

**The University of Leeds**

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

**ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014– 2015**

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

Faculty / School of:	History
Subject(s):	<i>Medieval History</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Undergraduate History (including Institute for Medieval Studies and Joint Honours)
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

**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 Quality Assurance**  
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?*

**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 been impressed with the quality of the teaching, assessment and procedures in the School of History during my four year term as external examiner. Over that time, the programme has retained its long-standing strengths: state of the art research-led teaching, rigorous marking, detailed formative feedback, and a programme designed to develop students' research and critical thinking progressively over the course of the degree. There has also been a steady growth in the range of provision in the field of medieval history in recent years which has done much to enhance the student experience, including new inter-disciplinary Medieval Studies modules offered to history students. The breadth of courses available to Leeds students is excellent, both in terms of chronology and geography, but also methodologically - with political history, military history, social and economic history and cultural history approaches all covered well. The standard of student achievement is also high, with almost all the cohort achieving either First Class or 2.1 degrees.

My only misgiving – as mentioned in previous examiner reports – has been the adoption of the 20-90 scale in the School in recent years. I feel that this is something that should be kept under review. I have seen some instances where students have been able to pass modules when having only completed half of the required assignments, and it is hard to see how they could have met all the ILOs of the course in such instances.

**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 Intended Learning Outcomes are wholly appropriate for all of the modules I have seen. The medieval history content of the programme is impressive, both in its range and its intellectual rigour. The addition of a number of Medieval Studies modules this year has added further to the breadth of the programme, which now offers students an excellent introduction to all facets of the period.

**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 comparable with History programmes in other leading UK universities in terms of its quality, range and expectations of the students (including that of my own institution).

**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 used in the modules I have seen are well designed, consistent and appropriate. The greater emphasis on coursework at level 3 helps to prepare students for postgraduate study, and oral assessment is used well to develop presentation skills. The quality of much of the work that I have been sent this year, along with the full and helpful feedback given to students, indicates a high level of teaching in the school. Second marking has generally been carried out thoroughly and this ensures comparability of assessment across modules.

**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 are given every opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes. The standard of the cohort is high, with almost all of this year's finalists achieving 1sts or 2.1s. The quality of dissertations was again strong, a marker of the excellent research training being given to students over the course of their studies.

**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.*

The main enhancement this year has come from new modules offered, particularly the interdisciplinary Medieval Studies courses at level 3. These not only enhance student choice, but provide opportunities for students to think conceptually across disciplines. This is a welcome development for the 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.*

The medieval history modules relate directly to staff research interests and expertise, and this specialist and up-to-date knowledge is evident in the curriculum, reading lists and feedback given to students. Students are encouraged and directed in their own research through longer essays and dissertations, and this is being done very effectively.

**8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD**

N/a

**For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements**

**9. 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

**10. 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.*

The guidance provided is clear and helpful, in particular the External Examiner Handbook.

**11. 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.*

I have received all the necessary information at module level, including handbooks and marking criteria. It would also have been useful to have been sent documentation about the programme as a whole (e.g. school handbook), to enable me to provide advice on its broader structure.

**12. 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?**

Yes: all draft assessments have been sent in good time, including re-sit papers. Exam papers and coursework questions have all been well designed, and pitched at an appropriate level. Where offered, my comments were taken into consideration.

**13. 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?**

I have received quite full samples of assessed work for every module this year (in fact, fuller than in previous years). All the scripts I've seen have been clearly annotated, and where relevant the dialogue between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> markers in arriving at a final grade has been helpfully signalled.

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

Yes: there were some excellent dissertations this year, with some extremely well-designed, interesting and up-to-date topics. The standard of assessment was appropriate, although I felt that dissertations which did not make a serious effort to undertake independent primary source research could have been marked more strictly.

**15. 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 operation of the Board of Examiners was very smooth this year, with full information provided in good time. The meeting itself was managed well and all the recommendations of the Board were balanced and fair, taking full account of the views of externals.

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

Yes, this was handled with sensitivity and consistency.

