

Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships (CICP)

External Examiner report template

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
Current year of appointment	2021-22, second.

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 two remote viewings I have been able to access and evaluate:

- Digital portfolios and annotated contact sheets (pdfs)
- Digital publications (pdf books and magazines)
- Digital workbooks and supporting material
- Digital exhibitions
- Filmed presentations and recorded online ones conducted via Teams
- Essays and reports via Turnitin
- Student blogs and diaries

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. Occasionally, a document or file was locked but this was easily remedied.

I was particularly impressed with the production of the online exhibitions offering a rewarding facsimile of the real thing.

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 2019 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 capture and post-production; design skills appropriate to different modes and contexts of presentation; skills of analysis with regards visual and theoretical material; professional and business skills such as networking and self-promotion (impressive, given the circumstances), 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 programmes.

As evidenced by their work, the students 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 and the nature of context specific practices. 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.

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.

I would, however, like to draw the course team's attention to the fact that at Level 6, it is possible for a student to produce a body of work without them having investigated theoretical material pertinent to the genre, context, or subject, something necessary for the conceptual understanding and critical evaluation of the subject. This is something I recommend the college considers in the forthcoming review of the level.

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 to support the development of such work to the high standards that the students achieve.

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 and arts applications.
- At their best, they make excellent work which is creative, contextually appropriate, thought provoking and accomplished.
- Problem solving.
- Collaborative working.

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 on the course and continues from last year. It needs to be noted that this is a weakness that colleagues from other institutions are seeing, so isn't specific to Photography at UCL/LCC.
- 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. See the note in Section 3, above; further, it isn't limited to Level 6.

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 outcomes, the staff possess a wide range of skills and knowledge which they share through stimulating sessions made up of lectures, seminars, 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 excellent. A change from last year has seen the course team offering observations and developmental comments against the individual learning outcomes such that it is clear in the paperwork what the student has done well and what needs further attention. It is clear that a lot of time and attention has gone into this process and the feedback comments now form an explicitly valuable part of the student experience.

As noted elsewhere, the students' performances suggests that they have access to staff capable of addressing a wide range of applications to which photography might be put, and who are capable of effectively sharing their knowledge such that the students can achieve as well as they do.

By inference, the teaching is delivered with a passion for the subject and individual student progression.

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

The curriculum has clearly been carefully constructed so as to guide students through an 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, generally, as significant to the students and their post university success. The materials supporting this are produced to a very high standard.

As noted in Section 3, the curriculum does make it possible for students to make work (and I want to record that this work is generally made to a very high standard) without investigating appropriate contextual material. The Learning Outcomes for Personal Photographic Project don't explicitly direct the students towards theory, although I note that the guidance notes do, nor is the module linked to Research Project (of course, it doesn't need to be), so, as happened this year, students can make work appropriate to a particular context without evidencing an awareness of the associated theoretical debates. There is, perhaps, some work to be done here to ensure that students have access to the material they need which, given the circumstances, has been a challenge this year, but they do need to know the debates as well as the techniques.

In addition, the limited time that students have had to access campus resources seems not to have hindered their progress at all. As best as one can tell from the work produced, students have had regular access to staff, and general access to the necessary high quality digital resources appropriate to capture and post-production.

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, digital portfolios of work, presentations, interviews, and digital exhibitions.

(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

There was an issue at the Semester 1 review in that I was of the view that quite a number of the grades awarded were generous; the submissions lacked the critical content as detailed by the Learning Outcomes. I was initially of the view that over-marking was consistently so but upon reflection and after consulting with colleagues at the college, it became clear that inaccuracies were inconsistent and, therefore, a single correction couldn't be applied. Consequently, all of the work was remarked and I am satisfied that the grades awarded for the first semester are an accurate reflection of student achievement. I have no such concerns about the work viewed at the end of Semester 2; the grades accurately reflect student achievement of the Learning Outcomes measured against the Grading Criteria. And, having been able to see every student's work, I am content that the grading is fair, as well as accurate. The course team is to be applauded for work undertaken between the two visits in addressing and remedying the situation.

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 Level 5 module was impacted upon by issues with the cohort and while that might have been disappointing for the participating students, the course team did offer suitable experiences and content.

The grades of achievement reflect the spread seen elsewhere and at their best indicate a readiness for work.

Given the situation, the course and students have done well to maintain the quality of delivery and engagement of external professionals for these modules.

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. My primary concern last year was the Research Project content that addressed cultural ideas beyond the form, the challenges supporting and assessing such work, and the potential limitations such research placed on students' preparedness for work and further study. Students have clearly been directed towards topics more explicitly related to Photography this year and produced appropriate papers.

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 throughout the year, the developmental work that has gone into addressing the accuracy of the assessments and expanding the feedback to students, and their ability to school students through a wide range of photographic practices to the production of very high quality outcomes.

I would draw their attention to the issue of making explicit the need to ensure that students in the top-up year engage in theory appropriate to their area of practice.

The course continues to produce students ready to enter industry who are accomplished technically and creatively, and conscious of the fast changing nature of contemporary creative industries. There is evidently a good ethos shared by the teaching team and students.

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

Signed:



Date:

8th July 2021.

