



The Open
University

Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships (CICP)

External Examiner report template

An electronic copy of this report should be sent to:

cicp-external-examiners@open.ac.uk

Or, a signed hard copy sent to:

The Director, CICP, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA,
United Kingdom.

You should also submit a copy of this report to the institution.

Section A: General information

Institution:	University Centre Leeds/Leeds City College
Programme:	FD Photography and BA (Hons) Photography
Subject examined:	Photography
Name of examiner:	Paul Allen
Address:	
E-mail:	
Current year of appointment	2019-20, first.

Section B: External examiner's report

The reporting structure of this section is intended to help draw out issues which may require attention by the Institution or the University. It should not be seen as limiting in any way the range of issues which may be addressed or the level of detail given. The report will be considered as part of the annual evaluation process and, as such, external examiners are encouraged to be as frank and open as possible, but avoiding wherever possible references to individual staff or students. External examiners' attention is also drawn to 'The Guide for external examiners of OU validated awards', which should be forwarded by partner institutions to their external examiners.

Please comment as appropriate on:

1. The range of assessed material and information provided by the institution on which your report is based.

Across the visit and a remote review I have been able to access and evaluate, amongst other things:

- Physical and digital portfolios
- Physical and digital workbooks of supporting material
- Filmed presentations
- Essays
- Essay proposals and research folders
- Reports
- Instruction manuals

And had access to:

- Course staff
- Module/unit handbooks
- Assessment sheets
- Verification/moderation documents

All of this has been made easily accessible, viewable across different operating systems, and, where applicable, prepared to the expected standards.

2. Whether the standards set are appropriate for the award, or award element, by reference to any agreed subject benchmarks, qualifications framework, programme specification or other relevant information.

In my evaluation, the standards set are in accordance with the SBS for Art and Design 2017 and the individual levels align with the expectations detailed in the FHEQ Level Descriptors, Levels 4 to 6.

3. The quality of students' work, their knowledge and skills (both general and subject-specific) in relation to their peers on comparable programmes elsewhere.

The students evidence a wide range of technical skills as is appropriate for the contemporary photographic artist. As such, they have skills in digital and analogue capture and post-production; design skills appropriate to different modes of presentation; skills of analysis with regards visual and theoretical material; professional and business skills such as networking and self-promotion, and presentation skills. All of these are appropriate for the levels at which the students operate and there are clear signs of progression across the programme.

In conversation and through their work, the students evidently possess a wide range of knowledge appropriate to the studying and business of photography. As well as knowledge regarding genre-based practices, there is evidence of models of professional operation including securing commissions and funding and the nature of context specific portfolios. In addition, students are clearly aware of the myriad contexts for which photography is made and in which it operates, and the resulting necessity for them to be able to operate in different commercial contexts, recontextualising their practice.

Overall, the quality of the work viewed is appropriate to a full spread of achievement and so reflects what one would expect to see in any cohort and is, as such, similar to other institutions. One aspect of note is that the work doesn't evidence a house style and so reflects the broad interests of the students and abilities of the teaching team.

4. The strengths and weaknesses of the students

Strengths:

- The students possess a very good range of technical skills, professionally appropriate and applicable early on in the programme. In addition, there is a technical curiosity which sees individuals self-motivated to continuously develop their skills in relation to the specific needs of their projects.
- There is an awareness of the creative industries, the opportunities there are in them, the ways in which photographers function businesswise, and the processes by which work is secured. By the end of the programme students are ready for work.
- Knowledge of the contexts for photography and its commercial applications.
- In person, the students are passionate and articulate when talking about their work and course.

Weaknesses:

- Students evidently struggle to evaluate their own practice. As an example, when engaged in the discussions with professionals for the L6 unit Making a Professional Network, students were primarily descriptive when talking about their work in general and projects specifically. As such, they tend towards anecdote about the making of the work and assertions about how it functions. This weakness is noticeable elsewhere.
- While the course team puts a lot of effort into the delivery of theory, the relationships between theory and practice seem not to be as understood or as appreciated as one would hope for an undergraduate programme. From experience, it's a challenge in many an institution.

- A number of Level 6 dissertations (Professional Practice and Research Project) were off topic and so didn't evidence sufficient engagement with the medium.

5. The quality of teaching and learning, as indicated by student performance

Generally, the teaching is what one would hope for. As best as I can ascertain from the paperwork, the record of activities, and the conversations I have had with staff and students, the staff possess a wide range of skills and knowledge which they share through stimulating sessions made up of lectures, seminar, tutorials and workshops, etc.

The course is shaped with a clear student trajectory from Level 4 to Level 6, with the demands becoming increasingly rigorous intellectually, creatively, and technically.

If one includes assessment feedback as part of a student's development, then this is something which needs a little attention. At present, and from evidence seen at the end of both semesters, there is a tendency to make broad developmental comments in the assessment feedback: portraits could be developed further or more theory could have been read, for example. In the absence of context and detail, how the portraits could be developed and what theory could be read, this doesn't offer clear guidance. It would be advantageous for the student to be given more instruction to accompany these comments, in particular and where applicable, some based on the Learning Outcomes.

