

PERIODIC REVIEW OF HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

- 1 An internal review of programmes in the Department of History was held on 21 and 22 November 2019. The members of the Panel were:
 - a. Professor Clare Furneaux, Teaching and Learning Dean (*Chair*)
 - b. Mr Peter D'Sena, Learning and Teaching Specialist, University of Hertfordshire (*external member, subject specialist*)
 - c. Professor Katy Cubitt, Professor of Medieval History, University of East Anglia (*external member, subject specialist*)
 - d. Dr Katharine Burn, Associate Professor of Education, Department of Education, University of Oxford (*external professional member*)
 - e. Dr Anne Thies, School of Law (*internal member*)
 - f. Dr Geoff Taggart, Institute of Education (*internal member*)
 - g. Ms Grace England, MSc Species Identification and Survey Skills, University of Reading (*student member*)
 - h. Ms Jennie Chetcuti, Senior Quality Support Officer, Centre for Quality Support and Development (*Secretary*).

- 2 The Panel met the following members of staff:
 - a. Dr Richard Blakemore (*Departmental Director of Teaching and Learning*)
 - b. Dr Rohan Deb Roy (*Study Abroad Coordinator*)
 - c. Professor Joel Felix (*Head of Department*)
 - d. Dr Andrea Kreideweiss (*Director of Careers and Employability*)
 - e. Professor Patrick Major (*School and Departmental Director of Academic Tutoring*)
 - f. Dr Elizabeth Matthew (*Lecturer and former Departmental Director of Teaching and Learning*)
 - g. Professor Helen Parish (*Head of School*)
 - h. Professor Rebecca Rist (*Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies Director*)
 - i. Dr Ruth Salter (*Teaching Fellow*)
 - j. Professor David Stack (*School Director of Teaching and Learning*)
 - k. Dr Jacqui Turner (*Associate Professor and School Director of Recruitment*)

- l. Ms Vicki Wiles (*Careers Consultant for History, Careers and Employability*)
 - m. Professor Matthew Worley (*Professor of Modern History*).
- 3 The Panel also met with two sessional lecturers and one PhD student with teaching responsibilities in the Department.
- 4 The Panel met students who represented the following degree programmes:
 - a. BA History
 - b. BA History and Economics
 - c. BA History and Politics
 - d. MA History.
- 5 The Panel met six recent graduates from the BA History, MA History and MRes Medieval Studies, one of whom was currently studying for a PhD in Medieval Studies in the Department.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- 6 The Panel extends its thanks to all staff members from across the Department, School and wider University who participated in the Review, and in particular to the Head of Department (Professor Felix) and Departmental Director of Teaching and Learning (DDTL) (Dr Blakemore). Staff were fully engaged with the review process and supplied the additional information requested by the Panel in a timely manner.
- 7 The Panel welcomed the opportunity to meet with a number of current and former students, who were passionate about their discipline and gave a very positive endorsement of the Department and the programmes under review. The Panel wishes to express its thanks to these students, and to those who contributed to the written Student Submission, for their valuable input to the Review.
- 8 As noted below in the sections on **Teaching and Learning** and **Learning environment and student support**, the Panel was impressed by the supportive, friendly and welcoming environment within the Department, which was praised by current and former students.
- 9 The Panel noted the Department's positive engagement with the University's Curriculum Framework, and in particular its recent focus on the principles of global engagement and diversity and inclusion in some modules (see also the section on **Programme Design**). The Department must, of course, remain mindful that curriculum review is an on-going process that programme teams should 'own' and continuously refer to when reflecting on programme design and delivery.
- 10 The Panel noted that the Department had undergone a number of significant changes since the last Periodic Review in 2014. The History Project in 2014, which was initiated by the University Executive Board with the aim of considering the scope and attractiveness of the undergraduate curriculum, had led to several major reforms to the undergraduate programmes. The MA in History was also extensively redesigned in 2018, drawing on feedback from students and External Examiners. The Department had experienced a number of academic staffing changes in recent years, and it continued to rely on sessional and temporary part-time staff. The Panel also noted the changes in administrative support that resulted from the Professional and Administrative Services (PAS) review conducted by the University in 2016 (see also the section on **Learning environment and student support** below).

ACADEMIC STANDARDS OF THE PROGRAMMES

Committee structures

- 11 Overall, the Panel was satisfied that the committee structures in place were appropriate and effective for the quality management and enhancement of the Department's programmes. The Panel considered that the membership of the School Board for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience (SBTLSE), Department-level Boards of Studies (BoS) and Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLC) was appropriate and noted that suitable provision was made for student representation.
- 12 The Panel found evidence, in the form of Minutes of meetings, that the SBTLSE, BoSs and SSLCs were fulfilling their formal responsibilities in respect of quality management and enhancement. The Student Submission (which was from UG students) stated that these students felt that they were listened to by staff and that issues raised were rectified by staff.
- 13 With regard to the SSLCs, the Panel noted that student attendance had been limited at some meetings (for example, there were no Part 2 reps present at any SSLC meetings during 2018/19). The Panel suggests that Course Reps should be asked to send an alternate or to provide a written report when they are unable to attend SSLC meetings. The Panel noted that the Minutes of SSLC meetings did not record actions taken as a result of previous meetings, and that items suggested for discussion at future meetings were not always picked up (for example, presentations, which were mentioned at the 31 October 2018 UG meeting). It was also not clear how actions taken as a result of meetings were fed back to all students. The Panel considered that the operation of the SSLCs could be made more effective by agreeing a standard mechanism to communicate the Minutes to all students. The style of the Minutes could also be adapted to make them more reader-friendly, for example, by circulating a short summary of points raised and Departmental responses, instead of complete Minutes.
- 14 With regard to Boards of Studies, the Panel noted that the UG BoS did not always have a student rep attending, nor listed in the apologies for absence. Whilst MA reps routinely attended the PG Studies Committee, no student reps had attended the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies (GCMS) BoS, nor reported to it. The Panel considered that GCMS student representation should be encouraged at BoS meetings. The Panel **recommends** that the Department introduce additional, formal mechanisms for student evaluation at taught postgraduate level, which might include the use of electronic feedback forms and exit surveys, and would allow feedback to be formally recorded and considered by the SSLCs and/or BoS [**Advisable recommendation a**].

