

Department of Mathematics: Examination Conventions 2011–12

Final Honour Schools of Mathematics and
mathematics papers within the Joint Schools - Part C

1 Introduction

This document sets out the examination conventions for **Part C Examinations** in Mathematics. The first part of this document is written explicitly for candidates; the second part of the document contains additional information for assessors and examiners but will also be of interest to candidates. The Mathematics Teaching Committee directs that the Part C Examinations are in accordance with these conventions. The Board of Examiners may only make minor deviations from these conventions in exceptional circumstances and only after the consent of the Mathematics Teaching Committee or the Proctors. This document is in all ways subsidiary to the current:

- *Examination Regulations*
- *Notes for Guidance of Examiners and Chairmen of Examiners*
- *Notes of Guidance on Examinations and Assessment*

2 Examinations

To qualify for your BA in Mathematics or MMath you must pass a First and Second public examination. The first public examination in Mathematics is currently called Honour Moderations and is taken at the end of the first year.

The Second Public Examination has three parts: Part A taken at the end of the second year, Part B taken at the end of the third year and Part C taken at the end of the fourth year. Candidates who satisfy the examiners in Part A and Part B only qualify for the award of BA in Mathematics; candidates who satisfy the examiners for all three parts qualify for the award of the MMath. Only candidates who achieve Lower Second Class standard or higher on Parts A and B together qualify to proceed to Part C.

3 Part C

Normally the number of questions on each paper is prescribed in the *Examination Regulations* or *Course Handbook* (including the *Lecture Synopses*).

Each mathematics paper will examine one half unit course, will be of one and a half hours duration and consist of three 25 mark questions. Candidates may submit answers to as many questions as they wish, but only the best two answers will count towards the mark for the paper.

In all papers the questions set should give a reasonable coverage of the syllabus.

Questions should be similar in style to previous Part C questions, commencing with straightforward routine bookwork worth up to 13 marks, followed by a part which tests understanding. Each question should be set so that a sound student can produce a complete answer in 35–40 minutes.

Part C Classification Conventions

The formulae agreed by the Teaching Committee of the Department of Mathematics are as follows:

- First Class: $AvUSM - PartC \geq 70$
- Upper Second Class: $70 > AvUSM - PartC \geq 60$
- Lower Second Class: $60 > AvUSM - PartC \geq 50$
- Third Class: $50 > AvUSM - PartC \geq 40$

[Note: Half unit papers count as half a paper when determining the average USM.]

Candidates so classified may supplicate for the MMath degree with the above associated classification for Part C; additionally their transcript will show the classification for Parts A and B assigned by examiners in 2010.

A ‘Pass’ will not be awarded in the MMath (Part C). Candidates achieving:

$$AvUSM - PartC < 40,$$

should be eligible to supplicate for the BA and be awarded the appropriate class as determined by performance on Parts A and B. The name of such a candidate is not eligible to appear on the same class list as those eligible to supplicate for the MMath.

Note: Examiners are advised not to issue the Class List until 48 hours after the final meeting. This allows some time for administrative errors to come to light.

4 University Standardised Marks

Marks for each individual examination paper will be reported as University Standardised Marks (USMs). The object of the USMs is to allow direct comparison between the results of examination in different subjects. Raw marks are turned into USMs by scaling, sometimes necessary to ensure that all papers are fairly and equally rewarded. The correspondence between the USM ranges and classes is as follows:

- 70-100: First Class
- 60-69: Upper Second Class
- 50-59: Lower Second Class
- 40-49: Third Class
- 0-39: Fail

These marks reflect the qualitative descriptors given in appendix N.

5 Analysis of marks

5.1 Part C

The Board of Examiners in Part C will assign USMs for full unit and half unit papers taken in Part C and may recalibrate the raw marks to arrive at university standardised marks reported to candidates. The full unit papers are designed so that the raw marks sum to 100, however, Examiners will take into account the relative difficulty of papers when assigning USMs. In order to achieve this, Examiners may use information on candidates' performances on the earlier Parts of the examination when recalibrating the raw marks. They may also use other statistics to check that the USMs assigned fairly reflect the students' performances on a paper.

USMs on each paper should be symmetrically rounded [62.49 will be rounded down and 62.50 will be rounded up].

