

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	History
Subject(s):	<i>Medieval Studies</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA in Medieval Studies
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA

Completed report

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six 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.

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 – but I was sent the previous external's report for the BA in History, for which I was also newly appointed external examiner in 2011/12.

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 intended learning outcomes were wholly appropriate for a Masters level programme. The academic standards of the programme are high, particularly the component which provides training in research skills.

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 programme is comparable to those at similar institutions. I was particularly impressed by the way it combines international coverage (and recruitment) with full use of local resources (such as the Royal Armouries museum).

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 were in general well designed. Most modules made use of a varied assessment package, including both essays and primary source commentaries, and this worked well. The feedback provided to the students was also enriched by the addition of some of the 2nd marker's comments.

Student performance was extremely good on the programme and no doubt this is a reflection of the quality of the teaching.

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.*

Yes, there was adequate opportunity for students to demonstrate their achievement through a range of assessment tasks, culminating in the research project. Some of the assignments had a relatively low word limit, and I felt that some of the students undertaking the 6,000 word research project could have written considerably more. I therefore fully support the decision to replace the research project next year with a 10,000 word dissertation.

The overall standard of the students' work was unusually high, with several achieving Distinctions.

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. Please comment on 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 – this is my first year as external examiner for this programme.

7. Please comment on 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.

Every aspect of the programme is heavily influenced by research. The modules are all taught by experts in the field, and good use was made of the medieval collections of the Royal Armouries museum. The high standard of the students' research projects indicates that the research training provided on the programme is very effective.

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

8. 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

The Examination/Assessment Process

9. 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 – I was provided with all the information I needed, either by correspondence or access to materials about the programme on the university webpages.

10. 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, marking criteria?

- *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 was provided with information about each module, and the taught MA postgraduate handbook provides guidance about marking criteria. There is full information about the programme on the university website.

11. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

The assessment for the programme was generally well designed. On one occasion I recommended that marks should be re-scaled for a particular assignment, and this was done efficiently and entirely to my satisfaction.

12. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes. I have seen the large majority of the work submitted for the programme. All of this work had been carefully and appropriately marked and second marked.

13. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

The students' research projects covered a wide range of topics, all of which provided the opportunity to make a genuine contribution to scholarly knowledge. These projects were all carefully and rigorously assessed.

14. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

Yes, all communication was conducted with efficiency and courtesy. The Board of Examiners was also efficiently run and the external examiners were fully involved in discussions about the Board's recommendations.

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

Yes, this was handled sensitively and with the full involvement of external examiners.

Other comments

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

From:
To:
Cc:
Subject: MA Examiner's Reports
Date: 29 November 2012 10:37:37

Dear

I write to thank you for your reports as external examiner for the MA in Medieval History and the MA in Medieval Studies, both of which I have read with great attention and which I shall submit to the School's Taught Student Education Committee in due course. I am pleased that you approve of the programmes, teaching and assessment of these courses, and that you feel that they embody appropriate research skills and training.

While you very kindly praise the efficiency of our administrative processes, on one issue I can only apologise, that you were not sent copies of the reports submitted by your predecessor as MA external examiner, We ought to have done this, and will ensure that this is done for our next new external examiner.

We very much appreciate all your work as external examiner, your careful moderation of the examination process, and your advice about the often complex special cases which arise each year. We look forward to working with you again next year.

With best wishes,

Head of School,
School of History,
University of Leeds,
Leeds LS2 9JT

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	IMS
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA in Medieval Studies
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	Medieval Studies

Completed report

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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

NONE

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

I have now completed my four year term as External Examiner on the IMS MA programme, an experience which I have enjoyed and learned from. During this period the MA was detached from its administration by the IMS and taken over by the School of History. External examiners were not clearly informed about this change while it was being mooted, and the new arrangements came as something of a surprise. The programme continues to offer a good range of provision in a number of areas, and the assessment and marking standards are high. I single out in particular the teaching in Viking and Anglo-Saxon studies which seem to attract students; the language element has become more rigorous and the range of literature studied is impressive. The dissertation / research projects which I have seen are generally impressive and one or two were immediately publishable.

There has been a marked decline since I began as examiner both in the numbers taking the IMS MA and the range of options available. In that time the School of English has ceased to offer an MA in Medieval Literature and the depletion of English staff able to teach options in medieval literature for this MA programme has entailed a reduction in range and has resulted in a less interdisciplinary course. In my view, it is a matter of urgency to bring at least one new medieval English lecturer on board, to prevent the MA becoming primarily a history MA with a few options from other disciplines available. If the MA is to remain truly interdisciplinary, and competitive with such obvious rivals as York, this is absolutely crucial.

