

MSc in Modern History

Awarding Institution:
Teaching Institution:
Faculty of Arts and Humanities

The University of Reading
The University of Reading
Programme length: 12 months full
time, 24 months part-time, 3-6 years
modular
Date of specification: March 2002

For students entering in 2002
Programme Director: F Tallett
Board of Studies: Postgraduate Studies in History
Accreditation: N/A

Summary of programme aims

The MSc in Modern History (1500 to the present) involves training in the theoretical and practical concepts of the social sciences as well as in historical research in general and in social and economic history in particular. Its aim is to provide students with the skills and confidence to undertake an original piece of research in their chosen historical area, and to provide an underpinning for further research at doctoral level as well as offering a satisfying and rewarding experience for those who take the MSc as an end in itself. Additionally, the programme aims to augment students' existing skills so that they may further a career in a cognate profession and within the knowledge economy more generally.

Transferable skills

The University's Strategy for Teaching and Learning has identified a number of generic transferable skills which all students are expected to have developed by the end of their degree programme. In following this programme, students will have had the opportunity to enhance their skills relating to career management, communication (both written and oral), information handling, numeracy, problem-solving, team working and use of information technology.

The MSc in Modern History is designed to ensure that students continue to develop these transferable skills, in parallel and integrated with the acquisition of more specialist knowledge, understanding and skills concerned with the conduct and management of historical research and enquiry appropriate at a postgraduate level. The programme is recognised by the ESRC as providing appropriate research training, as part of its 1+3 scheme.

Programme content

The MSc is administered from the School of History, but it also draws on expertise in the Rural History Centre and the Centre for International Business History, based in the School of Business. Some elements of the modules offered are run in common with a long-standing MA programme in Modern History which is recognised by the AHRB, but the MSc has a distinct syllabus which intersects with other Masters programmes in the Social Sciences in the University of Reading, especially in Skills and Research Methods Training.

In the Autumn term, all students follow three core courses. The first of these, *Historical Skills and Resources*, is an intensive induction into fundamental bibliographical, archival and methodological skills. The second, *Essentials of Research in the Social Sciences*, is a web-based module, and covers philosophical approaches to research, principles of research design, data capture methods, and techniques and concepts of data analysis. The third module, *State and Society: Historical Concepts and Problems*, deals with some key conceptual and historiographical problems in the history of the state over the last five centuries. Students also begin work on their individual research topic, initially identifying and refining a suitable subject for the dissertation in some field of social and economic history, and locating potential primary source material. Work

is conducted under the guidance of a tutor who continues to act in a supervisory capacity throughout the student's period of registration.

In the Spring term, students continue the modules in *Essentials of Research in the Social Sciences* and *Historical Skills and Resources*, leading up to an oral presentation on their research topic, with additional elements being added (eg. advanced data analysis, advanced computing, foreign language work, palaeography) according to the specific needs of the individual research project. They choose two Options which complement the work done on the *State and Society* course; and they undertake the module in *General Research Skills and Transferable Skills*, which covers ethical and legal issues, intellectual property rights, writing and oral presentation skills, research management and team working skills. Students intensify work on the dissertation. The Summer term is given over to detailed research and writing up of the dissertation under the guidance of the supervisor.

The MSc is designed within a 180 credit modular structure. Sixty credits are awarded for the dissertation, which must be on a topic in social and economic history. 120 credits are awarded for taught courses as shown in the table below.

Mod Code	Module Title	Credits	Level
HSMMS1	<i>Historical Skills and Resources</i>	30	M
HSMMS2	<i>State and Society: Historical Concepts and Problems</i>	20	M
HSMMS3	<i>Option 1</i>	20	M
HSMMS4	<i>Option 2</i>	20	M
HSMMS5	<i>Essentials of Research in the Social Sciences</i>	20	M
HSMMS6	<i>General Research Skills and Transferable Skills</i>	10	M
HSMMS7	<i>Dissertation</i>	60	M

Part-time/Modular arrangements

The programme may be taken part-time over two years or in modular form over 3-6 years. Part-time and modular students take the same modules as full-time students, and normally in the same order, but with appropriately revised deadlines.

