

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

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 Medieval Studies: MEDV500M (Beginners Latin); MEDV5001M (Intermediate Latin); MEDV5145M (Dissertation); MEDV5260M (Warfare in the Age of the Crusades); MEDV5281 (How to be a saint); MEDV5295M (Religious communities); HIST5028M (Bede's Northumbria); HIST5875M (lifecycles)
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

Points of innovation and/or good practice

Please highlight areas of innovation or good practice within the programmes or processes you have been involved with in this box.

The quality of research in MA dissertations and the breadth of subjects which students are tackling, from very detailed linguistic work to broad theoretical structures is impressive and the quality of dissertations demonstrates that these students are well supported.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.

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

Not applicable

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y / N
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	Y / N
3.	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	Y / N

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	Y / N
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y / N
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y / N
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	Y / N

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

Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Y / N
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y / N
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y / N
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y / N
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y / N
<p><i>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</i></p> <p>The programme is an excellent one. It provides high quality skills teaching, ensuring students have the opportunity to gain the necessary skills in palaeography and Latin. I have not been called upon to act as external examiner for the research methods course, but this is a standard part of a masters degree. Optional modules build upon the research strengths of staff and allow students to investigate a range of subjects as well as enforcing some engagement with interdisciplinary work. Its learning outcomes and stated aims are clearly stated and adhered to.</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y / N
<p><i>Please explain how this is/could be achieved (examples might include: curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research)</i></p> <p>This is achieved through the provision of optional subjects in staffing research areas, where students' work demonstrates that they are encouraged to challenge current academic thought where this can be substantiated through the evidence,</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	Y / N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	Y / N
<p><i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i></p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y / N
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y / N
<p><i>Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs, in particular: the design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards; the</i></p>		

quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.

Student assessments are carefully designed to fit with the course in question, involving for example straightforward tests in skills subjects and more substantial essay work in optional subjects. The dissertation is the central assessment of the MA and demonstrates that students can put in practice their practical skills as well as assessing and structuring an argument to a high level. The learning outcomes for earlier modules are clearly designed to support students in developing confidence and skills for this final piece of work, whilst the learning outcomes for the dissertation reflect the necessary demands to be made on students at this level.

18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y / N
-----	--	-------

19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y / N
-----	---	-------

Please comment on 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:

As I would expect as external, the student work sent to me was across the range of abilities. At the top level, however, and particularly in the final dissertation, students often demonstrated exceptionally high levels of achievement, producing genuinely original work. The standards on this course are fully commensurate with, and sometimes somewhat above, that of comparable courses.

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:

Staff commitment to the provision of careful and detailed feedback, both amongst first and second markers, continues to be impressive and worth noting.

The Progression and Awards Process

20.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiner's role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Y / N
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y / N
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y / N
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y / N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y / N
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y / N
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y / N
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y / N
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y / N
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y / N
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y / N
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N

35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y / N
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i>		

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: 2016-17

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

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

Points of innovation and/or good practice

Please highlight areas of innovation or good practice within the programmes or processes you have been involved with in this box.

I was impressed by the excellent range of modules offered in these programmes, and I would particularly commend the emphasis on practical research skills in terms of palaeography and language provision that is essential for developing the next generation of scholars. The materials and assessment for all of the modules I saw were of a very high standard, and I would particularly draw attention to the use of portfolio assessments as an excellent way to help students engage with wide ranging material effectively. In terms of the assessment practices employed, I found the way in which dialogue between markers was evidenced to be very helpful, and it was clear that all of the markers were engaging in detail with the work and with each others' views in order to ensure robust and fair marking. In giving feedback to students, I was particularly impressed by the explicit use of the published criteria to help explain to students how their work sat within those marking criteria, and by the clear advice given to students on how to improve. In most cases, feedback was typed, which also seemed helpful for students and markers alike.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.

N/A

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

If vernacular texts are set as palaeographical exercises, it would be helpful if the individual setting them and producing the fair transcription for markers were familiar with the language(s) in question. This is a minor point, especially as it made no difference to the marking and certainly did not disadvantage any students, but this year an inaccurate fair transcription of an Old English text was provided to markers.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	N
3.	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	Y

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	Y / N
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y / N
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y / N
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	Y / N

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

Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Y
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y

Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.

The MA in Medieval Studies is internationally renowned, and for good reason; this programme provides one of the most comprehensive groundings in research practices and approaches for Medieval Studies of any Masters level programme in the world. The programme structure is geared very much to providing students with the skills necessary to undertake research in Medieval Studies, and this contributes to the production of some really excellent MA dissertations, as well as providing students with the perfect springboard for doctoral work. This is a very carefully designed programme, which is perfectly geared to achieving its aims and intended learning outcomes, and there are very few MA programmes in the UK that are comparably effective in developing new researchers in the field of Medieval Studies.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
-----	---	---

Please explain how this is/could be achieved (examples might include: curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research)

The modules taught in this MA programme are closely informed by the research practices and research interests of the staff involved. The programme's emphasis on developing key research skills draws heavily on the skills and approaches that the staff teaching the programme employ in their own research. At the same time, modules such as 'Medieval Bodies', 'The Medieval Tournament' and 'Vikings, Saxons and Heroic Culture' are informed by the research of various colleagues and reflect current developments in the discipline and encourage students to engage as researchers examining sources in the light of current work in these areas.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
-----	--	---

Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

As the foregoing comments suggest, this programme is perfectly designed as training for a PhD, and this is one of its great strengths.

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
-----	--	---

Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:

16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<i>Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs, in particular: 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.</i>		
<p>Modules on the programme utilise a range of types of assessment that are carefully geared to test the ILOs of those modules. This includes language exercises and practical palaeographical exercises alongside more traditional essays, and the use of assessment portfolios in some modules is, as noted above, an excellent way of engaging students with the breadth of the material covered. The marking arrangements are also transparent and ensure fairness, with both markers engaging carefully with each piece and providing clear evidence for their decision-making processes.</p> <p>There is one area in which I think some further thought could be given to assessment practices. In marking translation work, it is difficult to envisage how the very wide distinction band of marks can usefully be employed, since the difference is very slight between a near-flawless translation that might reasonably gain a low distinction and an absolutely flawless translation that should, presumably, achieve the highest possible mark. This is a thorny problem and certainly not unique to this programme, but it is worth considering whether there are any possibilities for addressing it.</p>		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y
<i>Please comment on 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:</i>		
<p>Student performance across the programme is very impressive, and the dissertation in particular included a number of very well-deserved distinctions this year; this is a testament to very high quality teaching, learning and assessment across the board.</p>		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i>		

The Progression and Awards Process

20.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiner's role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Y
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y

25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p>		

Other comments

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

As I said in person at the final exam board, it is clear to me that Medieval Studies at Leeds continues to go from strength to strength, and I am delighted to see the MA programme flourishing and continuing to provide so well for its students. I would also like to record my thanks to the administrative staff in the School of History who have been unfailingly helpful throughout the year and made sure I had everything I needed in a timely fashion.