**Other comments**

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

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Quality Assurance Team

Received 27/07/2015

**From:**  
**Sent:** 27 July 2015 13:58  
**To:**  
**Subject:** FW: External Examiner's report

-----Original Message-----

**From:**  
**Sent:** 27 July 2015 12:44  
**To:** '  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** External Examiner's report

Dear

Thank you for your report as external examiner, which I have recently received. I am very grateful for your very positive report, which confirms that the School's standards remain high and intellectually rigorous, our provision in medieval history varied and challenging, and our procedures fair and efficient.

You make only two cautionary points in your report. First, while you commend the overall quality of our dissertations, you suggest that those few which do not undertake independent primary research should be marked more strictly. I entirely agree with this sentiment, and will draw it to the attention of the incoming Director of Student Education and the Director of Examinations, so that it may be communicated more generally to colleagues.

You also, as in your report last year, express your disapproval of the 20-90 mark scale, which allows students marks even when they have not fulfilled the course requirements. As you are aware, many colleagues, including myself, share these reservations. I understand that the use of this mark scale is now under review by the university, and I hope that the criticisms that you and other examiners have expressed will be properly taken into account.

Finally, since this is your last year as our external examiner, it only remains for me to thank you most sincerely for all your work, and for your unswerving professionalism and constructive assistance. It was a great pleasure as Head of School to work with you, and I wish you all the best for your own work in the future.

Yours ever,

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

[www.makingmedievalhistory.com](http://www.makingmedievalhistory.com)

**The University of Leeds**  
**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014– 2015

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	History
Subject(s):	History
Programme(s) / Module(s):	History
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

**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 Quality Assurance**  
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building  
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**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?*

Not as far as I recall.

**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.*

I felt that the ILOs were in all cases appropriate and I had no criticisms to make.

### 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 of high quality and meets the national benchmarks. It is similar in quality with other institutions with which I am familiar and compares favourably with some of them. I was impressed with the range of modules and their geographical and chronological scope. It is clear that the students are being challenged intellectually and are presented with many different historical approaches. I was particularly impressed with the History on the High Street module (which encourages research in the M & S archive) and by the Research Placement module.

### 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 that I saw – essays, exams, presentations, and dissertations – are all wholly appropriate and are comparable with those used at other institutions. There was evidence of innovative assessment methods in the History on the High Street module and the Research Placement module although otherwise things seemed fairly conservative. I am not necessarily against this – indeed the students may prefer it. However, the Department might like to reflect on whether alternative forms of assessment could be tried, e.g. student-led seminars, take-home exams, videos or podcasts.

It was clear that much innovative and intellectually challenging teaching is taking place: the students are being appropriately stretched.

Some markers were more thorough than others in terms of providing feedback. There were no cases of unacceptably low levels of feedback but occasionally some comments did look a bit thin in comparison to the most 'prolific' markers (who in some cases may not in fact need to provide quite so much.) It is not so much a case of more feedback being needed overall; rather the Department should aim for somewhat greater consistency in terms of levels of feedback provided.

Markers are willing to use the full range of marks.

The feedback forms were well-designed. There was not however much evidence of the students making use of the opportunity offered for self-reflection.

### 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.*

I saw many examples of high quality work, both in essays and (to a lesser extent) in exams. The best students were well able to make appropriate use of evidence, to develop strong and clear arguments, and to write in an appropriate way. They were able to engage with some very complex issues and showed their capacity to think historically. At the weaker end, of course, there were examples of sloppy thinking, inadequate research and poor writing, grammar and spelling. However, these cases were mercifully few and I did feel that some of the Third Class marks awarded were, if anything, a little harsh. Overall, the Department can be very pleased with the standards that are being achieved.

### 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.*

As an examiner in my first year I was not aware of what changes had been made in the previous year.

**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 is clear that all module leaders are bringing their research to bear on their teaching to a greater or lesser extent, with great benefits to the curriculum. I will again highlight the History on the High Street module and the Research Placement module as examples of good practice in terms of encouraging students to undertake research.. Some thought might be given to how the innovative approaches that they represent could be spread further throughout the curriculum.

