



University of East Anglia

PARTNERSHIPS OFFICE

ANNUAL EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT

Name of institution examined: INTO UEA

Faculty/School

Course Title(s) International Pre-Sessional English Programme
Language and Study Skills Modules

Academic Year: 2018/19

External Examiner Name: Jane Sjoberg

External Examiner's home University / College or Other Professional / Institutional Affiliation: University of Birmingham

NB – External Examiner reports are widely circulated, therefore students and staff should not be individually identified. Course Teams will respond to the recommendations made by the External Examiner in the boxes provided. The response should be counter signed by the Head of HE or equivalent within ten working days.

An electronic copy of this report should be emailed to the Head of HE (or equivalent) at the partner institution, to arrive no later than one month after the main assessment board meeting. You will receive a copy of the report with the Course Team's response completed.

Sufficient Evidence Checklist

Please can you confirm the following:

Programme materials

Did you receive:	Y	N	N/A
a. Programme handbook(s)?	Y	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Programme regulations (these may be in the programme handbook)?	Y	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Module descriptions (these may be in the programme handbook)?	Y	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Assessment briefs/marketing criteria?	Y	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Draft examination papers

- a. (i) Did you receive all the draft papers? Y
- (ii) If not, was this at your request?
- b. (i) Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? Y
- (ii) If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?
- c. Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments? Y

Marking examination scripts

- a. (i) Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts? Y
- (ii) If you did not receive all the scripts, was the method of selection satisfactory? Y
- b. Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate? Y
- c. Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks? Y

Dissertations/project reports

- a. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? n/a
- b. Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate? n/a

Coursework/continuously assessed work

- a. Was sufficient coursework made available to you for assessment? Y
- b. Was the method and general standard of marking and consistency satisfactory? Y

Orals/performances/recitals/appropriate professional placements

- a. Were suitable arrangements made for you to conduct orals and/or moderate performances/recitals/appropriate professional placements? X

Final examiners' meeting

- a. Were you able to attend the meeting? Y
- b. Was the meeting conducted to your satisfaction? Y
- c. Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board of Y

Examiners?

Maintaining Threshold Academic Standards

Please provide feedback on whether:

The programme and its component parts are coherent with learning outcomes aligned with the relevant qualification descriptor and subject benchmark statements where applicable

The preessional programmes are of different weeks' length based on students' initial English levels. The guiding principles and general learning outcomes for each course have been established to guarantee a valuable learner experience, providing academic study skills and core language that the students will need to deploy on their chosen course of study. Principles and outcomes also ensure that the course, endorsed by UEA, is representative of the quality and attainment levels expected on other validated and accredited preessional programmes of similar length and intensity. Learning outcomes and course design are fully aligned with the expected qualification requirements of external bodies i.e. UKVI and are appropriate for students to meet the language entry requirements of the various programmes they have applied for. Informed use of other relevant benchmarking tools such as CEFR is also evident, particularly in the design and assessment of shorter courses. Though this does lead to several different marking systems being used contemporaneously, the blended system of percentage grades, CEFR bands and IELTS scores appears sufficiently clear to enable teachers and assessors to use a more flexible approach in the documentation of formative and summative grades and the tracking of individual students' progress.

The programme reflects appropriate PSRB requirements where applicable

N/A

Assessments in modules of the same level are of a comparable standard to those in other UK HEIs

Assessments of productive and receptive language and study skills are designed to reflect attainment at B2 (6.00 - 6.5 IELTS) level and above and are of a comparable standard with those of other HE institutions in my experience. The use of continuous assessment for the shorter courses in which students require improvement perhaps only on one or two skills is not such common practice. This has been made more rigorous this year by combining formative progress check information with grades from summative assessments.

The curriculum is current

This is a strength. Course content and formative and summative assessments are regularly updated to reflect current developments and interests in broad academic areas of relevance to the different cohorts and to ensure that UKVI regulations on assessing proficiency in all four skills areas are met. Recommended texts are relevant and up-to-date.

