenure as EE I have found little to comment upon in relation to the overall programme structure and design. Nor have I needed to critique the quality of the pedagogy, assessment design and teaching resources – beyond looking for greater consistency in the use of the VLE platform. I have recognised and supported the currency of the programme maintained by research-led teaching, and the ongoing enhancements of modules and the programme through updating resources.

The programme intended learning outcomes are embedded within the programme structure and design, and amply meet the quality benchmarks for the subject area.		
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>There are sufficient subject specialists within the school to deliver modules that both meet the National Benchmark, and relate to academic research interests. It is evident in the topic areas and themes within modules that they are informed by case studies and selection of exemplary material that grows out of module leaders scholarly interests and research. This maintains currency in the curriculum, as well as vibrancy growing out of the living and changing nature of the subject area.</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>		
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>		
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>		

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>There are varied assessment methods across the modules, which are effectively designed to meet the intended learning outcomes. They also allow students to develop their skills and knowledge through the programme in a formative and constructive process over the three levels of study.</p> <p>I would advise in the next quality process of periodic review or revalidation of the programme that the number and weighting of examination components within the overall assessment structure is reconsidered. Examinations are one effective way to support and test knowledge. However, they can be pedagogically challenged if over used, as insufficiently inclusive. Moreover, time-limited; hand written responses are increasingly out of tune with digital-native students. And it is difficult to assure consistent and quality feedback through the processes of marking examination scripts.</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
<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>I can confirm, as I have over the period of my tenure, that students on this course are achieving comparable academic outcomes to students of the same abilities in other courses. I have no specific comments to make regarding the particular strengths of the students as a cohort (the primary source for such a commentary should be evidence-based examination of overall student achievement data in Annual review).</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>		

I have previously commented on the excellent feedback provided by module tutors. And I have noted that in some cases this may even be excessive, if it is found that students are neither accessing, nor using, the written feedback as formative and developmental.

I would suggest a systematic scrutiny of student use of written feedback. This can be used to inform a review of type and detail of academic feedback to students in order to develop the most effective programme and module level oversight of assessment for learning. Grademark is a useful tool but it should not constrain the modes of feedback offered by tutors based on experience and data informed pedagogy. It may, for example, be more useful to offer formal oral feedback in class for a mid-semester assessment, than detailed in-text comments, or rubric as defined by Grademark.

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?	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?	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

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:

I noted in my final oral report to the examination board my especial thanks to the administrators and academic overseeing assessment for the school, for ensuring that each of these aspects has been professionally processed to a high standard.

Other comments

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

My thanks to all colleagues with whom I worked and shared ideas during my period as external examiner at Leeds University. It has been a very positive experience, in which we have all sought to assure good process in assessment and marking, and enhance the overall student experience.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Theology and Religious Studies

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA Theology and Religious Studies (plus Joint Honours programmes involving TRS)
BA Philosophy, Ethics and Religion
BA Religion, Politics and Society

THEO-coded modules

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

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Assessment Officer

Faculty / School of:

Philosophy, Religion and History of Science

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 are delighted to hear that the changes to our external examining procedures, which were implemented in 2018–19, are proving to be successful from the external examiners' point of view as well as from the School's. The input from external examiners, especially from you, was extremely helpful in prompting us to develop the new system.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

We are pleased that the monitors' reports are, as intended, providing helpful information on our monitoring practices.

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:

It is gratifying to hear that the consistency of our procedures is discernible across a number of areas, including the information supplied to external examiners, the use of virtual learning environments for modules and also our electronic marking methods. The advice received from you and other external examiners has been invaluable in enabling these improvements.

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:

It is reassuring to hear that our TRS programme and related programmes with a religion component are in generally good order. Your suggestions over the last four years have been invariably helpful and encouraging.

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 reiteration of your views about the use of time-limited handwritten examinations is welcome and appreciated. There is a gradual move across the School in the direction of diversifying assessment methods, and this is being encouraged by advice from specialists in inclusivity. It is highly likely that this diversification will result in a smaller number of exams overall, and there are already very few for final-year undergraduates. We expect that some exams will be retained as part of our comprehensive range of methods.

Your remarks on our methods of providing feedback to students are also well taken. In 2017, a committee comprising members of staff within the School, including me (as Assessment Officer), plus student representatives did undertake an examination of our feedback procedures. The outcome of this was a guidance document for markers of students' work listing features of feedback that students (reportedly) find helpful and some that they (reportedly) find unhelpful. We shall, however, continue to review our procedures, and your suggestions about how feedback might be supplied in ways that are rationally targeted while also minimizing redundancy have been very helpful indeed.

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 are very pleased that our assessment and classification procedures are operating successfully.

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

My colleagues and I have found it a genuine pleasure working with you over the last four years. I especially appreciate the keen interest you have shown in how we go about monitoring our own procedures and your willingness to engage in detailed conversations on these and other matters in addition to undertaking the standard activities of sampling and perusing other documentation. Thank you and best wishes.