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External Examiner report template

Section A: General information

Institution:	**The Harrogate College (validated by Leeds City College)**
Programme:	**MA Creative Practice**
Subject examined:	**Creative Practice**
Name of examiner:	**Dr James W Brogden**
Address:	
E-mail:	
Current year of appointment	**4**

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 to include confirmation that sufficient evidence was received to enable your role to be fulfilled.
The range of assessed material made available was appropriate.
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.
The standards set were appropriate to similar programmes and national benchmarks.
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 quality of students' work in relation to the creation of 'creative practice' production across a variety of media was comparable to programmes elsewhere, and in some 'practice-based outcomes', exceeded comparable programmes.
4. The strengths and weaknesses of the students
The students' strengths are revealed in their commitment to their own self-directed creative practice and self-reflections, which in turn, are informed by their admiration for the work of other creative practitioners. Furthermore, the students have enhanced the availability of their work to the 'outsider' by a sophisticated use of digital YouTube presentations, providing welcome insights into their creative process etc. Such digital presentations make their work available to a wider audience beyond the MA programme, whilst inculcating an awareness of self-promotion and its relationship to self-reflection. Moreover, I was very pleased to see that working sketchbooks had received a similar digital treatment through the use of 'My Album.com' digital sequencing. This digital reconsideration of working sketchbooks 'in-progress' provided another invaluable opportunity for each student to reflect and evaluate on the creative design process, and the inherent narrative of their work. And of course, it make it easier for the External Examiner to follow the development of each project.
Overall, the weaknesses evident in the students' module work in comparison to similar MA programmes reside in the critical and contextualization of their creative practice work. In this sense, the students are competent in researching their own 'favourite' artists who they feel and allegiance with, but often their critical writing lacks the expansiveness expected by

other MA students. In this context, the students; creative work would benefit from a more rigorous critical analysis, one which would include an informed reference to critical and cultural studies scholars and the related literature. The exploration of the literature needs to extend beyond the texts associated with working as an artist or establishing a exhibition etc. The wider intellectual and socio-cultural context in which a student's work is produced and consumed needs to be more exploratory, instead of relying on their existing knowledge when they join the programme. And in this way, the staff should (through the tutorial system) actively direct the students to a broader range of critical / theoretical materials, disseminated through lectures and seminars etc. The reason that I raise this issue, is because the evidence of theoretical underpinning of students' work is extremely light when compared with other similar MA programmes. I recognise that this is a challenge to both students and staff, especially when the programme attracts ' mature' students who might have a fixed idea about their creative work. But surely, the programme should not be a simple extension of a student's existing approach to their creative work? Rather, the MA is an opportunity to experiment and develop new intellectual perspectives on the creative process itself, in which the 'comfort zone' of the student is provoked in a supportive way? The ideal module to anchor some of these thoughts would be the module 1. Critical Contexts, which would allow each student to critically reflect on their existing creative practice and its development.

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

The quality of teaching is obviously very supportive and empathetic to the personal background of each student. There are good examples of creative outcomes, which in the main, evidence each student's creative preoccupations. My observations in 4. Could be reiterated here, in that students need to expand their engagement with a broader critical and theoretical literature, one that would eschew creative practice as a purely vocational activity.

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

The curriculum is coherent in relation to the overall development towards a final creative practice exhibition, but could be viewed as somewhat repetitive in its module structure; the over emphasis on self-reflection and students choosing their own themes/ directions. The first year of the curriculum could re-evaluate how much choice each student has in terms of thematic choice? Perhaps there needs to be a weighted prescriptive module element, which makes each student solve creative practice problems, rather than follow their own intuitions? Prescriptive module projects with creative problems might help to reconfigure a student's approach to their creative aspirations? The first year could more deliberately include theoretical texts that students have to engage with in order to produce work? Adjustments to module assessment weightings could be designed to include more theoretical elements.

The course materials and learning resources have improved since my previous Report. The inventive approach shown by both staff and students in relation to the covid crisis should be commended.

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

(i) design and structure

I can confirm that the quality of assessments and their documentation have improved since my previous Report. The assessment feedback sheets show genuine critical rigour,

including clear and substantive constructive staff comments that relate to each learning outcome in italics. My only query in relation to the feedback weighted marks is how they are averaged into a final grade mark? Is there a formula that reveals a final grade?

(ii) relation to stated objectives and learning outcomes of the programme
I noted in my recent access to the documents that in the Module. 5 Masters Project that the grading descriptor for 'Level 7' 90%-100% stated that: 'Presentation is logical, error-free and, where appropriate, creative.' This is a bizarre descriptor for a mark that is exceptional? One would hope that a mark of between 90%-100% is highly creative! Also, when would being 'creative' be inappropriate? Might I suggest the use of the following terms to re-word this descriptor: outstanding creativity, exceptional professionalism, outstanding conceptual thinking…
(iii) marking to include comments on whether marking scheme / grading criteria has been consistently applied
In general, the marking scheme and grading criteria has been produced in a fair way that is clear to students. As noted earlier, the staff feedback comments in relation to specific learning outcomes is excellent.

8. Where the programme has specific work-related learning outcomes (e.g. Apprenticeships and Foundation Degrees) please comment on the assessment and achievement of these outcomes, including employers' involvement where relevant.
N/A
9. The administration of the assessments, operation of examination boards, briefing of external examiners, access of external examiners to essential materials, etc.
In general, this has been very professional and much appreciated during these 'unprecedented' times, although access to the TEAMS exam board was problematic.
10. Have all the issues identified in your previous report been addressed by the institution?
YES (I'm pleased that my Report comments regarding the clarity of students' developmental work in arbitrary sketchbooks has been addressed by the use of digital presentations.
If no, please comment
11. 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, reliable and transparent across the provision. *(For those with responsibility across the whole programme or for chief external examiners – if in doubt please check with the appointing institution)*
Yes
12. Any other comments

Please ensure that you sign and date below, if sending a hard copy of this report	
Signed:	Dr James W Brogden
Date:	14th September 2020