LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY

External Examiner's report summary

School of Art, Architecture and Design

Undergraduate

- BGRAD Graphic Design(UG)
- GADES Graphic Arts and Design(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

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

Conduct of process

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	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)

N/A

Areas of good practice/commendation

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

There are many strengths, distinctive and innovative features evident on the course. In particular:

- Managing the situation with Covid-19 and moving all learning, teaching and assessment online. As part of this, areas of good practice include the creation of a Student Profile Sheet for all graphics students ensuring all staff had an overview of each student at the summative assessment point. Also enabling the students to submit a personal statement / points for consideration outlining the ways their Semester 2 submission was affected by the Covid-19 situation. The time and dedication by the course team to move everything online and support all students during this unprecedented time should not be underestimated.

- CAGD, the course VLE is a very valuable resource for both students and staff. Because of its clean interface and seamless usability perspective, it enables both students and staff to easily access and engage with necessary information and files. Importantly, it also allows for key communication between students and staff. The value of it has been highlighted even more since remote learning and teaching occurred this semester where it is evident that both staff and students found it an invaluable tool to engage with each other. Level 6 students commented on this and on the staff curated resource space created within CAGD, to add additional resources and links to support student learning during Covid-19. CAGD is also a space where students can easily organize and present their work for assessment. Additionally, and importantly, the course also has the ability to adjust and expand the system to suit the course needs in the upcoming academic year to facilitate digital and hybrid models of learning and teaching.

- The embedding of Critical Studies into modules at Level 5 and 6 enables students to reflect on their learning and consolidate their practice while also situating it in a wider critical and contextual framework.

- Clear and transparent student-centered approach to learning, assessment and feedback.

- Outward focus — engaging students with live project briefs and external opportunities that encourage broadening of professional practice skills, processes and awareness while responding to current cultural and social issues.

- Strong industry contacts with local, national and international design studios and practitioners.

Main report

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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

	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 courseplease 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).

While I did not attend any Exam Boards, my virtual meetings with the course team were all carried out in a fair and professional manner.

(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.

This year despite the unprecedented circumstances of Covid-19 and the move to remote learning, the overall performance, work produced, and grades achieved are comparable to that at other institutions. From speaking with Level 6 students, they were motivated by the support and encouragement of their tutors and course director and were appreciative of the two-week extension which enabled them to complete their work adjusting to the circumstances.

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

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Throughout Level 5 and Level 6, the students are encouraged to engage in a wide range of external 'live' briefs and competition briefs. These outward facing briefs enable students to develop industry relevant problem-solving skills, knowledge and technical ability in preparation for their future careers. These briefs also add to increase awareness of the role of graphic design in social, cultural and global issues.

Through the rich Visiting Lecturer series, Broadcast Lecture series and Inside Out Lecture series, the students are introduced to a wide range of professional practices within the creative industries and this is reflected in their project outcomes and Critical Study submissions. The Critical Study also enables reflection on practice, placing their work in context while also engaging with some key critical texts relating to the area of graphic design. It is also refreshing to see video essay submissions, where the samples I viewed were of a very high standard.

Overall from the range of work I viewed across the Levels, there is a range of skills and ability evident. This is reflected in project outcomes and feedback while also taking into consideration the impact of Covid-19.

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

During my first visit in January 2020 and in my more recent virtual visit, I viewed samples of BA (Hons) Graphic Arts and Design, Level 5 and Level 6 and the new BA (Hons) Graphic Design, Level 4. The assessment process appears very robust and fair and a strong moderation process is adhered to. All of the module learning outcomes are clearly communicated to the students and mapped against the assessment/ learning criteria and project submissions. The synoptic assessment approach allows for a holistic overview reflecting the submission requirements where studio practice and critical study complement and integrate with each other.

Overall on the course, there appears to be very rigorous and transparent assessment procedures implemented at summative assessment points with a prompt turnaround time for feedback delivery to the students. Equally, formative assessment is consistently implemented throughout each semester enabling the students to reflect on their work and receive valuable feedback on it so that appropriate project outcomes and module learning outcomes can be achieved. It also worth mentioning that the Level 6 students I spoke to commented that the feedback they received throughout the year was supportive and constructive and always enabled them to move forward with their projects and can therefore be identified as feedforward.

Importantly the 'Amended Feedback Guide' issued to Level 6 students kept them informed and reassured the exiting students that they would not be disadvantaged at the point of assessment by the Covid-19 situation.

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

As the curriculum is currently phasing out the BA Graphic Arts and Design Programme and implementing the new BA Graphic Design Programme this brings about exciting change for the programme. From the work I viewed at Level 4, there are exciting projects focused on establishing the core fundamentals of graphic design while also encouraging experimentation.

