

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2010– 2011

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION

Subject area and awards being examined:

| | |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| School of: History | Subject(s): Modern History |
| Programme(s) / Module(s): MA in Modern History | awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.) MA |

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than 6 weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to:

**Head of Academic Quality and Standards,
Academic Quality and Standards Team,
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building,
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT**

PART B: COMMENTS FOR THE INSTITUTION ON THE EXAMINATION PROCESS AND STANDARDS

Matters for Urgent Attention

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box.

No matters requiring urgent attention.

Only applicable in first year of appointment

Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?

N/A

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School.

N/A

Standards

1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme aims and intended learning outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award?

- *The appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

The aims and learning outcomes were appropriate for an award of MA.

2. Did the aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

Yes, they meet the expectations of the national benchmarks and compare well with similar programmes at other institutions.

3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs?

- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

The assessment methods for the various modules have been well considered, providing a good structure for students to progress through the programme. Everything points a high level of commitment by the teaching team to student support and the achievement of the learning outcomes. Students are given written feedback of a very high quality. Supervisors provide very good support for students working on their dissertations, as indicated by the excellent standard of presentation and execution of so many of the projects. The arrangements for marking and classification are entirely appropriate. My own preference would be for anonymised submission, rather than by the candidate's name, but I understand that this is approved practice across the University.

4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and ILOs?

- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

The students on the programme are provided with a very good training in research and are able to operate at a high level in discussing historical scholarship. The best of the dissertations reached a very high standard, particularly in their sophisticated approach to the historiographical context for their own research. Many of the research topics were ambitious, requiring impressive research, sometimes involving languages other than English and often making use of archival sources. The individual content modules also encourage students to engage at an advanced level, testing their abilities in argument and analysis. There was a wide range of academic abilities on the programme this year, but the students are encouraged to stretch themselves. The weakest students found it difficult to adjust to the greater expectations associated with Masters work, though the critiques offered by the markers showed that they were given every opportunity to develop and raise their levels of achievement.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

N/A

6. The nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year

It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.

The School has made efforts to improve the documentation of the internal reconciliation of marks, which is a very helpful development.

As examples of good practice, I note in particular the section on the marksheets for the dissertation where supervisors confirm their level of contact with the student, including approval of the topic and feedback on sections of the text prior to submission.

7. The influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching

This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.

As mentioned under section 4, the students' dissertations are – in the vast majority of cases – completed to a very high standard, showing that the candidates have been given excellent support in developing and executing their research. The range of interesting and original topics shows how the MA work is inspired and informed by the research of members of the teaching team. On many of the content modules too, students' bibliographies show that they are working at the cutting edge of the subject, engaging with the latest research in interesting ways. The liveliness of the programme and the research undertaken by the students speaks well of the active research environment in the School.

The Examination Process

8. **The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?**

- *Whether external examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.*

I was provided with sufficient information and guidance.

9. **Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks?**

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

Yes.

10. **Was sufficient assessed/examination work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?**

Yes. I was sent every piece of written assessed work. For one of the modules, with multiple assessed elements, I invited the School to consider sending me a sample of work, as allowed in the external examining guidelines, but they have decided to continue to send the complete batch.

11. **Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners?**

Yes. The Examination Board was conducted with admirable efficiency.

12. **Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?**

Yes. I welcomed the introduction this year of a pre-board meeting involving the external examiners to receive the information about special cases. This meant that the full board could concentrate only on the few cases where special circumstances might have a bearing on classification.

For Examiners involved in Mentoring Arrangements

If you have acted as a mentor to a new external examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements.

N/A

Other Comments

Please use this box if you wish to make any further comments not covered elsewhere on the form.

I am very pleased with the constructive way in which the School has responded to my comments from last year. Their development of clearer guidance about the recording of internal marking reconciliations and the adoption of working guidelines for treating discretionary cases are very helpful in strengthening the process.

From:

To:

Cc:

Subject: Ma external examiner's report.

Date: 22 November 2011 15:28:09

Dear

Thank you for your report as the external examiner for our MA in Modern History.

We are glad that the work of our students has been properly assessed, and that they have produced assignments that in some cases have been of very high quality. It is also equally re-assuring that those students of a lesser ability have been given guidance through feedback about ways they might have improved.

The new procedures that you encouraged us to adopt, both in the development of the markers' form to make explicit reference to reconciliation of differences between first and second markers, and in the way we consider cases for mitigating circumstances prior to the full meeting, have clearly improved our examination process, and we are most grateful to you for suggesting them to us.

We are most grateful to you for your careful consideration of the material we sent to you, and also for your guidance in those tricky cases where students faced special circumstances in meeting their obligations and where candidates fell in the discretionary boundaries between categories.

With many thanks and best wishes,

School of History
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT