

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

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner

Completed report

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of 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

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Only applicable in first year of appointment

Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?

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For Examiners completing their term of appointment

Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School

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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.*

Yes.

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 at Leeds broadly compares to its comparators, although I wonder whether it might be worth reviewing the Programme with a view to considering its competitiveness in a fast changing market.

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.*

Although the ILOs are appropriate, it would be timely to review and revise the marking criteria. These remain rather vague and, I suspect, unhelpful to markers. For example, there is little mention of the bibliography and the levels of research expected. This may be partly responsible for some inconsistency in marking at times (see below).

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4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?

- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

The work produced is broadly in line with the standards of similar programmes, and there are some examples of very good practice. In particular, I was impressed by the way the students proposed creative dissertation topics maximising the use of local sources. The connections between the dissertations and other modules on the programme are clear, and this is a positive sign that the curriculum is, on the whole, well-designed. The module on dissertation is well-planned and there is real clarity over the purpose of the exercise among examiners. I still feel that the students are not challenged to confront theoretical issues, and the programme team might reflect upon how students are prepared for doctoral study in terms of positioning their work within theoretical frameworks.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

NA

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'm not sure that the programme has changed over the past year, and therefore it is difficult to discern enhancements. Comments on good practice are captured in box 4 above.

7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching

This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.

There is ample evidence that the research interests of the staff are reflected in both the content of modules and the curriculum overall. As indicated above, these research interests and practices are feeding into the choice of dissertation topic.

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

NA

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

NA

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, although I would urge the Department to give some consideration as to the materials the externals should focus upon. The role of the external is not as a third examiner, as I understand it, and, as such, it would be useful to receive a covering letter from the module leader, offering some reflection and context. This is standard practice elsewhere, and is incredibly helpful for external examiners.

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?

It was not always possible to identify the second examiner. Moreover, there was some variation in the amount of feedback and justifications provided by the second examiner. I was surprised to see that there were almost no disagreements between first and second examiners. This is quite unusual. I wondered whether it might be worth piloting blind-marking on one or two modules to see whether such unanimity persists. It would also be helpful to standardise the assessment forms in use and to ensure that they are completed in full. This makes it easier for external examiners to compare across modules.

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

Yes. See comments above on dissertations.

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 meeting. I was not entirely satisfied with the outcomes, but this is not the fault of the Department, rather the guidance on discretion provided by the University, which remains vague and unhelpful. We spent considerable time thinking about a particular case. Although I know that this is a thorny issue (when does discretion become a new rule for classification?), I do think that the University should give some thought to additional measures (such as mark profile etc.). The focus on the dissertation should not be the sole criterion for considering raising a degree classification, particularly if it is a borderline mark.

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

From:

Sent:

15 December 2015 16:58

To:

Cc:

Subject:

Re: External Examiner Report - MA Modern History

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Achieve marks at the higher level in at least 2/3 of the credits used for classification purposes (this must include the Dissertation module) (i.e. 60 or above (Pass to Merit borderline) and 70 or above (Merit to Distinction borderline)). (Credits that are not at Master's level will not be taken into account when calculating numbers of credits at the higher level.)

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