Progression requirements

The Pass mark in each of the modules is 50%. Candidates who achieve a final mark of 60-69% in their assessment will be awarded a Merit; a Distinction will be awarded to those who achieve a final mark of 70% or above.

The award of the Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma will be dependent upon the successful completion of 70 and 120 credits respectively, at the same Pass mark as for the Masters Degree. Grades of Merit and Distinction will be awarded for the Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma.

Students have the right to one re-sit of any failed element. Taught modules are re-examined in September; a failed dissertation is due for re-submission within one year of the original submission date. Candidates presenting themselves for re-examination are not eligible for the award of a Distinction or Merit.

Summary of teaching and assessment

The relationship between class contact hours, visits to Libraries and Archives, workshops, tutorials and student-centred learning varies across the modules and is detailed in the individual

module descriptions. In general, the programme is structured so that the Autumn term provides a foundation for the inculcation of methodological principles, core research skills and broad debates. In the Spring term students apply this broad based learning to 'microcosmic' situations, and have hands-on experience of quantitative analysis using real historical data as well as workshops in which problem solving is integral to the teaching format. The focus throughout the programme is on the development of the individual but within the group context.

Assessment is solely by means of coursework. The module on *Historical Skills and Resources* is assessed by a 4,000 word report on issues relating to the individual research project, any additional elements being assessed by a portfolio of work. *State and Society: Historical Concepts and Problems*, and the two associated Options, are each assessed by an essay of 4,000 words. The module in *Essentials of Research Skills in the Social Sciences* is assessed by means of a summative, multiple choice based exercise, that in *General Research Skills and Transferable Skills* by a skills audit and portfolio of work. The student's individual research project is assessed by a dissertation of 14,000 words.

Admission requirements

Entrants to the programme are normally expected to have obtained an Upper-Second Honours degree in a course with a substantial element of History. However, approaches are warmly invited from overseas candidates, and from those with non-traditional qualifications who can demonstrate suitable ability and commitment. Each application is considered on its merits.

Admissions Tutor: F Tallett

Support for students and their learning

University support for students and their learning falls into two categories. Learning support includes IT Services, which has several hundred computers and the University Library, which across its three sites holds over a million volumes, subscribes to around 4,000 current periodicals, has a range of electronic sources of information and houses the Student Access to Independent Learning (S@IL) computer-based teaching and learning facilities. There are language laboratory facilities both for those students studying on a language degree and for those taking modules offered by the Institution-wide Language Programme. Student guidance and welfare support is provided by Programme Directors, the Careers Advisory Service, the University's Special Needs Advisor, Study Advisors, Hall Wardens and the Students' Union.

A Director, located in the School of History, is in overall charge of the programme and has responsibility for allocating students to courses and to research supervisors, ensuring that students and supervisors meet regularly, overseeing the progress of individual students, providing detailed feedback on their work, as well as offering pastoral care and support. The programme begins with an induction session. Students are provided with a handbook which outlines the programme, gives bibliographical advice and contains practical information about staff, sources of specialised help, submission deadlines, etc. Students are expected to attend seminars in the Rural History Centre, the Centre for International Business History, the History Research Seminar and meetings of the Postgraduate History Group. The latter comprises MA, MSc, MPhil and PhD students, and arranges seminars on a three-weekly basis throughout the year, and it is within its programme of seminars that MSc students give an oral presentation on their research topic in a setting which is both supportive and stimulating. Students are also provided with details of research seminars at other institutions, notably those held at the Institute of Historical Research, of which the School of History has institutional membership. The School of History has a Library which complements the material held in the Main University Library. As well as its holdings in books, the School's Library has complete runs of some significant periodicals, such as the *Economic History Review*, *Urban History*, *Journal of Economic History* and *Past Present*, and provides a quiet study space,

photocopying facilities and networked computers. The Rural History Centre has an extensive and nationally important library and archive collection.

