

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

**PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION***Subject area and awards being examined:*

<b>School of:</b> <b>Philosophy</b> <b>Programme(s) / Module(s):</b>  <b>History and Philosophy of Science</b> <b>Intercalated Degree in History of Medicine</b>	<b>Subject(s):</b> <b>History and Philosophy of Science</b> <b>awards: (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc.)</b> <b>BA</b>
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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](mailto: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?*

***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 ILOs were entirely commensurate with the level of the 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 programme aims and ILOs are comparable to those of similar programmes at other institutions with which I am familiar. They conform to national benchmarks for history of science, technology and medicine

### 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 appropriate to the content and ILOs of the courses of which I had oversight. Student performance on these courses was generally strong, indicating a high standard of teaching, learning and assessment.

### 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.*

Students were given adequate opportunity to demonstrate the performance against the aims and ILOs, both through in-course essays and unseen examinations. The generally strong student performance was comparable to that of students on similar courses in other institutions. HSTM lies somewhat off the mainstream of academic disciplines, and students who choose to take courses in this area are usually curious and highly motivated. The staff who teach these courses at Leeds have plainly succeeded in sustaining and stimulating that interest and motivation. The performance of medical students taking the intercalated degree was particularly impressive.

### 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.*

There has been no significant change to the programmes and modules since last year. This is not a criticism; since the modules were already well conceived and well taught, there was no need for enhancement.

### 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 well as courses providing a good general introduction to the history of science, technology and medicine, the programme includes a number of courses that plainly draw strongly on the research interests of the teaching staff. In-course essays for level three courses, in particular, demonstrated a degree of critical engagement with the relevant literature that was testimony to the stimulus of being taught by leading researchers in the field. The history of medicine project work, and a long essay submitted for the independent study module, all involved original research in primary sources, and demonstrated impressively high levels of research skills on the part of the students undertaking that work.

## **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.*

Ample guidance was provided on the roles, powers and responsibilities of external examiners via the External Examiner Handbook, Code of Practice and Student Handbook.

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.*

A full set of programme specifications and module handbooks was sent to me early in the academic year. These were generally clear and informative regarding both the content of the programme and the relevant teaching and assessment procedures.

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 given access to a sufficient quantity and range of assessed and examination work for me to form a clear and well-founded evaluation of the student work.

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

Administrative arrangements for the whole process were very satisfactory. Programme and module handbooks, examination papers, and student work were all made available to me in a timely manner. Ample opportunity was provided for oral feedback and discussion with the module and programme organisers. The Board of Examiners was effectively managed and the process of determining final degree classes was open and transparent while preserving anonymity.

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

Yes, procedures for considering mitigating circumstances and medical evidence were entirely appropriate, and the teaching officer responsible for those procedures was plainly very well informed both about the procedures themselves and about individual cases under consideration.

### **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.*

Marking and internal monitoring of marks was very carefully conducted and worked well, with a clear paper trail recording the monitoring process and how any discrepancies between first marker and monitor were identified and resolved. The practice of recording written justifications for the marks awarded by first markers and monitors was particularly helpful and greatly eased my job as external examiner. The department's practice in this respect is exemplary.

The comments I made last year, regarding discrepancies between the School's code of practice and student handbook as regards internal monitoring, and regarding the availability of semester 1 and in-course assessed work, have been satisfactorily resolved.

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7<sup>th</sup> July, 2011

**Department of Philosophy:  
Response to the External Examiners' Reports on the 2011 Examinations for  
undergraduate programmes in Philosophy and History & Philosophy of Science**

The Department would like to thank all the external examiners for their reports and assistance with the assessment process, and notes with gratification their favourable comments on the education we offer, range of module choice, extent to which teaching is informed by current research, rigour of internal marking, standard of student work, and the efficiency of our administrative procedures. We note in particular [redacted] comment on the impressive performance of students on the intercalated history of medicine degree, and the research skills demonstrated by those undertaking independent learning modules in the history of science and medicine. [redacted] note the value of our policy of providing written justifications for each individual mark.

We are also very grateful to the externals for shouldering a slightly heavier burden this year, as a result of the reduction of the number of externals from five to four.

In response to a suggestion made by [redacted] in his report on the 2010 examinations, this year we introduced meetings between external examiners and the leaders of the various module streams (First Year, History & Philosophy of Science, History of Philosophy, Logic and Language, Metaphysical Philosophy, Mind & Knowledge and Value Philosophy) on the afternoon before Classification. This enabled externals to discuss any issues arising over the content or assessment for particular modules.

[redacted] suggests that a digest of student evaluations of modules be given in the module packs sent to externals. The module rep reports would serve this function, and we are happy to adopt his suggestion. He also suggests that data on the proportion of students awarded each class be provided to the Board of Examiners. Again we would be happy to oblige.

[redacted] raises a question about non-standard forms of assessment, in particular the use of MCQs and 'wikis', and whether performance on these mirrors that on more standard forms. He notes one rationale for the use of MCQs, namely that it allows examiners to test students' knowledge across the whole range of the module (so selective revision is not an option). There is another: that MCQs allow us to give some credit for a level of comprehension below that required to respond adequately to short answer and essay questions.

In terms of comparative performance, the average for the MCQ section of the PHIL2421 Introduction to Epistemology exam was substantially higher than the averages for the short answer and essay sections, which fits with the second rationale above. (In fact, this component of the exam for this module will be dropped next year, given the considerable difficulty of framing appropriate MCQs for this kind of subject matter.)

On the use of wikis, there were a few surprising cases where an excellent wiki mark went together with poor exam performance, against all prima facie expectations given the nature and purpose of the exercise, but it was unclear whether these were anything more than statistical anomalies. We will monitor the mark distribution for this kind of assessment so that their functioning as summative assessment can be validated and fine-tuned if necessary.

Finally, at the conclusion of [REDACTED] term as external examiner at Leeds, we would like to offer particular thanks to him for all his work, and valuable feedback and encouragement over the last four years.