

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2023

External examiner name:	Anne Skeldon		
External examiner home institution:	University of Surrey		
Course(s) examined:	Part B Mathematics, Part B Mathematics & Statistics		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)	Undergraduate		

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
	<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect: (i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and (ii) any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 7 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	✓		
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?	✓		Yes, but only on the 29 th August

				2023, more than a year after the exam boards and after repeated requests
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?			This is hard to say
* 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?*

Overall, the level of the questions asked and the performance on exam papers suggests that academic standards are at least as high as other institutes of which I have experience.

- 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).*

Overall student performance was good. There remain some papers which are heavily scaled. I welcome the response to my comments on scaling last year and the establishment of a working group to look at scaling. I re-iterate the need for vigilance in this area to make sure that final student results are not overly sensitive to scaling choices made for individual papers.

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.

This year, external examiners were provided with much greater access to the setting / checking process. It was re-assuring to see the care and attention paid in trying to make sure that exams were clearly worded and of an appropriate level.

The exam boards were again conducted with rigour, with careful consideration of all borderline students and all students with mitigating circumstances. I note that the Oxford regulations allow for much more discretion to discount individual papers because of mitigating circumstances than available at other institutes I'm familiar with. In other institutes, papers cannot be discounted but students who successfully apply for mitigating circumstances are offered subsequent opportunities to take any affected assessments. These subsequent opportunities are normally either in a late summer assessment period or the following academic year. For students in their final BSc year, I can see that there is great merit to the Oxford process which enables students to graduate and move on with their lives. It also reduces academic burden.

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?

This year was my third year as external examiner. Each of the three years, the Mathematics Exam Board has had a different chair. I understand that chairs are drawn from the exam board from the previous year and that tenure is not necessarily for only one year. This year, I felt that the lack of continuity in chair meant that the Mathematics Exam Board did not run as smoothly as it could have done.

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.*

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.

Overall, the setting / checking process this year ran much more smoothly than in the previous two years. Communication with external examiners was much improved, external examiners were given greater access to the exam setting / checking process and fewer exam papers were late. I had the impression that extreme scaling was applied to fewer papers, although I hope the exam board will continue to monitor scaling carefully and there remain some papers which appear to be "repeat offenders".

I would like to think that the reasons that the process ran more smoothly were because of systemic change, in part as a result of feedback from external examiners. However, this is unclear, an alternative explanation is that there was a new, efficient Exams Secretary in place this year.

At the Exam Board in June I raised the fact that I had received no response to my report for the academic year 2022/23 (or 2021/22 for that matter). This surprised exam board members and I was told that a response had been prepared. After repeated requests, I did eventually receive a response on the 29th August 2023 – but since the date of the letter was itself 29th August 2023 and referred to a meeting on the 22nd March 2023 the timescale on which comments from external examiners were considered was unclear to me.

In order to “close the loop” on the quality assurance external examining process, I suggest that a formal response is sent in a timely manner. One would like to believe that improvements e.g. in timely setting of exam papers, is a result of procedural change rather than the result of a particularly efficient individual member of staff.

Signed:	Anne Skeldon
Date:	08/09/2023

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.