

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

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

Faculty / School of:	History
Subject(s):	<i>History</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA Race and Resistance
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

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?

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

- 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.*

These are fully appropriate
- 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

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 – long essays and a dissertation – are entirely appropriate and in line with practice elsewhere.

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, students were given adequate opportunities to demonstrate their skills. Some of the best work produced by students in this cohort was outstanding. These students were able to operate at a very sophisticated conceptual level indeed, having made good sense of the academic literature and showing an impressive ability to engage critically with this while producing thoughtful and original work. There were weaker performances, including some with problems with written expression. On average, the engagement of students with the course, particularly their ability to read independently, to make sense of a wide range of literature and to find interesting and exciting topics for their dissertations is impressive. I would suggest that, on average, this sort of engagement and level of achievement is higher on this programme than on comparative courses elsewhere in the UK, in my experience.

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 was very impressed with this course last year and so made no recommendations for improvements to the programme or to individual modules. I am just as satisfied with the programme and modules this time around.

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 University of Leeds has considerable research strength in the fields of the history of the idea of 'race' and of racism, also the histories of resistance to racialised oppression, in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The history of race, racism and Civil Rights activism in the USA is a particular area of strength, and this very clearly shapes the teaching on the core course and the sorts of projects that some students have pursued for their dissertations. This strength in a variety of inter-related areas, including various types of British and other colonial history and American, including African-American, history very clearly benefits this course and has shaped the teaching on the core course and dissertation work in extremely beneficial ways. The course is unique in the UK, as far as I know, and its popularity and successes are a credit to the research culture in History at Leeds in the broad areas of 'race' and resistance.

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. The office was very helpful, and were able to provide all the details that I asked for.

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 have seen a good sample of work, including dissertations and assessments from all modules. I am happy that these represented a good sample of the marks, including some of the highest, lowest and others from in the middle of the range.

On the whole the assessed work was clearly annotated, although I would encourage markers to type their comments whenever that is feasible (and I realise that it is not always) and also to use the sub-headings for feedback provided by the forms. These provide extremely useful ways of structuring feedback so that is of use to students for future assignments.

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

Yes. The topics were appropriate, and it is clear from the research methods module that students have plenty of time and support to choose appropriate subjects and sources for their work. The quality of many of the dissertations was extremely impressive, and it was good to see a number of these awarded marks well above 70. The comments and marks from first and second markers appeared to me to reflect a rigorous and thoughtful process of examination.

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 satisfactory, although it would be useful to have had a little longer to look through the work. I am aware, however, that staff at Leeds are working to tight deadlines. The office was very helpful and able to provide good and clear answers to my questions and responses to queries. I am, unfortunately, unable to attend the board this year due to a clash of commitments brought about by my wife's new job and a lack of childcare. I do not anticipate that there will be a problem next year.

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

I am aware of the procedures from previous years and have no criticisms of the procedures themselves or of how they are routinely implemented by the Department of History at Leeds.

Other comments

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

This is my third year as external examiner for the MA in Race and Resistance, and I continue to be extremely impressed by the quality of the course and the quality of student work. Some of the very best of the dissertations for the course, which deservedly achieved very high distinctions, are a particularly good advert for the quality of the programme and for the commitment and enthusiasm of teaching staff. This is also reflected in the detailed and useful feedback provided by staff on students' work and by the module handbooks.

I have a few observations on the marking and feedback but want to note that these are only comments. They are intended to be useful in maintaining and further improving upon the high standards set by this course:

I would suggest that it is better for students if first markers typed their notes rather than writing them by hand.

It would also be useful to students for all markers to use the subheadings on the feedback form and for them to aim to write more or less the same amount under each one. There is a tendency for some markers to make extended comments under the Argument and Analysis heading but then find much less to say under the other headings. In terms of improving for the future, comments on focus and presentation, in particular, would probably be very useful to students.

It is, of course, normal for the second marker to write shorter comments than the first, but some second markers could sometimes be a little more expansive.

I would urge markers to offer some useful critical advice even to those students who achieve marks of 80 or above. Work in this category is often of near publishable standard, and so it could be useful to students to know what sort of work they could do to improve things for publication as well as to explain why that mark, and not an even higher one, was chosen.

Finally, it is important to note that it is best practice to make a brief note explaining how differences between the marks of internal examiners have been resolved. When internal markers have disagreed, even by just a few marks, most markers make a brief record, for the external and for the student, about how and why that was resolved one way or the other.

In conclusion, all of the material I have seen suggests that students receive enthusiastic, well-informed and well-organised teaching. The marking is fair and rigorous and students are provided with clear feedback on the strengths and shortcomings of their work. Overall, this is a very well-run and successful programme.

From:
Sent: 27 January 2017 11:49
To:
Cc:
Subject: External Examiner's Report

Dear

Many thanks for your external examiner's report on our MA in Race and Resistance.

I was, of course, pleased to read your very positive comments about this programme - including the impressive level of student engagement, the high quality of the work that many of our students produced, and the strong and dynamic relationship between this MA and the School's research strengths in the histories of race, racism, and resistance.

While you commented on the "rigorous and thoughtful" feedback provided on dissertations, you do raise the issue of asking markers to type their comments. This is, of course, wholly desirable (especially for colleagues, like me, who have challenging handwriting). But, pending institutional moves on electronic marking, our approach has been to exhort and encourage - rather than compel - colleagues to turn to the keyboard, rather than the pen.

When it comes to the use of sub-headings, and the importance of advice about 'how to improve', we will pass on your comments to colleagues. In terms of work that is rated 80+ and considered as approaching a publishable standard, one possibility might be to invite those students to talk about how they might develop the piece further, if they so wished.

Over the years we have continually urged first and second markers to set out a clear explanation for how marks have been resolved - and will send out a further reminder in response to your comments.

You noted the relatively short timescale given to you to turn around the review of student work and dissertations. The Student Education Service Office experienced significant staffing changes in the weeks leading up to the Postgraduate classification boards. This meant that there was a delay in sending out some student work to our Externals. I apologise for the inconvenience that this caused. The School is currently reviewing its timescales for this academic year to allow more time for External Examiner scrutiny of student work. I also know that you agreed to take on some additional marking for us, at short notice, and I am personally grateful to you for having taken this on.

With all best wishes,

Professor of Modern History
Head of School
School of History
University of Leeds