

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2023

|                                              |                                                              |  |  |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>External examiner name:</b>               | John Hunton                                                  |  |  |
| <b>External examiner home institution:</b>   | Durham University                                            |  |  |
| <b>Course(s) examined:</b>                   | Mathematics, Maths&Computer Science, Maths&Philosophy Part B |  |  |
| <b>Level:</b> (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:<br><br>(i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and<br><br>(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?                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |     | ✓  |                   |
| A7.    | Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?                                                                                                                                                             |     | ✓  | Awaiting response |

**\* 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 very comparable with other good UK institutions I have taught or examined at.

- 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).*

As one would expect in a Maths degree, or joint Maths degree, by the third year there is likely to be a significant range of different abilities demonstrated by the candidates, and this was certainly the case this year. The top students showed an exceptional degree of engagement, ability and knowledge, while at the other end the weaker or less engaged students still demonstrated acceptable achievements for the degree classes awarded. Overall, performance was good and the programmes have clearly been a success.

### **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.*

Last year there were an unfortunate number of errors on the exam papers, which had potentially negative consequences for candidates. This year there were far fewer, so this was much more satisfactory and the Department must be congratulated for this improvement and as a result the assessment process was much smoother.

The process of the examination boards was very satisfactory, with all candidates being considered carefully, equitably and appropriately within the University's requirements.

### **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?*

Several issues do come to mind, though nothing especially serious. First, the external examiners are in Oxford the day before the main Part B board, to look at scripts. It could be helpful to have a preliminary ordered pass list at an early stage then, so that scripts of borderline, or MCE students could be looked at in detail; this may help to inform subsequent discussions.

Secondly, while it is pleasing that there are not nearly so many errors this year as last, I understand that it is still the case that when an error is found on a paper during the time it is being sat, it is not possible for the examiner to communicate the correction to the candidates. I would strongly encourage the University to find a way to enable this, as it could significantly improve the robustness of the examination process.

Finally, the examination board finalises the scaling on individual papers. Scaling for maths exams is a good thing so as to ensure fairness across topic choices. However, I found the process a little opaque; I wonder if it would be possible for the Department to articulate more formally its principles for how individual papers are scaled?

#### **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.*

I was impressed in the Maths and Philosophy board that the regulations for the classification of degrees allowed some latitude for students to do much better in one discipline than the other and still be awarded a good class. The guidance to my mind reflects well the fact that it can be much harder to do well across the board in a joint degree.

We had some discussion of the possibility of making exam papers have no choice of questions. While I could imagine the students might initially resist such a change, thinking that somehow this would make them harder, there could be potentially much merit in such a change, and I would encourage the Department to think about this possibility.

#### **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 process ran well and I have every confidence in its outcome. The external examiners were particularly well assisted by Haleigh Bellamy and I would like to commend her for her ability in that role.

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| <b>Signed:</b> | John Hunton  |
| <b>Date:</b>   | 31 July 2023 |

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