Let $AvUSM - PartC$ = Average USM in Part C (symmetrically rounded);

The object of the USM is to allow direct comparison between the results of examination in different subjects. This means that the USM will not correspond to the raw mark. In the case of mathematics the conversion tends to exaggerate small differences at the top and at the bottom of the scale. It is usually true that USM conversion makes the performance of a weak candidate appear better than the raw marks would suggest. It is often, but not always true that the effect is reversed for strong candidates.

6 Examination Conduct

You will receive advice from the Examiners before each part of your finals examination, giving more information. Notices from Examiners in previous years can be found on the Mathematical Institute website.

7 Special Needs Candidates

A candidate in any University Examination with special examination needs may apply to the Proctors through the Senior Tutor of his or her college

- (1) for special examination arrangements relating to his or her condition and
- (2) for the condition to be taken into account by the examiners as a special factor that may affect his or her performance in examinations.

For further details on the general rules for candidates with special candidates examination needs refer to the University's Examination Regulations.

Appendices

Further Information for Examiners

A Chairman of Examiners

'Regulations for the conduct of examinations, Part 6', in the *Examination Regulations* covers the appointment of the Chairman. The Committee for the Nomination of Examiners will usually appoint a Chairman in Trinity Term of the preceding year.

B Paperwork

B.1 Internal Examiners

The Internal Examiners should ensure that they are equipped with the following documents which will be provided by the Maths Institute's administration, either in hard copy most of which are available from Reception, or in electronic copy.

- The *Examination Regulations*.
- The *Notes for the Guidance of Examiners and Chairmen of Examiners* (produced by the Proctors' Office and sent by that office to Examiners).
- The Education Committee *Notes of Guidance on Examinations and Assessment*.
- The *Aims and Objectives* of the mathematics courses, as agreed by the Teaching Committee.
- The *Course Handbook*, including the *Lecture Synopses*.
- The examination papers from the preceding two years.
- The Examiners' Reports on these examinations.
- The External Examiners' reports for the previous year.
- Any responses to these agreed by the Teaching Committee on behalf of the Faculty, and any additional decisions of the Teaching Committee.
- Reports to the Teaching Committee on individual papers where appropriate.
- The published tables of *Class Percentage Figures* for the last two years (as published in the Examiners' Reports) and following guidelines from the Education Committee and the Mathematics Teaching Committee.
- Guidance on the method of Calibration of Examination marks in Mathematics on behalf of examiners.

In the instance of new examinations, material from previous years will not be applicable, but there may be specimen examination papers produced by the Teaching Committee.

B.2 External Examiners

The Director of Undergraduate Studies will ensure that the External Examiners are (where appropriate) also provided with copies of these documents.

C Target Marks

Examiners should follow any guidance in the *Course Handbook* on the profile of marks they are aiming for the candidates to achieve. Examination marks will be reported to candidates in the form of University Standardised Marks. Examiners may recalibrate raw marks but, in setting the papers, should aim to minimise the need for recalibration.

D Checklist for Setters and Checkers

The Examiners should provide those who are asked to supply draft questions with a checklist of important considerations.

1. Is the question on the syllabus (as in the *Exam Regulations* or *Course Handbook* (including the *Lecture Synopses*))?
2. Is the mathematics correct?
3. Is the notation and terminology standard/obvious/defined? (Standard usage from the course is acceptable without explanation but phrases such as ‘as in the lectures’ should be avoided.)
4. Is the question unambiguous? Is it clear what may be assumed, what detail is required, and what would constitute a complete answer?
5. Is the form of presentation familiar/inviting/readable?
6. Does each question have an easy start, worth at least 10 marks, which examines material explicitly covered in the course?
7. Is each question, together with its mark scheme, such that a II(i)/II(ii) borderline candidate should be able to clock up 15/25 marks (where relevant)?
8. Is each question overall of a straightforward character?
9. Are the questions as a whole fairly spread across the syllabus?
10. Are the questions as a whole of a similar general nature to questions in previous years?
11. Are the questions as a whole of comparable standard to other questions this year?
12. Is the question formatted using the `oxmath.sty` file?

