



Birmingham Newman University

External Examiner's Report 2024/25

Please note that in line with national requirements, this report will be published on the University website. Please do not refer to individual students by name or number in the report. Where your report addresses circumstances relating to an individual or small group of students (not named) these details will be omitted from the published version it may be possible to identify the individuals concerned from the description of the circumstances.

Please complete all sections of the report to provide a comprehensive assessment of the programme/subject area examined and the administrative arrangements of the University.

Once your report has been received, the Programme team will respond formally using the new section at the end of this form and a copy, including their response and an action plan appropriate, will be returned to you.

Name:	Jamie Grant
Subject/Programme/Course:	Theology, Christ the Redeemer College BA (Hons) Theology and MA Theology, Leadership and Ministry
Year of Appointment:	2024-25

THE REPORT

Please comment on each of the headings in your report below (insert additional pages, where necessary):

Scope of Examinations and Examination Methods

Examiners are asked to confirm that the assessment procedures of the subject/course/programme are appropriate to the subject matter, and are relevant, properly demanding and designed to allow for the display of knowledge at a level that compares favourably with other institutions offering similar provision.

Assessment methods are appropriate to the subject area, sufficiently diverse and relevant to the ILOs of the programme and the individual modules. They were all properly demanding, they are appropriate to the more vocational nature of the degree programmes and are properly benchmarked to accepted QAA standards for the respective levels of study. There is a good mix of modes of assessment across the modules with a mix of written and oral presentations which gives a fair opportunity to students with different skill sets.

Marking Standards/Degree Classification/Conduct of Vivas

Examiners are invited to comment on the marking standards and grading practices operating in the subject. Any concerns about the distribution of degree classes and the performance of students at the top and bottom end of the ranges should be noted.

While one can *always* quibble about individual marks, I would say that the marking standards are appropriate and broadly consistent with those applied at my own institution (the University of the Highlands and Islands) and are similar to those that I have witnessed at other HEIs teaching theology. I have no concerns here. Regarding the upper and lower ends of the marking scale, my sense is that the academic staff at CRC are content to 'protect' the 1st class category and, generally, an assessment needs to be excellent to be marked accordingly. I think their application of this level of rigour is commendable and that their marking at the upper end does genuinely reflect the level of performance of their students. At the lower end, there is no hesitation to award failing grades where attempts entirely fail to meet the LOs and quality expectations of a module. If I were to quibble, and I am quibbling here, I have noticed a tendency to award (bare) passing grades to borderline pass/fail assessments where I might have been on the other side of that decision. In each of these instances where I noticed a scrapped pass that I might have failed, I also noted that the student's second assessments would have brought them up to a passing grade overall anyway—so, no real harm was done and I did not request further moderation of individual marks.

Assessment Feedback

Please comment on whether you believe assessment and feedback are used effectively in supporting students' development, progression and attainment.

As always within any HEI, this is mixed but, broadly, fine. The feedback rubrics are clear and most of the tutors offer fulsome comment on their students' work and where things could have been clearer or more insightful. I raised the matter of feedforward at the S2 Assessment Board. I think the present feedback rubrics provide ample and detailed response to assessments, but it would be good to highlight specific steps that a student should take in order to improve their grade to the next level of achievement—so, what does a mid/low-B grade student have to do to improve their work to a high-B/low-A. The academic staff took this on board and mentioned that they would discuss this internally.

Student Performance - the overall performance of the students, and the standards of their achievements

Comments on the quality of students' work, including presentation and style are welcomed. Together with the quality of knowledge, competences and skills demonstrated by the students.

The theology students at CRC are clearly a mixed bag—theology as a discipline appears always to draw a mixed bag of applicants for some reason! It seems clear to me that CRC are applying a fairly open access policy to admissions and that is borne out in the levels of achievement in their student body. While there were a few truly excellent pieces of work in this year's cohort, the majority of submissions are not that. The average student performance from what I have witnessed across this AY is somewhere in the mid-C to mid-B range and I think that marking does reflect student performance fairly, by and large. The 3-year mean mark for the majority of modules in our own BA Theology degree at the University of the Highlands and Islands falls in the low-B range, so the patterns of student performance at CRC seem to be within sector norms, although such small cohorts (and it being my first year as ExEx) make it difficult to discuss trends meaningfully.

