

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012– 2013

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

Faculty / School of:

Arts

Subject(s):

History

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Modern History

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

MA

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**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

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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 it would be useful to see these.

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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

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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, intended learning outcomes and the structure of the programme is appropriate to the level of award. There are numerous components designed to test research skills in particular (the preparation of a research proposal, content-based specialist modules, and the final dissertation), and this is appropriate to postgraduate study.

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. The programme is designed to map onto the FHEQ in various ways, specifically through the provision of critical awareness of 'live' historical problems, comprehensive understanding of research techniques and skills, advanced conceptual understanding of the discipline (although arguably this could be developed further within the MA programme), advanced understanding of historiography and historical methodologies), and the skills associated with independent study appropriate to the MA qualification. I wondered whether the MA students ought to be given more exposure to theoretical and methodological approaches. Familiarity with and ability to distinguish between different schools of thought was not always apparent in the written work.

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 programme is well-designed with a variety of teaching and assessment methods. Some consideration could be given to extending these methods further, and a number of MA programmes in the UK are becoming increasingly creative and inventive with the type of assessments used in different contexts. This could involve shorter exercises on primary sources or a longer piece on historical theory, for example. These forms of assessment are not especially innovative, but they might help students to reflect upon the nature of the discipline more broadly or to engage in a more detailed and specific way with sources before working with a wider body of material for the dissertation. I thought that the assessment relating to the planning of a research project, in particular, was well-conceived and feedback was generally of a high standard, designed to identify any particular challenges with the proposed MA dissertation.

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 standard, on the whole, was good. The very best work displayed deep and thoughtful use of archival material in pursuit of innovative research topics. These students took care to position themselves in the field and to provide a clear set of research questions. The weak work was rather more limited and tended to be less ambitious. Such students did not always appreciate the complexities or subtleties involved in historical research, and the analysis undertaken was not especially wide-ranging or insightful. These comments, of course, are not by any means unique to students' work at Leeds.

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.

This is my first year as an external examiner at Leeds.

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.

There was a clear sense that the students were engaged with leading researchers in the field and that they were benefiting from this interaction. This was apparent through some excellent feedback provided in relation to the various assessments. I single out, once again, the detailed feedback provided (in most cases) on the research proposal. Receiving feedback from a 'research -active' scholar at this stage in the research process is invaluable. Individual modules map onto the Department's research specialisms.

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 sufficient material in good time.

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, but I had to request these. It would better to send these as a matter of course. It would be helpful if I could have copies for the coming year.

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?

N/A.

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 – sufficient work was made available to enable me to form a judgement about the standard of student work. I have two main observations here. Firstly, there was some variation in the level of feedback to MA students. Many received full and helpful feedback. However, some examiners were more conscientious than others. This is an important part of the process, in order to ensure marking standards and to provide additional feedback to students on their work and progress. Some second marking, in particular, was rather cursory. Secondly, examiners should consult the marking criteria when assigning a mark. This is particularly true of work in the upper band (distinction). Work placed in this band should clearly demonstrate independence of thought and an independent approach. This was not always the case, and my view is that the marking in these upper bands was a shade high as a result.

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

Yes. MA at students at Leeds receive excellent guidance and support on their choice of dissertation topics. On the whole, these were manageable projects with well-developed research questions. I was particularly impressed by the intelligent use of local collections and archives.

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. I attended and can confirm that I am happy with the administrative arrangements and the recommendations of the Board. The Department's officers and administrators are very efficient and helpful. This was most impressive.

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

Yes. This was handled with care and consideration

Other comments

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

Some policies – for example, on word limit penalties – are not yet clear to me, and there seemed to be indications that such policies may be applied in different ways by different examiners. I would be grateful if I could be sent any policies relating to penalties for excessive word-length or for the late submission of work, for example.