

## MSc Journalism

### 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.
I would commend the use of the "workshop" assessment in the online journalism module as it appears to encourage engagement and points of assessment throughout the duration of the module.

## 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>N/A</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 the summer board 2018 on medical grounds but I supplied written feedback via email beforehand and was satisfied with the way the process was handled.

(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.)
Not relevant – 2017-18 is my first year as EE.

(c) The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions.
The samples of student work demonstrated an inevitable range of performance/ability/range of marks but was commensurate with equivalent HE programmes in the sector.  Some of the best work was of a very good standard and demonstrated the strengths of the programme, particularly focussed on features, writing and production.

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

It was clear that students generally had a solid grounding in terms of knowledge, conceptual grasp and applying skills related to journalism practice. The strengths of the strongest students lay in news and feature writing and production. From the work I saw, one weakness may be that it was not clear to the extent students were applying knowledge and employing skills to produce audio and video content, something which is key in the industry.

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

I was satisfied that the programme generally met required standards. I have made some comments regarding assessment on specific modules (see below) that the academic team may wish to discuss and act upon.

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

The curriculum is focussed importantly in giving students a solid grounding in the practice of journalism. The core modules provide fundamentals in terms of news writing, news gathering, law and ethics. However, it appears that web and audio/video modules remain options and I would recommend that the academic team, given the importance of these areas across the industry, look at ways as ensure they are eventually reflected in core provision.

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

I did not have access of the VLE until I reviewed the dissertation module in semester 3, so my comments are limited here. The VLE was used effectively for this module.

**(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.)**

I was satisfied with standards generally in terms of module content, consistency and the achievement of learning outcomes.

I have also provided some further detail to consider in the following modules:

**Feature Writing**

The sample of student work provided a standard and range of marks that were inevitably mixed but commensurate with equivalent HE programmes in the sector.

In terms of assessment, it is also laudable that students provide a range of feature material, including opinion and first person pieces, although I would like to see a definition of the term 'proper' feature. Does this mean a news feature?

It is also worth the team considering whether students should be encouraged to also publish their material on the web with appropriate multi-media content in order to demonstrate to potential

employers that, as well as understanding different approaches to writing, they can serve up their material for a digital audience.

Levels of feedback were adequate.

I noted that there were only two assessment criteria: content and house style. This can work effectively in order to focus students on simple criteria however the team may want to consider breaking the criteria down further e.g. 1. Strength of idea/level of interest 2. Strength of interviews. 3 Strength of writing including grammar and spelling 4. Legal and ethical considerations. This is not a recommendation (or criticism) but worth considering to further break down the elements students need to be aware of when producing content and adhering to house style.

It would also allow the team to feedback to individual assessment criteria for greater clarity to the student i.e. to allow them to know exactly how the mark was derived and where their strengths and weaknesses lie.

It would also allow the grade descriptor to be less generic. I would, however, recommend that the grade descriptor be amended to include all marking bands. At the moment it is conflated to over 70, 60-69, 50-59, 40/49 and under 40. The full marking range should be used to reflect student work and students should know what they need to do to achieve 90-100 or 80-90 or, conversely, why their mark is a score under 40 (ie the difference between a mark between 20-30 and 30-40.)

### **Journalism Theory**

The strength of the module is that the assessment aims to ensure students are armed with a historical/sociological context of journalism but also that it is applied to current debate.

It may be worth the team considering a two-pronged approach to assessment (e.g. two essays or an essay and presentation) to help fully achieve the module's learning outcomes (and ease the pressure of a 100% assessment for the student) although the current assessment does clearly relate to the learning outcomes.

I would also guide towards my comments on the previous module: there is only one assessment criteria (i.e. 'essay') on the assignment brief and I would ask the team whether it would be appropriate to break this down further e.g. strength of analysis, clarity of writing, strength of referencing. There may be sound pedagogical reasons for not doing so but it could be argued that greater depth of criteria – with mapped feedback – would provide greater clarity for students and strengthen their learning experience.

The grade descriptor is also again conflated. I would ask whether again the team could debate the merit of helping students understand the full range of marks.

### **Online Journalism:**

I would commend the module for engaging students in the practice of online journalism.

The online sandbox portal appeared limited but it does allow students to do the most important thing of publishing digital content with a range of media, with the necessary emphasis on students providing interviews and original material within all legal and ethical frameworks.

There did appear to be limited video content, however, and would ask the team to what extent students are taught to self-shoot on mobile phones or embed YouTube clips where appropriate.

Feedback appeared limited on the excel spreadsheet (it may be fuller elsewhere on the VLE) and I noted the range of marks were limited 48 to 73; I would encourage use of the full range of marks when appropriate.

I would commend the use of the "workshop" assessment in that it appears to encourage engagement and points of assessment throughout the module alongside the portfolio, although I was unclear about the assessment criteria (this could be elsewhere on the VLE).

### **Editing and Production**

The sample of student work again provided a standard and range of marks that were inevitably mixed but commensurate with equivalent HE programmes in the sector.

Feedback was fair but inconsistent – there was general feedback on one assignment while another gave feedback on each feature. Feedback also appeared not to be mapped to assessment criteria.

The reflective report reflected a range of ability but was very short and descriptive. The team could consider students including links referenced to literature/professional practice. Overall, this is an important module in which students acquire knowledge and skills regarding editing, copy writing and design. It again appeared print focussed - do students edit in a digital/web environment.

### **International Perspectives on Law, Ethics and Regulation**

This is an important module as it covers three fundamental areas: law, ethics and regulation. The essay questions were relevant and a good range of work was produced by the students. As each question appeared to cover one of the three areas, I would question whether students could pass the module without demonstrating knowledge of the other two, but would need to consult the academic team on this. There were clear grade descriptors and assessment criteria but no feedback appeared mapped against them – just one line or two lines of handwritten feedback.

### **Reporting**

This is another sound module, with adequate feedback, centred on core skills including news gathering, story-telling, and words-based material. I will seek clarity from the team about how multi-media production is formed in the programme.

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

Staff and students are clearly engaged in practice of journalism, informed by the team's knowledge of industry.

### **(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 would like to see all work to be provided through the VLE as a matter of course across the University – this gives convenient access for EEs to overview an entire programme, rather than a sample.

### **(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)?	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		

<b>Draft examination papers</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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		

<b>Draft coursework</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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		

<b>Marking Examination Scripts</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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?			
<b>Recommended sample sizes at Leeds Beckett University are as follows:</b>				
<p>a) <b>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>c) <b>Samples to consist of internally moderated work, clearly evidencing the moderation process.</b></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		

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

<b>Coursework/continuously assessed work</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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?			

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

<b>Module Board/Progression and Award Boards</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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>
X		
Were you new in post in academic year 2016/17?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>If you were new:</b>		
(a) Did you access the on-line External Examiner Induction Module?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If not, was there a particular reason?	<b>I was not aware of this but may have missed the email/communication about this.</b>	
(b) Did you receive any specific induction or other support from your School?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Some inexperienced new examiners are formally mentored. Were you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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:**

I would like to thank the academic and administration teams for their support and help.

Work in the first two semesters was sent by email. Most institutions now provide full access to the VLE to allow EEs to see a full picture of the programme. This was arranged for the dissertation module in semester 3. I would recommend full VLE access from the start of 18-19.

## 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

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

(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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