

## **MA 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

For students entering in 2004  
Programme Director: J. Bell  
Board of Studies: Postgraduate Studies in History  
Accreditation: N/A

Date of specification: July 2003

### **Summary of programme aims**

The MA in Modern History aims 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 MA 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 MA 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 AHRB as providing appropriate research training.

### **Programme content**

In the Autumn term, all students follow two core courses. The first of these, *Historical Skills and Resources*, is an intensive induction into fundamental bibliographical, archival and methodological skills. The second, *State and Society*, deals with some key conceptual and historiographical problems in the history of the state over the last five centuries. Students also begin work on the dissertation, initially identifying and refining a suitable topic and locating potential primary source material 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 choose two options, which complement the work done on the *State and Society* course; they continue the course on *Historical Skills*, leading up to an oral presentation on their research topic; and they 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.

Further elements, such as foreign language work or palaeography, may be arranged according to the specific needs arising from the research project, and will normally be substituted for one of the Options.

The MA in Modern History is designed within a 180 credit modular structure, with 90 credits awarded for the dissertation, 30 credits for the module in *Historical Skills and Resources*

(compulsory core course), 20 credits for the module in *State and Society* (compulsory core course), and 20 credits for each of two option courses as shown in the table below.

Mod Code	Module Title	Credits	Level
HSMSR1	<i>Historical Skills and Resources</i>	30	M
HSMSS2	<i>State and Society: Historical Concepts and Problems</i>	20	M
HSMDN3	<i>Dissertation</i>	90	M
HSMOP1	<i>Option 1</i>	20	M
HSMOP2	<i>Option 2</i>	20	M

### **Part-time/Modular arrangements**

The programme may be taken part-time over two years or in ‘flexible’ 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 University’s taught postgraduate marks classification is as follows:

<u>Mark</u>	<u>Interpretation</u>
70 – 100%	Distinction
60 – 69%	Merit
50 – 59%	Good standard (Pass)
<u>Failing categories:</u>	
40 – 49%	Work below threshold standard
0 – 39%	Unsatisfactory Work

#### *For Masters Degrees*

To pass the degree of Master students must gain an average mark of 50 or more overall including a mark of 50 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 in the module on *Historical Skills and Resources*. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must be less than 60 credits.\*

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more overall including a mark of 70 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more overall including a mark of 60 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 will be awarded eligible for a Merit.

#### *For Postgraduate Diplomas*

To pass the Postgraduate Diploma students must gain an average mark of 50 or more and have no mark below 40 in the module on *Historical Skills and Resources*. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must be less than 60 credits.\*

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for the award of a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more and have no mark below 40 will be awarded eligible for a Merit.

#### *For Postgraduate Certificate*

To pass the Postgraduate Certificate students must gain an average mark of 50 or more and have no mark below 40 in the module on *Historical Skills and Resources*. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 10 credits.\*

\*The provision to permit a candidate to be passed overall with a profile containing marks below 40 is made subject to the condition that there is evidence that the candidate applied himself or herself to the work of those modules with reasonable diligence and has not been absent from the examination without reasonable cause.

Students have the right to one re-sit of any failed element. They may also wish to re-sit a 'failing' element but are not obliged to do so. Taught modules are normally 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.

Assessment is solely by means of coursework. This comprises one essay of 4,000 words in respect of all taught modules, except that students choosing *History and Computing* as one of their topics will be assessed on the basis of a project. The student's individual research project is assessed by a dissertation of 20,000 words. Where an additional element, such as foreign language work, has been substituted for one of the options, this will be examined by an appropriate test of similar weight.

### **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.

In the School, a Director is in overall charge of the programme and has responsibility for allocating students to modules 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 encouraged to attend meetings of the History Research seminar, Rural History Centre seminar and 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 MA 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 Library has complete runs of some significant periodicals, such as *Past and 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. A prize, based upon the Jeanette Martin Fund, is awarded annually for the best dissertation by an MA student.

### **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, graduates have used the MA to move into, or further existing, careers in cognate areas, such as museum work, information science and teaching, but they increasingly use the MA as a springboard into a range of occupations, including banking, accountancy, law, commerce, computing, management and the civil service. A significant number go on to Doctoral 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 20,000 words, which makes a contribution to our existing knowledge and understanding. The MA additionally provides recognised research training 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*

<p><b>A. Knowledge and understanding of:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. nature of debate and dispute in historical writing and discourse</li><li>2. the range of primary and secondary sources available for the study of modern history</li><li>3. elements of change and continuity in modern history</li><li>4. methods and skills appropriate to the study of modern history</li><li>5. strengths and weaknesses of different disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches to the study of modern history</li></ol>	<p><b>Teaching/learning methods and strategies</b></p> <p>Acquisition of knowledge of fields 1-5 is promoted across the programme through seminar discussions, seminar presentations, guest lectures, site visits, tutorials 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 5). 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.</p> <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <p>Students' knowledge and understanding are tested through assessed essays and the dissertation. They may also be assessed by a project (depending on the choice of option).</p>
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### *Skills and other attributes*

<p><b>B. Intellectual skills – able to:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. integrate theory and practice</li><li>2. analyse and interpret data and information</li><li>3. evaluate and select relevant research methodologies</li><li>4. negotiate both primary and secondary sources</li><li>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</li><li>6. provide a synthesis of the current state of scholarship and debate in their chosen area of specialism.</li><li>7. define and solve problems</li><li>8. demonstrate an understanding of their own modes of interpretation and an awareness of hermeneutical complexity in analysing texts</li><li>9. demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge</li></ol>	<p><b>Teaching/learning methods and strategies</b></p> <p>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. They are most especially the focus of attention in the research and writing of the dissertation, which is perforce an original piece of work, based upon primary sources and which involves engagement with current scholarship. The inculcation of these intellectual skills is also a significant aspect of the <i>Historical Skills and Resource</i> module.</p> <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <p>Intellectual skills are assessed through coursework essays, particularly the bibliographical essay which is part of the <i>Historical Skills and Resources</i> 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).</p>
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**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

**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.

*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).

**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
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 MA. 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 modules eg *History and Computing*, taking this skill further as appropriate to the subject matter.

*Assessment*

The transferable skills are assessed formally by means of coursework essays and the dissertation. 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.