Course Learning Aims and Outcomes, Structure and Syllabus

Examiners are encouraged to comment on these in the light of their impact on assessment procedures and performances they relate to national standards including the QAA Qualifications

Framework and, where applicable, subject benchmarks. Observations on course literature, handbooks, etc. are also helpful.

I am positive about the programme design of the two degrees for which I am external examiner. Clearly, the folks at CRC have thought very carefully about their target market and have developed their programmes accordingly. It is clear that the programme outcomes lean towards the practical and applied, rather than the 'typically' academic. It is also clear that the majority of the student body is either preparing for vocational ministry in church settings or is already in such a role and is seeking to formalise qualifications. The design of the programmes – from the modular to year-level to programme design – is focussed on appropriate applied and vocational academic outcomes. The modules are appropriately benchmarked according to the relevant QAA guidelines. Reading lists are current and appropriate, module assessments tend to reflect LOs appropriately. I have no concerns re. the programme design, I just wonder if the practical bent of the programme should not be reflected in the name of the undergraduate award. Perhaps something like a BA in Theology and Christian Ministry, may be more appropriate. However, that is a discussion for the programme team to consider. The programme design is fine.

Developing Students' Independence and Potential

Please comment on whether you believe course design, development, Standards and assessment are effective in stretching students to develop independence, knowledge, understanding and skills that reflect their full potential.

I see modules at Levels 5-7 and the undergraduate cohorts have been quite small. This also is my first year acting as external examiner, so I haven't been able to 'witness' the progression of individual students across levels yet. However, there is a clear expectation of increasing student autonomy implied in the module descriptors, the assessment load and the complexity and nuance of material under discussion. I look forward to seeing how this manifests itself in student performance over the years to come.

Teaching Methods and Teaching Quality

The University welcomes the comments of examiners on the quality of teaching, to the extent that this is reflected in the assessment process and in the performance of the students. Similarly, any observations of the effectiveness or otherwise of teaching methods, particularly where these are new or distinctive, will be of great assistance.

Obviously, I have no first-hand knowledge of TM and TQ, however, from the review of assessments and performance, I am content that the students at CRC are receiving a good quality of education that is appropriate to LOs of the programmes. The topics are engaging, the module descriptors sound interesting and the student performance shows that students are engaging with their studies.

Student Feedback and Perspectives

*Examiners are invited to comment on any Student Feedback and Perspectives that they have gathered. This can be from talking to students on visits or viewing feedback through Moodle (such as Module Evaluation Questionnaires). **Please specify if your observations are from visits.***

I have not yet been able to visit CRC but hope to do so in the coming AY. I have also not seen any student feedback on their TLA experiences. Perhaps, this is my fault for not requesting to see module feedback specifically. I would be grateful to see student feedback going forwards.

General Issues

Examiners are invited to comment on any issue relevant to their experiences at the University that is not covered in the checklist or elsewhere in this report. This is particularly helpful as an overview at the end of an examiners term of office.

I have found the staff at CRC to be friendly, approachable and keen that their provision reflects HE sector norms. It is clear from the two assessment boards that I have attended that the student experience lies at the heart of the academic provision that they offer. This is commendable. There has been an issue with regard to the assessments in place in the modules not matching the descriptors on record in the MAPs. My understanding is that a process is now in place to rectify this situation. I can confirm that the assessments that were applied this AY are appropriate and reflect QAA benchmarks, it is just that they do not match the agreed assessments of record. It would be good to get this sorted.

Good Practice Identified

In terms of good practice, students had a good level of choice in terms of assessment topics, without this becoming confusing—that's often a difficult balance to strike, but the programme team have done this well. The detailed assessment briefs that BNU require are also clear and helpful. I may 'steal' this idea!

Any Other Comments

Any additional comments with reference to TEF requirements would be welcome.

No additional comments, really, other than to say that I have found the experience of external examining at CRC to be broadly positive and it is clear to me that they have their students' best interests at heart.

New Appointments (if applicable)

If this is your first year as an external examiner for the University, please comment on the opportunities to view reports from the previous external examiner(s).

I have not, to the best of my knowledge, been given access to previous ExEx reports. If that is an oversight on my part, I apologise.

Continuing Appointments (if applicable)

As a continuing examiner, please comment on whether the points raised by you, or other relevant external examiners in the previous year, have been responded to satisfactorily.

