

University of Oxford

Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Divisional Office
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From the Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division

Professor V. Sassone
School of Electronics & Computer Science
University Road
University of Southampton
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Ref. MPS/25

7 May 2008

Dear Professor Sassone,

M.Sc. in Mathematics and the Foundations of Computer Science, 2007

I am writing on behalf of the MPLS Divisional Board to thank you for your detailed report as an external examiner for the M.Sc. in Mathematics and the Foundations of Computer Science. This has been considered by the Supervisory Committee for the course, the two departments involved, and the Division of Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences.

The Supervisory Committee has expressed its gratitude to you and, in particular, commented on two particular aspects of your report:

“The Committee would first like to thank the Examiners for the care with which this examination was conducted, and for their thoughtful observations. Particular points will be addressed below, but the Committee would like to express its especial gratitude to the external examiners for their support for this course, both in terms of their contribution to its success and also for the very positive comments they have consistently made about its intellectual standing.

1. We believe that [the problem about dissertation marks identified by Professor Sassone] has been overcome. Information was sent to external examiners as soon as it was received, rather than all being collected first, and the revised assessment procedure* assisted in this.

* On which they further comment –

While the supervisor is no longer required to provide a mark, he does still offer comments that the Examiners can (and should) note in moderating the mark provided by the assessor. Every dissertation is made available to the relevant external examiner, and all examiners are present at all vivas, together with the separate assessors for each. Thus more “manpower” is put into the assessment of each dissertation than for a full thesis. But we note that Professor Sassone was nevertheless confident in the outcome.

2. The Supervisory Committee has made a full report to the Division on the move from Greek letter marking to the use of USMs while maintaining, for this year at least, the existing qualitative descriptors.”

As you are again an Examiner this year and therefore fully involved with the implementation of their recommendations, I need not rehearse what they have reported at length on (2), save to thank you on their behalf for the effort that you have put into assisting with this transitional process and maintaining the integrity of what the Supervisory Committee rightly identifies as the course’s very high standards and expectations.

The role of external examiners is vital both to ensuring the maintenance of high standards and to enabling us to demonstrate an independent verification of the high levels at which we aim to provide education and training for our students. When you can write

The quality of the set exam papers was very high, in terms of the depth of the questions, and the students’ work was impressive, in terms of the scholarliness of the answers. I found the final projects on average of very high quality.

I can only add my gratitude for the contribution that you have made to this process.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Nigel Berry
Assistant Registrar

c.c. Dr A. Curnock, Mrs C.O’Connor