



EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2024

External examiner name:	Kathryn Allan		
External examiner home institution:	UCL		
Course(s) examined:	MPhil in Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics, MSt in Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)	<u>Undergraduate</u>	Postgraduate	
Year of term of office: (please delete as appropriate)	<u>First year</u>	Last year	Other year

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>	x		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect: (i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and (ii) any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 7 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	x		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	x		
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	x		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	x		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?***	x		
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?***	x		
* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.				

**** A6. and A7. If you are in your first year of term of office you should enter select N/A / Other.**

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 academic standards of the work I have seen as external are appropriate and comparable with other higher education institutions of similar standing.

- 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).*

The best student performances on these programmes are of the highest calibre; it is very clear that the programmes are demanding, as they should be, and that students are well supported by staff to meet high expectations and to undertake original research. Weaker work is less well executed, but often still promising, and again shows that students are encouraged to engage with challenging material.

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.

During my time as external examiner I have noted the care and thoroughness with which staff conduct the assessment process. Setting and marking is done with real attention to detail, and every effort is made to ensure that all students are treated fairly and consistently within the university's regulations. If there is every doubt about any part of the assessment process or about how marks should be assigned, staff consult with one another carefully, and this year I was again impressed by the time all markers take over setting and marking work. The time allowed for some parts of the assessment process is challenging for both markers and administrators, but even when deadlines are very tight indeed staff go beyond reasonable expectations to ensure students' work is read carefully and marks are assigned carefully.

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?

In previous years I have noted the very tight deadlines for looking at examined work before the board, and this year again work had to be turned around very quickly. The Faculty's Academic Administrator Camilla Rock gave me clear information in advance about when I would receive work, which was very helpful, but the lack of time meant that I sampled fewer pieces of work than I would have liked.

I have noted before that it is helpful for the external to see markers' notes on allocated marks; these are now available for almost all pieces of work, but are still missing in a few cases. For example, I did not see notes on one candidate's very high mark; it was clearly an excellent piece, but it would have been helpful to have a sense of the markers' justification for this very high mark when considering prizes, especially since some markers seem unlikely to award this kind of mark.

I attended the Board's MCE meeting the day before the exam board, and this was conducted extremely carefully and thoughtfully. The fact that it is not possible to award a rating of 0 seemed problematic, though, and meant that the rating 1 was given to students who were not felt to have had additional difficulties and students who had experienced more significant problems. I would suggest that the university should review its policy on the rating of MCE applications.

There seems to be a lack of explicit university guidance for students on the use of AI, and a lack of a policy on how AI use should be detected or treated; this leaves faculties to deal with problematic cases, and risks inequity in the way suspected cases are treated. I would suggest that the university needs to consider its policies on AI use urgently, as many other institutions have already done.

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.*

As I have said every year, the commitment and thoroughness shown by examiners, particularly those serving on the exam board, is exemplary. Every student profile is considered with careful attention to detail, and often additional markers review work to make sure students have been treated fairly and consistently; this makes the whole process time-consuming, but it means that any difficulties are identified and a consensus is reached about how they should be handled. Work is double marked, and while again this takes significant staff time it results in much fairer marks.

I continue to be impressed by the range of topics students can be examined on, and it is clear that they are encouraged to follow their interests and to be ambitious in the projects they undertake, even where these are highly specialised. It is also very obvious that staff know their students well, and go out of their way to support them.

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.

During the board we had a discussion about whether the different sections of Paper A are comparable: in some sections, the nature of the questions means that it is possible to get a very high mark, whereas in others essay-type questions make this much less likely. As well as this, some questions were attempted by large numbers of students, while other questions were not answered at all. Students can choose what to be examined in, and some variation in the type of questions asked seems a positive aspect of the paper, but I would suggest that the comparability of sections might be considered further. It might be helpful for paper setters to informally review each other's sections before the paper is finalised to make sure the paper does not seem too uneven.

It has been a privilege for me to serve as external examiner over the past three years, and I have very much enjoyed working with colleagues, who made me feel welcomed and valued. The standard of student work on these programmes is excellent, and some of the best assessments I have read are of publishable quality; I have enjoyed the opportunity to read such a range of material, including some on topics that are not taught elsewhere. I would like to thank Andreas Willi and previous Chief Examiners for the professional and careful way they have overseen the process, and Camilla Rock and Liberty Bradyll for their unflinching patience and efficiency.

Signed:	<i>Kathryn Allan</i>
Date:	9 th August 2024

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