

MSc Strategic Project 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		
	Yes	No
"In my view, the threshold academic standards set for the modules/awards are appropriate."	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' achievement is comparable with similar course(s) or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar."	X		
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		
	Yes	No
"In my view, the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are 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.		

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

As observed in previous years, assessment by coursework continues to allow for interesting variation, in terms of approaches to addressing the brief, contextualisation of concepts and use of case studies. Students have good opportunities and are positively encouraged to draw on their experience for discussion of assignment briefs both inside and outside class. Diversity of student needs and expectations (in terms of the range of educational and professional backgrounds) is handled well. Again, as in previous years, students comment very favourably on the support offered to them by academic staff throughout their studies.

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.	Yes	No	N/A *
<i>*Not applicable if the course is not a professional body course please indicate here.</i>	X		
<i>If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.</i>			
*APM will be involved in discussion as necessary as the courses are restructured and changes are validated, in order to identify any need for review of topic inclusion or for re-accreditation.			

(a) The operation and conduct of the Progression and Award Board (and/or Module Board meeting you may also have attended).
<p>The June Board was conducted efficiently, following due processes, with opportunity for External Examiners and other attendees to seek clarification, query any apparent anomalies and note specific circumstance where necessary. Administrative staff provided good support.</p> <p>Due to administrative oversight, I was not invited to attend the October Board, but I understand from the Course Director that this passed without issue.</p>

(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.)
<p>I received the Course Director's written response to my 2016/17 in Dec 2017. This made reference to my various recommendations for action/areas requiring particular attention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A number of additional teaching staff have been appointed, reducing the burden on too few individuals, and resulting in a more sustainable model of delivery of content, incorporating a broader range of perspectives. - The possibility of including research and academic writing guidance/tuition more formally in early modules is being considered, to address the diverse needs of students. - Use of Turnitin is now more established and consistent. - Possible inconsistencies arising from illogical module delivery due to 'rolling delivery' is being addressed as part of the review and restructure of the courses. - Differentiation between the two project management MScs is also being addressed as part of the course review and restructure. The proposal is for Strategic Project Management to become

a course focused on programme and portfolio management and the link to business/organisational strategy, and the MSc Project Management to focus on practical project-level delivery. The aim is for roll out for 2020-21; I'd be grateful to see the papers for submission to the approval event in April, and to know the outcome and any comments for follow-up.

- The APD has been terminated, as of October 2018, due to a variety of reasons, including low student numbers, particulars of delivery and associated impact on student experience.

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

Overall performance of students is comparable to attainment levels in other institutions. The performance of part-time and international students appears to be broadly similar to that of full-time and home students. As noted in my 16/17 report, it would be useful to see any comparative analysis that is undertaken, in order to understand if/when variances arise, and possible reasons for these.

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

Students seem to engage enthusiastically with the literature, and demonstrate critical evaluation of ideas. The strongest students show both depth and breadth of reading, originality in their perspective and/or approach to exploring the question set. Students are also willing to explore the historical development of concepts as well as modern applications, and show skill in contrasting these and in selectively and appropriately applying abstract ideas to modern PM challenges.

Dissertations cover a broad range of topics; students are encouraged to draw on their own experience and develop their own areas of interest. Again, the strongest students are also able to draw powerful conclusions directly related to their findings, and to make recommendations with implications for both research and practice. Where there are clear opportunities for further research, I understand that, beyond graduation, students are occasionally involved alongside staff in ongoing research related to their topic.

Students consider alternative research strategies and to select and justify the most appropriate one, which may include qualitative and quantitative methods.

Where marks are lower, it generally seems to be due to poor connections between themes, or between generalised observations from the literature, the topics of primary investigation and methodological approach, and conclusions; there is still engagement with the literature, but it is rather more superficial and largely descriptive, demonstrating little critical evaluation. Methodology and/or methods chosen sometimes also lack proper justification or explanation.

There are some inconsistencies in presentation.

One student with an apprenticeship background commented that he needed additional help in understanding academic writing requirements and integrating into the system; he was helped with examples.

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

I received the module guide, a sample of papers and marks for: Contemporary Issues and Project Futures; Programme Management; and Project Strategy. Questions/briefs require and encourage students to explore topic in depth, and propose a range of literature (some of which is zipped into a file for students' convenience). Students feel that coursework briefs provide clear direction and assessment criteria, but allow flexibility in terms of how to approach their answer and the contexts and cases that can be utilised.

There is a clear distinction between the works awarded top, middle and bottom marks. It would have been useful to see the narrative feedback/markers' comments alongside the paper and fractional marking guide.

Other than the presence of second mark (% score) on the majority of dissertations, there was no explicit evidence of first and second marking in the samples I received. I understand that second markers are involved, particularly for dissertations, but the process and degree of consistency is not altogether clear (e.g. whether second marking is undertaken across the board, whether both first and second markers provide comments, whether second marking is 'blind', and how marks are arrived at in the event of disagreement between markers – on occasion, the final mark agreed was actually higher than both the first and second marks).

I had the opportunity to meet 2 full-time students prior to the June Board. Both commented favourably on the thoroughness of feedback throughout, especially in terms of advice on how to hone their essay-writing skills and enhance their next assignment.

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

From my June visit, I learnt that a new MSc in Construction Management, aimed at senior practitioners, was planned to begin in Sept 2019. This will include core and elective modules, some of which are already offered by and will be shared with the 2 existing MSc programmes. It was indicated previously that some current students may have opted for the content of this MSc had it been available, and so there is both opportunity and risk here: it would be good to have an update on the latest plan and thinking for this programme during 2018-19, together with the results of any (soft) market testing that has been carried out / additional student feedback.

The department is still running the existing MSc programmes with 2 intakes; the administrative burden of this and impact on class sizes is apparent. However, new teaching staff are now on board, including one member of faculty who will set up and run the new MSc, and another with a background in the oil and gas industry. These new these staff will help expand the staff knowledge / experience base, which should have a positive impact for students, in terms of exposure to a greater range of industry knowledge and experience, and research-led teaching.

As mentioned in section (b) above, differentiation between the two existing project management MScs is also being addressed as part of a course review and restructure. The proposal is for Strategic Project Management to become a course focused on programme and portfolio management and the link to business/organisational strategy, and the MSc Project Management to focus on practical project-level delivery. The aim is for roll out for 2020-21; I'd be grateful to see the papers for submission to the approval event in April, to know the outcome and any comments for follow-up, and to understand any implications for accreditation (which is considered a strong selling point by students).

Again, as mentioned in section (b) above, The APD has been terminated, as of October 2018, due to a variety of reasons, including low student numbers, particulars of delivery and associated impact on student experience. However, it was noted in previous years that MSc students enjoyed the interaction with the (usually more experienced) APD students when the opportunity arose through open/shared lectures/events; hopefully the loss of these opportunities can be mitigated.

In general, students are able to discuss their dissertation topics thoroughly and with great enthusiasm; they greatly value the opportunity to engage with practitioners and consider that this enhances their understanding of the topics in practice.

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

A good deal of information and support is provided via the VLE, including module guides, reading lists and case study material. Students appear to make good use of this and find it particularly helpful when working away from the campus.

Students I spoke to commented that individual notification of feedback availability would be helpful (rather than as group announcement). It was also mentioned that a mark tracker would be helpful to students in monitoring their progress and evaluating the feasibility of / improvement required to reach the next grade boundary overall.

(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.)

Modules appear to cover a good breadth of topics, and (as mentioned above) to encourage students to consider both historical development of ideas, current applications and emergent challenges for theory and practice.

A module in Projects and Organisational Strategy module has been introduced at Level 6, and I understand this has been very well received.

In line with the planned course restructure / refocus, staff are considering module content to establish which modules will be course-specific and which will be shared by the 2 MScs. For 2018-19, it would be good to have an update on this process, and to understand in more detail around how courses are being differentiated, how the content for each is focused / targeted / how modules will be clustered to achieve particular learning outcomes, and whether any changes are required to module content, breadth and availability.

One student I met commented that the research methods module would be more helpful if held in Semester 1.

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

Both existing MSc courses APM accredited and this is considered a good selling point. Staff are engaged with relevant professional bodies.

As mentioned above, the appointment of 2 new members of academic staff (one who will set up and run the new MSc, and another with a background in the oil and gas industry), will help expand the knowledge / experience base and L7 research-led activity.

Good relations are maintained with alumni, who are invited back to contribute to courses where appropriate. Staff draw on strong student dissertations to take research forward for publication where appropriate, and to engage students further.

(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.

(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

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

NB – I received (c) and (d) above for some, but not all, modules. I believe these documents may be available via MyBeckett. Ideally, however, I should like these to be sent to me by email. Otherwise, I will need to be directed to their location on MyBeckett when they are posted to the site, and to have assurance that I am looking at the correct versions, as appropriate to the samples of work I am/will be sent for moderation (this is particularly important in view of the rolling delivery cycle). I believe that some of the assessment briefs and marking criteria may not have changed since 2017-18, but I should be grateful if it could be confirmed in writing if this is the case in future.

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

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

I was sent a range of coursework on request in advance of the June Board. However, I was not sent any sample of work in advance of the October Board, and had to request this after the event. As requested previously, it would be useful to receive the linked assignment briefs, coursework samples and feedback all at once for the purpose of evaluation and to help me in providing comments and completing my report as fully as possible.

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?			X
	(ii) If you did not receive all the scripts, was the method of selection satisfactory?			X
<p>Recommended sample sizes at Leeds Beckett University are as follows:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>b) Samples to include all classification categories, and it is helpful to concentrate around the boundaries to include some fails.</p> <p>c) Samples to consist of internally moderated work, clearly evidencing the moderation process.</p>				
b.	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?			X
c.	Were the scripts marked in such a way to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?			X

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

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?	X		
b.	Was the method and general standard of marking and consistency satisfactory?	X		

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?			X

Module Board/Progression and Award Boards				
		Yes	No	N/A
a.	Were you able to attend the meetings?		X	
b.	Were the meetings conducted to your satisfaction?	X		
c.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Module Board/Progression and Award Boards?	X		