Career prospects

Our postgraduates are trained in clear thinking, research skills, diligence, independence, adaptability and the ability to understand people and situations in the world at large. Additionally they have the ability to locate, collate and process a wide variety of information, assess its value and use it to arrive at sound conclusions. This makes them attractive to a wide range of employers, especially in the 'knowledge economy'. In the past, History postgraduates have used their Masters degree to move into, or further existing, careers in cognate areas, such as museum work, information science and teaching, but they have increasingly used it as a springboard into a wider range of occupations, including banking, accountancy, law, commerce, computing, management and the civil service. A significant number go on to graduate study in History, either at Reading or elsewhere.

Opportunities for study abroad or for placements

The intensive nature of the full-time course means that it is not tailored to any period of study abroad. Those taking the course part-time or on a modular basis over 3-6 years may have the opportunity to study abroad as part of the Socrates scheme. This is arranged on an *ad hominem* basis.

Educational aims of the programme

The programme aims to provide a structured yet flexible framework which allows students to develop and follow their own interests within a rigorous academic setting, and to ensure that they develop skills which will be appropriate to a range of occupations including the academic discipline. The subject-specific skills and the confidence which they acquire while undertaking the programme allow them to produce an original, independently-researched dissertation of 14,000 words, which makes a contribution to existing knowledge and understanding. The MSc additionally provides research training, recognised by the ESRC, for those who wish to proceed to doctoral work at Reading or elsewhere.

Programme Outcomes

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate knowledge, understanding, skills, qualities and other attributes in the following areas:

Knowledge and Understanding

A. Knowledge and understanding of:	Teaching/learning methods and strategies
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. nature of debate and dispute in historical writing and discourse2. the range of primary and secondary sources available for the study of social and economic history3. a sensitivity to the distinctive nature and problems of historical sources, and of the forms of analysis which can properly be applied to the kind of data they provide4. elements of change and continuity in social and economic history5. the key epistemological and theoretical concepts in relevant branches of the social sciences and their application to historical study6. strengths and weaknesses of different disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches to historical study in the social sciences.7. ethical and legal issues relevant to research in the social sciences	<p>Acquisition of knowledge of fields 1-6 is promoted across the programme through tutorial and seminar discussions, seminar presentations, guest lectures, site visits, and workshops. The <i>State and Society</i> module makes specific use of a wide range of textual readings, drawn from both primary and secondary sources, to illuminate areas of change in the nature of the state and its power, and to illustrate how different disciplinary approaches to a problem can condition perception (field 6). The workshop associated with the Stenton Lecture focuses on approaches to the writing of history. This complements the teaching in the <i>Historical Skills and Resources</i> module, which also deals particularly with fields 1, 2 and 4. These are also the special focus of the module in <i>Essentials of Research in the Social Sciences</i>. Field 7 is dealt with explicitly in the module in <i>General Research Skills</i>.</p> <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <p>Students' knowledge and understanding are tested through assessed essays, web-based exercises, portfolios of work, a skills audit and the dissertation. They may also be assessed by a project (depending on the choice of option).</p>

Skills and other attributes

B. Intellectual skills – able to:

1. integrate theory and practice
2. analyse and interpret data and information
3. evaluate and select research methodologies relevant to the social sciences
4. negotiate both primary and secondary sources
5. think critically, logically and independently, leading to an ability to manifest a nuanced appreciation of issues and an ability appropriately to challenge received opinions
6. provide a synthesis of the current state of scholarship and debate in their chosen area of specialism
8. define and solve problems
9. demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

These skills are developed throughout the programme through seminars, guest lectures, workshops, site visits and through individual consultation with essay supervisors, the research supervisor and the Programme Director. The inculcation of these intellectual skills is also a significant aspect of the modules in *Historical Skills and Resources* and *Essentials of Research Skills in the Social Sciences*. The stress throughout the course is on learning by doing: theory and practice proceed in tandem. Thus they are most especially the focus of attention in the research and writing of the dissertation, which is performed as an original piece of work, based upon primary sources involving engagement with current scholarship and the development and application of appropriate methodologies.