Administration of the programme has still not entirely recovered after the programme's change of ownership. It would, as noted below, be good for externals to have a full overview of the students taking the course, the range of modules on offer and their take-up, and the division of labour between external examiners in terms of moderation of both modules and dissertation

marking. This would enable better planning and would allow, for example, as happened this year, an external sent an inappropriate dissertation to mark, to note immediately that the wrong one had been sent.

The last few years have clearly been difficult, both in terms of internal re-organisation and in terms of resourcing. My sense is that the MA is back on track as regards organisation, and I hope that resourcing difficulties will be overcome in the near future. I wish the programme continuing success.

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 ILO's and structure and content of the modules which I saw were entirely commensurate with Master's level work. I felt that high standards were demanded, and very often achieved by the students, and that the average level of achievement was higher than in previous years.

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 aims and ILOs seem comparable with the MSt programme in medieval English studies in <>.
-

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 design and structure of the assessment methods and the marking arrangements are admirable. Student performance quality indicate a high standard of teaching delivery. Feedback was given on all work and there was evidence of students using it to improve performance. A full range of marks was used, and detailed and conscientious feedback, crucial to continuing improvement, is regularly given.
-

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.*

Academic standards appeared to be high and the students were able to demonstrate their understanding of, for example, Old English and Old Norse language and literature to a demanding level. They also showed that they had largely understood the requirement of academic writing style, and of reference and bibliographic conventions

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

6. Please comment on 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 language module I marked seemed more testing than previously. Less lexis was provided for the advanced students and a range of questions, both addressing comprehension and points of philology had been introduced.

7. Please comment on 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.

It was clear from the modules which I marked that teaching was strongly informed by the research interests of the instructors, as evidenced from the bibliographies.

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

8. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

The Examination/Assessment Process

9. 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.*

Useful guidance and support was given where appropriate.

10. 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, marking criteria?

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

No; it would have been useful to have been regularly updated on the number of students, the options they chose to take, and their likely dissertation / research project choices. As it was, one was never quite sure whether one ought to have received work to moderate, or whether everything had arrived, and this made it difficult to plan.

11. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

I didn't see draft examination papers for the language module, though I did for the Research Methods and Bibliography module in the first semester.

12. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes, the scripts and supporting documentation were annotated and clear.

13. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

Yes.

14. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

The Board Meeting was held later in the year than previously, allowing more time for the final projects, for marking and for moderation. The business was dispatched effectively. The Board's recommendations were appropriate.,

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

Yes, these were fully considered.

Other comments

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

From:

To:

Subject: MA Examiner's Report

Date: 29 November 2012 10:40:09

Dear

I write to thank you for your (valedictory) report as external examiner for the MA in Medieval Studies, which I have read with great attention and which I shall submit to the School's Taught Student Education Committee. I have also discussed this with the incoming Director of the Institute for Medieval Studies, who took up this post on 1st November.

We are pleased that you approve of the teaching and scholarly standards on the MA course, and the rigour of the assessment process. We are also glad that you concur with us concerning the later submission date for dissertations and long essays, which we believe is both in the best interests of the students and improves the efficiency of the process.

I can, however, only apologise that you were not kept better informed of the changes in the administration of the IMS last year: these were instituted by the University at very short notice, and with little prior consultation, imposing a very heavy workload on both the relevant academic staff and the School of History administrators. You also make an important point about the need to keep the external examiners properly informed concerning the full range of modules on offer, the number of students taking these and the division of labour between the two external examiners. I intend to take steps to ensure this is done in future, and have drawn the attention of the School's administrators to this issue.

I entirely agree with you about the need for the Institute to offer as full a range of interdisciplinary medieval options as possible, and providing appropriate teaching in languages and literature as well as history. We are actively exploring ways of doing this, as well as involving staff in a range of disciplines from around the university. I share your hope that the School of English will be fully represented in this teaching, but as you will be aware the staffing of that School is a matter outside my authority. We hope, however, that with the appointment of a new director, who can devote her time more fully to the Institute than could I, as Chairman-elect of the School of History, and with a more expansive recruitment campaign for PG students, the IMS will continue to flourish.

We very much appreciate all your work as external examiner over the past four years, your careful moderation of the examination process, your advice about the often complex special cases which arise each year, and your very helpful more general advice about the programme.

With best wishes,

Professor of Medieval History,
Head of School,
School of History,
University of Leeds,
Leeds LS2 9JT