

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM FOR TAUGHT COURSES 2020-21

Name	Alice Wilson		
Home Institution	University of Sussex		
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Name(s) of course(s) examined <i>e.g. Tripos Part/ MPhil</i>	Part IIA and Part IIB Social Anthropology, Human, Social and Political Sciences		
Level (<i>Delete as appropriate</i>)	Undergraduate		
Year of Appointment			3 rd

	Yes	No	N/A
1. Are the academic standards set for the award appropriate for the qualification, and comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions?	Yes		
2. Are you satisfied that you received sufficient programme materials (handbooks, regulations, marking and classing criteria) in a timely manner?	Yes		
3. Are you satisfied that you were consulted adequately on draft examination papers, and that your comments and suggestions were taken into consideration?	Yes		
4. Are you satisfied that the assessment was pitched at the appropriate level?	Yes		
5. Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	Yes		
6. Do the assessment processes measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme?	Yes		
7. Are you satisfied that issues raised on your previous report form have been properly considered and, where applicable, acted upon?	Yes		
8. Did you receive a written response from the Department to your previous report form?	Yes		

If you replied No to any of the questions above, please expand here:

Do you have any concerns about the course, including standards and quality?

I have no concerns about the course.

Are you satisfied that the procedures associated with the assessment are efficient (e.g. timeframes, draft papers, questions, design and conduct of exam, meetings, vivas)?

On the whole I am satisfied that procedures around assessment are efficient.

The examinations procedures made suitable adjustments for the changed circumstances of another year disrupted by covid. In the circumstances of tight turnaround times where candidates had exceptional circumstances extensions, the decision to base marks for the dissertation on the written dissertation, without an additional oral examination, offered candidates the greatest chances of equitable assessment conditions.

The “safety net” practice of assuring Part IIA candidates that they would progress, and assuring all Part II candidates that only the top 3 of their 4 grades would be used for classing was also a suitable adjustment.

The review of cohort performance compared to other years also offered reassurance that cohorts would not suffer unfair penalty because of disruptions to teaching during covid.

Do you have any comments on marking and classing (e.g. range of marks, action around borderline marks, penalties, moderation, double marking, reconciliation of marks)?

Regarding disputed scripts:

The form in which assessors are invited to give the external examiner some information about the nature of disputed grades for scripts is relatively new. Whilst the assessors for SAN 6 and SAN 8 used this form very effectively, other assessors have written very broad comments that are less helpful for adjudication. To help assessors make better use of this form, I suggest circulating the comments from SAN 6 and SAN 8 as examples of helpful descriptions in case of a request for adjudication.

Regarding penalties for a year disrupted by Covid 19:

It seems that the wording of the adjustment to take into 3 out of 4 papers created some ambiguity to the extent that although the instruction specified that a candidate should sit all 4 examinations, the original wording did not specify the potential penalty should a candidate not upload scripts for a 4th examination. This raises the possibility that if a candidate chose such a path strategically in order to focus their efforts on only 3 papers, rather than 4, then this potentially puts such candidates at an advantage compared to candidates who dedicated themselves to preparing for and sitting all 4 examinations. Thus, there is a possibility of introducing inequity between candidates in the assessment procedure. Clearer wording, should such measures need to be taken in the future, can avoid this.

Do you have any comments on the student experience of the course and/or their experience of the assessment process?

Interventions to support candidates who might be vulnerable:

Unusual in this year’s scripts were the presence of failed papers. This concerned not simply cases where a candidate did not upload files for a particular examination, of which there were a few cases in these cohorts. There is also the question of candidates who try to sit exams, and upload notes and

potentially an attempt at answers, but these uploads fall below the standard required to pass. There was one such candidate in these cohorts, who uploaded a script with 2 out of 3 essays answered, and then for the other 3 exams uploaded documents that apparently had some preparatory notes, but either no answers at all or only a sentence or two for a whole examination paper.

The nature of the examination procedure means that assessors mark what they see with no information about the circumstances of the candidate, and it will be for the College to take up any next steps to assess this candidate's circumstances and appropriate next steps. Whatever the circumstances of this candidate, the presence of scripts for 3 separate examinations that were uploaded but that nevertheless earned grades of 0 or 1 raises a question: what support systems are available for candidates who may not have a state of mind conducive to raising an "alarm bell" themselves, but who might be vulnerable persons who would benefit from an early support intervention? In such a case, if the College will not find out that there is an issue that needs addressing until the release of grades after the examinations board, is there an opportunity to rethink whether there is an earlier stage in which someone else – an assessor, someone from professional services who might be administering scripts and see an empty file – can raise an alarm bell? In other words, given the possibility of extreme vulnerability and crisis, is there a better option than leaving the responsibility for raising an alarm in the hands of the vulnerable person who might not have been in a frame of mind to take such decisions themselves? If it turned out that a candidate's very poor examinations performance arose from circumstances of crisis, it would be important to try to put support in place earlier rather than later. If there is currently a time lag before Colleges can take up that role, how could that be addressed?

Do you have any comments on University policies (e.g. the role of the external examiner, policies around plagiarism, script annotation)?

No comments.

Please describe here any recommendations for improvement.

Please see my answers on student experience and marking/classing.

Please highlight any good practice you encountered.

The very high quality of research-led teaching was once again evident in the scripts.

The Senior Examiner and colleagues in professional services were exemplary to work with, once again. I especially encourage the university to take any steps that it can to acknowledge the outstanding work of professional services staff on whom the smooth running of teaching and assessment in such difficult circumstances relies.

The assessors for papers SAN 6 and SAN 8 included succinct and very helpful comments describing the nature of the different assessor views that led to a script being forwarded as disputed.

Have you seen any evidence of grade inflation?

No.

If this is your final year as external examiner? If so, have you seen improvements over your tenure?
Has the Department acted on your advice?

This is my final year of serving as an external examiner. The Department has acted on advice.

Do you have any other comments?

No other comments.

Thank you for completing the Examiners Report form.

Please now forward to vcexternalexaminers@admin.cam.ac.uk by July 31st for undergraduate examinations, **1st October** for Masters Degrees, and **12th October** for resits.

Please also forward copies to your Chair of Examiners.