Assessment

Intellectual skills are assessed through coursework essays, particularly the bibliographical essay which is part of the *Historical Skills and Resources* module. This requires students to show an awareness of historical theory as appropriate to their own field of enquiry, to critically appraise the primary sources and to situate their own research within the subject's broader historiographical context. Above all, it is in the dissertation that students are assessed on their possession of these skills and ability to apply them in practice. They may also be assessed by means of a project (depending on the choice of option).

C. Practical skills – able to:

1. locate information sources, including through the use of IT
2. select, collate and present information in a variety of contexts
3. develop and implement an individual research programme and strategies
4. engage in group discussion
5. Write an accurate text, using properly referenced footnotes
6. demonstrate a fluency in foreign language work, palaeography and IT as relevant and appropriate to the individual research topic

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Skills 1, 2, and 3 are developed primarily through the research project, which involves tutorial supervision and feedback from the research supervisor and programme Director as well as upfront student activity. These skills are also the focus of specific seminars and guest lectures in the *Skills and Resources* module, with ‘hands on’ sessions being devoted to IT training. Skill 1 is also developed through site visits to Libraries and archives. Skill 5 is embedded in all modules, as is skill 4, which is additionally honed through the oral presentation on the research project and through participation in postgraduate and History research seminars. Field 6 is the focus of individually arranged elements.

Assessment

Skills 1-5 are formally assessed through coursework essays and the dissertation and skills 3 and 4 are additionally tested informally in individual tutorials with staff and by participation in the postgraduate seminar. They may also be assessed by means of a project (depending on the choice of option). Language skills are assessed by means of a short examination.

D. Transferable skills – able to:

1. communicate effectively, both by oral and written means, and also graphically, subject to the particular choice of option
2. operate effectively within a group and on a one-to-one basis
3. demonstrate time/task management skills
4. handle information, including through the use of specialist databases as appropriate
5. undertake autonomous learning
6. solve problems
7. deal with complex issues in a systematic and creative manner
8. exercise initiative and personal responsibility
9. show a competence in numeracy within the parameters of the subject

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

The teaching and acquisition of these transferable skills is firmly embedded in all areas of the programme. Thus, the ability to write clearly and in a style appropriate to purpose (eg a progress report, textual analysis, coursework essay, dissertation) is a *sine qua non* of success in all aspects of the MSc. All students are expected to participate in and lead seminars and group discussions and to defend their research proposals; and they will also develop and maintain cooperative networks and working relationships with their peers, essay and research supervisors and other members of academic staff within the University. And a graphical presentation, eg using Powerpoint, is a requirement of certain options. Team working feeds into skill 5 which is primarily, though not exclusively, embedded in the research project: for example, coursework essay topics are initially generated by the students and reflect their individual interests. Skill 3 is inculcated throughout the programme, for example in prioritising assignments and working to deadlines, and is particularly evidenced in the research project which involves the establishment of research goals and intermediate milestones and the prioritisation of activities. The location, collation and processing of substantial handling of substantial amounts of information is above all integral to the research project, though the skill pervades all of the modules. The option on *History and Computing* deals with some specific issues concerned with this, including the use of databases. A basic appreciation of numeracy is developed through an awareness of chronology, cataloguing systems and estimation, with some topics eg. *History and Computing*, taking this skill further as appropriate to the subject matter.

Assessment

Formal assessment is by means of coursework essays, the dissertation, portfolios of work and a skills audit. They are tested informally at peer group sessions, seminars and tutorials.

Please note: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably expect to achieve and demonstrate if he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in module and programme handbooks.