

MA Documentary Filmmaking

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 leader.

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.		

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Areas of good practice

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

This is my report on the first cohort completing this programme. I would commend the Programme Leader for the careful design of the curriculum and assessments for this degree. I have been consulted at all stages from the time of programme development and throughout the first delivery of these modules. The programme team have outlined the rationale behind the programme with a clarity that places at its heart student learning and development. From my scrutiny of the work submitted for student assessments and from meetings with students it is evident that the care taken in these early stages has paid off as evidenced by the professional level of the final Major Projects completed by this cohort. The focus on the clear progression of knowledge and understanding of contemporary documentary filmmaking, alongside the increasing level of technical competencies in filming and in post-production over the period of study, has resulted in all students demonstrating that the course has enabled them all to improve substantially and all produce project work achieving suitable high levels. This is an outcome supported by the quality of teaching and careful constructive feedback which students received 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. *Not applicable if the course is not a professional body course please indicate here.	Yes	No	N/A *
	Yes		
<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 Board of Examiners (and or Examination Committee meeting you may also have attended).
The procedures and conduct of the Boards I attended on 7 th March 2017 and on 8 th March 2017 were carried out properly with appropriate representation from the programme team to ensure the accuracy of marks recorded and to report back on student progression. I was unable to attend on 22 nd June 2017, however, I was able to scrutinise student work, the marks and feedback in advance and to provide a short written report which was read to the Board.

(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.)
N/A

(c) The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions.
The overall performance of the students is comparable to students at this postgraduate level on other practice-based documentary filmmaking programmes in other UK HEIs. I will comment later regarding individual modules, however, a relevant general point is that this course has been designed to attract applicants with a wide range of previous experience including some with limited prior knowledge of filmmaking. The structure of the programme has enabled all to achieve the learning outcomes suitable for this postgraduate practice-based film course and for the full cohort to undertake a varied range of project work which demonstrates creative ambition, technical craft skills and editorial consistency at an

appropriate level. The quality of the highest graded films from their final projects is at a professional level. The diverse and varied topics for the Major Projects demonstrates that the degree programme has been successful in delivering the objectives set out in the programme rationale. Another aspect that I would commend is the teamwork and collaboration between students on their project work throughout the period of their studies which is vital in professional documentary filmmaking and is evident across the project work on the programme.

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

The student work demonstrates an understanding of the history of the film documentary as well as an awareness of the wide diversity of genres and approaches in contemporary documentary filmmaking. There have been some attempts by students to approach their practice project work and to demonstrate critical reflection on the theoretical debates regarding film practice. This could be developed further and incorporated with discussion about current debates about 'practice-as-research' within the modules in semesters 1 and 2.

The range of documentary topics is broad and reflects the diversity of the student cohort.

The student work demonstrates how they have improved their technical and craft skills for film camera, sound, and post-production editing and sound design. Students do have appropriate contact with professional practitioners and this is an important element of the programme keeping the student experience relevant to contemporary industry practice and bringing an awareness of the challenges of 'employability' for freelance filmmaking. The business models for funding new film documentary are evolving rapidly. There are many new platforms and individual filmmakers are no longer confined to pitching projects to commissioning editors from television broadcasters. There are new pathways such as crowd-funding and the importance of on-line portals (for example those hosted by film festivals). These new models are included in the programme curriculum, however, it is vital that this is kept up-to-date and relevant to the student experience. The incorporation of suitable contemporary case studies may be an effective way to ensure that the curriculum captures examples of innovation and change.

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

As is appropriate there is a range of different forms of formative and summative assessment for this programme. This includes group project work, screenings, individual oral presentations and pitches, individual portfolio submissions, and written reports and reflective journals. These are appropriate for this discipline. The balance of different types of assessment appears to work well. The grading and ranking reflects the range of individual achievement. The criteria for marking is clear and there is good evidence of consistency, double-marking and moderation. Through the variety of types of assessment it is possible to provide individual feedback to students utilising a range of methods including face to face tutorials as well as written feedback which is constructive and provides a clear explanation of what action(s) the student should take to improve and learn from their work on the module.

As this is the first delivery of the degree these assessments have been delivered for the first time. It is evident that the Programme Team has responded to student comments and feedback to make minor revisions to adapt and improve the coherence of the programme.

