

Memorandum

Date: 8 October 2009

From: Simeon Underwood,
Academic Registrar

To: Dr Joanna Lewis

cc: Professor Dominic Lieven, Demetra Frini, Janet Hartley

External Examiner's Report 2009 (Undergraduate courses and programmes)

I attach an external examiner's report from Professor Martin Thomas which relates to your board.

These reports are the most important piece of evidence available to the School in demonstrating its academic standards and the quality of its provision, both to itself and to the outside world. The School is therefore anxious that any suggestions or critical comments in them are considered with care and in a spirit of dialogue with the external examiner.

In general, as someone who reads the full set of both undergraduate and postgraduate reports, I am impressed by the numerous positive comments from examiners. They are often highly laudatory about the high level of the School's academic standards and the integrity with which the assessment process is carried out. Cumulatively the reports provide strikingly positive support for what departments are doing.

This is a highly laudatory report – indeed, it is among the most laudatory reports I have seen in several years of carrying out this process. The only response it needs is a note of thanks. Also, although my remit requires me to draw the most negative reports to the attention of the Pro-Director (Teaching and Learning), I will send her a copy of this report as an example of the other extreme.

Please note that the third part of the report form, which was new last year, asks the examiner for comments to be shared with students. I would ask you to make this section of the form available to students by sending it to the next appropriate staff-student liaison committee and/or by putting it on your website.

Best wishes,



PP Simeon

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

External examiner's report form 2008/09

Dear Colleague

Attached is our annual external examiner's report form. The form comes in three parts: part A asks some basic quality assurance questions; part B is for use by academic departments and/or Boards of Examiners; part C is to be made available to appropriate students, for example through departmental Staff/Student Liaison Committees. Please complete all three sections.

It would be a great help to us if you were able to complete the form in an electronic version. If you are willing to do so, please email the completed form to Katrina Etheridge at examinations@lse.ac.uk

We do however recognise that for some examiners the paper version is easier to use, in which case please complete the attached form and return it to Katrina Etheridge, Student Services Centre, LSE, Houghton St, London WC2A 2AE.

If at all possible we would like to receive your form within two weeks of the final examiners' meeting.

If you have any questions about this process, please contact Simeon Underwood, Academic Registrar (s.underwood@lse.ac.uk).

Thank you for the time and trouble you take over these reports. We see them as an especially important part of our quality assurance processes.

Janet Hartley
Pro-Director (Teaching and Learning)
July 2009

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

External examiner's report form 2008/09

The School sees it as important that there should be a three-way dialogue on standards and assessment between you as the external examiner, the Department concerned and the central School bodies. If the space provided in the box is not large enough for your answers please continue on a separate sheet.

Your name and institution:

Professor Martin Thomas, University of Exeter

Department you are responsible for examining (eg Economics):

Department of International History

Degree(s) being examined (e.g. MSc/BSc in Economics):

BA History

Course(s) being examined (e.g. EC484, Econometric Analysis):

HY113, HY203, HY222, HY233, HY235, HY237, HY304, HY312, HY313, HY316

Were you able to attend the final examiners' meeting(s)?

YES

DATE(S): 2nd July 2009

PART C

This part of the form will be shared with students, usually through departmental Staff:Student Liaison Committees. You are asked to provide a brief summary of your comments from Parts A and B that might be of particular interest to students. We would also ask that you restrict your comments to those that would be of primary interest to students, rather than, for example, technical points on assessment schemes. What you have written will not be changed, though it may be accompanied by a statement of the actions the Department or School has taken in response to your comments.

Please use the space below to provide commentary on any or all of the following topics:

- Strengths/weaknesses of the programme/course
- Methods of teaching (judging by standards achieved by students)
- Methods of assessment
- Standard of the student performance

The Department of International History offers an exceptionally well-integrated BA degree that expects and secures the highest standards from its students.

I am particularly impressed by the following aspects of the degree:

- An excellent balance between European and non-European courses that increasingly offers students the opportunity to study subjects beyond either national or Eurocentric boundaries.
- High quality first year courses that provide breadth and depth of coverage to students while preparing them well for the more specialist courses pursued in years 2 and 3.
- A commitment to the integration of Political Theory and other theoretical approaches within individual courses and within the degree programme as a whole.
- The opportunity offered to students through final-year dissertations to pursue extended independent study into complex subjects, often through archivally-based research. Numerous students achieved outstanding marks for their dissertations, a reflection of their hard work and of the clarity with which they have been advised, particularly regarding the feasibility and scope of selected research topics.
- Clear evidence of correlation between high quality teaching and high quality marks.
- The expectation that students need to demonstrate both conceptual understanding and critical insight in order to excel in summative work. (Factual knowledge, on other words, cannot substitute for sophisticated and well-supported argument.)
- Due consideration is given by Examination Boards to special/extenuating circumstances cases.
- Well-organised examination mark-sheets that provide clear evidence of examiners' views and their judgements on marks awarded. Put simply, the written comments provided and the resultant marks awarded indicate that internal marking is conducted fairly, transparently, and thoroughly.
- Where fails or borderline marks are given, the markers take pains to justify in writing why their decision has been reached. This is clearly essential and is certainly being done.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND TROUBLE IN COMPLETING THIS FORM.