Students would like clearer more overt suggestions for self-study practice in order to improve quickly. Teachers expressed some concerns at the appropriateness of the Cottrell Study Skills book which is not seen as very user-friendly at this level.

Assessment criteria, marking schemes and arrangements for classification are set at the appropriate level

Marking schemes and criteria with explanatory descriptors for writing and speaking are internally consistent with bands and step-marking indicators. As discussed, given that some students (albeit a small proportion) do achieve higher levels, I recommend thinking about the use of descriptors across the whole range of marks at the top end (C1+ C2 IELTS 7.5) which will reflect 'high distinction'.

The use of percentage grades in combination with IELTS scores and CEFR bands is very complex. Use broad categories for marking may make it hard to indicate subtle differences between students' performance in various areas. A great deal of thought has gone into ensuring that grades and IELTS/CEFR equivalences are as consistent as possible. However, in the light of the desire to move towards programme validation I recommend looking at ways of simplifying this in some way e.g. percentage grades for all summative assessments which are then given an IELTS equivalent based on a table consistent with departmental entry requirements. This can also ensure that the grading process is more in line with general university practices.

Measuring Achievement, Rigour and Fairness

Please provide feedback on whether:

The types of assessment are appropriate for the subject, the students, the level of study and the expected outcomes

Assessment includes formative and summative writing tasks of vary lengths, including opportunities for practice in research and referencing skills and timed writing. Both of these reflect the kind of authentic academic writing students will be engaged in on UG and PG programmes of study. As this is my first year of appointment, I did not on this occasion compare this year's assessments or assessment data with that of previous years. To the best of my knowledge topics and texts are changed regularly. This will become more apparent should my appointment continue.

The use of oral presentations for assessment of speaking skills is reflective of good practice in HE contexts and provides value-added to students as they are practising and preparing for a skill that many will need on their destination programmes. Reading skills are assessed in a specific exam which is designed to test comprehension and vocabulary. Teachers expressed a desire to see more specific work on longer more authentic academic reading e.g. journal articles. Should I continue in the appointment and should this kind of assessed task feature in the programme I would also like to see a recording of an assessed seminar discussion providing this is not too difficult logistically and is not unduly disruptive to students.

The marking scheme/grading criteria have been properly and consistently applied, and internal marking is of an appropriate standard, fair and reliable

Based on a sample of longer and shorter writing tasks and a sample of presentation recordings, I observe that criteria are applied fairly and consistently. Teacher feedback shows consistent reference to the criteria and double marking and moderation are used well to ensure a rigorous, fair and reliable assessment for all summative assessments viewed. Teachers I met reported that they were highly satisfied with the marking and moderation training and assessment processes in general.

Some further information regarding how step-marking (a common practice in HEIs) is applied at the marking and moderation stage would be useful.

The use of continuous assessment on shorter courses where students have a higher level entry point is done for very good reasons in encouraging teachers to evaluate language progress in real terms rather than wholly based on test results. Looking at samples of graded work and tracking documents I observe that descriptors and records of progress are applied in appropriate ways. CEFR bands are used as a constructive and flexible tool and I understand the reluctance to use IELTS or numerical scores for continuous assessment. However, the combined presence of CEFR, percentage grades and IELTS scores on the final gradesheet may make comparison difficult e.g. of grades across courses by length, discipline cohorts and overall student achievement from year to year. As you move towards validation and bring the preessional courses in line with university practice, the continued use of continuous assessment may prove challenging. I recommend seeking some input from the wider university when and if considering changes. Should my EE appointment continue, I look forward to seeing how you are able to streamline this in the future.

The assessment processes are carried out in accordance with the institution's regulations and procedures

As an academic partnership, I am confident that INTO works closely with UEA to ensure that assessments are carried out following university regulations processes and procedures. At the moment there is no provision for resits. I imagine this is due to the tight schedule of preessional courses and the need for students to convert CAS into an unconditional accept to progress onto their course. However, in the light of the intention to achieve full validation, this may be something that will need to be revisited.