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

The curriculum and design of the programme is well structured in order to provide students with a suitable depth of knowledge and understanding. The student assessment submissions demonstrate that the teaching and learning on this programme is at an appropriate level. The full cohort has been successful in achieving the learning outcomes as evidenced by their work across the full range of assessments.

(g) Comments on the use of X-stream (Virtual Learning Environment) within the course (if applicable).

There is suitable use of the VLE – although at times as an External Examiner there have been glitches which have inhibited my access to MyBeckett. I have been provided with IT assistance although as an infrequent user the VLE can seem ‘user-unfriendly’. For access to larger files with student films and recorded oral presentations it has been easier for the Programme Leader to provide me with access through other platforms eg Google drive.

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

As stated above I have commended the programme design and the way in which there is a well formulated pedagogic structure with the coherent development of student knowledge, understanding and progression in gaining technical skills and competencies. This has supported all students to achieve the learning outcomes and to make steady progress in improving as documentary filmmakers.

Documentary Practice 1 – a module that provides a number of exercises to provide students with competencies across location film camera and sound and editing. The importance of teamwork is embedded across the programme and is introduced well in this module. The module also introduces the importance of the responsibilities for Health & Safety and Risk Assessment.

Creative Practice – an effective module to introduce students to the importance of experimentation and innovation. It is also enables students to develop a broad awareness of the numerous layers of ‘creativity’ in film work.

Documentary Research 1 – the module provides students with a broad knowledge and understanding of the history of the documentary tradition alongside awareness of contemporary currents. The assessment by oral presentation enables the student learning to be shared and students to learn from their peers.

Documentary Practice 2 – the portfolio assessment provides an innovative way for students to consolidate their learning and start to build a digital record which may also be useful on graduation as a way to present themselves as filmmakers.

Documentary Research 2 - on this module students demonstrate their understanding of the ethical issues and debates which are relevant to all contemporary documentary filmmaking.

Major Project – the films ranged across a wide number of topics reflecting a diverse student cohort. All projects demonstrated an appropriate high level of ambition and clearly achieved the learning outcomes. ‘Goodnight friend’ was a moving film exploring the emotional impact of the death of pets and other

companion animals. The contributors were treated with sensitivity. As a documentary this benefitted from a personal authored approach by the director. The film provided a good overview of the charities and support offered 'Fractured' was a well-made short example of factual broadcasting examining a local issues with broader national implications. 'Rise Up' was an impressionistic, collage documentary which told the story of a unique individual musical performer. This film was successfully built around the relationship between the filmmaker and subject. This resulted in the footage giving a revealing and authentic portrait of Daddy Chester. All the other projects demonstrated a suitable level of achievement. 'Church of Epiphany' was a portrait of a local community which establish real access to the local people of Gipton and gave an honest, unexploitative representation of the estate. 'My name is Hassan' told the story of a fascinating personal journey of a Bahraini dissident who came to the UK as a political refugee. 'My new life' gave insights into how two families struggle with the challenge of cultural and religious tolerance for both the Muslim and Christian communities. 'Rooted' was an example of a portfolio project with short-form films suitable for on-line delivery demonstrating the flexibility of the programme to respond to innovation in delivery and exhibition for contemporary film documentary content.

All of the projects demonstrated that the students were 'fully-formed' as filmmakers, telling stories that they believed were important, and creating films with clear 'unique individual voices'. To achieve this demonstrates the success of the programme in achieving its original aim.

Next Project Research – the students demonstrated their awareness of prospects for future employment and developed appropriate ideas for future development.

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

The experienced practitioner background of the programme team was essential in establishing the credibility of the programme with appropriate links to professional filmmakers, with the broadcasters and with industry events such as the Sheffield International Documentary Film Festival.

(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.

N/A

(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/marketing 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?			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?			
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?			
<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		

Examination Committee/Board of Examiners				
		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 Examination Committee/Board of Examiners?	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you were new:

(a) Did you attend a University external examiner development session during the 2016/17 academic year?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If not, was there a particular reason?

Attended 2nd December 2016

(b) Did you access the on-line External Examiner Induction Module?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If not, was there a particular reason?

(c) Did you receive any specific induction or other support from your School or Faculty?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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(d) Some inexperienced new examiners are formally mentored. Were you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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(e) Did you find the mentoring you received helpful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Any general or specific comments on the development and support offered by the University, especially improvements you would like to see:

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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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