**8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD**

N/A.

**For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements**

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

I was not allocated a mentor.

**The Examination/Assessment Process**

**10. 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.*

I received sufficient documentation. I would have been helpful to have some mentor support in the form of a phone chat to orientate me.

**11. 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. The documentation appears to me to be appropriate.

**12. 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?**

Yes. Although I was given little notice, I was able to offer comments/suggestions on the exam papers and essay questions and they were passed to module tutors for their consideration.

**13. 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?**

I was overwhelmed with material, the volume of which was more than sufficient to allow me to make a judgement. The scripts were clearly annotated, in line with best practice. The only criticism I would make is that sometimes the examiners did not make wholly clear how they had reconciled their marks. Comments such as "It was agreed this was a 2.1" are not especially helpful. Much more often, however, it was clear how agreement had been reached.

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

I read several very interesting high quality dissertations, on topics ranging from De Tocqueville and women to Colonial Liberia. Some of them were potentially publishable. Students made good use of archival sources. Many of these dissertations received very high marks indeed, which I felt to be appropriate.

I do, however, urge that double-blind marking of dissertations be adopted. It was explained to me that the rationale for the present system (whereby the second examiner sees the first examiner's comments and mark) is that, "whilst we do try to ensure that the second marker has some knowledge of the period and topic of the dissertation, this is not always possible – and the second marker will not have had any involvement with or exposure to the dissertation topic, whereas the supervisor may at least have had a chance to become acquainted with it." However, this creates too great a risk that the second marker will simply defer to the expert knowledge of the first, rather than giving an independent assessment. The second marker should be able to give a judgement based on the dissertation's clarity, range of sources, capacity to provide an argument, etc. They *may* wish to defer to the first marker during the reconciliation process but they should not

do so by default. I do think that reform is a matter of urgency and will at any rate have administrative advantages.

**15. 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 fairly smooth, notwithstanding the change in administrators part way through the year. There was some delay in getting material to me, due to illness. However, I would like to commend the efficiency of <> in managing the process. I attended the Boar and it did its work carefully and efficiently. I was satisfied with its recommendations.

In my view there is no need for the Board to go through the 'medieval ritual' (as one person present put it) of reading out every single student's name and result. It is hard to see what purpose it serves. I recommend moving to a system of 'exception reporting', i.e. highlighting only those cases where there is some sort of issue. Examiners can be provided with a spreadsheet of all the results.

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

Yes: these were very thorough.

**Other comments**

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

The school should abolish the 20/90 system of marking, which has the potential to lead to perverse outcomes. For example, one student did not turn up to an exam and was awarded 20%. This meant that he achieved over 40% for the module as a whole and therefore was not eligible to retake. The Board overrode this, so no in, but the system seems bizarre.

There did seem to be a big discrepancy in the number of assessed essay titles for courses at the same level. These appeared to range from 4 to 10 for second year courses. Nor does there appear to be a rule setting a maximum length for gobbets in the Special Subject exam. There should be (broadly) equivalent numbers of questions for each module of the same type.

By contrast with the other examiners, I was given significantly more modules to deal with. The volume of material that I consequently had to look at was so large that I physically struggled to get it to the Post Office to return it. There is a strong case for the appointment of another examiner at the Modern end.



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Quality Assurance Team Received

**From:** 27 July 2015 13:58 27/07/2015  
**Sent:**  
**To:**  
**Subject:** FW: External Examiner's Report

-----Original Message-----

**From:**  
**Sent:** 27 July 2015 12:55  
**To:**  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** External Examiner's Report

Dear

Thank you for your very positive and helpful report as external examiner, and I must apologise for some delay in responding, which has largely been due to the recent International Medieval Congress.

I am pleased that you find, in your first year as external examiner, that our standards and procedures, the quality of our students' work, and the intellectual challenges that we pose to them, are all high, and appropriate for a Russell Group university. You made a number of suggestions about the marking and examination process, to which I shall try briefly to respond.

