

# The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014-15

### 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 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

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?

Yes

#### 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 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 the programmes that are taught at QMUL. The Aims and ILOs of the MA Social and Cultural History at Leeds meet the expectations of the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications for 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.*

This year I was only required to look at two dissertations. These were both of a high standard: students engaged critically with a broad selection of primary materials and showed an impressive familiarity and facility with secondary sources. Both students discussed concepts and theory well – I note that my predecessor had previously expressed satisfaction with the ‘applied theory’ unit on the core module and I wondered if this was a sign that this was still working well.

In both cases, the prodigious thanks given to their supervisors by the students in their acknowledgements suggested that they felt that they had been well taught and received sufficient guidance. Certainly I would feel that the high standard on show in these pieces of work reflected a lot of hard work by supervisors as well as students. As a form of assessment, the dissertation remains a highly effective marker of academic attainment as a taught postgraduate.

Marking was clearly done with care and consistency, and markers’ comments made it easy to understand why a mark had been given with reference to the assessment criteria. In one case, the markers explained why one of the criteria relating to perfection in punctuation was being set aside – which I think was very sensible and absolutely correct, but did lead me to question why this level of virtue was being set so specifically in the first place. First and second markers showed a high level of agreement, with the rationale for reconciliation made clear where necessary. First markers’ comments were detailed and explained how students could improve their work. My only comment would be to encourage all markers to write more fully about what students had done well: as the recipient of this feedback I would without doubt understand why I had been given the mark I had, but I might be more conscious of what I had failed to achieve than what I had done, which seems a shame for the crowning glory of the 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.*

This year’s cohort had two students and, as detailed above, I saw only their dissertations. The marks for these pieces of work, a merit and distinction, seemed wholly appropriate. From a cohort this small it is inappropriate to make judgements about strengths and weaknesses.

**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 external

**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.*

Both dissertations comprised original research that fitted well with the current cutting edge: this reflects the involvement of research-active supervisors with a clear awareness of the field.

**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.*

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?

n/a

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 saw the two dissertations produced on the course this year.

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

Yes to both

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.

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

I was able to choose not to attend the board this year, and I am not aware of any such circumstances requiring such consideration.

#### Other comments

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

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**From:**

**Sent:**

15 December 2015 16:48

**To:**

**Cc:**

**Subject:**

Re: External Examiner Report - MA Social And Cultural History

Dear

Thank you for your external examiner's report for the MA in Social and Cultural History for 2014-15, which I have recently received. It is, of course, extremely gratifying to see such positive comments. I note that you view the degree programme itself as "well-structured" and providing students with "an excellent opportunity" to develop a range of methodological and conceptual approaches, and that you consider the work that you saw to be of a high standard.

I am also glad that the work that you saw had been marked, and second-marked, with "care and consistency" – and that the marks awarded had been explained with clarity. With regards your point about "perfection in punctuation", I can confirm that – following advice from one of our other externals – the School will be reviewing and refreshing the MA marking criteria.

With all best wishes,

Head of School  
Senior Lecturer in American History  
School of History  
University of Leeds