

Leeds School Of Social Sciences

Undergraduate

- CRIME Criminology(UG)

Please indicate, below, whether you agree with the statements about the threshold standards of Leeds Beckett University's awards, student achievement and the conduct of the University's assessment processes, using as a reference the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable Subject Benchmark Statements / Qualification Characteristic Statements. Please also list any shortcomings and areas for commendation. You should expand on any issues you mention here in the main report. If any boxes are ticked "No" the Dean of School or nominee will be alerted and will oversee the response from the Course Director.

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Standards Set

	Yes	No
"In my view, the threshold academic standards set for the modules/awards meet with the requirements of the relevant National Qualifications Statement's."	X	

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short:

Student achievement

	Yes	No	N/A*
"In my view, students' who have been awarded qualifications have had the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in course(s) or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar." *Not applicable – if you are a practitioner and are not in a position to assess this statement, please note here:	X		

Please provide any further comment on the comparability of collaborative provision

Given the new regulations implemented as a result of Covid-19, the thresholds have clearly had to be changed for the 2019/20 academic year. I am, however, confident that in considering these adjustments, student's have still had the opportunity to achieve the appropriate standards.

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short:

Conduct of process

	Yes	No
"In my view, the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are reliable, rigorous and fairly conducted."	X	

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.

Actions from last year's report

(This will not be relevant if you are examining for the first time)

Yes

Areas of good practice/commendation

Any particular strengths or distinctive or innovative features in relation to learning, teaching and assessment:

Whilst teaching and learning has inevitably been impacted by Covid-19, many of my observations from last year in terms of the offering still hold true in 2019/20. Although there remain some inconsistencies within module teams, the scale and scope of feedback is often impressive and clearly beneficial for students. LBU evidently has a strong relationship with HMP Full Sutton and there is scope to develop this further. The delivery of Learning Together was clearly impacted by Covid-19, but the assessments demonstrate that even in these circumstances, the learning that takes place through LT remains transformative. There is a clear scaffolding of assessments across the degree, with some excellent examples of good practice (e.g. concept map assessment in the punishment module). In reviewing the sample, what I was often impressed with was the students' grasp of theory and research methods. Moreover, the students were provided with numerous opportunities to apply theory with policy/practice. I appreciate that staff use the full range of marks, which is not always the case at some institutions. Work at the top end is extremely impressive. Importantly, it is evident that many modules operationalise the principle of research-informed teaching. Moreover, there is a clear commitment to ensuring that the degree encapsulates current issues in criminology.

Main report

In this section you are asked to describe more fully how the University has or has not maintained threshold academic standards and the quality of the student experience in relation to the course(s) for which you are the external examiner, using as a reference the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable Subject Benchmark Statements / Qualification Characteristic Statements.

Please complete all sections of the form fully and where not applicable please state N/A. Where applicable please also complete the sections for any collaborative provision sampled.

If you are an external examiner for any of the University's Pearson Licensed Centre Programmes (HND/HNC level) provision, please also complete the section on page 9 sections l, m and n entitled "for External Examiners Associated with Pearson Licensed Centre Programmes."

Professional Body Requirements

External Examiner's report summary

	Yes	No	N/A*
"In my view, the professional body requirements for this course have been met. *Not applicable if the course is not a professional body course please indicate here.			
If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.			

(a) The operation and conduct of the Progression and Award Board (and/or Module Board meeting you may also have attended).

In particularly challenging circumstances, the Progression and Award Board I attended online via MS Teams on Thursday 23rd July 2020, was conducted with a reassuring attention to detail and was delivered pretty seamlessly. Joining instructions were clear, although I did not receive the access to the Dropbox files before the Board itself (this was a technical issue with my email, rather than a fault of the course administrators). The Board did overrun, which meant I was unable to stay to the end of the Board, but in the circumstances, this overrun was entirely understandable. Even more than last year, academic and administrative staff should be commended for the smooth operation of the Board. I was fully supported by the course leader and administrative staff throughout. My only observation is that given the detailed and complex changes to the regulations, there may have been some value in including the External Examiners in a 'pre-Board' to make sure that these changes were fully understood....this was a lot to take in at the start of the Board.