E Protocols

Each half-paper should be drafted by the appropriate Lecturer, and checked by the Lecturer of the complementary course if appropriate, or some other qualified person nominated by the Examiners. Examiners and assessors are reminded of the need for security of examination papers. Examinations papers must be kept in a “By Hand Only” folder and must be passed via the Academic Administration Office in person and by hand only. The Lecturers and (if needed) the Convenor of the appropriate Subject Panel shall be responsible for the production of the camera ready copy of the questions for the whole examining board to approve. The camera ready copy of exam papers for Michaelmas term lecture courses will be prepared in early Hilary term, whilst for Hilary term courses, the camera ready copy of exam papers will be prepared immediately preceding the start of Trinity term. Assessors need to be available at these times to sign-off on their respective exam papers.

F Marking Schemes

F.1 Model Solutions

Those setting questions are asked to provide **complete model solutions** worthy of full marks, carefully annotated so as to indicate what is considered bookwork, what has been seen before on problem sheets and what is considered to be new and unseen, and with a draft Marking Scheme for the approval of the Examiners; the solution, with additional comments, should also make clear how much of the question is accessible to less strong candidates. Where material has been seen before on a problem sheet, please give the precise reference.

F.2 Aims of Marking Schemes

Marking schemes for the questions should aim to ensure that the following qualitative criteria hold:

20–25 marks A completely, or almost completely, correct answer, showing excellent understanding of the concepts and skill in carrying through the arguments and/or calculations; minor slips or omissions only.

13–19 marks A good though not complete answer, showing understanding of the concepts and competence in handling the arguments and/or calculations. Such an answer might consist of an excellent answer to a substantial part of the question, or a good answer to the whole question which nevertheless shows some flaws in calculation or in understanding or in both.

This should be regarded as a guide to candidates conveying the intentions of the examiners.

F.3 Approval of Marking Schemes

The Marking Schemes are approved by the examiners alongside the papers. Minor edits may be made during the setting and checking process in consultation with the setter.

F.4 Review by External Examiners

The external examiners should be consulted according to the agreed timetable, and provided with stable draft papers; they should be provided with full annotated solutions indicating what is bookwork, and with the proposed Marking Scheme. Comments from the external examiners on each paper will be sent to each respective setter. The examiners should not finalise any paper without taking into account the comments of the external examiners. External examiners should be informed of action taken in response to their comments.

G Invigilation

The Examination Schools should inform a candidate's college if an incident occurs during the sitting of the papers which is recorded in the log sheet, so that, for example, a medical certificate can be sent to the Chairman of Examiners if appropriate.

H Marking and Checking

H.1 Marking

The Examiners should provide each Assessor with the marking scheme approved by the Examining Board. Letters to assessors and markers in previous years are commended; the following points must be made:

Marking Schemes It is the responsibility of assessors to use the final approved marking scheme, discarding earlier drafts. Marks schemes should be applied consistently. However, should it become clear while marking that the allocation of marks should be changed, please ensure that this is done consistently, and advise the Examiners of this change.

Mark Ranges in FHS papers All questions are to be marked out of 25.

Marking The Examiners will want to review at least some of the scripts during the classification process. They will not want to re-mark (since they cannot do so consistently across all candidates). They will want to be able to see quickly where marks have been gained. They will also want to be sure that all of a candidate's work has been taken into consideration. Markers are therefore asked to observe the following.

- to indicate the marks given for each part of a question, by writing, e.g., $\frac{3}{5}$;
- to show the total mark in some distinctive way, e.g., 18;
- to leave some trace that each page has been marked; pages on which no individual marks have been shown should not be ticked, but marked “\”;
- to copy the total mark for each question on to the cover sheet;
- to use some colour of ink not used by the candidates;
- not to write comments on the scripts, but, if necessary write on the mark sheets provided. (Markers may indicate briefly to the Examiners where arguments are flawed.)

Mark Sheets Pre-printed marks sheets will be supplied.

In entering into the pre-printed mark sheets the integral numerical mark for each question care must be taken to distinguish between 0 marks for an attempt and – for a non-attempt.

Assessors are asked to compute the check-sum for each candidate, which is the candidate number(mod 100) plus the sum of raw marks.

Before sending in the marks sheets markers should retain a photocopy.

Reports Assessors will provide the examiners with a brief report on the performance of the candidates on each paper (or part-paper) to assist them in their deliberation on calibration; in particular assessors are invited to suggest where class boundaries could be drawn. Model examples of helpful reports are available.