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<i>Please tick</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
I was satisfied that the mode and standard of assessment tasks were appropriate		X			
Professional requirements have been considered by the Board		X			

FOR ITE EXTERNAL EXAMINER COMPLETION ONLY:

Outcomes for trainees in relation to the assessment against the Teachers' Standards;

In relation to those trainees you have visited in school(s) please comment on;

- *the quality of the teaching observed in relation to the Teachers' Standards*

Quality of training across the partnership;

In relation to the trainees you have visited/had discussions with please comment on;

- *the trainees' perception of the overall consistency, coherence and quality of training*
- *preparedness to teach;*
 - *subject/curriculum knowledge expertise*
 - *phase expertise*
 - *the ability to use a range of appropriate teaching and learning strategies*
- *the impact of the teaching on the learning and progress on the pupils*
the monitoring and assessment of pupil learning over time
- *the use of assessment evidence to inform and adapt future planning to impact on pupil learning and progress over time*
- *the quality of planning*
- *behaviour management*
- *the ability to adapt teaching to ensure that the needs of learners with different needs and abilities are met with a specific focus on children with SEN (D) and EAL?*
- *personal and Professional conduct*

If appropriate/possible please comment on the quality of;

- *mentors and tutors*
- *placements*

If appropriate/possible please comment on the assessment of trainees;

- *the accuracy of tracking the Teachers' Standards*
- *the accuracy of assessment of the trainees observed*

Leadership and Management

If appropriate/possible please comment on the quality of;

- *quality assurance systems*
- *improvement planning*
- *mentor training/development/engagement*

Assignments/Tasks

If appropriate/possible please comment on the quality of tasks and assignments;

Do they enable trainees to develop trainees' understanding, refine their practical teaching skills and provide evidence in relation to the Teachers' Standards?

FOR SCHOOL OF NURSING & ALLIED HEALTH EXTERNAL EXAMINER COMPLETION ONLY:

Please detail any visits to clinical area, including discussions with students and staff

Please outline any activity that you have undertaken in relation to RPL

Please provide feedback on the Practice Assessment Document/Common Practice Assessment Form

Please provide feedback on the programme meeting PSRB (NMC/HCPC/CSP) outcomes for professional practice and good health, good character/fitness to practise

FOR ALL EXTERNAL EXAMINERS TO COMPLETE:

Conduct of Assessment Boards & Administrative Arrangements

To provide a detailed assessment of the administrative arrangements in place, please complete the section below by ticking the appropriate box for each statement given below:

I was satisfied with the...?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
...information I received about the subject/course		X			
...information I was provided on the scheme of assessment		X			
...information I was provided on marking and grading practices		X			
...information I was provided on my responsibilities as an examiner		X			
...dates and times of the meetings		X			
...domestic arrangements		X			
...overall administration of assessments by the University		X			
...way in which I was provided with the material for consideration		X			
...general level of communication with the subject/programme area		X			
...general level of communication with the University		X			

Please tick the appropriate box to confirm whether you have received the following information:

	Yes	No	N/A
Module/Programme Handbooks	X		
Assessment Criteria	X		
Question Papers – Question titles, yes	X		
Up to date University information	X		
External Examiners' Handbook	X		

Please tick to confirm those boards/events you attended:

Subject Assessment Boards (including Work Placement)	
Progress/Programme Boards	X
External Examiners' Conference	
Other (please specify)	

Please add any additional comments you may have on administrative arrangements below:

It would be helpful to have a space on the BNU website or a SharePoint space, where external examiners can download all of the requisite forms for completion. Some, but not all of these were emailed to me and – given the nature of email chains – these can be hard to find. It would be great if we had access to a space where we know we can access everything that we need in terms of documentation. However, having said that, I have found all of the BNU staff looking after externals to be hugely welcoming and helpful. Thanks for that.

Please return your completed report via e-mail to externalexaminers@newman.ac.uk

FOR COMPLETION BY PROGRAMME/SUBJECT AREA:

Programme/Subject Area Response to External Examiners Report

The Programme/Subject is to complete this section responding to items raised for consideration and action. You should complete the attached action plan form (if appropriate) and return the whole document to the Quality Office within four weeks of this date:

Action Plan (if appropriate)

Report for Year:		Subject/Programme:	
Faculty:		Department:	
Subject Leader/ Programme Leader:		Date:	

Items Identified:	Planned Action:	Person Responsible:	Date to be Completed by:

For Quality Office Use Only:

Report Received Date:	
Date Passed to Subject:	
Date Passed to Deputy VC, VC and Head of Department:	
Date Response Received from Subject:	
Date Response Sent to External Examiner:	