The Chair of the Board ensured that there was plenty of scope for External Examiner input at the Board itself and I got the sense from the discussion of 'complex' cases that Course Leaders knew their students well, both in terms of grade profiles and also attendance/engagement/mitigations. This latter point is especially important in the context of Covid-19. This is to be commended and is suggestive of strong professional relationships between academic staff and students and a commitment to student welfare. Overall, the process felt transparent, coherent and accountable and in a year of extenuating circumstances, criminology students can be assured that the standards of the exam board is entirely fit for purpose. Staff should be commended for all their hard work during what undoubtedly a very stressful time for all and for simply being able to keep the 'show on the road'.

(b) The action, if any was required, taken in response to your report of last year. (This will not be relevant if you are examining for the first time.)

(c) The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions.

Given the conventions put in place to deal with Covid-19, direct comparisons are difficult to operationalise this year. This is especially true at the lower end of the grade profile where students who would ordinarily not progress, were allowed in the next academic year with an incomplete profile. My own institution had imposed a very different set of criteria, with a notably different threshold for progression. Moreover, I noted last year that there were notable discrepancies in marks between modules; such observations are too extent redundant in light of Covid-19, so I will be interested to see how this plays out next year, but would still encourage the module team to put the relevant strategies in place to deal with this.

That said, I was once again hugely impressed with some of the work I saw. At the top end, the students produced some spectacularly good work which was critical and analytical. In a year where there is understandably some 'progression' inflation, the grades allocated were generally in line with the quality of work produced and I am therefore confident in benchmarking the grade profiles with other institutions that I am familiar with and that grade inflation has not taken place. Importantly, there appears to be a good alignment between the grades and the learning outcomes. Where the learning outcomes have not been achieved, then - for the most part - the feedback from staff provides clarity on what is 'missing'. Overall, in terms of understanding of theory, policy and practice, the work of students at LBU on BAH Criminology is comparable to the level of work in other institutions.

(d) The strengths and weaknesses of the students in general with respect to knowledge, conceptual grasp or application of skills.

In line with my comments in Section C, the degree programme gives the students a number of opportunities to not only demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes, but also to demonstrate that they have grasped the alignment between theory, policy and practice. Through the Learning Together module, there is also an excellent opportunity to apply this knowledge to another environment. In the samples that I looked at – even at the lower end of the grade profile – the students grasp of key criminological theories was generally pretty good.

As noted in my 2019/20 report, the degree is strong in allowing students to demonstrate and apply research skills (for example, the application of literature review and synthesis of ideas in the patch assessment for the dissertation module) and the inclusion of assessment by (group) presentation is comprehensive and students appear well positioned to apply these important transferable skills post-LBU. Further narrative can be found in my detailed module specific feedback.

(e) The standards of the structure, organisation, design and marking of all examination papers and/or other forms of assessment.

There were still some inconsistencies in the level of feedback given by some staff on some modules that need levelling out to ensure that students have a consistent experience and are clear about what is expected from them moving forwards. For the most part, however, the scale and scope of feedback is very good, often impressively so, given the number of students reading for the degree. The clarity of feedback makes it easy for students to understand why they achieved the grade that they did and where they should focus their attention in future assessments. Importantly, where a module has more than one assessment, there is a degree of continuity in the design of these assessments (the dissertation being a clear example of this).

The assessment tasks and marking criteria were extremely transparent for all the modules I was asked to review and the sample size allowed me to get a feel of the quality of work across the range of marks. That said, there is still an under-use of formative assessments and as a team, this is something that I would encourage the module team to look at.

In relation to learning outcomes, whilst I was impressed that students have to consistently demonstrate knowledge and understanding across the identified learning outcomes to gain a high grade for their work, I was not clear why the single honours students had one less learning outcome compared with joint honour students. This had an impact in considering the new BoE regulations for Covid-19.