Programme design

- 15 The Panel received and considered a range of evidence including programme specifications, module descriptions, programme handbooks, External Examiners' reports and samples of student work and feedback. Additionally, the Panel spoke with staff and students about their experiences of the programmes. On the basis of this evidence, the Panel was able to confirm that the academic standards of the programmes under review were appropriate and comparable with programmes on offer at other universities. The Panel was also satisfied that the programmes were designed in accordance with external reference points such as relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements.
- 16 As noted above, the Department had undergone a systematic review of its undergraduate programmes beginning in 2014 which had resulted in a new curriculum, introducing key elements with regard to global engagement and awareness, and modules which embedded mastery of the discipline, skills in research and enquiry and personal effectiveness. The new degree programme

- consisted of core modules (three at Part 1, 2 at Part 2, 1 at Part 3) with a number of optional modules at each Part. It combined essential subject knowledge and transferable skills with the flexibility for students to construct a degree programme which met their interests and needs. The students whom the Panel met specifically praised the flexibility of choice around a core curriculum **[Good practice a]**.
- 17 With regard to globalisation, the Panel noted that key appointments had been made in Middle Eastern, African and Asian history which had extended the Department's reach. Within modules focused on Europe and Britain, there was a clear move to addressing issues of diversity with, for example, modules on western views of the East in the Middle Ages and on Black Britain. The Panel noted that the inclusion of 10-credit modules at Part 1 also strengthened the diversity of history taught and encouraged students to take a wide range of history in their first year. The Panel considered that the Department had been in the vanguard of the historical field amongst universities in its promotion of a global agenda and in its diversification of the curriculum **[Good practice b]**. In order to build further on its strengths in this area, the Panel would encourage the Department to adopt a more systematic approach to decolonisation of the curriculum. The Panel also **recommends** that the Department engage with the ideas and recommendations in the Royal Historical Society's *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History* report (October 2018): https://royalhistsoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/RHS_race_report_EMBARGO_0001_18Oct.pdf **[Desirable recommendation a]**.
- 18 The Panel was pleased to note that the undergraduate programmes included opportunities for Study Abroad and for work placements, and that the Study Abroad options were supported by specific modules tailored to the needs of students studying overseas **[Good practice c]**. However, the Panel noted that the work placements and study abroad schemes had not recruited particularly well (a common experience in the sector) and would encourage the Department to consider how it could improve recruitment to these modules.
- 19 The Panel noted that, whilst there was a considerable amount of information available on Blackboard about the different components of the degree programmes, it was very hard to gain a picture of the overall structure of the programmes and how they developed progression. The Panel noted the importance of articulating clearly the progression across the degree programmes with regard to subject mastery, personal and transferable skills. This was particularly important with regard to subject knowledge and how the Department teaches broader themes and larger historical and geographical periods and progresses students to more detailed study at Part 3. The relationship between the specific history-linked employability modules and the wider transferable skills embedded in the other modules focused on academic history should also be strengthened and made clearer.
- 20 The Panel therefore **recommends** that the Department adopt a more systematic approach to increasing students' awareness of important aspects of its programmes with regard to both progression and employability **[Advisable recommendation b]**. The Panel suggests that information on the structure of programmes and how they fit together over Parts 1 to 3 could be included in Programme Handbooks. This could take the form of a pictorial representation of each Part of the degree programme, showing the compulsory modules and options. Handbooks could also set out clearly how the Part 2 and Part 3 modules develop coverage or intensify the focus. For example, relevant information could be extracted from the individual module descriptions for the Part 2 optional modules and set out clearly as part of a discussion of the overall programme structure. The Panel would also advise the Department to consider re-badging the options at Parts 2 and 3 with an overall umbrella title such as 'Historical Themes and Approaches' and then listing the relevant individual modules under this heading.

