

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

Title and Name of Examiner:

Institution:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

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

My experience of the programme over the past four years has been overwhelmingly positive. This remains a very well-structured and intellectually stimulating MA programme.

There have been small changes during my time as external examiner, mostly to do with changes in teaching staff on the module due to patterns of leave, but the quality of provision appears to me to have been consistently very good.

I am impressed by the standards achieved by students on this programme. There is, as you would anticipate, a spread of marks each year—a reflection of the different aptitudes, abilities and application shown by individual students. But I have been impressed each year with the number of students achieving marks in the distinction category, a good many of them scoring above 80. This, I expect, is testament to the fact that they are pushed and (more importantly) inspired and nurtured by their tutors. There have been some especially impressive dissertations, showcasing impressive work with primary sources and sophisticated engagement with historiography.

My impression of the marking is that it is robust and consistently fair. Sometimes, particularly during my first couple of years as an external, I felt the marking could be a bit on the tough side. But it is very clear that markers are prepared to reward excellent work with high marks and to use the full range, including marks about 80.

The procedures around moderating and second marking could, perhaps, be tightened up a bit. Would it be useful to have a form that requires both the marker and second marker to identify themselves, for instance? At the moment the identity of the second marker is generally unclear (certainly on the dissertation form). Since I've been external examiner on the module, colleagues have more regularly provided a note on how differences between marks were reconciled (although that ought to happen every case). It is also worth pointing out that there is a disparity in the detail and extent of feedback comments. Some tutors are providing students much more than others, and second markers' comments vary most widely—some writing a lot, others making only a cursory note. Where possible, it is always best for a student (I think) if comments can be typed rather than hand written. Could it be worth being a bit more explicit about what is required/desired/recommended?

Finally, I have always been impressed by the quality and level of administrative support for this course. During a time when many universities are hollowing out and centralising their administrative structures to save money, History at Leeds ought, I think, to be extremely grateful for the support, expertise, and hard work of staff in a dedicated departmental administrative office.

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.*

These are fully appropriate

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.*

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.*

As last year, I thought that students were given adequate opportunities to demonstrate their skills. Again, 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. As is to be expected, there were some weaker performances, but generally 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 still 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. The history of modern Africa and India are also areas of considerable strength. These specialisms very clearly shape the teaching on the core course and the sorts of projects that some students have pursued for their dissertations. Research 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.

As in previous years, on the whole the assessed work was clearly annotated, although I would still 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. On the whole, 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 good. 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 _____ which means it is not possible for me to take a trip to Leeds from _____ on the day of the board.

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 fourth and final 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. As in previous years, 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 been very impressed and satisfied by the overall quality of the marking and feedback. Where I have had questions, I have raised these in my comments on individual modules or pieces of work, and none of those are serious enough to warrant a general comment.

My overall thoughts and suggestions about the course and how its administration might be fine-tuned can be found in the box above for examiners reaching the end of their term of employment.

It simply remains for me to commend colleagues at Leeds for an excellent and well-run MA course that I hope will continue to go from strength to strength.