First, you suggested that the School might wish to consider some alternative methods of assessment. We do to some extent do this already, and not just in the couple of modules which you mentioned, but largely in the 10% element of other modules' assessment. However, I am sure that the incoming Director of Student Learning, who has a particular interest in innovative pedagogy, will encourage us to expand our horizons in the way in which you suggest.

Secondly, your point about consistency of feedback is well taken, and we do indeed urge colleagues every year to think about this, and ensure that feedback is adequate, but not excessively long. We shall continue to do this, reinforced by your encouragement.

Thirdly, I entirely agree with your comment about the need for a broadly similar number of questions for each type of module, and some controls on the number, and especially the length, of gobbets in Special Subject papers. We do have clear rules on the number of questions in level 2 examination papers. (6 for a two-hour paper), and I have every year of my headship urged colleagues to limit the length of their gobbets on exam papers. I did also attempt, a couple of years ago, to create some guidelines for the number of questions in Special Subject papers. Unfortunately, this modest proposal ran into such opposition that it was in the end abandoned; but your very sensible advice will, I hope, encourage my successor as Head of School to continue this struggle.

I shall pass your suggestions for some changes to our examination board procedures, to streamline the meeting, to my successor. Reading out the very long list of students and their results is a survival from the days when the School is much smaller than it is now, and as the person who has had to do this, it has never been a task that I have much enjoyed.

Fifth, like several of our other external examiners, and indeed many of our colleagues in the School, you have grave reservations about the use of the 20-90 marking scale – and in particular its capacity to 'reward' students who make no obvious effort. This is a university matter, and not one within the School's remit. But I am happy to say that the university is now conducting a review, and it may be that this will secure the outcome you desire.

The penultimate point is your suggestion that we move to the blind double-marking of dissertations, rather than our current practice of full double-marking, but with the second marker seeing the mark and comments of the first marker. I shall suggest that this option be fully considered by the School in the autumn. However, I would have to say that not everyone, myself included, is convinced of the inherent superiority of blind double-marking. Perhaps my own experience of my medieval colleagues, who are not inclined to deference, and are quite happy to suggest changes, has influenced me.

Finally, you raise the very pertinent point of the workload expected of the Late Modern External Examiner. I am quite convinced by this, and we have indeed now recruited a second late modern external examiner ( ). I hope that will make your examining much easier next year.

I would like to thank you for undertaking the role of external examiner, and for being such a source of wise and helpful counsel to us. We look forward to working with you again next year.

Yours ever,

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

[www.makingmedievalhistory.com](http://www.makingmedievalhistory.com)

## The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014– 2015

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

Faculty / School of:

History

Subject(s):

History

Programme(s) / Module(s):

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

**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).

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**Head of Quality Assurance**

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*

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 ILOs were entirely appropriate to the School of History's modules and for the degree of BA .

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.*

I found these to be entirely consistent with expected national standards and my experience teaching at the Universities of <> and <>

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.*

I found the criteria laid out for module objectives, skills and knowledge outcomes, and assessment methods, to be admirably clear. As with previous years, I was impressed with the obvious care with which these were delivered.

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.*

I found the academic standards to be high and entirely commensurate with equivalent institutions in the material I saw.

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.*

I saw a number of new modules this year and those I had previously seen did not, in my view, require any amendments. I did not receive any modules about which I had previously expressed reservations.

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.*

This appeared to be entirely appropriate and literature on the course was up-to-date.

8. **Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD**

N/A

## For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. **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

10. **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.*

The School has been efficient and responded quickly and clearly to queries.

- 11. 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

- 12. 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?**

Yes. On a couple of occasions it was apparent that material could have been scrutinised more carefully but arrangements for discussion and amendment of questions with module leaders were satisfactory. I would encourage module leaders to be as precise as possible in their setting of questions as I felt that students of all abilities struggled a little, relatively speaking, with questions that were left very open and comparative.