- 21 The Panel noted that there appeared to be some confusion amongst students about module choice and requirements. The students who met with the Panel mentioned that there were restrictions on what could be studied at Part 2, and that students were required to take an option in both medieval and modern history. This requirement was not clear to the Panel from the documentation submitted (perhaps it was only present in the online module choice information?). Another student stated that students could only select Part 3 modules if they had already taken a module in that or a relevant area. The Panel **recommends** that any module selection requirements and restrictions should be communicated clearly to students at the start of their programme [**Advisable recommendation c**]. A clear account of the module choice system in Programme Handbooks could prevent the growth of student 'myths'. The Panel also highlighted the importance of encouraging students to be adventurous in their module choice (a possibility facilitated by the 10 credit modules at Part 1).
- 22 The Panel considered that the Department had developed an excellent curriculum with regard to geographical and chronological range, diversity of approaches and global history, with options in medical and gender history, for example (see also paragraph 17 above). The students who met with the Panel praised the diversity of modules available to them and singled this out as a reason for choosing Reading [**Good practice d**]. The varied selection of "very engaging and interesting modules" which spanned time periods and covered different themes was also praised in the Student Submission. The Panel noted the importance of maintaining this range in order for the Department to retain competitiveness with regard to admissions. Key new appointments had been made to support the globalisation agenda, as noted above. However, since 2014, staff losses elsewhere in the Department had impacted upon its ability to deliver its curriculum and to maintain and enhance teaching quality. Research-led teaching is essential; it was therefore very challenging for the Department to maintain the necessary breadth of teaching with diminished staff numbers and expertise. For example, the recent move of the Department's Russian historian to another university had significantly weakened its coverage in a particularly vibrant and popular field of modern European history.
- 23 The Panel noted that Digital Humanities had become a major field of research across the Humanities and was seriously under-represented at Reading following the loss of Professor Nicholls in Classics. The Panel **recommends** that an appointment be made within the School to support the teaching of Digital Humanities, or that other opportunities be explored for developing students' digital literacy [**Desirable recommendation to the School a**].
- 24 The Panel considered that the University had an outstanding reputation for its strengths in medieval studies, and the GCMS brought together academics and postgraduate students from across the Humanities, the School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science and Henley Business School. The MRes in Medieval Studies had been a strong recruiter and was an essential feeder into doctoral programmes. It consisted of core modules which provided essential training in research skills, including Latin. The programme was weighted towards the go-credit dissertation and students could take two optional modules from a list of topics taught by academics across a number of Schools. The Panel considered that this allowed for great individual choice and highly effective research-led teaching. However, some modules recruited very small numbers and the wide range of personnel had led to inconsistencies in the types of essay designed for assessment and in the marking and standards expected; this lack of consistency had been raised by an External Examiner (Curry, 2018) (see also the section on **Assessment and Feedback** below). The Panel **recommends** that the GCMS consider reducing the range of options to a smaller group with more generic themes to bring together students on modules [**Desirable recommendation b**]. These generic modules could include a tutorial element provided by individual tutors and tailored to students' interests. GCMS might also wish to adopt the model of the individual study module provided by the MA in History.

- 25 The Panel noted that the MA in History recruited both from the Department's own undergraduates and from elsewhere in the UK, and also overseas. The structure of this degree included key higher training and skills in historical theory. The Panel was pleased to note that the possibility of replacing attendance at the seminar series for Option 1 (HSMOP₁) or Option 2 (HSMOP₂) with independent study on a topic of choice gave the degree desirable flexibility which enabled students to develop their research interests [**Good practice e**].

Assessment and Feedback

Assessment policy, design, methods and arrangements

- 26 The students who met the Panel commented that there was a concentration on essays and exams as the preferred means of assessment but recognised that this was an expectation within the discipline. Some students remarked that they appreciated the way in which this focus allowed them to hone their skills in these methods over the course of their programmes.
- 27 Notwithstanding these comments, the Panel considered that the Department had been proactive in diversifying assessments beyond examinations and essays and noted several examples of good practice on undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes including the use of wikis, individual and group-based presentations, class quizzes, reflective reports and portfolios [**Good practice f**]. However, with the proliferation of modules and the changing availability of options, these different types of assessment were not consistently available. The Panel would therefore advise the Department to maintain a careful audit of assessment types when revisiting the design of the curriculum and to consider conducting a mapping exercise in order to ensure that students encounter a range of assessment types in any given year, and across their programme.
- 28 Whilst the Panel welcomed the introduction of non-standard, innovative forms of assessment, it noted the absence of bespoke assessment criteria for them. For example, whilst students could access the mark sheet used to assess their presentations on the *History Education* module, descriptions of success at different grade bands were not available. The Panel noted with concern that module evaluations for many undergraduate modules indicated that satisfaction regarding the clarity of assessment criteria was low compared to other elements evaluated. It considered that it was likely that this was associated with the lack of specific assessment criteria for different assignments across programmes, specifying success criteria at different grade bands. Echoing the recommendations of some of the External Examiners, the Panel **recommends** that the Department make use of professional development opportunities for staff, and of staff expertise/advice from the Centre for Quality Support and Development (CQSD), to devise bespoke assessment criteria for different types of assignment at different levels, making use of the rubric facility within Turnitin [**Advisable recommendation d**]. This would help students to develop strategies for raising their achievement and make the assessment process more transparent and equitable. It would align with the Department's plans, as stated in the Self-Evaluation Document, to explore the introduction of "progressive marking criteria differentiating between the expected attainment at each level". The Panel would advise the Department to draw on examples in other Schools, including the Institute of Education, and to consider involving students in this process.
- 29 In light of the concerns raised in respect of consistency in assessment design and marking on the MRes Medieval Studies (see paragraph 24 above), the Panel was pleased to note that marking criteria were being introduced for the MRes in 2019/20 in response to comments from the External Examiners. The Panel **recommends** that the GCMS should continue to review its practice in respect of the assessment of the optional MRes modules. The GCMS should also consider how it disseminates External Examiners' feedback on marking to staff so that those marking the following year are aware of their comments [**Advisable recommendation e**]. The Panel

considered that feedback from External Examiners needed to go beyond discussion at Board of Studies meetings and to be incorporated into the marking guidance.

- 30 The Panel commended the moderation processes in place which encouraged written narrative justification of marks [**Good practice g**]. The Panel noted that the Exams Representative matched up members of staff at random for moderation of work and that these pairs changed periodically. The key points from moderation were posted on Blackboard for the next cohort of students taking the module.

Feedback to students

- 31 The Panel saw evidence of many examples of written feedback which represented good practice and offered specific advice on how to improve. The majority of students who had contributed to the Student Submission had stated that feedback was detailed and fair, with reasonable improvements suggested. The students who met with the Panel commented that they felt comfortable seeking additional feedback from lecturers and from their Academic Tutors.
- 32 The Panel noted that students also commented favourably upon the opportunities provided for formative feedback, for example written and oral feedback on essay plans and proposals [**Good practice h**]. However, the Panel noted that there was significant variation in opportunities for formative feedback across programmes and modules and the students who met with the Panel commented that not all students took up those opportunities, particularly at Part 1, although they began to appreciate the value of formative feedback as they progressed through their programme. The Panel **recommends** that the Department articulate more clearly to students the way in which a formative task can help inform and shape a summative assignment, and that formative feedback be provided more consistently across modules [**Desirable recommendation c**].
- 33 The Panel welcomed the Department's engagement with electronic feedback and grading. Whilst most written feedback included points for development and 'bubble comments' were used to make bespoke remarks, the Panel found little evidence of the use of standardised bank(s) of quickmarks. Where this did exist, some quickmarks such as 'good comparison of sources' and 'more evidence needed' would seem to have broad relevance across history programmes. The Panel therefore **recommends** the wider use of quickmarks across the Department [**Desirable recommendation d**]. It wishes to highlight the bank of stock quickmarks which can be downloaded from the EMA website which contain embedded hyperlinks to appropriate pages (e.g. Study Advice).

External Examiners and accreditation

- 34 External Examiners' reports verified that the standards achieved by learners met the minimum expectations for awards, as measured against the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. The Panel was satisfied that, on the whole, robust systems were in place for reflecting upon and implementing any recommendations made in External Examiners' reports.

QUALITY OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY THE PROGRAMMES

Teaching and learning

- 35 The Panel noted that teaching excellence within the Department was achieved through embedded research-led teaching at every stage and through a broad range of stimulating modules [**Good practice i**]. The currency and breadth of provision had been commended by

- several External Examiners in respect of the undergraduate programmes (Austin 2018 and 2019; Loughran 2018; Jotischky 2019).
- 36 The Panel noted that feedback from students, including the comments in the Student Submission, was very positive in respect of the high level of expertise, approachability and support provided by staff [**Good practice j**]. The Panel considered that students were enabled to develop their skills and understanding in the discipline in a carefully staged manner, moving from briefer examinations of a broad range of topics in the first year to progressively more focussed and challenging ones with higher expectations in terms of assessments in later years [**Good practice k**].
- 37 The Panel noted that staff teaching on some modules on the MRes did not always upload teaching materials on Blackboard. The Panel **recommends** that GCMS ensure that key learning resources are uploaded to Blackboard at least 48 hours in advance of the relevant teaching session for all modules, in line with the University's *Policy on Inclusive Practice in Teaching and Learning*. [**Advisable recommendation f**].
- 38 The Panel noted considerable variation between modules in the way in which course materials were organised on Blackboard, which would impact upon student satisfaction and engagement. For example, some module convenors organised materials thematically and others organised them in order of delivery, week by week. The module handbooks were located in different areas and none of the Blackboard sites included staff contact details/office hours. The Panel would encourage the Department to standardise Blackboard presentation of information and to consult the TEL team regarding best practice in the use of Blackboard. The Panel noted that the learning materials on Blackboard for the Part 1 module *Hunger and Famines in History* (HS1HAF) did not appear to be accompanied by a warning that they contained distressing images. The Panel would advise the Department to review its practice in this respect (using trigger warnings as appropriate).
- 39 The Panel noted that there was currently no evidence of incorporation of Blackboard-based University initiatives such as ALLY, video-conferencing or personal capture. In light of the above observations, the Panel **recommends** that staff are encouraged to attend relevant training sessions delivered by the TEL team to promote good practice in the use of Blackboard in the Department [**Desirable recommendation e**].

Student admission, retention, progression and attainment

- 40 The Panel learned about the Department's Open and Visit Days, which had played an important role in some students' decision to come to Reading. Current and former students who met with the Panel confirmed that they had felt welcomed by the Department's "friendly" and enthusiastic staff, and that they had found the sample lectures, which were designed to showcase the global range of the teaching, and the broad range of module choice, particularly attractive.
- 41 Despite the Department's commendable efforts, the Panel noted that recruitment to History undergraduate programmes had declined since 2017/18 (2017/18: 187; 2018/19: 141; 2019/20: 116). The newly introduced undergraduate Foundation Year was expected to have a positive impact on recruitment. The Panel considered that increased collaboration with the Careers and Employability Service as well as the Global Recruitment and Admissions Team might help to increase the visibility of History programmes and improve their marketing, thereby leading to improved recruitment.
- 42 The Panel heard from staff that the Department was increasingly committed to widening participation efforts. It noted some excellent practice and ongoing initiatives in respect of outreach, including: the new combined Reading Scholars programme; WP events on campus and in schools; and the development of an online course in developing historical skills for sixth form

students. The Panel encourages the Department to engage further with best practice in other History departments in the UK, particularly with regard to increasing the diversity of the student population. This might include analysing in more depth the activities of other institutions with regard to the global reach of their curriculum, and how that affects their recruitment and widening participation achievements. The Panel **recommends** that central University services, including the Admissions Office and Student Recruitment and Outreach team, work closely with the Department to broaden access and increase recruitment to its programmes [**Advisable recommendation to the University a**].