I Checking the Marks

The Examiners should ensure that their procedures allow for:

- an independent arithmetic check of the correctness of the addition of the partial marks for each question;
- an independent check of the marks entered into the marks database for each candidate;
- an audit trail for these checks.

In recent years graduate research students have been employed to carry out such checks. The standard document 'Instructions for Graduate Checkers' is kept in the Academic Office, and gives details.

I.1 Logging Scripts

The Examiners should ensure that a central log is kept of the whereabouts of all scripts; and should instruct all Markers to return 'sporadic' scripts or answers to the central contact with a note of explanation.

I.2 Availability of Assessors

The Chairman must ensure that those appointed as Assessors are informed of the Examiners' timetables, and are made aware that they must be available for consultation by the Examiners until the signing of the Class List, and in particular during the input and checking of the marks. Assessors must be available during the examination of their subject in case of candidate queries.

J Practical Work

Special provision may be made, at the direction of the Proctors, for candidates who, having deferred taking an examination, are offering coursework from a previous year.

K Dissertations

The Examiners should pay careful attention to what candidates have been told about the assessment of these in the *Examination Regulations* and the *Course Handbook*. All dissertations are independently marked by at least two assessors. The examiner responsible for dissertations will oversee the reconciliation of marks. Discussion between all assessors should focus on any reasons for differing marks, and thereby agree a reconciled mark. If agreement is not possible, an additional marker should be appointed.

L Recalibration of Marks

On each paper, any recalibration of marks should be done without disturbing the order of candidates. In order to ensure fair treatment Examiners are reminded that they may exercise individual consideration in assigning USMs for candidates whose marks lie outside the standard pattern.

Examiners should take note of the distribution of USMs above 60 and above 70 in the Examination in a normal year and not depart from it without good reason. Information about the distribution of USMs in the Examination for recent matriculation years can be obtained from the Academic Administrator.

The object of the USM is to allow direct comparison between the results of examination in different subjects. This means that the USM will not necessarily be equal to the raw mark.

USMs on each paper should be symmetrically rounded.

M Medical Certificates

Proctorial guidance is that medical certificates should be kept if students are taking an examination with different Parts in different years, in case the final Board of Examiners wants to refer to them at classification stage.

In the case of Mathematics, this guidance is relevant to Part A and Part B Examiners.

If Part A examiners are presented with medical evidence affecting one paper they can take it into account and modify the USM for that paper accordingly.

If Part A Examiners are presented with medical evidence affecting more than one paper and feel unable to modify USMs accordingly they should pass this information, along with the medical evidence, to the Board of Examiners in Part B the following year. The Part B Examiners can then take this evidence into account before making a classification. Once USMs have been issued to colleges at the end of Part A they cannot be altered, so in order to take such evidence into account Part B examiners may have to suspend the examining conventions in awarding a classification.

N Classification of Candidates

The average USM ranges used in the classifications reflect the following general **Qualitative Class Descriptors** agreed by the Teaching Committee:

First Class: the candidate shows excellent skills in reasoning, deductive logic and problem-solving. He/she demonstrates an excellent knowledge of the material, and is able to use that in unfamiliar contexts.

Upper Second Class: the candidate shows good or very good skills in reasoning, deductive logic and problem-solving. He/she demonstrates a good or very good knowledge of much of the material.

Lower Second Class: the candidate shows adequate basic skills in reasoning, deductive logic and problem-solving. He/she demonstrates a sound knowledge of much of the material.

Third Class: the candidate shows reasonable understanding of at least part of the basic material and some skills in reasoning, deductive logic and problem-solving.

Fail: little evidence of competence in the topics examined; the work is likely to show major misunderstanding and confusion, coupled with inaccurate calculations; the answers to questions attempted are likely to be fragmentary only.

[Note that the aggregation rules in some circumstances allow a stronger performance on some papers to compensate for a weaker performance on others.]

O Post Examination

Examiners should ensure that the following are deposited with the Academic Administrator (or deputy), Mathematical Institute:

- a definitive record of individual USMs, signed off by one of the Examiners (to be kept on file at the Institute for reference and for use in later examinations);
- all records of the Examination not otherwise destroyed and declarations relating to the destruction of examination material (as requested by the Proctors);

- full marking schemes, including any subsequent amendments;
- LaTeX source files for the papers incorporating any corrections (which will be passed to the computing officers for the electronic archive).

Chairman
on behalf of the Teaching Committee.