

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):
Programme(s) / Module(s): MA Social and Cultural History MA Eighteenth-Century Studies	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.

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?
No -- although this was not applicable in the case of the MA in Social and Cultural History.

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.

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 programme aims and the ILOs are commensurate with MA level expectations. The programmes are well-conceived and well-structured and include a wide range of modules covering appropriate training in core skills as well as providing opportunities to develop more specialised interests, and candidates undertake dissertation projects involving sustained and independent research appropriate for this level of award.

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.*

The programmes are comparable to similar programmes that I have taught or examined at institutions elsewhere, including the Universities of Cambridge, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Sussex, and the programmes I examined at Leeds meet the expectations of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications pertaining to a Master's degree (level 7).

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.*

Assessment methods are well designed and support the ILOs of the programmes. The variety of methods is appropriate, ranging from seminar presentations and coursework essays to an extended piece of primary research in the form of the dissertation. The 'applied theory' exercise, included as part of the core module 'Debates in Social and Cultural History', represents a nice addition to the range.

The quality of teaching is clearly high, both in relation to the coursework modules and the dissertations. All students had clearly been encouraged to produce a substantial piece of primary research, and were well supported in undertaking their dissertation projects, and one or two displayed impressive initiative in their findings and analysis. Some of the weaker students might have benefited from having a clearer question as the focus (and even the title) of their dissertation project, and several dissertations would have been strengthened by a fuller discussion of sources and method at the outset, but the level of primary source engagement was nonetheless very impressive.

The assessment criteria were mostly consistently and rigorously applied, although very slightly more generously so in response to coursework essays compared with the dissertations. Coursework and dissertations have been very thoroughly marked, with excellent feedback for students, and the rationales supplied for agreeing internal marks were useful and demonstrated a clear engagement with assessment criteria.

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 academic standards demonstrated by the students spanned a range of abilities across the full range of marks, including some very fine performances at the top end of the scale as well as one fail. Half of the cohort that I examined achieved distinctions, and more than half (5 out of 8) achieved a mark in the distinction range for their dissertation. This is a higher level of achievement than at Edinburgh, where I have been external for a comparable programme over the past three years.

The strengths of the cohort were clear in the best dissertations that I read, which were original pieces of research, some engaging with demanding sources and challenging critical perspectives to produce innovative lines of enquiry and argument. The best of batch <<<>>> with a little reworking, could be publishable. At the weaker end of the spectrum, work was poorly presented, inadequately structured, insufficiently researched and tended towards description rather than analysis. But this was the exception rather than the rule.

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.

n/a

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.

Curriculum design is clearly up to date with current research in the subject; the courses offered stem directly from the research expertise of members of the department; and the students are trained in undertaking primary research as a core component of the programmes.

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.*

Yes. The materials provided detailed clear guidelines for external examiners, and a clear description of the assessment process. Any questions I had were answered promptly and clearly by the programme administrator.

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. I received module handbooks, programme specifications, the taught MA postgraduate handbook and the external examiner handbook, which clearly detailed the procedures and policies for assessing work and classifying degrees, and the role of the external examiner in these processes.

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 saw all the written coursework submitted for the relevant modules, and all the dissertations for each of the programmes I examined.

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

Yes. The administrative arrangements were thorough, timely and clear, and the Board of Examiners was conducted with exemplary efficiency and precision. Thanks are due to <<<>> for excellent administrative support.

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

Yes. A meeting prior to the Exam Board enabled due consideration of relevant cases.

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.

Other Comments

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

Eileen Foster

From: Richard Whiting
Sent: 04 November 2011 14:46
To:
Cc:
Subject: MA external examiner reports

Dear
Thank you for your report as external examiner for our MA programmes in Eighteenth Century studies and Social and Cultural History.
We are pleased that the quality of our students' work, and our assessment of it, have proved to be acceptable. I am also glad that the administration of the examinations process has been satisfactory. It is heartening too that our new MA in Social and Cultural History has got off to a good start.
We shall certainly take note of your suggestion that dissertation students would benefit from having a clearly focused question to which they should direct their research.
We are most grateful to you for your scrupulous marking of our students' work, and your most helpful contribution to the discussion about the way we were to treat those students presenting mitigating circumstances in connection with their exam performances.
We look forward to meeting again next year!
Best wishes,
Richard Whiting

Professor Richard Whiting
Professor of Modern British History and Head of School

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