

BAH English Literature

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. |

- Students are particularly well supported in their studies via the module handbooks which give detailed guidance for each stage of the learning process, from preparatory reading through to advice for success in assessments.
- The curriculum offers good breadth in terms of period coverage and literary forms and genres. There is also a nice balance between canonical authors and writers who are less well known. There is a strong sense of students being stretched and challenged.
- The curriculum encourages meaningful engagement with literary theory in a way that is built and developed through the stages of the degree.
- The range of different assessment methods encourages creative critical approaches to the study and analysis of literary texts. There is real innovation in the programme's assessment suite.
- Students are taught by committed, enthusiastic, and research active staff who put every effort into enabling students to fulfil their academic potential.
- Feedback given to students is always very well judged: it is not overwhelming, but is instead carefully targeted, highlighting the key areas for future improvement in ways that are always constructive.

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> | Yes | No | N/A * |
| | | | x |
| <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). |
|---|
| <p>As in previous years, the Progression and Award Board was very well run. Communications in advance of the meeting by the subject team and administrative staff were as professional as ever. I found it very useful to see the mean final grades table, which compared this year's figures to 2016-17. It was also valuable to hear module leaders' responses to those figures. As one of two external examiners, who sees work for only half of the modules offered by the team, this discussion of the overall programme, accompanied by reflections on this year's attainment and recent revisions to the provision, gave a useful overview.</p> <p>There is not a separate section for the provision of comments relating to the samples of work, so I will add a few comments here. The samples I received were very well organised, and received in good time. My thanks go to the team for all their hard work in getting these to me and dealing with the preparation of the samples so efficiently. I did have two points to make about the samples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In some places the samples were very top heavy. I saw lots of examples of First Class work, but less at the lower end. 2) I have suggested to the team that it would be useful to be sent sound recordings of a sample of oral presentations (without which the feedback forms are not very meaningful). There are various apps that can be used via mobile phones or ipads if rooms are not set up with recording equipment (we use Voice Record Pro). Just sound recordings would be fine, along with ppt presentations. This is also good practice in terms of detecting (and indeed deterring) plagiarism. |

| (b) The action, if any was required, taken in response to your report of last year. (This will not be |
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| |

relevant if you are examining for the first time.)

The team have always been receptive to my comments. In previous years I have commented that the moderation process has not always been visible to me because pre-moderation marks have been crossed/blacked out so I could not see how a grade had been revised through the moderation process. Whilst the samples have improved in this area, there were still a few examples this year (for example on the Gothic module) where I could not see the original mark given by the first marker, prior to moderation, because the mark had been crossed out. In one or two other instances moderators' comments had been cut off the bottom of the page when copies had been made. I would stress that this only applied to a handful of assignments, but it does affect my ability to comment on the moderation process, so is just a reminder to the team to ensure that any revisions to the initial mark made as a consequence of the moderation process should be visible to me.

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

Performance of students is comparable with similar programmes in other institutions (including mine). A large proportion of students achieved "good" degrees (i.e. upper second and first class), and students' general writing and literacy skills compare favourably with those at comparable institutions (which in turn will enable them to be competitive in the job market). The best English Literature students at Leeds Beckett are as good as any I would expect to encounter elsewhere in the sector.

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

As I said above, students generally write well. They develop skills in literary analysis across a range of forms and genres, gain breadth of understanding across different historical periods, and demonstrate confidence in the application of literary theory. Students demonstrate enthusiasm and ambition, which is wonderful to see.

In some areas the students demonstrate good understanding of the historical circumstances of a text's production, but historical knowledge is a little uneven across the modules and levels.

It is often the case that students receiving lower marks do so because they have not properly engaged with taught sessions, or spent enough time on reading and research. As is the case across the sector, there is a clear link between good attendance and engagement and good results (which is a testimony to the quality of the teaching).

Last year I said of dissertations that "even first-class examples sometimes lacked a clear literature review element in their introductions – students were not always as good as they could be at situating their own critical argument in relation to existing scholarship." I think that was true again this year, and would suggest that a little more guidance might be given to students in this area.

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

Standards of assessment and marking are excellent. Students are exposed to an appropriately varied range of assessments, and in fact are offered a much richer portfolio of assessments than is available in some institutions. English will always be primarily an essay-based subject, but there are some innovative tasks in the provision – annotated bibliographies, anthologies, critical reflections – that productively encourage students to think in new ways, and explore real-world applications for their learning.

