

## 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:	History
Subject(s):	
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA Social and Cultural 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](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*

n/a

**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

**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 programme is well-structured and provides an excellent opportunity for students to develop the necessary skills, and to build firm conceptual and methodological foundations, to support a wide variety of specialised interests and enable 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 programme is comparable to similar programmes that I have taught at Glasgow, Cambridge, and Sussex, and externally examined at Edinburgh. The Aims and ILOs of the MA Social and Cultural History at Leeds meet the expectations of the QAA 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.*

The assessment methods are well designed and support the ILOs of the programme. There is good range of assessment methods beyond the standard coursework essay, including oral presentations and focused primary-source case studies as well as the large-scale piece of independent research that is the dissertation. My concerns (expressed last year) remain that the 'applied theory' exercise in the core course 'Concepts and Debates in Social and Cultural History', while an excellent initiative, still requires an awful lot of students in a short space, and some clearly failed to meet the brief set for this piece of coursework.

The students on this programme clearly benefit from high quality teaching, which is reflected in the diversity of topics tackled for dissertations as well as the quality and range of modules available. The feedback provided to students was often exemplary – particularly in the module 'Gender and Power'. In this module, the full and constructive assessment of the first presentation clearly helped students to improve their performance in their second presentation.

The assessment criteria were for the most part applied consistently and rigorously. In cases requiring reconciliation of marks it was clear that the markers had deployed the assessment criteria with due care and attention, providing a clear rationale for their agreed mark. I would, however, reiterate remarks made previously to encourage the use of a fuller range of marks in the 50s, particularly in relation to coursework. It is not always clear that MA coursework is being judged at a higher standard than undergraduate work. There was some minor inconsistency in penalising students for failing to meet the brief for the 'applied theory' exercise in the module 'Concepts and Debates in Social and Cultural History'. Finally, there appeared to be some inconsistency in penalising poor referencing (which was, regrettably, all too common). While these are all points for consideration, they are relatively minor in relation to my general impression of fair and considered application of the 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.*

As I was unable to attend the examiners' meeting this year I did not see the final classification of the cohort. However, the academic standards demonstrated by the students in the coursework and dissertations that I saw ranged from outstanding to borderline pass. The best dissertation was highly original and a very impressively researched and written piece of work, clearly deserving of a mark in the mid-80s. At the other end of the scale was a dissertation that did not quite warrant a pass, produced by a student who had failed to establish sufficient historiographical and conceptual foundations for the analysis of the primary sources.

**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 still a relatively new programme but one which has already firmly established many strengths. The core module in particular is well-designed and provides a very good foundation for the programme. The remainder of the programme for the most part builds on the existing strengths and impressive range of expertise available to MA students in the School of History.

**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.*

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.

**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.

**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.

**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. I saw all the written coursework submitted for the relevant modules, and all the dissertations for the programme I examined.

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

Yes. There was a good range of topics and the standard of assessment was appropriate.

**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 administrative arrangements were satisfactory. I was not able to attend the meeting.

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

Yes.

**Other comments**

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