# **Research-Informed Teaching case study: Staff research in UG and PGT degrees from L4 to L7**

**History staff:** Dr Olivia Saunders (BA Programme Leader), Dr Gillian O’Brien (MA Programme Leader), Dr Kate Ballantyne, Dr Mike Benbough-Jackson, Dr Malcolm Craig,   
Prof James Crossland, Dr Dan Feather, Prof Susan Grant, Katherine Harbord, Dr Andre Keil, Dr Andrea Livesey, Dr Lucie Matthews-Jones, Dr Chris Vaughan, Prof Nick White

**General Context**

Research-informed teaching is at the heart of the History subject programme and is integral to the identity and ethos of our staff and student body. History comprises a three-year undergraduate programme, a joint honours programme in History and English Literature (c. 270 students across L4-6 on Single and Joint Hons), and a postgraduate MA degree in Modern History (21 students between 2021-24). Across these degree programmes, staff in History teach 44 Modules, every one of which is informed by the research expertise of those teaching the modules. The History subject area is aligned with the History REF UoA 28, and the Centres for Modern and Contemporary History and Port and Maritime History: this concentration of research activity among all staff in the subject area creates an integral bond with the programme to which staff at all levels, from Professors to ECRs, make a major contribution.

**Specific Project Work**

This case study starts from the position of celebrating and recognising the impact for students created by all colleagues in a programme that delivers research-informed teaching at all levels. The entire history programme is designed and structured around our research expertise from the first year of an undergraduate degree, through to postgraduate level, and students develop their own specialist research-informed expertise as they select options through the second and third year of their degrees. The high level of optionality in our programmes across L5, 6 and 7 mean that students can access a wide range of sole-taught research-led modules designed and delivered by experts in their field. Undergraduate dissertation supervision is offered exclusively in areas of staff research specialisms. Team taught modules are also not generic in content, and several contain optional strands within them, where students are able to select projects or content which aligns with the particular research interests of individual staff. The consistent embedding of research-informed content is matched by an ethos of training students as historical researchers, capable of interpreting original historical source material from the outset of their degree.

**Impact on Curriculum**

The entire history curriculum is driven by research-informed teaching. For a relatively small programme, the reach of the department’s teaching is very wide, reflecting the diversity of staff research interests. Students are taught by subject experts across a huge range of geographic areas including Japan, Latin America, Malaysia, United States, Europe, Africa, Soviet Union and Middle East. Staff also teach different approaches to history, again derived from their own research interests: political, social, economic and cultural approaches to historical research are all represented in the programme. Staff draw on their research expertise in related fields such as archaeology, religion, literature, museum and heritage studies to further enhance the curriculum. External examiners note the strengths of this broad curriculum, offering comments including: ‘I continue to commend the department for offering breadth and depth across vast different geographies and themes. The outcome is obvious to see’... ‘I urge continuation of this breadth’. Applicants also repeatedly note the attractiveness of this offering at open days.

Highlights within the curriculum include:

