



Department of Mathematics

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The Vice-Chancellor
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Dear Vice-Chancellor,

I am an External Examiner for the MSc in Mathematics and Foundations of Computer Science for 2005-06, and I am writing to you with a report on my past year in this role.

I found that the assessment on the course (a range of mini-projects, together with a substantial thesis written during the summer) was very appropriate. A large number of distinctions have been recommended this year, and this reflects the excellent standard of students on the course. I was impressed by the quality of those mini-projects and theses I have looked at, and I very much enjoyed the opportunity to read these and meet students in the vivas.

The marking was careful and fair, and the vivas were conducted well, with each student having adequate time to explain the main points of their assignment and to highlight their original contributions. A viva is conducted after two internal members of staff have looked at the thesis and produced an independent report; one of these academics is usually present at the viva itself. I would ask that every effort is made to make the reports available to an External Examiner at least two days before the date of the vivas; this allows the External Examiner to think in depth about any disagreements between the internal reports. (This year I received approximately half the reports on the date of the viva itself.) It might also be worthwhile making both reports available to the other members of the panel of viva examiners ahead of time; but I realise there might be disadvantages to this, and so I would certainly not want to insist on this point.

I found that all the examination procedures I came across were robust, well executed and facilitated an accurate outcome. From the students' work, I can deduce that the learning environment is excellent. I think the mix of subjects in this MSc to be very well judged: the University should be proud of an MSc that teaches the combination of rigorous, modern and applicable mathematics and computer science so effectively.

I believe that this is my last year as an External Examiner for the MSc. I'd like to express

my thanks for the prompt and relevant responses to my recommendations during my time in the role, and for the friendly reception I have been given: this is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Simon R. Blackburn