

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 20/11/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

School of History

Subject(s):

History

Programme(s) / Module(s):

International History and Politics – a range of modules

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

BA

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 have again been incredibly impressed by a number of things regarding the external examining experience for the School of History's International History and Politics programme. The interaction with the professional services team at all stages – draft exam paper inspection, dispatch of scripts, examiners' meeting correspondence, and follow up validations and signatures – has been smooth and very well handled from the Leeds end, and and colleagues are always quick to respond and friendly to work with. The same must be said, too, of the academic staff involved in leading, coordinating, and teaching this flagship element of Leeds's undergraduate history and politics offer; one always has the sense that one is working with people who welcome the input and understand the role of external examiners. Consequently, one feels, as an external, that one's contribution is welcome and valued. Not, of course, that there is much need for anything more than a 'light touch' – in addition, of course, to the proper and thorough scrutiny of exam materials and sample exam scripts and theses – because the programme is run in such a professional efficient, and enlightened fashion. I have again been impressed, at the 'business end' of the process, by the internal resolution of marks between markers, and the explanations offered for grades, which makes it easy for the external to see what's gone on and gives general confidence in the rigour of the process and fairness of the grades awarded. It is also worth noting that, though industrial action during the year disrupted things, this in no way adversely affected the School's dealings with the external examining process (from my perspective).

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

Things were exceptionally good last year, and the School's very high standards have been maintained, is how I would prefer to construe this matter.

Matters for Urgent Attention

NA

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

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

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

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

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

NA

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.

I don't have anything to add to what I entered here last year, which was basically to reflect that the courses offered in International History and Politics are interesting, dynamic, research-led, well designed, and with clear expectations placed on the students.

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)

There is no doubt that the modules in International History and Politics are informed by the research of the staff involved. I've been really impressed by the sense of specialist knowledge, and indeed, relish for the subject, that suffuses the course material that students are given as they undertake one or other of the courses. This also comes through – and is the foundation of – one of the most impressive aspects of the International History and Politics programme: the BA dissertations. These allow students to look at really diverse topics within the parameters of the various courses for which they are written, and show the research expertise of the tutors who are able to guide the reading and primary research of the students. This can only be done by virtue of the research specialisms of the School's academics, which allows the students to experience 'proper' historical research and the production of research material.

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)?	N
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

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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>Assessment methods include written, timed examinations, specifically essays and comments/commentary invited on 'gobbets' style papers. I review every exam question, and the School is meticulous in ensuring that resits questions don't overlap/repeat summer questions. The questions are uniformly appropriate in my experience to date. I always find the gobbets particularly fascinating. Completing this traditional suite of assessment activities, the students also write dissertations based on primary and secondary research.</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>A very high standard was demonstrated in the sample material I saw, descending the curve to minimal pass and fail standard work. As most of my work involved postgraduate students, largely at King's but also regular master's students at , it is difficult to answer this question as authoritatively as other colleagues might. Falling back on my undergraduate teaching experience at 1996-2004 and , 2004-05 – and recent exposure of UGs through supervising History BA dissertations, I feel qualified to say that the standard at Leeds compares very favourably.</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 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?	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?	NA
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	NA
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	NA
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i> I was unable to attend the meeting because of a last-minute emergency, so was engaged in all the processes up until that moment and thereafter, but this means I'm unable to comment on the actual board business on the day.</p>		

Other comments

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

One area that I'd suggest might require consideration is the dispatch and return of scripts, and so here's a little homily on the subject. The scripts are posted to me in normal padded envelopes. This isn't particularly secure given the absolutely irreplaceable nature of the content; on at least one occasion a packet containing script has almost entirely come open in the post. Also, bear this in mind: even if you pay for a 'signed for' Royal Mail service (I can't recall whether Leeds SoH does or not), this doesn't mean this is actually going to happen. In my area, we are perhaps over-friendly with our postmen and women, and they tend to know us; this means that not infrequently even 'sign for' packages are left by the door or 'round by the bins'! Unlikely, of course, but this could lead to theft, or, more likely, a good dowsing in a rain shower!

There's then the burden – I think an unfair one – of the examiner having to return the scripts. This could either be done separately, returning each package as it had arrived. But I for one can't be bothered going to the Post Office up in town that often, nor do I want to cart large envelopes into my department, 2 buses, 2 hours, and some walking away from home. That leaves the only alternative - to wait til all one's scripts and dissertations have been received, and then go to the time and considerable irritation of bagging them all up and carting them to the Post Office in one go. I forget the actual weight of the lot I send back in June, but it was very heavy and took some considerable exertion to bus it to town and walk to the PO. The recuperated cost of packaging and postage gets nowhere close to compensating for this most unwelcome task. The only other option is bringing them in person to the exam board. But that's too much weight to be lugging around, and a really silly risk to the safety of the papers.

So, what to do? Easy. For proper security, and for the consideration of your poor oppressed external examiners, do what do: send all scripts and theses in secure super-strong sealed plastic bags, delivered by a professional courier company. These bags are then used to return the material, with security tabs to be applied this end, and a courier collection is then arranged at the convenience of the external. It's going to cost you – but it's your job and the security of your scripts that's at stake, and you shouldn't put so much work on the externals. Amen.

Part C: School Response to External Examiner Report

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

History

Programme(s) / Module(s):

International History and Politics

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

BA

Title and Name of Responder:

Prof. Andrea Major

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

History

Address for communication:

Michael Sadler Building
University of Leeds,
LS2 9JT.

Email:

Telephone:

*If the individual responding to the report is not the Head of School please state their position within the School.

Completing the School response

The completed School response (including the full original report) should be attached to an e-mail and sent to the Pro-Dean for Student Education in the relevant Faculty. Following approval by the Pro-Dean for Student Education, the School must send the response (including the full original report) directly to the External Examiner. A copy must also be emailed to the Quality Assurance Team at qat@leeds.ac.uk. External Examiners should receive a formal response no later than six weeks after receipt of the original report.

Response to Points of innovation and/or good practice

I would like to thank _____ for _____ warm and supportive words about the IHP Programme. We are pleased to have received such positive feedback and endorsement of the programme and its delivery and I will pass on these kind comments to everyone involved, including both academic and SES staff.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

I'm gratified to read that _____ believes our high standards have been maintained and can assure _____ we will endeavour ensure that this continues in the future.

Response to Matters for Urgent Attention

If any areas have been identified for urgent attention before the programme is offered again please provide a specific response to them here:

N/A

Response to questions 1-7 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

N/A

Standards

Response to questions 8 to 16 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

The comments here are again very positive, particularly around research led teaching on this programme and student achievement, of which we are very proud.

Assessment and Feedback

Response to questions 17 to 19 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

No issues are raised, and we are pleased to learn that our processes are considered robust and appropriate.

The Progression and Awards Process

Response to questions 20-35 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

N/A

Other comments

Response to items included in the 'Other Comments' section of the report

We are currently reviewing our processes for sharing work with external examiners and will most certainly take these suggestions into consideration.