- 43 The Panel reviewed the Department's arrangements for transition and progression to subsequent years of undergraduate study. It noted examples of good practice, such as Welcome Talks for all year groups, which are held in the Autumn Term to give students guidance on the demands of the year [**Good practice I**]. As noted above in the section on **Programme Design (Advisable recommendation b)**, the Panel recommends the adoption of a more systematic approach to increasing students' awareness of how skills development is supported at different stages of their programme, and how that relates to progression, attainment and employability.
- 44 The Panel noted that, overall, retention, progression and attainment rates were good. The Panel noted that the combined proportion of History students achieving a First or 2:1 was slightly higher than the University average, but that the proportion of History students achieving a First was lower than the University average over the past three years (2015/16 to 2017/18). This might be linked to the observation made by several External Examiners for undergraduate programmes about a "tendency to mark conservatively at the upper end", and to comments made in the Student Submission about students' frustration at not being able to achieve more than 80% in an essay. The Panel would encourage the Department to reflect further on these observations and how to encourage marking across the full range at the upper end.

Learning environment and student support

- 45 As noted above in the section on **Teaching and Learning**, the students and alumni who met with the Panel praised the commitment and approachability of, and support provided by, academic staff. One former student commented that staff were "very good at giving their time to students," and all students confirmed that they felt comfortable asking for clarification about teaching sessions and assignments.
- 46 However, comments from a number of current and former students highlighted some discrepancies in colleagues' availability, and in particular a lack of consistency in the level and nature of support provided by dissertation supervisors. The Panel observed that the supportive environment appeared to rely on individual colleagues' commitment, and that what staff referred to as the "supportive ethos" might come under increasing pressure in light of high staff workloads and staff turnover. The Panel **recommends** that the Department adopt a more coordinated approach to managing staff and student expectations in respect of student support, recognising new challenges such as a larger proportion of students joining the undergraduate programmes with lower marks (both through Clearing and following the planned introduction of a lower entry tariff from 2020), an increasingly diverse student body, and larger class sizes [**Advisable recommendation g**]. This should include issuing guidance to staff and students in respect of dissertation supervision to ensure a more consistent student experience.
- 47 The Panel considered that academic tutoring was deemed to be a strong element of the Department's provision. However, the Panel noted that academic staff appeared to remain as Academic Tutors even when they were on a sabbatical. The Panel **recommends** that the Department put systems in place to ensure that students are able to access support for their academic, personal and professional development during periods when their Academic Tutors are

- on sabbatical, to ensure a consistent and equitable student experience [**Advisable recommendation h**].
- 48 The Panel was pleased to note that the Department had managed to create and maintain a sense of an academic community, overcoming a number of challenges related to the nature of the building and the fact that staff offices were spread over two floors in different parts of the Edith Morley Building. The sense of community was highlighted by the undergraduate and postgraduate students with whom the Panel met. The Panel wished to highlight as a particular feature of good practice the creation of a strong PGT community, which was facilitated by the provision of the PGT Resource Rooms, which acted as hubs for students, and regular scheduled lunches [**Good practice m**]. Having visited the PGT Resource Rooms on a cold Autumn day, the Panel **recommends** that central University services take the necessary steps to allow for the rooms to be heated appropriately to make them more suitable for studying and socialising [**Advisable recommendation to the University b**].
- 49 The Panel considered that the Department had been successful in overcoming the challenges initially faced following the PAS Review while new systems and processes were being embedded, and in establishing a fruitful collaboration and relationships between academic staff and support staff based in the Support Centre [**Good practice n**]. Academic staff who met with the Panel praised the “excellent support” provided by colleagues in the Edith Morley Support Centre.

Employability

- 50 The Panel considered that, in some respects, the Department was providing students with an excellent foundation for, and guidance in, pursuing particular kinds of careers. The Part 3 HS3HED *History Education* module was highly valued for allowing students to test out their interest in this area and to develop appropriate skills, and was well-regarded in the discipline and beyond the University [**Good practice o**]. Similarly focused provision was offered through the optional Part 3 module HS3DAC *Discovering Archives and Collections* (which made it disappointing to see that it could not run in 2019/20 due to a staff sabbatical). The Panel also noted an impressive commitment to embedding a clear focus on work-related skills within particular core modules in Part 1 (HS1RSO *Research and Skills Opportunities in History*) and Part 2 (HS2GPP *Going Public*), very deliberately raising students’ awareness of what they were learning in this respect. The Panel was also pleased to note that the Department had incorporated trips and links with external heritage providers, both locally and nationally; for example, the University’s new partnership with the British Museum.
- 51 The Panel identified from the module evaluation reports that, while most modules received lower ratings for ‘developing skills required in the workplace’ than for other aspects, some modules achieved equally high ratings for this aspect. Clearly, some module convenors had been highly successful in integrating appropriate skills into their modules and making students aware of them. The Panel **recommends** that this successful practice should be analysed, discussed and shared more widely spread across the Department [**Advisable recommendation i**].
- 52 The Panel recognised that an explicit focus on work-related skills risks alienating students if they perceive it as having a distorting effect. The *Going Public* module, which was well rated for developing work-related skills, had frustrated some students, who felt that they were not simultaneously learning enough about the actual content and research processes to be able to carry out their joint project. The Panel also found that students perceived a lack of focus within the Department’s provision on the kinds of careers for which history provides an excellent foundation, but which are less obviously history-related, such as careers in local government, public administration and the charity sector. The Panel **recommends** that the Careers Service, working in conjunction with the Department, should ensure that careers fairs and other events are more directly targeted and that stronger links are made with employers and alumni working in such