* First year core modules on the history of the British Empire; modern Europe; British cultural history and modern American history which are all taught by teams of specialists who work in these areas, and who deliver lectures and design seminars based on their research interests and expertise.
* A core first year group project-based module, 4101HIST Exploring History, where students select research projects using original source materials based on research interests of individual staff, designing history exhibitions for a public audience or classroom resources for the teaching of history in schools
* History of slavery, covered in 5126HIST Gender, race, and slavery in the United States and 7104MHIST Liverpool and Slavery. Led by Andrea Livesey, students on these modules use the interviews with the formerly enslaved that form the basis of Livesey’s own research on enslaved experiences in Louisiana (e.g. Livesey, 2021, ‘Learning Slavery at Home: Garçonnières and Adolescent Enslavers in Rural Louisiana 1806–1861’ *Journal of Global Slavery,* 6 :31-54). Students use ancestry and other genealogical tools to research individual enslaved experiences – a level of microhistory that can only come from close research guidance. Each year, the best student blogposts are published on a collaborative website, liverpoolslavery.com. LJMU undergraduate student researchers are cited in Livesey’s forthcoming monograph. Students also visit the International Slavery Museum and Liverpool Record Office and meet Livesey’s research collaborators
* History of war, humanitarianism and terrorism, led by James Crossland. 5125HIST The Age of Terror. This module was introduced in 2019 during the research stages of Crossland’s book *The Rise of Devils: Fear and the Origins of Modern Terrorism* (2023). In tracing the evolution of terrorism as a global phenomenon in the 19th century, this module’s week-to-week content maps onto the book and, in-class, students adopt a similar approach to that used by Crossland in the underpinning research, by critically evaluating historical newspapers. 6107HIST – Laws of War. This module examines the evolution of the norms and laws of armed conflict over the span of several centuries. The module’s latter half (late 19th century onwards) draws explicitly from Crossland’s books, *War, Law and Humanity: The Campaign to Control Warfare, 1853-1914* (2018) and *Britain and the International Committee of the Red Cross, 1939-1945* (2014). In-class, students perform discourse analysis of international law documents and archival material that Crossland gathered during his research for both books.
* Ireland’s dark history.6125HIST Commemoration and Celebration in Irish History and 7100MHIST History Beyond the University**.** Led by Gillian O’Brien, these modules engage with the research questions pursued in O’Brien’s bestselling *The Darkness Echoing: Ireland’s Place of Famine, Death and Rebellion* (2020), in particular demanding that students engage with the production and consumption of history in the public sphere, and how this relates to broader political and identitarian narratives. Engagement with Liverpool’s public heritage and museum sites is integral to 7100MHIST in terms of learning activities and assessments.
* A new module in 2024/25, 5133HIST, Revolutionaries: International Communism designed and led by Tom Beaumont, based in part on the outcomes of his AHRC funded network (2021-22), *Rethinking International Communism,* notably two special issues published with *Journal of Labour and Society* (2024) and *Twentieth Century Communism* (2023). Material tested in the classroom, drawing on original archival research, will also underpin the writing of a new monograph within the current REF cycle.

**Broader Change**

In addition to traditional historical research a number of staff also work as expert practitioners and advisors in areas including post-conflict reconstruction, student radicalism, exhibition development; restitution and repatriation in relation to museum collections; legacies of slavery; civil rights. All of these elements are embedded in undergraduate and postgraduate modules, giving our students an enhanced understanding and outward-looking understanding of how their historical studies connect to present-day challenges. The curriculum also allows our students to engage with the public history approaches that our staff engage with as researchers: they assess historic sites, they explore city streets, they interrogate museum collection in dialogue with researchers who are recognised authorities in this area.

As noted above, engagement with external partners (including National Museums Liverpool, National Museum of Ireland and Unilever) is an important strand of the History undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, contributing to students’ professional networks and understanding of diverse professional environments. Students have been given internship opportunities with research partners, which we aim to regularise and extend in our new employability module at Level 5, History Works. Student research projects, even in the first year of undergraduate study, based on the research interests of staff in History, have created resources used by secondary school teachers in the city region. One teacher who invited first year History students to present their resources in the classroom commented our students *‘had worked incredibly hard to produce brilliant resources which really engaged the children’.* Partner feedback on a final year undergraduate student who worked in 2024 on the HLF funded project, *Giz a Job* with Vauxhall Community Law and Information Centre, noted, *‘the skills and knowledge she had acquired from her time at LJMU enabled her to play a principal role in the research and dissemination stages...Moreover, Katie displayed advanced communication skills, patience, maturity, and great enthusiasm.’*

Module evaluation and NSS feedback consistently highlights the success of the programme in encouraging our students to think critically and independently, as well as the inspiration and pleasure derived from being taught by leading experts in their research fields. Twenty-four of our thirty-two optional modules from L5-7, scored 100% satisfaction in 2023/24 module evaluations, a remarkable outcome that reflects the outstanding success of our research-informed teaching strategy and the commitment of our staff at all levels to that approach. NSS results in 2023 placed History at LJMU comfortably ahead of the sector average in all areas, and were the best scores for a History department in the Merseyside region. Module evaluations contain comments such as *‘The lectures where the lecturer drew on his own research were a highlight of the module*’ (5106HIST); *‘I loved diving into the blog post assignment since it was like a little research investigation’* (5126HIST).