There are very few exams in the English provision as a whole, which is a little surprising. Whilst I fully support an emphasis on coursework, there are skills that can be tested (and which can in fact shine) in an exam setting more successfully than in any other. Students can think in surprising and creative ways in an exam, away from the distractions of the internet, and the ability to work to such tight time constraints is also, of course, an important transferable skill. In relation to that point, I wonder what the rationale is for making the Victorian Novel exam (one of the only exams on the course) a pre-seen paper? Whilst I see that pre-seen exams might be used in the first year of study as a way of easing students into the requirements of university, beyond that it seems a slightly odd half-way house between a coursework essay and an exam. I would expect second-year students to be able to cope with the demands of an unseen exam paper with the appropriate revision support (which I am absolutely confident they would receive from the teaching team).

As I've said before, marking is done carefully and humanely. I think the feedback model (where students are first told what they have done well, then given suggestions for future improvement) gives real structure and clarity to tutors' comments. Within that shared format there is genuine personal engagement from tutors, who express excitement at reading thought-provoking and intelligent criticism, and always give praise to writing that evidences hard work. It is easy to overwhelm weaker students with lots and lots of marginal annotations on assignments, but staff always avoid that by highlighting indicative examples of errors, and targeting the most important issues rather than covering pages in ink. In short, I cannot think of anything I would want to see that is not in evidence in the feedback practices of the team – their work is exemplary.

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

The curriculum, teaching and resourcing are all of a high standard. There is continual reflective practice in evidence, and I look forward to hearing more about the recent revisions that have been made to the programme as part of the revalidation process. After three years of working with the team I view them as dedicated, enthusiastic and professional. The curriculum is reflective of the research activity of the staff, and students can be confident that they are taught by specialists who are actively doing their own research and writing in the areas they teach.

Resourcing seems good. Students are given extensive guidance to direct their further reading, and the VLE is clearly used across all modules to support students.

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

Although I did not have access to X-stream it is clear from module handbooks that the VLE is being widely used to support student learning.

(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.)

All of the modules I have seen are interesting and very well organised. Learning outcomes are appropriate, and the modules are organised in a way that provides a lot of support to students in the attainment of those outcomes.

See my comments above in box e) relating to the Victorian Novel exam. As I have said before, I like the two-part format of this exam, but having familiarised myself with the provision over the last three years I do wonder whether the module as a whole is quite as demanding as others at the same level. In addition to my point about the exam, I'm not sure that the reading load is equivalent to other year 2 modules, and it seems difficult to achieve a good overview of the development of the novel through the Victorian period via only 4 texts and without, for example, the inclusion of authors such as Dickens and Hardy (but perhaps students encounter their work elsewhere, for example in first year?). I think there is certainly a case for paring things back and reducing the number of primary texts on a course in order to give students space to do more historical work, but the exams I saw did not always show a particularly rich understanding of the wider contexts within which the works were produced.

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

I think this has been covered in my answers above. There is a clear sense of the English team as a vibrant research community, to which students contribute.

(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).

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/marking criteria? | x | | |

| 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? | | | |
| b. | (i) Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? | x | | |
| | (ii) If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments? | | | |
| 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? | | | |
| b. | (i) Was the nature and level of the coursework appropriate? | x | | |
| | (ii) If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments? | | | |
| c. | Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments? | x | | |

| 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 Yes, although see section a) | | |
| <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 See box a) | |

| 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 | | |

Development and support of External Examiners

Please mark the appropriate boxes:

| | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Were you new in post in academic year 2016/17? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

If you were new:

| | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) Did you access the on-line External Examiner Induction Module? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If not, was there a particular reason? | <input type="text"/> | |
| (b) Did you receive any specific induction or other support from your School? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) Some inexperienced new examiners are formally mentored. Were you? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) Did you find the mentoring you received helpful? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Any general or specific comments on the development and support offered by the University, especially improvements you would like to see:

For External Examiners associated with Pearson Licensed Centre Programmes

If you are an external examiner for any of the University's Pearson provision (HND/HNC level), please complete sections (l) – (n) below to enable the University to capture the data requested by Pearson for its Annual review report.

(l) Any major issues with regard to the HND/HNC course(s) with which you are associated

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(m) Areas of good practice you have identified specifically relating to HND/HNC course(s) with which you are associated

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(n) Any other comments that you wish to make that are related specifically to the HND/HNC course(s) with which you are associated

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