

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 Studies</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA in Medieval Studies
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 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?

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

I have been impressed by the MA and its development over the four years of my appointment as external examiner. During that time the module coverage has continued to broaden, and the interdisciplinary programme now offers exposure to a very wide of periods, topics and methodologies. Academic standards and marking are rigorous, and the MA clearly provides excellent training and preparation for advanced work in medieval studies.

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 for the programme are entirely appropriate and consistent with comparable institutions in the sector. The academic standards applied across the programme are rigorous and very effective in training postgraduate medievalists.

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 meets national benchmarks and undoubtedly compares favourably with MA programmes offered in similar institutions, in both the quality of skills training (in Latin and palaeography) provided and the wide range of thematic options available to students.

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 programme are well designed, combining exams (for the skills modules), essays, primary source commentaries and other imaginative approaches. It is clear from the good standard of the work produced, and from the detailed feedback received by students, that the quality of teaching is high across the programme. Real care has also been taken to ensure the standardisation of grading in the several team-taught modules on the programme.

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.*

Yes. The general standard of work was good this year, including a number of strong dissertations. This indicates the effectiveness of the programme in training students to produce high-level independent research.

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 introduction of new modules this year has broadened the scope of the MA impressively.

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.

Every element of the programme integrates research. The thematic modules are closely linked to the research interests of members of staff, and they all encourage reflection on and engagement with the sources for the study of the topic. The programme also includes rigorous training in the skills needed for research in medieval studies, and an opportunity to practise and develop these skills in the dissertation.

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 material provided by the university and the school of history was clear, comprehensive and helpful.

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: I received everything I needed, and in good time.

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.

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: I received all the assessed work for every module that I examined. In almost every case, the scripts had been clearly and carefully marked and second marked, with the second marking helping to ensure high levels of consistency across the programme.

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

Yes: a range of interesting projects were devised which allowed students to pursue original and up-to-date avenues of research – in some cases, strikingly so. The standard of assessment was rigorous and fair, thanks in part to diligent and thoughtful second marking.

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. The Board of Examiners was conducted professionally and the views of external examiners sought at every juncture. All the recommendations of the Board were fair and consistent with the university's procedures and policies.

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

Yes. These were all handled with sensitivity and with due attention to the university's procedures.

Other comments

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

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 IMS
Subject(s):	MA in Medieval English and History
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Modules in: MEDV 5110: Research Methods and Bibliography MEDV 5235: Medieval English MEDV 5250: Vikings, Saxons and Heroic Culture MEDV 5320: Theologus-Poeta: Dante and Medieval Theology MEDV 5145M: MA Dissertation x 8 HIST 5465M: MA Dissertation x 1
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA

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

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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

No areas require urgent attention.

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 are fully commensurate with the standards demanded for Masters level programmes. However, there appear to have been what one might call 'teething problems' in respect of MEDV 5235 Medieval English. This module will require a module booklet which clarifies assessment procedures for future years.

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 aims and ILOs are set out clearly in the relevant handbooks and are consistent with those at my own institution (University of <>), at other institutions where I have acted as External Examiner, and in respect of national benchmarks.

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.*

Assessment criteria, marking practices and award classifications are rigorous and fair. Students are given clear guidance on preparation for assignments (but note my comments above regarding MEDV 5235 at Standards 1) and receive extensive feedback on their work. Students are given all possible advice on how make improvements for future assessments and are provided with comprehensive comments on their submissions for the 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.*

Students have wide choice of topics to research and an exceptional range of scholarly expertise to guide them. Most take advantage of this provision. The students are given appropriate guidance as to how they might reach their fullest potential in respect of the ILOs. This guidance compares well with provision at my own institution and at other institutions where I have acted as External Examiner. The work I was sent was, in the majority of cases, of a high standard, most notably this year, in respect of the MA Dissertations I was sent.

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.