Currently three of our MA students have gone on to pursue PhD studies, at LJMU or elsewhere. Two of those students have secured competitive fully-funded PhD scholarships. One of our 2023 MA graduates had her MA Dissertation published in a peer-reviewed journal, and undergraduate dissertations have been published in regionally based learned journals. An MA student who wrote an MA dissertation on the history of counter-terrorism and intelligence in 2021, associated with James Crossland’s research, now works with Greater Manchester Police Counter Terrorism Unit.

**References**

In order to get a sense of the range and depth of the research that students benefit from below is a list of one publication published by every member of the history team. Each publication is a text used in at least one history module.

**Kate Ballantyne, *Radical Volunteers. Dissent Desegregation and Student Power in Tennessee* (2024**). 5132HIST The US Civil Rights Movement, 6130HIST Social Movements and Activism

**Thomas Beaumont, *Fellow Travellers. Communist Trade Unionism and Industrial Relations on the French Railways, 1914-1939.***6101HIST Living with Defeat, 7105MHIST Post-war France

**Mike Benbough-Jackson, *Cardiganshire and the Cardi, c.1760-c.2000: Locating a place and its people,* (2011).** 4102HIST The Faces of Britain; 5114HIST Supernatural Britain

**David Clampin, *Advertising and Propaganda in World War II* (2014).** 6106HIST Advertising and Propaganda in World War Two; 7103MHISTForging the People’s War

**Malcolm Craig, “The Long Dreaded Islamic Bomb”: Perceptions of Middle Eastern nuclear proliferation, 1979-1989, *Diplomatic History: the journal of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations*, 44 :580-608 (2020).** 5127HIST An International History of the Cold War

**James Crossland, *The Rise of Devils: Fear and the Origins of Modern Terrorism* (2023)** for 5125HIST The Age of Terror

**Daniel Feather, *British Cultural Diplomacy in South Africa, 1960-1994****,* (2024), 5106HIST Colonial Africa, 1880-1994

**Susan Grant, *Soviet Nightingales: Care Under Communism,* (2022)** 6108HIST Soviet Body Politics

**Katherine Harbord, ‘In the Back-Garden of Allah (Jarvis 1939): Egypt and the Egyptians in the writings of C.S. Jarvis Kennedy V’, *Discourses of Travel, Exploration, and European Power in Egypt from 1750 to 1956,* (2022).** 5127HIST History of the Middle East.

**Andre Keil, ‘A Very British Dictatorship: The Defence of the Realm Act in Britain, 1914-1920’, *First World War Studies*, 14, 51-70 (2024).**

**Andrea Livesey, ‘Learning Slavery at Home: Garçonnières and Adolescent Enslavers in Rural Louisiana 1806–1861, *Journal of Global Slavery*, 6 :31-54, (2021).** 7104MHIST Liverpool and Slavery; 5126HIST Gender, race, and slavery in the United States

**Lucinda Matthews-Jones, ‘Settling at Home: Gender and Class in the Room Biographies of Toynbee Hall, 1883-1914’, *Victorian Studies*, 60, 29-52 (2017).** 5108HIST Gendering the Past

**Gillian O’Brien, *The Darkness Echoing: Ireland’s Place of Famine, Death and Rebellion* (2020)** for 6125Hist Commemoration and Celebration in Irish History and 7100MISTHistory Beyond the University

**Olivia Saunders, The United States and Latin America and the Caribbean, c.1898-1940 in *the Routledge History of U.S. Foreign Relations* (2021)** 5121HIST A History of Modern Latin America

**Christopher Vaughan, *Darfur: Colonial violence, Sultanic legacies and local politics 191-1956,* (2015).** 5106HIST Colonial Africa.

**Nicholas White, *Decolonisation: the British Experience since 1945* (2014)**for both 6102HIST When the Sun Set in the East and 4103HIST Lion Rampant, Lion Tamed.