



Vice-Chancellor
c/o Mrs Sally Powell
University of Oxford
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28th September 2006

Dear Vice-Chancellor

External Examiner's Report of the Assessment of the Master of Science in Mathematical Modelling and Scientific Computing 2005/6

Last week (18th and 19th September) I spent two days in Oxford participating in the assessment of dissertations, oral examinations, and discussions about the final award of degrees for the MSc in Mathematical Modelling and Scientific Computing. This was my first year as External Examiner for this degree and the purpose of this letter is to report on the assessment procedure from my perspective.

My key conclusion is that, as far as I can tell, the assessment (involving classes and practicals, examinations, special topics, a dissertation, and an oral examination) was conducted in a fair and rigorous manner and to the appropriate academic standards.

My specific involvement in the assessment was fourfold.

- I provided (mostly rather trivial) comments on the examination papers before they were sat.
- I read and independently graded all of the dissertations.
- I participated in the oral examinations taken by all of the candidates.
- I participated in the discussions concerning the dissertation mark, oral mark, overall mark, and fail/pass/distinction award.

At all stages I found the procedures to be rigorous and fair and, in particular, I am entirely content with all of the final marks for the dissertations and oral examinations as well as the overall mark, and the fail/pass/distinction award.

Naturally some dissertations were better than others, but all deserved to pass and all merited the marks they were awarded. The best dissertation [REDACTED] was excellent, and a number of the others were very good. Generally the technical content was high, although I was a little disappointed by the presentation of a number of the dissertations. (There is no excuse for simple spelling mistakes or a failure to proof read carefully before submission.) Generally my independent grading was in close agreement with that of the internal examiners, and in the handful of cases where our preliminary judgements differed we had no difficulty reaching a mutually acceptable compromise.

All of the students were given a tough but fair oral examination. Most of the students acquitted themselves very well and I was impressed by how well many of them performed under pressure. All deserved to pass (although, in one case, only just) and all merited the marks they were awarded.

I didn't believe that it was necessary for me to review the marking of the examinations or of the special topics, but was given the opportunity to do so if I had wished to.

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* Candidate Information deleted.

I believe that the overall marks are a fair and accurate measure of the students' performance. In particular, there was no argument that [REDACTED] was the best student and thus deserved the Nuclear Electric Prize.

I wish to put on record particular thanks to the Chair of the Examiners (Dr Sam Howison) for making me so welcome during my short time in Oxford, to the other internal examiners for taking full account of my views and recommendations, and to the support staff (notably Shirley Day and Kathryn Gillow) for handling the administrative aspects so smoothly.

I believe that this may be the last year of the present degree in its current form. If this is indeed the case then can I take this opportunity to recommend that the present practice (of which I thoroughly approve) of giving all of the students an oral examination at the end of their degree be continued. However, if the successor degree has significantly more students taking it, then it may be necessary to re-consider the present practice of asking the External Examiner to read all of the dissertations in detail.

I would be happy to continue to serve as External for the successor degree if asked to do so.

Yours sincerely



Professor Stephen Wilson MA MSc DPhil
(Head of Mathematics, University of Strathclyde)

cc Dr Sam Howison (Chair of Examiners)