At Level 5 and Level 6, it is evident that here are many successful outward facing opportunities available to the students each year which in turn develops their professional practice skills and these are to be commended. With the new BA Graphic Design Programme, it is encouraging that further professional practice opportunities will be available through mentoring/placement/ internship opportunities which will have a positive impact on the student learning experience and graduating opportunities.

The physical resources available to the students are very good, for example access to printmaking facilities, letterpress, bookbinding, risograph, laser cutting etc. These facilities enable experimental and interesting approaches as evidenced in the student work and praised by the Level 6 students I spoke to. The Digital Print Centre is also a very valuable resource.

While access to these facilities are to be commended, other resources for student learning are of equal importance. Access to appropriate computers / hardware and industry relevant software needs to be implemented in response to the needs and objectives of the new BA Graphic Design course and growing industry requirements.

LinkedIn Learning is fast becoming a standard digital learning resource across higher education institutions. I believe it is an essential learning resource for Graphic Design students to build software and other digital skills and should be embedded into the curriculum from Level 4 stage to support a blended learning experience. As the new BA Graphic Design course has just completed its first academic year, this appears to be an apt time to implement it across all Levels for the upcoming 2020/21 academic year. This timing of implementation is also of criticality as there is a move towards more digital and hybrid models of delivery in the next academic year in response to the ongoing Covid-19 situation.

While new programmes are implemented in the School of Arts, it is my observation, that it is integral that the Graphic Design programme has sufficient space to run the programme effectively and adequate staffing to ensure an appropriate and healthy staff/student ratio.

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

Please see previous 'Areas of Good Practice/Commendation' for comments on using the course VLE, CAGD.

(h) Module content, consistency of modules and module assessment across the course and the achievement of learning outcomes. (You may be asked by your School to provide detailed comments on the modules that you examine.)

As previously stated, during my first visit in January 2020, and in my more recent virtual visit, I viewed samples of BA (Hons) Graphic Arts and Design, Level 5 and Level 6 and the new BA (Hons) Graphic Design, Level 4. The semester 2 module I sampled at Level 4 consisted of set and optional project briefs which appear to deliver a very balanced approach enabling students to take ownership over some of their projects while aligned to the learning outcomes. At Level 5 and Level 6, the external / live projects, competition projects, and self-initiated projects all enable the students to produce a wide range of outcomes that include printed and digital outputs, while also developing key professional practice and transferrable skills. These projects are supported and linked with Critical Studies creating a holistic approach to student learning. This is good practice as it enables all students to consider and situate their practice in a wider, critical context.

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The module assessment and feedback process appear very robust and fair. For Level 6, there are many opportunities to receive formative feedback throughout each semester and an indicative grade and tutorials are given at the summative assessment point at the end of semester 1. Summative feedback forms clearly outline the learning outcomes so the students can importantly identify their how own learning maps against the module/s learning outcomes. This is good practice as it allows reflection, discussion and feedforward for semester 2. The range of Level 6 grades achieved at the end of semester 2 are in line with the learning outcomes and comparable with national benchmarks.

As Covid-19 abruptly interrupted semester 2, many students had to re-think how to approach and complete their work while still achieving the learning outcomes. It was encouraging to see the creative approaches, the lateral thinking and resilience of many students as evidenced in submissions.

It is also worth noting that the Level 6 students I talked to commented on the module handbooks as clear and informative and delivered in a language which is student friendly.

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

There appears to be a lot of exciting opportunities presented to the students at Level 5 and Level 6 through external 'live' project briefs where students can develop professional practice and presentation skills through engaging with external clients. Notable examples I have seen include 'Story Makers' project involving research staff from Leeds Beckett and graphic design and illustration students in the production of a childrens' book. Also 'Slingsby Gin Project' which enabled students to consider approaches for bottle design, packaging and branding while also collaborating with design students from other programmes, for example Product Design. This collaboration on projects across programmes and disciplines should be encouraged and enabled where possible and appropriate for the student learning experience. 'Print Perform Present' also provided students with an opportunity to create, make and sell their work to an external audience developing key professional skills.

I am also aware that tutors are engaged and actively involved in external graphic design and typography professional networks, for example Graphic Design Educators' Network (GDEN) and International Society of Typographic Designers (ISTD). These engagements are important and critically feed into learning and teaching approaches and opportunities.

There is a strong creative network and important industry links have been built by the course team as evidenced through the Visiting Lecture Programme and disseminated into the learning experience through the Critical Studies submissions. Other important resources that I have noted for Level 5 and Level 6 professional practice engagement is 'Lecture In Progress' providing national and international industry links and opportunities.

(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.

This is my first year as external examiner for Level 5 and Level 6 on the BA Graphic Arts and Design Course

and Level 4 on the new BA Graphic Design course. I believe the new BA in Graphic Design course will have a positive impact and bring exciting opportunities for students responding to the ever-expanding graphic design industry and the ever-changing role of the graphic designer.

(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