



Edinburgh - July 20, 2015

The Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford  
c/o Catherine Whalley

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

**External examiner's report: Part C, Mathematics, Mathematics &  
Statistics, Mathematics & Computer Science**

**1. B1. Academic standards**

The standards at Oxford are very high both in the intellectual quality of the students and the difficulty of the examinations. The courses cover a wide range of advanced mathematics and contain interesting and challenging material. The cohort of students is pre-selected (upper second in Part B) and they achieve the highest standards of performance compared with other higher education institutions.

**2. B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process**

I believe that the assessment processes are rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for students, and are fairly conducted within the institutional regulations and guidelines for Part C examinations. There are excellent procedures in place for the preparation of examination papers. Almost all of the papers sent to me had followed these procedures in full, with detailed information contained in the model solutions relating to marking schemes and the difficulty of questions. A pre-meeting with the chair of the examiners prior to the main meeting was very helpful in identifying issues. The formal meetings were very well run with excellent administrative support. A large effort is needed to ensure that all examination papers are treated equitably and to arrange that the results fit into the university's USM scheme. This is done with great care and judgement. The information contained in the assessors' post-examination comments is very useful for this task.

**3. B3. Issues**

I am pleased to report that there has been an increase in the number of students offering the mathematics dissertation over the last few years. I am impressed with the standard of the dissertations and for the enormous effort by staff that has gone

into devising, supervising and marking the projects. One issue is that it appears to be difficult for students to obtain a very high mark for a dissertation. There is some evidence that the very best students are choosing not to offer the dissertation because of this. The Teaching Committee of the Mathematical Institute may wish to consider this issue.

#### 4. B4. Examples of good practice

- The quality of documentation provided covering all aspects of the courses and the assessment processes.
- The preparation of model answers together with the indication of the level of novelty in questions is a good example of how this practice can enhance the transparency and consistency of assessment.
- The assessors' post-examination comments are very useful
- The assessment of dissertations is a difficult task at all HEIs. The procedure used here, of having two independent markers, is good practice.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Carr', is positioned below the list of good practices.

Professor Jack Carr (J.Carr@hw.ac.uk)