C  EXAMINATION CONVENTIONS

Each piece of work submitted is awarded a University Standardised Mark (USM) by the Examiners, with a USM of 50 or more representing a pass. To pass the course, passes must be obtained on at least five mini projects that include two on courses from Section B and two at the Schedule II level (these need not be distinct) and for the dissertation. The Examiners may award a distinction for excellence throughout the examination.

The following sets out the conventions for the level of USMs awarded, and the mechanism by which a final USM is determined. A pass requires a final USM of at least 50 and a distinction requires a final USM of at least 70.

The Board of Examiners consists of at least three (currently four) members, with at least one (currently two) being external to the University. The current Board of Examiners consists of Prof Jonathan Pila and Prof Thomas Lukasiewicz as internal examiners and Dr Corina Cirstea (University of Southampton) and Dr Ivan Tomasic (Queen Mary University of London) as external examiners. (Note: candidates must not under any circumstances communicate directly with examiners.)

Mini projects are set by those giving the courses and are double-blind marked by that person and one other assessor (these two mark the work independent of each other). Each proposes a USM for the work and a range whose maximum and minimum values differ by at most 5 USMs from the proposed USM within which the assessor would be content for the USM to lie. If there is overlap between the ranges proposed by the two assessors and neither of the ranges crosses a classification boundary the two proposed USMs are averaged and rounded to the nearest whole number (.5 is rounded up). In all other cases the two assessors are asked to discuss the mini project to agree on a final USM.

The exception is mini projects which have a model solution and marking scheme approved by the examiners. In such cases each script is marked by an assessor and this marking is checked independently to ensure that all parts have been marked and the part-marks have been correctly totalled and recorded.

The mini projects which are set are submitted to the Examiners for prior vetting, and the Examiners may moderate the marks given by assessors, in particular to achieve parity across subjects. The pass list for each individual course is published before the beginning of the subsequent term and candidates will be advised of the USMs awarded.

The dissertation is marked independently by the dissertation supervisor and by a second assessor. These two marks are reconciled to produce a provisional USM following the same procedures given for mini projects which are double-blind marked above. Each Dissertation will also be seen by at least one Examiner. The second assessor of the dissertation will normally be present at the oral examination, and the Examiners will determine the USM only after the oral examination has been held, taking into account all the evidence from the double-marking, the supervisor’s additional input, and from the oral examination.

Plagiarism

The University takes a strong stand against plagiarism.

Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s work or ideas as your own, with or without their consent, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement. All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition. Plagiarism may be intentional or reckless, or unintentional. Under the regulations for examinations, intentional or reckless plagiarism is a disciplinary offence.

Where the Chair finds that the matter can be dealt with by the Exam Board, assessors will mark the work on its academic merits. The Board may deduct marks for derivative or poorly referenced work. Boards are
free to operate marks deductions of between 1 and 10% (maximum) of the marks available for that particular piece of work. Where the consequence of the marks deduction would result in failure of the assessment and of the programme (i.e. no resit opportunity) the case must be referred to the Proctors.

Please see the University’s guidance on plagiarism for detailed information.

http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism

**Criteria for the award of USMs**

USMs will be awarded according to the following criteria:

**70 - 100 Excellent** - the candidate has demonstrated an excellent understanding of almost all the material covered with a commensurate quality of presentation, and has completed almost all of the assignment satisfactorily - further subdivided by;

- **90-100**: The candidate has shown originality or insight that in the case of a mini project goes beyond a basic completion of the task set, and in the case of the dissertation contains some original work of potential publication standard
- **80-89**: The work submitted shows a near-perfect completion of the task in hand, whether a mini project or dissertation, but does not meet the additional requirements above, or does but has defects in presentation
- **70-79**: The work submitted is of a generally high order, but may have minor errors in content and/or deficiencies in presentation

**60 - 69 Good** - the candidate has demonstrated a good understanding of much of the material, and has completed most of the assignment satisfactorily

**50 - 59 Adequate** - the candidate has demonstrated an understanding of the material and an ability to apply his or her understanding that together are sufficient to pass;

and at levels that fail;

**40 - 49** The work submitted, while sufficient in quantity, suffers from sufficient defects to show a lack of adequate understanding or ability to apply results

**30 - 39** The candidate, while attempting a significant part of the mini project or in writing a dissertation, has displayed a very limited knowledge or understanding at the level required for a master's degree

**0 - 29** The candidate has either attempted only a fragment of a mini project or has shown an inadequate grasp of basic material.

In all cases, the Examiners take account of the presentation of work.

**Formative feedback**

From the first term of the MSc students will attend classes and complete problem sheets which will be marked and feedback given.

**Determination of the final USM**

To determine the final USM, $F$, the dissertation is given the weight of three mini projects and first a provisional USM, $P$, is calculated as

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\[ P = \frac{(X + Y + A + B + C + 3D)}{8} \]

where \(X, Y\) are the best two marks on Schedule II courses, \(A, B, C\) are the three highest other marks on mini projects, and \(D\) is the dissertation mark. Passes and distinctions, and the final USM \(F\) awarded, are determined by the following rules.

(i) If any of \(X, Y, A, B, C, D\) is less than 50, or if fewer than two Section B courses have been passed, then \(F = \min\{P, 49\}\) and the candidate is failed.

(ii) If either

(a) \(D \geq 70\), and \(X, Y, A, B, C \geq 70\)

or

(b) \(D \geq 80, X \geq 70, Y \geq 67\) and \((X + Y + A + B + C)/5 \geq 70\),

then \(F = P\) and the candidate is awarded a distinction.

(iii) In all other cases, \(F = \min\{P, 69\}\) and the candidate is awarded a pass.

\[ \text{Note: Condition(ii)(b) permits the examiners to interpret the requirement “excellence throughout the examination” more broadly, to award a distinction for particular excellence on the dissertation where the mini projects are not uniformly of distinction standard.} \]

A candidate who has failed the MSc may be admitted to and examined on the course as offered in the year subsequent to the initial attempt. No piece of written work shall be submitted for examination on more than one occasion. It is University policy that candidates who have initially failed an MSc are not normally eligible for the award of distinction.

**Late penalties**

A candidate who does not submit a written assignment on a course for which he or she has entered, by noon on the specified deadline, shall be deemed to have failed the course in question.

Any candidate who has not satisfied the examiners in four courses, at least one of which shall have been taken from schedule II and at least one from Schedule B, by the beginning of the Trinity Term shall be deemed to have failed the degree course.

A candidate who fails the course will be permitted to retake it on one further occasion only, in the academic year following the initial attempt. In such a case, the examiners will specify at the time of the failure which of the assessed components of the course may or must be redone.

**Medical Certificates**

The board of examiners will use the following procedure for the consideration of medical and other special circumstances transmitted to them via the Examinations and Assessments Section:

(a) A subset of the board will meet to discuss the individual applications and band the seriousness of each application on a scale of 1-3 with 1 indicating minor impact, 2 indicating moderate impact, and 3 indicating very serious impact. When reaching this decision, examiners will take into consideration the severity and relevance of the circumstances, and the strength of the evidence. Examiners will also note whether all or a subset of papers were affected being aware that it is possible for circumstances to have different levels of impact on different papers.
(b) The banding information will be used at the final board of examiners meeting to adjudicate on the merits of candidates;

(c) A brief, formal record will be kept confirming (i) the fact that information about special circumstances has been considered by the examiners, (ii) how that information has been considered, and (iii) the outcome of the consideration with the reasons for the decisions reached.

Further information on how to make an application for consideration of factors affecting performance in an examination is available at [http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/guidance](http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/guidance).