

## MA Housing, Regeneration and Urban Management 2017/18

### External Examiner’s report summary

Please indicate in the relevant boxes 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.

Standards set		
“In my view, the threshold academic standards set for the modules/awards are appropriate.”	Yes	No
	Yes	
If your answer is ‘no’, please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.		

Student achievement			
“In my view, students’ achievement is comparable with similar course(s) or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar.”	Yes	No	N/A *
	Yes		
Please provide any further comment on the comparability of collaborative provision.			
* Not applicable – if you are a practitioner and are not in a position to assess this please indicate here.			
If your answer is ‘no’, please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.			

Conduct of processes		
“In my view, the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are rigorous and fairly conducted.”	Yes	No
	Yes	
If your answer is ‘no’, please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.		

Areas of good practice
Any particular strengths or distinctive or innovative features in relation to learning, teaching and assessment.

Yet again the course has demonstrated both in the learning materials and in the assignments the robust theoretical grounding provided to students, many of whom are in practice. This understanding of the theoretical context, recognises and maintains contact with current practice and the historical precedents that underpin it. The course subject matter is both contemporary and relevant. The presentational material which introduces and guides students through the assignment is well pitched for practitioners which being grounded in the planning and housing theory. As in past years I was particularly impressed with how important social and philosophical considerations are contextualised to help mediate the tensions within planning and housing systems which need to adapt to rapidly changing political and economic challenges. The close partnership with practice is a crucial part of the course and its ability to provide excellent support for and to nurture emerging planning, housing and regeneration professionals.

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

(a) The operation and conduct of the Progression and Award Board (and/or Module Board meeting you may also have attended).
I was unable to attend this year's Board due to it clashing with the burial of my mother. However, previous meetings I have attended have been efficient, profession and thorough. They provided ample opportunity for external examiner comments which I felt were listen to. The other participants were clearly very experienced in the processes involved in running a board of examiners meeting.

(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.)
The use of references both in quantity and there use at appropriate points within essays and dissertation has improved markedly overall, with some in Sustainable Communities for example reaching doctoral standard. Critical analysis and use of literature has improved, though greater use of research papers should be considered. The standard of grammar has also improved, along with the overall quality of the coursework samples.

(c) The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions.
My background is in practice rather than academia, although I have undertaken post graduate studies as part of my doctorate and masters and have run seminars with MA students in recent years. I was impressed with the standard of work and communication skills demonstrated by the students. Critically, the standard of work produced would in many instances compare with consultancy work undertaken in practice.

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

The research methods teaching materials is comprehensive and presented in a very digestible way. But some student's dissertation proposals are too broad and the transition between assignment and research needs to reflect greater attention to a more narrowly focussed area of study where depth is privileged.

On this point the guidance from tutors in response to research proposals was very helpful, clear and informative. Given that many students are in practice, I would have perhaps expected more focus on primary data collection, but the general understanding of the research methods looks adequate.

My only criticism is the need for more students to better develop the discussion sections of their assignments and research reports, interpreting the data bringing the various threads together into a wider context. On some occasions this process is conflated with the conclusion, undermining the work in question.

Generally, the quality of the assignments has improved from an already good standard. The close working relationship with practitioners assisting with site visits, lecturers and information come across in the professional, informative and thorough practical assignments prepared by students.

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

The course modules are well set out in the course handbook and marking notes, provided cogent and reasoned justification for the markers actions.

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

There are a significant number of students who although with full time jobs have achieved some consistently good marks and I understand that this is a long-standing feature of the course.

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

Staff appear to make good use of the VLE which includes details of guidance, handbooks and extensive background material for the use of students. The announcement function is used for cascading useful information to students. I am unclear as to what extent students use the discussion board as my search found no items as of 28 October 2018.

**(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.)**

Yet again I have had the opportunity to comment on the modules shortly before the start of term which was helpful, although I could do with a little more notice. The module guides have clearly been written by experienced lecturers who know their subjects and their relevance within current practice.

The dissertation module guide quite conversational, informative, easy read and offers reassurance which is helpful for students who have little or no experience of attempting a research project of this size and duration. The assignments are very topical, clearly written and produced some interesting narratives.

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

Some of this is covered in my earlier comments, but the key matters in evidence were:

- Engagement with the planning practice and practitioners in Halifax led to some very strong consultancy / design and access statements
- There is strong evidence of good use of external speakers, site visits and live information to create realistic and relevant learning for the students – good links evidenced between this resource and assignment topics
- Improved setting out of the current debates in the literature, though mainly book rather than article based. Given that some subjects such as housing are in a continual state of flux a greater reliance on research papers may be advisable.

**(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.**

I do not have any concerns with regards to the University's regulatory framework. I have worked for several years on the RTPI's partnership board prior to becoming an external examiner and my experience of the University's regulatory framework has been a positive one, both from direct experience and from that of other academics from outside LBU.

**(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

**External Examiners' Report Checklist**

**Please comment for all boxes**

<b>Course Materials</b>				
Did you receive?		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
a.	Course Handbook(s)?	Yes		
b.	Academic Regulations including any Professional Statutory Body requirements where appropriate (these may be included the Course Handbook)?	Yes		
c.	Module specifications (these may be in the Course Handbook)?	Yes		
d.	Assessment briefs/marking criteria?	Yes		

<b>Draft examination papers</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
a.	(i) Did you receive all the draft papers?			n/a
	(ii) If not, was this at your request?			
b.	(i) Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate?			n/a
	(ii) If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			
c.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			n/a

<b>Draft coursework</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
a.	(i) Did you receive all the draft coursework?	Yes		
	(ii) If not, was this at your request?			
b.	(i) Was the nature and level of the coursework appropriate?	Yes		
	(ii) If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			
c.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	Yes		

Marking Examination Scripts				
		Yes	No	N/A
a.	(i) Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts from both home and (if appropriate) collaborative partner students?	Yes		
	(ii) If you did not receive all the scripts, was the method of selection satisfactory?			
<p><b>Recommended sample sizes at Leeds Beckett University are as follows:</b></p> <p><b>a) Samples should be determined by a square root of cohort size, no smaller than 6, no larger than 15. However it should be borne in mind that not all work is assessed in a way that makes a square root sample possible and allowance should be made. For example in subjects such as the performing arts where there may be a requirement for an external to come and view a performance instead, or to visit the exhibition of art work.</b></p> <p><b>b) Samples to include all classification categories, and it is helpful to concentrate around the boundaries to include some fails.</b></p> <p><b>c) Samples to consist of internally moderated work, clearly evidencing the moderation process.</b></p>				
b.	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	Yes		
c.	Were the scripts marked in such a way to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	Yes		

Dissertations/project reports				
		Yes	No	N/A
a.	Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate?	Yes		
b.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?	Yes		

Coursework/continuously assessed work				
		Yes	No	N/A
a.	Was sufficient coursework made available to you for assessment from both home and (if appropriate) collaborative partner students?	Yes		
b.	Was the method and general standard of marking and consistency satisfactory?	Yes		

Orals/performances/recitals/appropriate professional placements				
		Yes	No	N/A
a.	Were suitable arrangements made for you to conduct orals and/or moderate performances/recitals/appropriate professional placements?	Yes		

Module Board/Progression and Award Boards				
		Yes	No	N/A
a.	Were you able to attend the meetings? Missed the 10/10/18 board due to funeral.			
b.	Were the meetings conducted to your satisfaction?			n/a
c.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Module Board/Progression and Award Boards?	Yes		