- 13. 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 feedback was generally clearly set out and generally of high quality, although on occasion I felt that feedback could have been delivered in a less casual style and presented more of an exemplar of good practice to students. I was pleased to see clear differentiation between first and second markers in most cases and reconciliation of marks adequately explained.

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

Yes. Although I received a more limited set of dissertations this year they were again of a high standard with an impressively level of ambition, and achievement.

- 15. 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 was able to attend the meeting, and that was again conducted with scrupulous clarity and efficiency. I was happy with the recommendations of the board.

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

Yes, careful and due consideration was given to all mitigating circumstances according to the information available to the board.

#### Other comments

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

**From:**  
**Sent:** 27 July 2015 13:58  
**To:**  
**Subject:** FW: External Examiner's Report

-----Original Message-----

**From:** 47  
**To:** '  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** External Examiner's Report

Dear

Thank you for your report as external examiner, and I must apologise for some delay in responding, which has largely been due to the recent International Medieval Congress.

I am pleased that you continue to find our standards and procedures to be suitably rigorous and fair. I particularly appreciated your praise for the conduct of the examination meeting (which was my final one as Head of School). You raised a couple of points, both at the examination meeting and in your written report. You urge that questions set should be as precise and carefully worded as possible, and I shall make sure that this very sensible advice is conveyed to colleagues. We do already have careful procedures for the scrutiny of exam papers before these are sent to the external examiners – and quite extensive revision is often requested. Nevertheless, we take on board your point that the scrutiny should be as rigorous as possible, and to this end I have suggested that in future the scrutiny panel be a little larger than it was this year, both to have more persons proof-reading the papers and to ensure that each part of the School is properly represented, which should improve the academic quality of the scrutiny.

Your other point about the occasionally casual style used for feedback has proved more controversial, and my Early Modern colleagues have been adamant that their feedback is carefully considered and rigorous, and not at all 'casual'. One colleague has responded to me as follows: 'I say without reservation that we think very carefully about how we communicate our thoughts and comments to our students. This is done not only on paper but in person, and my own experience is that we do it with care, clarity and an eye for detail, all to the purpose of improving our students' historical thinking and writing.' But your stricture will remind colleagues that they should adhere to these admirable intentions at all times, and has clearly been taken to heart.

Thank you once again for all your work and care in your role as external examiner.

Yours ever,

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

[www.makingmedievalhistory.com](http://www.makingmedievalhistory.com)

The University of Leeds

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014– 2015

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

Faculty / School of:	History
Subject(s):	History
Programme(s) / Module(s):	International History and Politics
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

**Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner****Completed report**

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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*

The programme has been subject to a trend of grade inflation with a far greater number of First Class and 2:i degrees than was awarded 20 or 30 years ago. This was particularly noticeable this year. While I deplore this trend, this is a sector-wide phenomenon from which the School of History is not immune. I would say that marking has been consistently slightly more generous than at the University of Birmingham, where I taught from 2006-13.

In general, I have been extremely impressed by the standard of students' work, and of marking and assessment, that I have seen. Some anomalies in the procedures of the School which were identified during my period as External Examiner have been rectified. In sum, the School of History seems to be in rude health.



**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.*

- Very appropriate
- Very appropriate

**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.*

**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.*

- Fine
- Excellent

**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.*

- Comparable
- Judging from the scripts that I read, IHP has a number of students with a good breadth of knowledge and understanding. I was particularly impressed with the quality of some of the dissertations. Overall, the quality of the work was 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****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

**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.*

The expertise of individual academics is reflected in the curriculum .

**8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD**

**For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements**

**9. 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**

**10. 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

**11. 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

**12. 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?**

1.Yes 2. Generally, and in the few exceptions suitable arrangements were made to consider my comments.

**13. 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

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

Yes, to both questions

**15. 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, to all questions

**16. 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**

I would like to thank colleagues in the School of History for their hard work. From my perspective, the administrative arrangements were not quite as smooth as in previous years, but this was I suspect the result of the loss of key personnel and I suspect that lessons will have been learned from this year for the process in 2016.