- fields, allowing for their involvement in core History modules and/or 'Meet the Professionals' events [**Advisable recommendation j**]. The Panel considered that greater use could be made of social media (such as the History Department's Twitter account) and of Blackboard (as is done in other Schools e.g. Law) to promote careers events and work-related advice for students.
- 53 The Panel noted that the Careers Service was very aware of the low levels of History students' engagement in career-related planning, and that the SDTL clearly recognised the need to work closely with the Careers Service to tackle this issue. The Panel was pleased to note the ways in which this was already being addressed: through the core and optional modules discussed above; through direct promotion in History lectures of careers events; and through plans for an annual survey of all students, requiring them to reflect on the work-related skills and experience that they had been developing in relation to their future career plans.
- 54 The Panel noted the disappointing UG employability rate, which was below discipline norms. This resulted in History having the second largest negative impact on the overall University "Positive Destinations" outcomes in 2016/17, and a direct (negative) impact on the overall University ranking position. The Panel noted that it was really important for the entire University that employment outcomes for History graduates improve significantly. The critical importance of the employability issue, highlighted by the Department's disappointing DLHE scores, raised the question of whether responsibility for its promotion and for collaborating with the Careers Service should rest simply with the SDTL. The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider whether responsibility for employability and careers should be allocated to another member of staff within the Department, who could focus more sustained attention on the issue [**Advisable recommendation k**].
- 55 The Panel also noted that the Careers Service had identified specific concerns about students' lack of work experience – and hence their lack of knowledge about the kinds of careers for which they would like to apply and about when and how to do so. The Panel recognised that the Careers Service was working hard to promote engagement in extended work experience (of at least six weeks), particularly between Parts 2 and 3, and **recommends** that the Department and Careers Service continue to work together on this agenda, ensuring that the strategies they pursue are compatible with, and work in connection with, demands related to students' dissertations [**Desirable recommendation f**]. For example, the Department might explore whether credit could be awarded for the completion of a placement over the Summer, assessed via a reflective report and/or presentation. Talks or presentations from students who had undertaken a placement could also help to promote placement opportunities to other students.

ENHANCEMENT OF QUALITY AND ACADEMIC PROVISION

- 56 As noted above, the Panel considered that high quality teaching was evident throughout the Department's provision. Eight staff members out of a total of 19 permanent staff members (26 including sessional staff) were Associate Fellows or Fellows of the Higher Education Academy and seven held Senior Fellowships, and a number of staff had been recognised with RUSU or University awards in teaching and learning. The Panel noted that some staff developed their professional practice through regular attendance of CQSD training courses. The Panel would advise the Department to encourage more staff across the Department to engage with opportunities of this kind, and for more academic staff to achieve HEA Fellowship. The Panel noted that good practice was discussed in Boards of Studies meetings, although it considered that there was a need to ensure that good practice was cascaded to all staff and that staff were supported to make appropriate changes to their own individual practice. For example,

support/training should be provided across the Department to ensure greater consistency in the use of Blackboard (see also the section on **Teaching and Learning** above).

- 57 While module evaluation took place on a regular basis and in line with University policy, the Panel would encourage the Department to put in place more robust mechanisms for ensuring that actions are taken to address any significant issues identified. The Panel would also advise the Department to consider the use of more dynamic mechanisms to ensure that the wider student body is informed of actions taken in response to student evaluation (and/or why actions could not be taken in some areas). For example, staff could present a summary of the issues raised by module evaluations and actions taken at the beginning/end of a subsequent teaching session (see also paragraph 13 in the section on **Committee structures**).
- 58 The Panel noted that mid-module evaluation was not currently being implemented in a consistent way across all undergraduate and taught postgraduate modules. It **recommends** that the Department introduce some form of informal, light-touch mid-module evaluation for all of its modules on an annual basis, in line with the *Policy on student evaluation of learning and teaching [Advisable recommendation l]*. It noted that this would provide an opportunity for Module Convenors to react quickly and efficiently to feedback from students for the benefit of the current cohort. Module Convenors should feedback to students on what actions (if any) have been taken in the light of their mid-module feedback.
- 59 The Panel was pleased to note that annual peer review was taking place, and considered that this was an effective way of supporting colleagues and developing good practice across the Department. However, the Panel noted that monitoring and reporting on the outcomes of peer review had not taken place in a consistent manner in recent years, which could be at least partially attributed to factors outside of the Department's control, including changes in the personal circumstances of key staff members. The Panel also noted from its discussions with sessional staff and PhD students with teaching responsibilities that these groups did not always participate fully in reciprocal peer review. The Panel **recommends** that, in accordance with the University policy on *Peer review of learning and teaching*, the Department:
- (a) introduce systematic monitoring and reporting of peer review of learning and teaching on an ongoing basis;
 - (b) continue to promote staff participation in peer review, to include sessional staff and postgraduate research students with regular and substantive roles in teaching and supporting learning [**Advisable recommendation m**].
- 60 The Panel noted that sharing of good practice could occur in a variety of ways beyond mutual observation of teaching sessions; for example, through peer review of assessment and feedback practices or through the establishment of curriculum development groups (as implemented in the Institute of Education).
- 61 The Panel considered that engaging PhD students in teaching duties constituted a valuable development opportunity for them as well as an important resource for the Department. It noted that these students gained useful theoretical knowledge from the *Preparing to Teach* programme, run by the Graduate School. The Panel was pleased to note that the early career and sessional staff and PhD students with teaching responsibilities who met with the Panel felt integrated into the departmental community and that they had been welcomed and supported. However, the Panel noted a lack of coordinated guidance for these groups in respect of, for example, module content/delivery, marking and moderation, and dealing with challenging interactions with students. The Panel **recommends** that the Department establish a more coordinated system of induction and mentoring of incoming and sessional staff and postgraduate research students with teaching responsibilities. It should provide more specific guidance and support with regards to matters of quality assurance to enable these staff to support students appropriately inside and outside the classroom [**Advisable recommendation n**].

