

1.

I was particularly impressed by the student work I saw this year, in exam scripts and even more so in dissertations. Students made excellent use of local archives, and presented their findings in clearly structured, analytically ambitious and well-expressed dissertations. In nearly all cases, they had clearly benefitted from intensive and exemplary supervision.

Overall, student performance was very much in line with other leading history departments in the UK. The only relative – but very slight! – weakness I see relates to an occasional tendency in exam essays (which does not apply across the board!) to opt for exclusively narrative answer formats, which avoid explicit engagement with underlying conceptual, methodological or historiographical issues. The benefit of this is that it gives student the opportunity to display more actual knowledge of historical facts than I have seen in most other comparable institutions. The downside is that non-narrative skills for interpreting the past are not as rigorously tested. I would thus like to reiterate my recommendation to challenge students more on these other fronts. This could be achieved in different ways. Possibilities may include a historiography and/or methodology course at level 1, on which all future courses can build, or the introduction of different rubrics of questions within individual papers, where some require more factual and other more historiographical or methodological answers, or simply more informal emphasis on such dimensions in teaching, inviting and encouraging the students to display the full range of their interpretative skills in answers to all questions, in all papers.

Finally, I would also urge the department not to abolish assessed work or components of exams that are based on the analysis of primary source extracts (“gobbets”), even though it emerged at the exam board that scores in this element of exams tend to be a little lower on average than the mean. In my view, it is the purpose of history degrees to train students in a variety of skills, which includes the systematic analysis of “messy data”, so I feel strongly that we should not drop certain elements of assessment just because they require students to engage with unfamiliar material in ways that they have not yet practised at school.

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2.

The undergraduate programme in the Department of International History has a very wide range of 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.
- Students are consistently challenged to stretch themselves intellectually by the variety of assessment techniques deployed by the department.
- 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.

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3.

The programme is enviably wide-ranging and expertly taught. This latter observation is particularly evidenced by the high quality of the final-year dissertations. Some of those I read were quite outstanding. Assessment was at all times thorough, indeed meticulously done. Any differences of opinion between internal markers were carefully and fully laid out, as were the wider contexts where course work was involved. In general, the standard of student performance ranks with the very best U.K. universities

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