EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2023

External examiner name:	Alan Champneys	
External examiner home institution:	University of Bristol	
Course(s) examined:	Part C Mathematics	
Level: (please *delete as appropriate*)	UG Mmath	MSc

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
	*Please (✓) as applicable**	**Yes**	**No**	**N/A / Other**
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? *[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].*	Y		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect: (i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and (ii) any applicable subject benchmark statement? *[Please refer to paragraph 7 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].*	Y		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	Y		
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	Y		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	Y		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?	Y		
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?	Y		
**** If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.***				

Part B

B1. Academic standards

a. *How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?*

The standards achieved are more than equivalent to any Mathematical Sciences Programme I am aware of. The level of difficulty in most of the papers is extreme, and the standard of work in the projects and in the mini projects is really high.

b. *Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

Students perform well with a good percentage achieving the equivalent of a first class (or distinction) mark. This seems to me to be fair, given the level of difficulty and there is a pre-selection of students progressing onto year 4 of the undergraduate masters of only the best students.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

I am happy that the process is fair, and transparent. I am satisfied that good care is taken over the preparation of exam papers with a checker, internal examiner and external. I am less sure that complete cross-validation is made of marks awarded to projects, and in places the examiners comments to justify marks are missing or incomplete. I have found no evidence of grades being inappropriate for this project work though, and in general the best projects seem to achieve justifiably high marks. This problem of how to rank project marks is not unique to the University of Oxford, and I have made similar comments in other institutions where I have been examiner. There are one or two other parts of the process where the audit trail is not quite as rigorous as would have expected (see below under issues). But in general I would say that more care and attention is paid, especially to paper scaling and the treatment of borderlines, than I have seen in other places.

B3. Issues

Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?

I would recommend the Examiners take more of an oversight into the marking of projects. I would expect it to the job of the examiners to ensure that all project marking proformas are filled in with complete justification of the mark awarded. Where two markers don't agree, I would expect to see an audit trail that explains the process by which the mark was resolved.

I would also like more of an audit trail to be presented that the Examiners have looked carefully at all projects where Turnitin has flagged a high score. I found this had not been done and we wasted a good deal of time in the final examiners meeting on this. Having said that, we only found

one project where we recommended a poor academic practice penalty, where none had previously been flagged.

Finally, on the subject of audit trail. The use of sharepoint with separate folders for each paper is good. However, I would recommend a standard practice that each folder be pre-populated with subdirectories called “preliminary versions” and “final versions” I would also recommend that each folder have a mandatory files called “checkers comments”, “internal examiners comments” and “setters response to comments”. In order for a paper to be signed off, I would recommend each of these folders should be non-empty (even if they contain, “I have no comments”, or “see version called ***.pdf in which comments have been marked). This would make the job of the external examiner MUCH easier.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

*Please comment/provide recommendations on any **good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment**, and any **opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities** provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.*

The system that the Department have adopted for scaling exam papers based on the same cohort’s performance on related papers and (where appropriate) their performance in Part B, is exemplary. As is the care taken to look at borderline candidates.

I like the two-tier system of having the Proctors for allowing excusals (a good Oxford word!) or penalties to be awarded, this ensures common practice across the University.

B5. Any other comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

One thing I found slightly surprising this year were the number of cases with extenuating circumstances that came to light after the board of examiners that had to be dealt with by email afterwards.
I strongly recommend that students and colleges be told there is a strict deadline by which any extenuating circumstance or related information must be submitted to the board of examiners. Only under truly exceptional circumstances should information `that has come to light late’ be permitted. This should include a clear reason why the information could not have been made available on time. If necessary, in future the board could be be put back a week or two, to ensure that all the relevant information is available. This also applies to some of the joint honours programmes where marks are not available from other programmes/departments in time.

Signed:	

Date:	10th Feb 2024 (with many apologies for lateness).

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk AND copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.