

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2015– 2016

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:

- MEDV 5330M The Medieval Tournament
- MEDV 5110 Research Methods and Bibliography
- MEDV5145M MA in Medieval Studies Dissertation
- MEDV5435M: Preaching History
- MEDV5235M: Medieval English
- MEDV5245 Old Norse
- MEDV5250 Vikings, Saxons and Heroic Culture
- HIST MEDV5875M Lifecycles: Birth, Death and Illness in the Middle Ages
- MEDV5120 Palaeography: Reading Medieval Manuscripts

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 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

The MA has always been an excellent programme, providing students with wide choice and, quite clearly, high quality teaching. Where I have tried to be of help has been in respect of the standardisation of feedback and module advice to students. This, I am pleased to say, has been acted on efficiently and to good effect over the four years of my appointment. Internal markers' comments and agreement processes are now comprehensive and clear. Overall, students are very well served by the delivery of the MA modules and have further benefitted from increased choice. My final recommendation is that module convenors should have a check list (or perhaps a tick box list) for all the necessary requirements before sending scripts out to External Examiners. This minor but, I believe, helpful suggestion apart, I have only praise for the School's academic and administrative staff in delivering an MA programme that surely must be among best in the UK.

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.

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 and receive extensive feedback on their work. Teaching standards are of the highest calibre. 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 a wide choice of topics to research, an exceptional range of scholarly expertise to guide them and are given all appropriate supervision as to how they might reach their fullest potential in respect of the Aims and 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 overwhelming majority of cases, of a very high standard, most notably as regards the MA Dissertation. The School is to be congratulated on recruiting students with a high level of ability and a strong commitment to 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.

Whereas last year I commented on nine Dissertations and three modules, which in itself was a significant increase in provision from the previous year, this year I have commented on seven Dissertations, four of which achieved Distinctions, and eight taught modules. This increase in choice and the maintenance of the high standards of delivery set in previous years is much to be commended. Along with this, Internal agreement processes and the resultant detailed feedback that students receive on their work is admirable. It is therefore not surprising that the MA programme has attracted so many students of exceptional ability.

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.

As noted last year, students in the School benefit greatly from research-led teaching and the wide range of academic staff expertise. Particularly commendable is the teaching students receive for languages – Old Norse, Old English, Latin, and Old French. This provides them with research potentials and opportunities that, in a number of cases, produced work of exceptional scholarship, so preparing the MA candidates for doctoral studies, should they wish to pursue further study.

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 evident in both the high standard of work produced for the MA Dissertations and all the taught modules. 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

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 am grateful for 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 have been made fully aware of what the School expects from me in my role as External Examiner and hope that my efforts over the past four years have been 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, I have received full documentation in all cases and, where I have queried certain scripts and marking procedures, all the necessary guidance and advice has been sent to me. In order to avoid such queries from External Examiners in the future, please see my recommendation in Part B of this report (**For Examiners completing their term of appointment**).

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. However, please see my recommendation in Part B of this report (**For Examiners completing their term of appointment**).

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, the 7 Dissertations all concerned research into different areas of medieval literature, languages, and practices. The subjects chosen were intriguing in all cases and, also in all cases, very well researched and presented, so resulting in four Distinctions and three merits. 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 2nd November 2016. 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 School's administrative staff and 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

I have enjoyed my time as External Examiner for the School's MA programme and have learned a great deal from the School's procedures, exemplary teaching practices and, indeed, the research conducted by the MA candidates. I offer my personal thanks for the courtesies I have received over the last four years from academic and administrative staff and wish the School well for the future. Should any circumstance arise about which I can be of help, either procedurally or as an academic colleague, please do not hesitate to ask.

From:
Sent: 27 January 2017 11:50
To:
Cc:
Subject: MA External Examiner's Report

Dear

Many thanks indeed for you external examiner's report on our MA in Medieval Studies.

It was, of course, very gratifying to read your very positive comments about this programme - including the range of module choice available to students, the level of academic support and advice provided, the very high standard of work produced by our students, and the quality and clarity of the feedback that colleagues provide on written work. It is also good to know that your advice on standardising feedback and module advice has led to a demonstrable improvement.

I was particularly pleased to note your positive comments about the way in which we dealt with mitigating circumstances: these are not always easy cases to consider, and it is good to know that we have done our best to make appropriate allowances.

Our professional support staff work very hard, often under challenging circumstances, and I know that they will appreciate your kind comments about the administrative procedures and organisational arrangements. You did suggest that the School might provide a check list to accompany the student work that is sent out to externals - and we will introduce this for 2016-17 (to include such information as a spreadsheet of student marks - including component marks, marking criteria, and module handbook).

Finally, since you have now completed your four-year term, I would like to thank you for having carried out your duties in a thoughtful, constructive and professional manner. We have certainly benefited from your advice and expertise, and your efforts on behalf of the School have been greatly appreciated.

With all best wishes,

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