

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT Received 01/07/2019

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Social Sciences

Subject(s):

Sociology & Social Policy

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Programmes: BA Social Policy & BA Sociology (and associated programmes)

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

As above

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.

These are excellent programmes developed and delivered by professional and dedicated academic and professional service staff. The modules are timely, relevant and enable students to engage with a range of contemporary sociological and social policy issues while not losing sight of the core tenants and values of a social science education at HE level. All modules are excellent and, in different ways, highlight the value of a sociology or social policy degree to the wider world. See further comments below.

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 my view the second marking/moderation process continues to be made more transparent. There also seem to be more support for/checks on less experienced markers. These are both very good to see.

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

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

These were very good programmes when I joined as External Examiner. In my view they have continued to develop, with new teaching and learning materials, innovative and challenging assessments, and improvements to procedures (particularly around moderation). Students continue to be treated fairly and the various University rules & regulations always adhered to at the Progression and Award Boards I have attended.

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.

See comments below

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)

See comments below

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

N/A. However, I should think students are very well equipped for this thanks to the excellent training in critical thinking, opportunity for independent work, and research methods modules. The quality of the Dissertations I have seen suggest that many students are certainly capable to PhD level study

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.

See comments below

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:

See comments below

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

See comments below

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?	N/A
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:

See comments below

Other comments

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

Programme structure and content/Standards

- In my opinion, these are excellent undergraduate programme. Modules are well designed, interesting, relevant and robustly assessed. All standards are appropriate for the awards under consideration and meet the AQA benchmark requirements.
- Given the quality of module design across the programme, I am reluctant to single out particular modules for particular praise here, but the support provided to students completing the Dissertation is outstanding. This year (once again) students turned in some brilliant work and it is good to see that empirical sociology continues to fascinate students. The Dissertation module is well designed and delivered and, in my view, continues to be better than similar modules at competitor institutions. 'Sociology and Public Policy Beyond the University' was another notable module, mainly for its ability to get students out into the world and for its engaging method(s) of assessment. A lot of excellent marks awarded on the on Research Methods module, particularly for quantitative skills and I hope these students are encouraged to do quantitative-based dissertations in the future

Assessment and feedback

- Teaching and learning materials are well developed; marking and feedback transparent, justified and fair. I believe the programme offers a good quality teaching and learning experience for students. In all modules the assessments aligned with the learning outcomes without restricting students to pursue their own interests.
- Students have ample opportunity to demonstrate the full extent of their learning and understanding. Their work is comparable to (and often better than) that produced by students on other programmes I am familiar with. Based on the samples of work I reviewed students by and large receive constructive feedback and are encouraged to perform as well as possible.
- The teaching team continue to see a good range of assessment styles that not only assess pedagogic progress, but also provide opportunity to develop employability skills.
- Marking and feedback is generally good and usually engages with what the students have written. There is very clear evidence of second marking in operation. I like the forms that have been introduced to support this process. Going forward, it was not always clear to me whether a process of 'moderation' or 'second marking' was in operation, and the teaching team may want to ensure there is consistency of purpose as well as practice here. It is also unclear what might happen if a first and second marker disagree about an assignment (outwith the Dissertation module, where procedures are clear). If first and second markers disagreed by, say, over 10% (which was the case in one example I looked at), would other assignment marks awarded by that marker, or within that grade boundary also be checked? I would hope so, but it is not necessarily obvious to me that this either would, or does, happen as a matter of course.

Progression and Award Boards

- This was well attended by knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff. It was chaired very well. Good time was given to the consideration of complex cases. In my view all students were treated fairly. Knowledge of the University's rules and regulations was outstanding. Administrative input/support was excellent.

This is my final report as an external examiner. It has been a pleasure to have insight into the ongoing development of such good programmes. Students undertaking degrees in sociology and social policy can leave the University of Leeds safe in the knowledge that they have had access to an excellent teaching and learning environment. All staff involved in teaching delivery, management, professional services, and other student support roles should be proud of what they do to deliver the best student experience possible. I wish all the team, and their programmes, well in the future.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Sociology & Social Policy

Programme(s) / Module(s):

SLSP2150 Debates in Childhood & Youth, SLSP3242 The Social Life of Data, SLSP2040 Disability Studies, SLSP2010 Research Methods, SLSP3930 Sociology of Consumerism, SLSP2975 Social & Public Policy, Dissertations

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

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Director of Student Education

Faculty / School of:

EL/ Sociology & Social Policy

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

I am particularly pleased that you consider all of our modules to be excellent and to show the value of degrees in our subject area. Recognising the professionalism of academic and Student Education service staff is too hugely pleasing.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Thank you for recognising our attempts to make the marking process more transparent. We will continue to provide support to new markers as they traverse the transition to marking in our school, I acknowledge that in the last year we recruited a large amount of new staff and thus said transition was as well supported as has been previously.

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:

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:

I am pleased that you believe treat students fairly and that our programmes have continued to improve during your term as external examiner. The school will continue to work to improve our student education offer to be the best it can be.

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:

We have introduced a quantitative methods pathway to our degrees. This has proved to be more popular than we were expecting we will continue to encourage students who achieve highly in this area to conduct a dissertation that deploys quantitative methods.

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:

Cases of the engagement of a third marker are brought to my attention via the dissertation tutor and I follow up with staff as necessary. From here on the dissertation tutor will check the marking of other dissertations when a colleague has requested a third marker.

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:

Thank you for recognising the knowledge of the process the quality of the chairing this year. As you note there were a number of complex cases that needed to be handled with care and precision.

Other comments

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

Throughout your time as our external examiner you have been a thoughtful and helpful critical friend. The quality of our student's education has been improved by the rigour in which you have conducted this role and we wish you well in the future, and miss your role in our academic community. Thank you.