

Title of Examination(s):		
External Examiner Details	Title:	Prof
	Name:	Simon R Blackburn
	Position:	Professor of Pure Mathematics
	Home Institution:	Royal Holloway University of London

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

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓		
A2.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	✓		
A3.	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 3(b) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
A4.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	✓		
A5.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓		
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 are very high. Some students at the top end, in particular, performed exceptionally well.

My predecessor as external examiner comments that he would like to see the balance between bookwork and problem solving tilted more in favour of problem solving. My own feeling, looking at this year's papers, is that this balance is very appropriate.

### 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 was impressed by the care and professionalism taken throughout the assessment process, in particular by the work done by Helen Lowe, Waldemar Schlackow, Dominic Joyce, the examiners and assessors. I am convinced that the process was run in a fair way, and gave robust outcomes.

The system in place seems to work very well, but is rather different to my own institution and those where I have been an external examiner previously. In particular, I was surprised that I did not have face-to-face meetings with assessors. However, the written comments on exams provided to me were an excellent substitute for direct meetings, and provided a good audit trail in terms of standards. As a second point, I spent less time looking at scripts after the scaling from raw marks to USMs were proposed than I was expecting, though there was an opportunity to examine scripts on the day before the meeting.

### 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?*

A small number of exams did not distinguish between the very best students, with one or more students getting full marks. I suggest the assessors make sure that a small number of marks per question are devoted to extremely challenging material, to make this less likely to happen. I should emphasize that the overall standard of the exams was excellent, and appropriate: this comment just refers to the very top end.

There were delays in getting some of the exam papers to me to check, which meant I had difficulty meeting appropriate deadlines for comments for these papers (when I was away, for example). I would appeal to assessors to conform to deadlines for exam paper preparation.

There was little-to-no justification of the assessor's suggested initial mark scalings on many courses, despite detailed feedback on the exam as a whole. I would have preferred more justification here (at the expense of some of the other comments for examiners), identifying (for example) candidates close to borderlines. I should say that despite this, it was clear to me that borderlines and scalings had been thought about in depth, and there was good evidence of careful discussions between Prof Joyce and the assessors regarding the correct scaling.

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 of using an algorithm based on Part A marks to generate an initial scaling, and then moderating this scaling by discussion, worked well and is to be commended.

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.*

No more comments.

Signature:	S.R. Blackburn
Date:	6 <sup>th</sup> July 2016
<p><b>Please email your completed form (preferably as a word document attachment) to: <a href="mailto:external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk">external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk</a> and copied to the applicable divisional contact.</b></p> <p><b>Alternatively, please return a copy by post to: The Vice-Chancellor c/o Catherine Whalley, Head of Education Planning &amp; Quality Review, Education Policy Support, University Offices, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD.</b></p>	