Procedures governing mitigating/extenuating circumstances, academic integrity/ misconduct and borderline performances have been considered fairly and equitably applying institutional regulations

No cases of mitigating circumstance were presented to me. The use of step marking and broad IELTS bands makes the need to review borderline cases less likely. There was evidence of careful moderation in cases where students lacked half a band in one skill area in order to ensure that students were fairly and equitably evaluated. Plagiarism cases were examined carefully by the appropriate plagiarism officer and plagiarism hearings were held in line with institutional regulations with the exception of the time allowed between communication of the result and the hearing. This necessity is clearly signalled to students on posters around the building but is not currently included in the student handbook. I recommend that there more detail regarding plagiarism procedures and possible penalties be included in handbooks. Communication with students as to what would happen during and following a plagiarism hearing and their right to appeal was clear and timely. All plagiarism cases were deemed to be 'medium' and the ensuing penalties were fair. At the time of writing this report two students had decided to appeal against this penalty. Good use was made of Turn-it-in and comparative language analysis to establish the type and extent of possibly plagiarised work. You may like to consider increased use of Turn-it-in at draft stages as a formative instrument for teachers to give every opportunity to students to address the risk of copy-paste plagiarism (it should be possible to decide that a text is not included in Turn-it-in's repository so that a second draft does not appear as plagiarised).

Comparability of Standards and Student Performance

Reflecting on your experience at other institutions please provide feedback on:

The comparability of standards and student achievement:

- across the modules within a single programme
- across programmes within a single subject area in an awarding institution
- across programmes within a single subject area across institutions of which you have experience
- any of the above, across cohorts during your period of appointment

Good standards of assessment and achievement were observed across all programmes (16-week, 12-week, 8-week and 6-week) with some students on shorter courses achieving well above the required standard. Moderation of borderline cases (where students lacked half a band in one skill area) seemed to be necessary rather more for the 12-week programme. A comparative post-assessment analysis of tested areas may show up whether this was perhaps due to certain tests being harder than in previous years. Results and pass-rates are comparable with final results observed in other pre-sessional programmes with which I am familiar but it should be borne in mind that final results of other programmes observed are based on additional resits when students have initially failed in one or more skill areas.

Enhancement of Quality

Please provide comment and recommendations on:

Good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment you have observed

As expected in the EAP sector, assessments are designed to provide a complete picture of students' productive and receptive language skills across all four areas: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Appropriate testing of study skills such as listening to lectures and note-taking, research, critical thinking and referencing are also designed into assessments showing the value-added of the pre-sessional course beyond IELTS. Length of written assessments (word count) and presentations (minutes) is in line with comparable pre-sessional programmes. There seemed to be a themed approach in summative assessments (based on the broad topic of language). While this ensures that topics are broadly accessible to students of all backgrounds and disciplines, having the same general topic across two assessments may lead to confusion. In my experience this is more likely in listening tests where students may recall information that they have been exposed to elsewhere rather than focus on what they are actually hearing.

The use of a portfolio and continuous assessment approach combined with opportunities for formative and summative assessment in the shorter courses (8 and 6 week) is perhaps less representative of other HE programmes. However, despite the complexities mentioned above, thanks to the careful monitoring by the course coordinators and appropriate standardisation support for teachers, this approach appears to guarantee that standards of marking and feedback are high and in line with comparable programmes in other HEIs.

Opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students

The course focuses on both language and study skills, helping students to prepare for the linguistic demands of studying in the UK HE environment by exposing them to various academic practices such as seminars, presentations, lectures and exploratory research to engage critically with a topic. Meetings with both student representatives and teachers showed that the main pre-sessional stakeholders are highly satisfied with the quality of provision. Students were very happy with the standard of teaching. Rather inevitably, they would like more test practice but I am confident that this take place to a sufficient degree in order to prevent 'teaching to the test'. Students on shorter courses expressed a desire for

more 1-1 tutorial contact with teachers. While I understand that to differentiate support based on learning needs some students need more 1-1 support than others, the apparent 'disparity' has caused concern among the student representatives I met. I suggest that the number and nature of 1-1 tutorial meetings could be made more consistent across programmes and that this is clarified in the student handbook. Both teachers and students mentioned the need for greater exposure to real complex academic reading during the course. As course-books do not provide this kind of text exposure, this could perhaps be done by a revision of some of the in-house booklets and/or the creation of a reading syllabus. This also responds to some teachers' suggestions about how the course could perhaps prepare students a bit more to manage and deal with real academic reading loads.

Also, please:

State whether you received sufficient evidence to enable your role to be fulfilled. If not, please provide details

Yes. Thank you very much for ensuring that I had everything I required and for making my experience a pleasant one in what is often, I know, a stressful time for all involved. I was sent draft versions of the assessments and was very happy to see that my comments were received and acted upon.

State whether issues raised in the previous report(s) have been, or are being, addressed to your satisfaction

No previous reports available to my knowledge.

Use this space to address any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body

N/A

Give an overview of your term of office if this is your final year

N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS, RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN

Please list your recommendations for action by the course team:

External Examiner's Recommendations for action <i>(to be completed by External Examiner)</i>	Course Team's Response (action to be taken and measurable outcomes) <i>(to be completed by Course Leader)</i>	By whom <i>(to be completed by Course Leader)</i>	By when <i>(to be completed by Course Leader)</i>
Consider reviewing the way in which grades are recorded to ensure ease of comparison.	We can make the grading more transparent by showing grades and equivalences in the handbook and on Blackboard	Rosalind Boote	March 2020
Please provide a rationale and/or guidelines/instructions provided to assessors for step-marking	Guidelines to be produced for second markers and Co-ordinators.	Rosalind Boote	March 2020
Please revise descriptors to reflect higher end achievement (C1+ and above)	We have started looking at this for the writing and speaking criteria.	Senior Team	March 2020
Please include clearer details of plagiarism policy and processes in the student handbook	We can add the plagiarism process to the Handbook and Blackboard. This will be part of a wider discussion about Plagiarism and how we can limit it.	Rosalind Boote	March 2020
Consider the use of turn-it-in to inform draft feedback	This will be part of a wider discussion around the research essay and plagiarism on PSE.	Bill Horncastle/Senior team	March 2020

Report completed by:

Signature

Jane Sjoberg

Date: 19/09/2019

COURSE TEAM'S GENERAL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

We thought the report was thorough and fair. Jane mentioned a couple of points in her report, though not in her recommendations which we can reflect on for next year.

She commented in her report that the 2 main courses using different grading systems is potentially confusing. As a team, we are secure in our reporting system and as we were endorsed using this system, we are not going to streamline it.

The final grades are all reported to admissions in % and IELTS equivalencies.

She referred a few times to the fact PSE is going to be validated, which is not the case.

Her recommendations were realistic and achievable, so we are generally happy with the report.

We hope she will return next year.

Responses and Action Plan completed by:

Course Leader:

Date:

Rosalind Boote

28/10/19

(Please print name and sign)

Countersigned by:


Head of HE (or
equivalent)

Date:


Jeremy Moyle

1/11/19

To be completed by the Partnerships Office:

A	No action identified	
B	Identified action and picked up appropriately	X
C	Identified action and not picked up appropriately or action not identified	
 Hannah Jackson Assistant Head of Partnerships 12 November 2019		

To be completed by Academic Director of Partnerships

A	No action identified	
B	Identified action and picked up appropriately	X
C	Identified action and not picked up appropriately or action not identified	
 Professor Ian Dewing Academic Director of Partnerships 13 November 2019		