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

External examiner's report form 2008/09

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Your name and institution: **Peter Jackson, Aberystwyth University**

Department you are responsible for examining (eg Economics):

International History

Degree(s) being examined (e.g. MSc/BSc in Economics): **Various combinations with International History including International Relations and Government.**

Course(s) being examined (e.g. EC484, Econometric Analysis): **HY101, HY116 , HY206, HY208, HY209, HY226, HY232, HY300, HY303, HY311, HY318, HY320.**

Were you able to attend the final examiners' meeting(s)?

YES

DATE(S): 2 July 2009

PART C

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Please use the space below to provide commentary on any or all of the following topics:

- Strengths/weaknesses of the programme/course
- Methods of teaching (judging by standards achieved by students)
- Methods of assessment
- Standard of the student performance

The undergraduate programme in the Department of International History has many strengths. Among the most important are:

- The department offers a wide range of choice in courses.
- Courses cover a variety of geographical regions, time periods and themes.
- The standards of teaching are very high and this is borne out year after year by exceptional overall student performance.
- Nearly all students graduate the department having developed all of the key historical skills: the ability to use evidence to make an argument; a sophisticated grasp of the nature of historical evidence; the ability to assess the relative persuasiveness of historical arguments based on evidence and, very often, the ability to comment on these debates from an original perspective.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND TROUBLE IN COMPLETING THIS FORM.



THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

External examiner's report form 2008/09

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Your name and institution:

Maiken Umbach, University of Manchester

Department you are responsible for examining (eg Economics):

International History

Degree(s) being examined (e.g. MSc/BSc in Economics):

undergraduate

Course(s) being examined (e.g. EC484, Econometric Analysis):

HY 114, 117, 221, 230, 234, 302, 314, 315, 319

Were you able to attend the final examiners' meeting(s)?

YES

DATE(S): 2 June 2009

PART C

This part of the form will be shared with students, usually through departmental Staff:Student Liaison Committees. You are asked to provide a brief summary of your comments from Parts A and B that might be of particular interest to students. We would also ask that you restrict your comments to those that would be of primary interest to students, rather than, for example, technical points on assessment schemes. What you have written will not be changed, though it may be accompanied by a statement of the actions the Department or School has taken in response to your comments.

Please use the space below to provide commentary on any or all of the following topics:

- Strengths/weaknesses of the programme/course
- Methods of teaching (judging by standards achieved by students)
- Methods of assessment
- Standard of the student performance

I was impressed by the range of material covered in the courses I examined, and by the thoroughness with which most students tackled the questions. The vast majority of scripts I read were extremely well-informed, reflecting good teaching and high levels of motivation, and, at the top end, also imaginative and exciting. Occasionally, I thought particular topics invited more methodological experimentation and risk-taking than was apparent from the scripts.

As for assessment, I found the written feedback provided by internal examiners on all my courses very detailed, constructive and helpful, and in most instances, I agreed with the marks awarded. There were some specific instances, however, where the written feedback did not appear to match the grade awarded by the same internal examiner (i.e. the prose description identified significant weaknesses both in historical knowledge and the structure of the argument, but the essay was still awarded a mark in the high 60s.) Fuller marking criteria should help iron out such anomalies. This should also help clarify the difference between work within the First Class range, where there is currently little systematic differentiation between 70, 80 and 90% marks, being equivalent to a difference of TWO FULL CLASSES elsewhere on the scale. I feel it is important the clarity and consistency are established at this end of the marking scale.

Another area of concern was plagiarism. This was a particular problem in one dissertation I examined, in which I easily identified a few instances by just googling three phrases. I did not regard it as my task to check the text more fully, but was surprised to find that the Department does not, as a routine check, use automatic plagiarism detecting software on dissertations. This usually flags up most offenders, and course tutors can then follow this up by exploring plagiarism from non-online resources to determine the extent of the problem.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND TROUBLE IN COMPLETING THIS FORM.