Similarly, observational comments regarding levels of achievement could be more explicitly linked to the grading criteria. One example this semester saw all students being told that their work was good even though their grades differed by forty percentage points. It's a minor point, but students comparing their feedback might wonder why their grades are so different when the feedback isn't. Again, drawing on the language of the grading criteria to find the vocabulary for the feedback will make it more grade specific and explicit.

It needs noting that students receive verbal as well as written feedback so these areas might well be sufficiently covered but more detailed written guidance offers the students something to refer back to once the excitement or disappointment over the grade has passed.

6. The quality of the curriculum, course materials and learning resources

The curriculum has clearly been carefully constructed so as to guide students through a ninety-week experience that is founded on ideas about practice, theory and professionalism. As such, the modules and classes of study guide students through subject areas discretely initially, making explicit the links between them as the course progresses, culminating in a semester which sees all three as significant to students and post university success. The materials supporting this are, comments elsewhere aside, produced to a very high standard.

One small query is regarding the Level 5 Semester 2 module Contextualising Photography for which students, as per item 7 of the module guide, were required to make a Portfolio of

work but which at this assessment was a research folder. There seems to be some confusion regarding the demands of the Semester 1 Contextualising Your Photographic Practice and the Semester 2 Contextualising Photography modules which needs clarifying.

With regards contextual studies, the curriculum is really interesting and, from the outset, covers a broad range of material appropriate to the medium and its study. As such, students get material covering Photographic practices as well as discourses of analysis all of which informs their practice. I would, however, like to see the Level 6 essays being more explicitly concerned with Photography and, if it's deemed appropriate and beneficial, more clearly linked to or informing the final visual project. This year subjects included misogynistic language in rap, conspiracy theories and 911, and the socioeconomics of the North, none of which were addressed through the medium of study. As preparation for the essays starts in Semester 1, this means that students miss a year of pertinent academic study. Further, given the specialist nature of the of the subjects, it's not clear how students can be supported with such investigations.

The students have access to a wide range of quality resources including studios, darkrooms, digi suites, and cameras, all of which are maintained to a high standard. In conversation, it was clear that while the students were happy with what they have, they didn't fully appreciate how lucky they are.

7. The quality and fairness of the assessments, in particular their:

(i) design and structure

A full range of assessment modes are utilised to evaluate student performance including essays, research folders, workbooks, portfolios of work, presentations, manuals, and an interview.

(ii) relation to stated objectives and learning outcomes of the programme

The modes of assessment relate explicitly to the Learning Outcomes and enable the course team to effectively assess performance.

(iii) marking

The grading criteria were carefully applied across all three levels and both semesters although there was some minor inflation in Level 6 in Personal Photographic Project. It was one piece of work which had been second marked and the feedback implied that evidence from outside the submission had been seen. It's one example and gives no cause for concern.

The internal moderations sheets for Semester 1 implied that the work had been team rather than second marked (the 1st and 2nd markers grades were the same in all instances). This was remedied for Semester 2 but the 2nd marker tended to offer bands of grades rather single figures. None of the grades seemed to be significantly different from

the 1st marker's and I would remind the team that the institutions regulations on 2nd marking need to be followed.

It's unclear whether or not strict timings are kept to with presentations and the lengths do seem to vary beyond, say, margins similar to those which might be applied to word counts. While it's a minor point, students who follow the guidance on such things are disadvantaged by comparison to others who stretch time to cover the content they feel they wish to include.

8. Where the programme has specific work-related learning outcomes (e.g. Foundation Degrees) please comment on the assessment and achievement of these outcomes, including employers' involvement where relevant.

There is a professional studies module in each level that offers the students opportunities to investigate and engage with the industry in a broad sense, culminating in the Level 6 presentation with working professionals. The modes of assessment are appropriate to the content and industry professionals are involved in delivery and consulted in assessment (at L6). The grades of achievement reflect the spread seen elsewhere and at their best indicate a readiness for work.

9. The administration of the assessments, operation of examination boards, briefing of external examiners, access of external examiners to essential materials, etc.

All the necessary information has been made available and I have been sufficiently guided through the processes. Everything has been administered with the rigor and professionalism one would expect and has been experienced elsewhere.

10. Have all the issues identified in your previous report been addressed by the institution?

YES/NO – please delete as appropriate.

Not applicable, this is my first report.

If no, please comment

11. *(For chief external examiners or those with responsibility for the whole programme – if in doubt please check with the appointing institution)*

Please confirm that the assessment and standards set for the programme as a whole, including all its pathways, modules or individual courses are consistent and appropriate, and that the processes for assessment and determination of awards are fair and sound across the provision.

12. Any other comments

The course team is to be congratulated on the support they have provided for the students in the second semester, and thanked for the welcome they have offered their new External Examiner.

Please ensure that you sign and date below, if sending a hard copy of this report

Signed:



Date:

14th July 2020.