Whereas last year I commented on 2 modules and just one Dissertation, this year have commented on 9 Dissertations and three modules two of which are part of the new provision (MEDV 5235: Medieval English; MEDV 5250: Vikings, Saxons and Heroic Culture). Of the Dissertation there were 5 Distinctions, 3 Merits and just one Pass. These enhancements in provision and, thus, choice have quite clearly led to exceptional performance from many students across the programme. Nor is it surprising, given this provision, that the MA has attracted so many students.

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.

Students in the School benefit greatly from research-led teaching and the wide range of academic staff expertise. This applies to all the modules I examined. I particularly commend the reintroduction of MEDV 5320: Theologus-Poeta: Dante and Medieval Theology, for which every student essay I received had, quite rightly, been awarded a Distinction.

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

Whilst it is currently not the case that the MA is part of an integrated PhD, it is nonetheless apparent that a significant number of students could readily go on to pursue PhD studies. This was especially evident in the high standard of work produced for the MA Dissertations. A number of these students are already producing work at PhD level; indeed, some are producing work of such originality that it has publishable potential.

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.

Thanks to the courtesy and consideration I have received from the School's academic and administrative staff, I have been able to access considerable guidance from the documentation I have received. I am fully aware of what the School expects from me in my role as External examiner and hope that my efforts in this role are commensurate with these expectations.

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, in all cases except for MEDV 5235 Medieval English where no handbook would appear to have available at the time (July 2015); however, I have been assured that this will not be the case in future.

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?

I did not receive, nor have I asked for, all drafts of examination papers/assessments but the documentation I did receive has been adequate for my needs and role. Examinations and assignment make reasonable expectations of the students and provide them with ample opportunity to demonstrate their engagement with the MA programme.

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?

The scripts I received were sufficient for me to assess student performance on the various modules. The marking processes are scrupulous and the comments and annotations provided are clear and helpful. I have, however, recommended that all scripts sent to External Examiners should include some comment from the internal 2nd markers, albeit that, where agreement is obvious and uncontroversial, such comments would inevitably be brief.

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

The choice of subjects for the Dissertations was wide; indeed, of the 9 Dissertations I received no two were on the same subject. The subjects chosen were intriguing in all cases and, in the majority of cases, very well researched and presented. This is testimony to both the wide range of expertise in the School and to the excellent guidance that students receive. The assessment is appropriate and rigorous, and students clearly have a good understanding of what is expected of them.

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?

I attended the MA Board of Examiners meeting on 4th November 2015. The meeting was well organised and the processes involved were clear and well observed. The Board's recommendations regarding student progression and awards were dealt with in an informed and procedurally appropriate manner. The overall administrative arrangements were professionally conducted.

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

The mitigating circumstances meeting prior to the Board of Examiners meeting was well conducted and involved contributions from both the academic staff who had taught the students and knew of their special circumstances and, helpfully, from the Disability Officer. Each case was considered at length and, where possible, appropriate allowance was made. Where this was not possible, it was clear that regulations prevented further consideration of the circumstances of certain students. All reasonable effort was made in respect of granting allowances for mitigating circumstances.

Other comments

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

From:

Sent:

15 December 2015 16:54

To:

Cc:

Subject:

Re: External Examiner Report - MA Medieval Studies

Dear

Thank you very much for your external examiner's report for the MA in Medieval Studies for 2014-15, which I have recently received. I was very pleased to note your very positive comments about the degree programme, the assessment methods, and the quality of our students' work. It is particularly gratifying to hear that, thanks in part to the centrality of research-led teaching, many of our students are producing work of doctoral-level quality.

Although you expressed confidence that our "marking processes are scrupulous", your point about examiners providing a clear record of how, and why, divergent marks are reconciled is an important one: and one that we shall be reminding colleagues of, at the relevant points in the academic year.

I am also sorry about the particular issues around MEDV5235: Medieval English – but can assure you that these "teething problems" have, indeed, been rectified.

With very best wishes,

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