

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:	School of History
Subject(s):	<i>International History and Politics</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	All second and third year modules in International History and Politics
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	Bachelor of Arts

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 modules are supported by high quality course guides handed out to students. The course offer a wide range of subject matter.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.
I can't point to any particular enhancements, but this is more because of the extremely high quality of the courses and the associated processes of teaching and delivery, rather than any failure to improve.

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
NA

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiners Handbook?	Y / N
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School 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 a 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

Excellent all round. The process of checking draft papers and course handbooks from early in the year, to the viewing of sample scripts and dissertations, to last-minute business around the time of the Exam Board/special circumstances etc meetings, worked exceptionally well, even more smoothly than the previous year. While the process was fine last year, it was even better this year. Things really do seem to purr along very nicely indeed, orchestrated by the staff of the exams office and a highly-developed school and university system. The experience, in addition to the smooth transit of material back and forth by email, PDF attachment, and overland mail, is made all the more pleasant and relaxed by the sharpness of responses from the exams office, and the fact that everyone is on the ball.

I was particularly glad this year, perhaps as a result of a request last year, to receive along with the exam question papers copies of all of the course guidebooks.

I also received the External Examiner Handbook 16-17, and the School of History UG Handbook 16-17.

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.

My overall impression is that the composite modules offer students an extremely well structured degree experience featuring exciting and well-taught courses. The modules are smoothly designed and allow students to understand the concepts involved, and the chance to understand how they might achieve the stated learning objectives.

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

This is achieved by having subject matter experts design and teach their own courses. It is very clear that the research knowledge and experience of Leeds' tutors are embedded in the courses that they are at liberty to design and teach.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
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Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
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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)?	Y / N
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

I don't know about this.

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<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 quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.</i></p> <p>Yes it does. The course module outline documents are particularly good at explaining methods of assessment. Assessment methods include essays, dissertations, presentations, and examination by question and gobbet commentary. A full range of assessment methods are offered. Module marking appears to be rigorously conducted by a mature and effective in-school system and code of practice, in to which new members of staff are routinely integrated.</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
<p><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> <p>I think it's a really awkward question – measuring performance in relations to comparable courses and 'cohorts'. I expect that, while many academics would 'have a go' at this question, a lot would come up with some pretty over-generalized or indeed pretty worthless stuff. And measuring the strengths and weaknesses of a cohort - well! What a tough question! I'd rather leave that to more expert appraisers, and hope that not too many unqualified 'have a go' experts provide unhelpful answers. I think it's quite difficult to talk about 'cohorts', when attainment is often very much down to a whole range of factors going to make up the <i>individual's</i> experience and learning journey. All that I can say with any confidence is that I am impressed with the work produced by the Leeds IHP students, in the round. I am impressed – from what limited perspective one can gain as an external examiner – by the teaching offered by the School's staff. And I can say with confidence that the students, as viewed through the prism of exam output, compare favourably with students I have encountered as an external examiner elsewhere, in previous employment at Oxford and ongoing peripheral BA and M. St. teaching and assessing there, and in comparison to the largely masters level students with whom I work at</p>		
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i></p>		

The Progression and Awards Process

20.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiners 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?	Y
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

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:

The Special Circumstances and Exam Board meetings were – again – expertly and smoothly organized and directed by the Head of Department, the Exam and Assessment Lead, and the Exams Office staff. I always enjoy the early period of checking draft exam question/gobbet papers, and can say with confidence that IHP offers an excellent range of questions and extract/comment papers.

All necessary material was furnished, and, like last year, I was sent an exquisitely well-balanced representative sample of all work involved across IHP’s modules. The scripts are clearly very well organized, stored and managed post-exam.

Agreeing marks seems to happen effortlessly.

My verbal contribution at the Exam Board was deliberately brief; the fact is that from my perspective the IHP module is excellent, in every facet discernible to the external examiner, and there was no point in dragging things out with the usual exhortations and platitudes (be confident enough to mark across the full scale, etc etc) – especially if this just repeats previous offered opinion, or that forwarded by other examiners. Excellent, too, are the processes connecting the external examiner to his/her role.

My only minor observations, advocating moderate change aimed at improvement, are common ones. Firstly, encouraging tutors to produce thorough course guides can only be beneficial. Some are lengthy (not that this alone necessarily makes them better), some are brief. While one doesn’t necessarily want to best experienced tutors or role out a new policy to be adhered to, it might be possible to induct new members of staff with a ‘best practice’ guideline regarding length, content, levels of descriptiveness, extent of bibliographical detail, etc, provided in course guides/handbooks.

The second observation, and again, one from among the litany of constant external examiners’ refrains, relates to marking script comments. Of course, they are bound to vary. But sometimes the variety becomes significant. As markers, we should be aware of the purpose of these comments; most people use them to justify the mark they’ve awarded, but some persist in viewing them as an opportunity to pen cryptic notes.

Other comments

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