I was provided with appropriate guidance on the marking and moderation processes used for each module and the inclusion of moderation of work from outside of the module teaching team is a nice touch. This year, the Course Leader had provided a narrative/data analysis in respect of the achievement results

compared with the previous academic year; this was extremely useful and much appreciated. The dissertation module also provided a detailed module report, which provided some useful context. I would strongly advocate that this pocket of good practice should be considered for all modules next year. Equally I think there would be some value in all modules clearly articulating how the module links with other modules in the degree programme; I only saw this information in one module handbook. There may be some value in providing more detailed design and formatting advice in the module guides; there were huge discrepancies in how some work was presented, so this extra guidance may help in this area. The module team might also want to consider exploring opportunities to standardise aspects of the assessment briefings where appropriate. There were some inconsistencies in the quality of referencing at the top end which also need addressing.

(f) The curriculum, teaching or resourcing of the programme of study as indicated by the performance of the students in the assessment

As per my comments last year, I am still confident that the range of modules and assessments are challenging, interesting and importantly offer students the opportunity to excel across theory, policy, methods and current issues in criminology. There were some innovative approaches to assessments (e.g. the concept map for punishment). There was plenty of evidence to suggest that staff continually challenge students to reach high standards of work across assessment types and staff should be commended for some excellent teaching and learning material. I am confident that the degree fulfils the QAA Criminology benchmarks.

Last year I suggested that the team might want to consider designing in more guest speakers across the degree, particularly in relation to the policy domain. Given the recent lock down and the shift to online learning, it would be unfair for me to comment on this for 2019/20. That said, many of the module designs did not obviously appear to incorporate this, so I would welcome some feedback on what plans are in place to engage more speakers from the policy arena across relevant modules.

(g) Comments on the use of My Beckett (Virtual Learning Environment) within the course (if applicable).

As mentioned elsewhere in my report, I very much appreciated the opportunity to review work online in advance of the exam Board and whilst there were some issues in receiving some of the information in advance of the BoE, the process was for the most part professionally handled and relatively pain free! However, there are still inconsistencies in how different module leaders upload their documentation to the VLE and this adds to the workload of the External Examiner. As such, I would welcome that this process be streamlined and standardised (combined with my previous comments about all module leaders providing a brief narrative on how the module has gone, challenges etc as part of the process). There were also a couple of occasions where MLs had not uploaded all of the relevant documents, and this had to be chased by myself and the Course Leader.

As an aside, in a year of unprecedented challenges, there would have been some value in the provision of a broad course overview of how the students had been supported throughout Covid-19, together with the aforementioned pre-board explaining the changes to the regulations.

(h) Module content, consistency of modules and module assessment across the course and the achievement

you examine.)

Detailed module feedback has been provided separately to the Course Administrators. The one thing I would like to flag here is that there are a couple of occasions where the design of the module assessments make it difficult to achieve all of the learning outcomes.

(i) Areas of student/staff engagement in teaching and learning, scholarship, research or professional practice.

There are numerous examples of staff being actively engaged in their discipline both within and outside of the classroom. The most obvious example is the great work being done in the partnership with HMP Full Sutton (e.g. Learning Together). There is evidently a clear commitment to research-informed teaching and scholarship. External relationships appear to be well-established and there are several modules where staff are experts in their field. At the time of writing this report, I am unable to comment on professional practice.

(j) The University welcomes external examiners' comments on its academic regulatory framework. Such comments may not have a direct bearing on standards set and achieved or the conduct of processes and so it may not be appropriate to include them elsewhere in this report or its summary. Please record any concerns or comments you may have here.

In my second year as external examiner for the degree, my overarching impression remains one of a contemporary, research focused and academically rigorous degree which is delivered by passionate and informed academic staff. The academic regulatory framework appears robust and has evidently stood up to scrutiny following Covid-19. At the periphery there are some question marks around the discrepancy in learning outcomes between single and joint honours that needs looking at in more detail. Although not specifically related to the academic regulatory framework, I would welcome some further achievement/progression data through a socio-demographic lens. Related to this, I did not know if there was perhaps greater scope to further 'decolonise the curriculum'?

(k) Collaborative Provision: please include here any comments you wish to make on elements of collaborative provision for which you have responsibility (in addition to those you may have indicated previously in this report).

N/A