- 62 The Panel also **recommends** that the Department explore with the University whether sessional staff and PhD students with substantive roles in teaching and learning might be given access to the Academic Practice Programme to further develop their pedagogic knowledge and understanding and allow them to work towards fellowship of the HEA [**Desirable recommendation g**].
- 63 The Panel noted that the 2019 NSS results were positive for teaching on the course and overall student satisfaction. However, they were lower for student union representation and the student voice, some aspects of assessment and feedback and some aspects of organisation and management/academic support. The Panel supports the Department's plans to address issues identified in these areas, where it is in its power to do so.

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROGRAMMES UNDER REVIEW

- 64 The Panel considers that the undergraduate and taught postgraduate degree programmes offered by the Department are current, well-designed and provide students with flexibility of choice around a core curriculum, allowing them to construct a degree programme to meet their interests and needs. The programmes facilitate the staged development of students' skills and understanding in the discipline and draw on an appropriate variety of teaching and assessment methods. The Department offers a diverse range of stimulating modules which encompass a broad geographical and chronological range, a diversity of approaches and global history.
- 65 The programmes are underpinned by high quality, research-led teaching at all levels, delivered by a committed, approachable staff team in a friendly and supportive environment. Students benefit from enriching opportunities for study abroad and work placements, which promote the development of employability skills. The Panel commends the Department's willingness to identify and address areas for improvement, thereby enhancing the student learning experience.

CONCLUSIONS ON INNOVATION AND GOOD PRACTICE

- 66 The Panel identified the following as representing particularly good practice:
- a. the flexibility of choice around a core curriculum;
 - b. the Department's position in the vanguard of the historical field amongst universities in its promotion of a global agenda and in its diversification of the curriculum;
 - c. the opportunities for Study Abroad, supported by specific modules tailored to the needs of students studying overseas;
 - d. the diversity of modules available to students with regard to geographical and chronological range, diversity of approaches and global history;
 - e. the possibility of replacing attendance at the seminar series for Option 1 (HSMOP₁) or Option 2 (HSMOP₂) on the MA History with independent study on a topic of choice, which gives the degree desirable flexibility and enables students to develop their research interests;
 - f. the diversification of assessment beyond examinations and essays on undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, including the use of wikis, individual and group-based presentations, class quizzes, reflective reports and portfolios;
 - g. the moderation processes in place which encourage written narrative justification of marks;
 - h. the opportunities provided for formative feedback, for example written and oral feedback on essay plans and proposals;

- i. teaching excellence achieved through embedded research-led teaching at every stage and through a broad range of stimulating modules;
- j. the high level of expertise, approachability and support provided by staff, as noted by students;
- k. the carefully staged manner in which students are enabled to develop their skills and understanding in the discipline, moving from briefer examinations of a broad range of topics in the first year to progressively more focussed and challenging ones with higher expectations in terms of assessments in later years;
- l. Welcome Talks for all year groups, which are held in the Autumn Term to give students guidance on the demands of the year;
- m. the creation of a strong PGT community, which is facilitated by the provision of the PGT Resource Rooms, which act as hubs for students, and regular scheduled lunches;
- n. the Department's success in overcoming the challenges initially faced following the PAS Review, and in establishing a fruitful collaboration and relationships between academic staff and support staff based in the Support Centre; and
- o. the Part 3 HS3HED *History Education* module, which is highly valued for allowing students to test out their interest in this area and to develop appropriate skills, and is well-regarded in the discipline and beyond the University.

