

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2017**

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Simon R. Blackburn	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	Royal Holloway University of London	
<b>Course examined:</b>	Mathematics, and Maths/Philosophy Part C	
<b>Level:</b> (please delete as appropriate)	Undergraduate	

***Please complete both Parts A and B.***

<b>Part A</b>				
<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A / Other</b>
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	✓		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 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?			✓
<p><b>* If you answer "No" to any question, please provide further comments in Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A / Other".</b></p>				

## **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?*
- b. Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

Standards achieved are exceptionally high, especially at the top end. This was true across all the programmes I was involved with.

### **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 convinced that the process was operated fairly and rigorously, and (to the best of my knowledge) according to regulations. In particular, I would like to thank all involved, especially Helen Lowe, Waldemar Schlackow and the examiners, for their efficient and careful operation of the process.

### **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?*

The following are all issues for the Mathematics Department to consider:

- Much of the time in the Mathematics Part C Board was spent finalising scaling (from raw marks to USMs) for each course. There was at least one instance where the majority of students taking a course were under a different programme, and the meeting was given no information on these candidates. This made it impossible to verify or moderate the assessor's proposed scaling. Ideally, scripts for all students taking the course should be available to the Board. But at the very least I suggest that the profile of marks is made available in future.
- I suggest that a more detailed mark scheme is introduced for Mathematics dissertations. I hope that this would significantly improve the rigour of the process.
- I would have liked to see some (short) justification of the final dissertation mark, in cases where the two assessor's initial marks differed significantly.
- The Maths Department might consider making model marked borderline dissertations available (especially to new assessors), to disseminate good practice and to help with self-moderation.
- It was hard to distinguish between the top few candidates in some exams, as the best students did so well. Is it possible to instruct exam setters to add a 'sting in the tail' (for a very small number of marks) to each question, to improve this?

An issue for Philosophy to consider:

The assessors' reports on the Philosophy Thesis were often not available to the Part C Joint Board. These reports are useful to have; this year, they were used in the Maths Part C Board when debating the award of prizes. I suggest the assessors be reminded that the reports should be returned in time for the Board next year.

### **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.*

I was a Part B Mathematics External Examiner last year. I would like to thank the Department for their detailed and helpful response to my report in 2016.

<b>Signed:</b>	S.R. Blackburn
<b>Date:</b>	20/7/17

**Please 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.**