

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT received 20/11/19

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:	School of Geography
Subject(s):	Geography
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MSc Data Analytics and Society (part of the EPSRC CDT "Data Analytics and Society").
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc

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 innovative 2-year MSc runs concurrently with students in the CDT in Data Analytics and Society starting the initial stages of their 4-year PhD research. This year was the first opportunity to review and assess the full MSc programme for the first cohort of the CDT. Overall it is clear from the high quality of the MSc awarded to the first cohort and also in discussion with several cohort 1 and 2 students that this MSc is delivering an excellent training portfolio for students that is highly applicable to their PhD research. A particular strength of the programme is the ability for students, via **GEOG5000M Internship Project** and **GEOG5099M Dissertation**, to tailor their work on the MSc to be directly relevant to their PhD research; guaranteeing that the technical training and skills acquired are appropriately embedded within the wider student research.

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 is the first year that the entire programme has been delivered to a cohort of the CDT. In general access to marks and student work via Minerva improved this year. It was particularly easy to access student dissertations, related marks and the excellent dissertation moderation documentation. However, as with 2017/18, it was still not possible to access any of the 45-credits of module material that students have taken external to Leeds.

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

Again, as was the case last year, content for the 45 credits taken outside of Leeds in year-1 of the MSc for cohorts 1 and 2 was not available at the time of the exam board. In the case of cohort 1 this means that as external examiner I have been placed in the situation of being unable to review a quarter of the content that has led to the award of an MSc. It is disappointing, after this issue was noted in my report last year, that it has not been addressed 1-year on. I appreciate that it is difficult managing modules, work and marks for externally delivered modules, but it is essential going forward that this issue is proactively addressed and that the external examiner is able to review the full body of work produced by students.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment only

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

This is an excellent MSc programme that prepares students for their PhD research extremely well. I had initial concerns over the workload balance between the MSc over 2-years and students undertaking their PhD research. However, overall the work I have reviewed has been to an extremely high standard and having talked to students from cohorts 1 and 2 it is clear they appreciate the opportunity to undertake the MSc alongside their PhD research; translating the knowledge, skills and techniques acquired in the MSc directly and in a timely manner to their research.

The intensive year-1 on the MSc has clearly benefited students, while the elective modules and dissertation in year-2 allows students to focus their efforts more towards their PhD research topic. This model works extremely well. The availability of a wide range of elective modules that allow students to gain research relevant knowledge and skills for their research is particularly impressive.

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)

The overall programme of the MSc has a clear focus on research with it being aligned to the CDT in Data Analytics and Society. As noted last year, the first year of the programme delivers research informed teaching via **SLSP5301M Researching Society and Culture** module and the **GEOG5000M Internship Project**. In the second year the elective modules (30-credits) allow students to choose modules that are directly relevant to their PhD research. Review of these shows a high-level of research informed material and also the opportunity for students to tailor coursework in manner that is directly relevant to their own research interests.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	Y
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Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

The MSc programme has been specifically designed for the CDT in Data Analytics and Society. As noted last year several modules directly offer students the ability to translate the knowledge/skills acquired to their PhD. For example,

the research proposal of **SLSP5301M Researching Society and Culture**. In year 2 the elective modules and dissertation allow students to focus their efforts directly on gaining appropriate knowledge and skills for their PhD research. When meeting with the cohort 1 students it was clear they found the ability to translate immediately the MSc knowledge and skills directly to their PhD research a significant benefit of the design of the programme. Overall this MSc provides excellent training of the PhD cohorts both in terms of content and also the 2-year structure.

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
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Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:

16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
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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.

As noted last year, there is an appropriate mix of technical computer-based lab assessment and essay/report style assessment in nearly all modules. Marking of the Leeds modules on the whole is in line with what I would expect from such a strong cohort of PhD students. The use of a 30-credit mini dissertation is novel and appropriate given that students are simultaneously undertaking their PhD research. The quality of the cohort 1 dissertations overall was very good. I found, however, that there seemed to be a tendency for a large number of dissertations to be marked just above the 70% distinction level. A review of the dissertations suggested to me a wider difference in marks across the cohort and it may be that there is a need for a more holistic consideration of how the dissertations can be assessed across the wider marking range.

18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y
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19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y
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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:

Cohort 1, who graduated this year with their MSc award, are a comparable to the very best MSc in GIS students I have encountered over the past 10+ years. Their technical skill set is highly impressive as is their ability to apply this independently within their dissertations and wider CDT PhD research. A review of the work by cohort 2 suggests a slightly weaker overall group of students than cohort 1, but a student body that is still comparable with strong students on other MSc programmes within spatial data science within the UK.

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

The availability and detail of feedback available via Minerva is variable between different modules. In discussion with the students it is clear that feedback across the programme is good but that it is not always available or recoded via Minerva.

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
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21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y
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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?	N
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Not Applicable
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?	Not Applicable
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?	N
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

To echo last year's comments, this is an excellent MSc programme that prepares the CDT students well for their PhD research. The opportunity to meet a number of cohort 1 and 2 students this year revealed a highly motivated group of students who have enjoyed the MSc structure and have found it as an excellent means by which to gain the key intellectual knowledge and practical skills for their PhD research.

Overall management of the programme is good and the CDT team were helpful in trying to provide material prior to the exam board. However, it was frustrating that yet again I could not review the three modules (accounting for 45-credits) that are taken at the other CDT partner institutions. In this regard there is a clear need for the CDT team to ensure that for these module descriptions, assessments, work and moderation is fully available in subsequent years for cohort 2 onwards.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)*Title and Name of Examiner:*

Subject(s):

Geography

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MSc Data Analytics and Society (part of the EPSRC CDT "Data Analytics and Society").

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

MSc

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

School of Geography

Address for communication:

School of Geography
University of Leeds

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 thank the EE for their very positive comments about the strength of the programme and their very positive opinion of the training portfolio. The Internship project is a core module to this programme, and although extremely difficult to manage (students undertake their internships at different times, have different experiences, different levels of engagement form partners etc), it provides them with a critical understanding of undertaking research in a commercial setting.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

We would like to be able to provide the EE with materials from other institutions but this has not been possible. Indeed we are struggling to identify appropriate avenues to do this. Moving forward it is unlikely that this will be resolved, although we continue to explore how this might be done. One option is for all the partners to have the same EE, while another is to circulate and share individual EE reports between examiners/institutions.

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:

See above – we *are* trying to resolve this. We will keep the EE informed of progress.

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:

Again we are pleased with the very positive and encouraging comments from the EE for all aspects of the programme considered under Qs 8 to 16. We have provided the EE with guidance on organisational structures and advice on day-to-day practicalities to help them set up a similarly shaped 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:

Again we thank the EE for their positive comments.
We will try to establish greater coherence in dissertation marking. The CDAS programme adopted the very successful schema used in the MSc GIS for dissertations (structure, form etc), marking schemes and mark agreement procedures. This year no dissertations had to be 3rd marked. Meaning that the marks were agreed by 1st and 2nd markers. Part of the problem may be due to markers from different disciplinary backgrounds being reluctant to use the full marking range – above and below the low 70s grade (NB the GIS MSc is marked by SoG staff in the main). We will encourage them to refer more strongly to the mark scheme and to be brave in future years.

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:

24 and 25. This relates to the lack of materials that were made available for modules delivered by partners (University of Liverpool, University of Sheffield, University of Manchester). We will continue to try to find a way to make these materials available to the EE in the future, as described above.

Other comments

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