CONCLUSIONS ON QUALITY AND STANDARDS

- 67 The Panel has concluded that the quality and standards of the programmes reviewed are appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS ON NEW DEGREE PROGRAMME PROPOSALS

- 68 The Panel received no submissions with regards to new programme proposals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 69 The Panel **recommends** to the University Programmes Board that the following degree programmes taught by the Department of History are re-approved to run for a further six years or, in the case of joint programmes, until the Periodic Review of the other discipline:
- a. BA History
 - b. BA History and English Literature
 - c. BA History and Economics
 - d. BA History and International Relations
 - e. BA History and Philosophy
 - f. BA History and Politics
 - g. BA History with Study Abroad
 - h. BA History with Placement Experience
 - i. BA History with Year Abroad
 - j. MA History

k. MRes Medieval Studies

- 70 The report will categorise any issues as follows, in order of priority:
- Those areas where the Review Team believes it is **necessary** for action to be taken urgently to safeguard the standard of provision;
 - Those areas where it is **advisable** that the issues be addressed as soon as possible;
 - Those areas where it is **desirable** that the issue be addressed over a longer time span.
- 71 The Panel does not consider that any recommendations must be addressed as a condition of re-approval.
- 72 The Panel makes the following recommendations to the **Department**:

Necessary

There are no necessary recommendations.

Advisable

The Panel **recommends** that the Department:

- introduce additional, formal mechanisms for student evaluation at taught postgraduate levels, which might include the use of electronic feedback forms and exit surveys, and would allow feedback to be formally recorded and considered by the SSLCs and/or BoS;
- adopt a more systematic approach to increasing students' awareness of important aspects of its programmes with regard to both progression and employability;
- ensure that any module selection requirements and restrictions are communicated clearly to students at the start of their programme;
- make use of professional development opportunities for staff, and of staff expertise/advice from CQSD, to devise bespoke assessment criteria for different types of assignment at different levels, making use of the rubric facility within Turnitin;
- in respect of the MRes:
 - continue to review its practice in respect of the assessment of the optional MRes modules; and
 - consider how it disseminates External Examiners' feedback on marking to staff so that those marking the following year are aware of their comments (this recommendation relates specifically to the GCMS);
- ensure that key learning resources are uploaded to Blackboard at least 48 hours in advance of the relevant teaching session for all modules, in line with the University's *Policy on Inclusive Practice in Teaching and Learning* (this recommendation relates specifically to the GCMS);
- adopt a more coordinated approach to managing staff and student expectations in respect of student support, recognising new challenges such as a larger proportion of students joining the undergraduate programmes with lower marks, an increasingly diverse student body, and larger class sizes. This should include issuing guidance to staff and students in respect of dissertation supervision to ensure a more consistent student experience;
- put systems in place to ensure that students are able to access support for their academic, personal and professional development during periods when their Academic Tutors are on sabbatical, to ensure a consistent and equitable student experience;
- analyse, discuss and share more widely across the Department successful practice in some modules in terms of integrating appropriate work-related skills and making students aware of them;

- j. working in conjunction with the Careers Service, ensure that careers fairs and other events are more directly targeted and that stronger links are made with employers and alumni working in fields for which history provides an excellent foundation, but which are less obviously history-related, allowing for their involvement in core History modules and/or 'Meet the Professionals' events;
- k. consider whether responsibility for employability and careers should be allocated to another member of staff within the Department (other than the SDTL), who could focus more sustained attention on the issue;
- l. introduce some form of informal, light-touch mid-module evaluation for all of its modules on an annual basis, in line with the *Policy on student evaluation of learning and teaching*;
- m. in accordance with the University policy on *Peer review of learning and teaching*:
 - i. introduce systematic monitoring and reporting of peer review of learning and teaching on an ongoing basis;
 - ii. continue to promote staff participation in peer review, to include sessional staff and postgraduate research students with regular and substantive roles in teaching and supporting learning; and.
- n. establish a more coordinated system of induction and mentoring of incoming and sessional staff and postgraduate research students with teaching responsibilities, including the provision of more specific guidance and support with regards to matters of quality assurance to enable these staff to support students appropriately inside and outside the classroom.

Desirable

The Panel **recommends** that the Department:

- a. engage with the ideas and recommendations in the Royal Historical Society's *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History* report (October 2018);
- b. consider reducing the range of options available to students on the MRes Medieval Studies to a smaller group with more generic themes to bring together students on modules (this recommendation relates specifically to the GCMS);
- c. articulate more clearly to students the way in which a formative task can help inform and shape a summative assignment, and provide formative feedback more consistently across modules;
- d. make wider use of quickmarks across the Department;
- e. encourage staff to attend relevant Blackboard-related training sessions delivered by the TEL team to promote good practice in the use of Blackboard in the Department;
- f. continue to work together with the Careers Service to promote student engagement in extended work experience, ensuring that the strategies they pursue are compatible with, and work in connection with, demands related to students' dissertations; and
- g. explore with the University whether sessional staff and PhD students with substantive roles in teaching and learning might be given access to the Academic Practice Programme to further develop their pedagogic knowledge and understanding and allow them to work towards fellowship of the HEA.

73 The Panel makes the following recommendation to the **School**:

Desirable

The Panel **recommends** that the School:

- a. make an appointment to support the teaching of Digital Humanities, or explore other opportunities for developing students' digital literacy.

74 The Panel makes the following recommendations to the **University**:

Advisable

The Panel **recommends** that:

- a. central University services, including the Admissions Office and Student Recruitment and Outreach team, work closely with the Department to broaden access and increase recruitment to its programmes; and
- b. central University services take the necessary steps to allow for the PGT Resource Rooms to be heated appropriately to make them more suitable for studying and socialising.

75 The Panel does not have a recommendation to the University Programmes Board as to whether any proposal(s) for new degree programmes should be approved, as this is not applicable.