External Examiner's report summary

Leeds School Of Social Sciences

Undergraduate

- BASCR Sociology & Criminology(UG)
- BASPS Sociology & Psychological Stud(UG)
- SOCIY Sociology(UG)

Please indicate, 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.

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Standards Set

	Yes	No
"In my view, the threshold academic standards set for the modules/awards meet with the requirements of the relevant National Qualifications Statement's."	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' who have been awarded qualifications have had the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in course(s) or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar." *Not applicable – if you are a practitioner and are not in a position to assess this statement, please note here:	X		

Please provide any further comment on the comparability of collaborative provision

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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Conduct of process

	Yes	No	
"In my view, the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are reliable, 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.

Actions from last year's report
(This will not be relevant if you are examining for the first time)

Yes

Areas of good practice/commendation

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

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

	Yes	No	N/A*
"In my view, the professional body requirements for this course have been met. *Not applicable if the course is not a professional body courseplease indicate here.			

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.

(a) The operation and conduct of the Progression and Award Board (and/or Module Board meeting you may also have attended).

The Progression/Award Board was conducted fairly and effectively. The administrative support was particularly impressive given the unique circumstances of 2020.

(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.)

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

I commented last year on the relative generosity of marking and this year requested a reduction in marks in one module. Even so, this year there is a significant increase in the number of 1st class degrees awarded, a much higher percentage than last year or seen in comparable institutions with which I am familiar. This was not clear until the subject board because there was no overview of degree classifications. Although changes to the assessment regulations as a consequence of the special circumstances in 2020 had an impact in a handful of cases, even discounting this, there appears to be a marked upward drift in the percentage of 1st class degrees awarded

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

Students have a strong grasp of some key theoretical issues in the subject. In the modules I saw, there is little evidence of students developing skills in accessing or interpreting empirical data from official or other sources. The assessment diet offers few opportunities for students to gain experience accessing, interpreting or presenting contemporary social data. Where 'evidence' is cited, it is almost always from a secondary source (and for that reason) relatively dated.

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

The part of the programme that I saw is assessed overwhelmingly by a single item 3000 word coursework essay. I am not convinced of an argument that uses 'inclusivity' as a reason for removing the only exam and introducing more coursework essays. Some of the objections to exams can be overcome by rethinking the style and nature of the exam paper; short questions, an open-book exam, a seen paper, single question exam, multiple-choice papers, stimulus response exam. If we think that exams only test memory, then we try an open-book or seen paper. The emphasis is taken away from students being required to remember facts, figures, and other such information. Exams can also measure retrieval skills. It is possible to set questions which measure how well students can use and apply information, and how well they can find their way round the contents of books and even databases.
We should not want a return to the exams/coursework regime of the recent past. Instead there should be, at subject level, a strategic overview of all assessment tasks with the aim of encouraging innovation, variety and the use of new technologies.

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

Not able to comment on resourcing issues, though it appears that there are no pressing concerns about staffing.

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

The VLE is a rich and valuable resource for students and it is made good use of in some cases. It tends to be used largely as a repository of written material rather than a means for students to interact with each other and tutors. It would be useful to see more student activity on the VLE – group chats, blogs etc. The special circumstances of 2020 will have made the VLE critical, and we should expect greater use of it in future.

(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.)

Module content is consistent with stated outcomes and reflects staff research and scholarly activity. The main areas of sociology - theory, method and application – are represented. Obviously a relatively small staff team cannot offer many important areas of research in the subject e.g. health, religion, science and technology, education, social media, comparative sociology, etc. Assessment tasks tend to be a bit repetitive. Twenty credits gained for a 3000 word essay in nearly all the modules I have seen with few examples of a broadening of the assessment diet and nothing innovative.

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

I would draw attention to the material on 'Assessment for learning' by Graham Gibbs on the University website.

(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.

None

(k) Collaborative Provision: please include here any comments you wish to make on elements of

previously in this report).

N?A