As I have commented in my reports in previous years, the IHP programme is working well. Judging from my reading of various scripts, the combination of international history and international politics makes for an intellectually coherent, and above all extremely interesting degree. This year, I have also seen some scripts from History programmes. Across the entire School, the depth of expertise among those teaching and marking the various modules is highly impressive, and the course reflects that this is a great deal of of research-led teaching.

As an External Examiner I can no longer function as (in effect) a third marker, confining my comments to the overall standard of marking. As in every year I disagreed with the marks given to a few individual scripts, but the discrepancy was never more than a few marks either way. In general, I was very content with the accuracy and consistency of the marking, and would like to express my thanks to colleagues in the School of History for making my job so straightforward as a result. There was some confusion about one particular paper, but that was resolved to my satisfaction. However, just like last year, I would stress the importance of markers stating explicitly how they reconciled divergent marks. I have no problem markers with splitting the difference, if that is what was done, but this should be made clear on the script. Finally, I have banged the same drum for a number of years not, but markers should if at all possible type their comments – failing that, they should write legibly.

To end on a personal note, I was an undergraduate in the School of History from 1979 to 1982 (single honours rather than IHP) and a Masters student here in 1983-84. It has been a pleasure and privilege to return as an External Examiner, even if it felt a little strange being on the other side of the desk, as it were. Overall, the quality of the work produced by the students is a credit to the School and the University of Leeds, and a tribute to the effectiveness of the teaching here.

**From:**  
**Sent:** 30 November 2015 15:44  
**To:**  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** HoS Reply to External Examiner's Report: IHP (VL22)

Dear

Thank you for your external examiner's report for the BA in International History and Politics degree for 2014-15, which I have recently received. It is, of course, extremely gratifying to see such positive comments - both on the degree programme as a whole, as well as the quality of our students and their work. I note, for instance, your confidence that the programme is "working well", and makes for an "intellectually coherent [and] extremely interesting degree", as well as your view that the work produced by students was impressive - particular the final-year dissertations. Although you quite rightly drew attention to one or two wrinkles (which we are, of course, always endeavouring to iron out, if not avoid entirely), I am also glad that, in general, our administrative processes appear to have worked well.

You raise one or two important points about the marking process itself, not least the legibility (or otherwise) of the comments of colleagues who elect not to type up their feedback. The University is presently exploring a move to e-marking but, in the interim, we will re-enforce to colleagues the importance of writing legibly - this is important not just for our hard-pressed external examiners, but also, of course, for our students - for whom high quality and useful feedback remains a major priority. We will also continue to emphasise to markers the importance of showing, clearly, how the reconciliation of divergent marks has been achieved.

In terms of your wider point about 'grade inflation' this is, as you explain, a "sector-wide" phenomenon. We would of course hope that higher levels of achievement reflect, at least in part, the increased emphasis on quality when it comes to undergraduate admissions (our standard offer for IHP is AAA) as well as our continued desire to improve the quality of the teaching on offer. While we must remain vigilant to ensure that the marks we award are appropriate, there is a wider - institutional - question about how Leeds awards firsts/2:1, and how this compares with other Russell Group institutions. The University is also considering making significant changes to the current, 20-90 marking scale - and, over the longer term, this might well have an impact on our marking culture. In the meantime, the School is - with the support of staff in the School Student Education Service - hoping to undertake some statistical analysis of average marks, across modules at levels 2 and 3, over the past 3-4 years, which will inform a School-wide discussion about our marking culture, most likely at a future Student Education Away Day.

Since you have now concluded your term as external, I would like to thank you - on behalf of the School, and in particular the IHP colleagues - for your considerable efforts over the past four years. We have appreciated very much the professional and thorough way in which you have discharged your numerous responsibilities, and I know that the School has benefited greatly from your thoughtful and well considered advice. It was a particular pleasure to have been able to welcome back to the School one of its most distinguished graduates.

With all best wishes,

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Senior Lecturer in American History  
School of History  
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## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014– 2015

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