

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2018

External examiner name:	Kersti Börjars	
External examiner home institution:	The University of Manchester	
Course examined:	MPhil/MSt Linguistics	
Level: (please <i>delete as appropriate</i>)	<u>Undergraduate</u>	Postgraduate

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?		X		
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>		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		
<p>* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A / Other".</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?*

They are comparable.

- 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).*

Generally, the students' performance is of a high standard. Some essays and dissertations are very impressive. In the first year I examined, the performance in Paper A was somewhat disappointing, and last year I commented on the fact that it was pleasing to see it improved. However, this year it was again lower than one may expect. The students are clearly bright enough as they do well in other papers, and the questions in Paper A are not exceptionally demanding. The paper is quite broad, but this is entirely appropriate, and the expectations on depth of answers are in line with the breadth of the paper. I don't understand why the performance is not better.

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.

The process was rigorous, and the Board of Examiners chaired well. Rules for classification of degrees, how to deal with fail marks, how to use the opportunity to viva students etc were applied consistently across the cohort, though there was no need for a viva this year. In a number of ways, the process was better this year.

Last year, I commented on the fact that the lists of students used in the Board of Examiners were not anonymised, which to my mind is bad practice. This year the lists were anonymous. I do understand that with small cohorts, it may at time be difficult to have full anonymity, but I think every attempt should still be made.

For the first time in my time as external examiner, a special circumstances committee met in advance of the Board of Examiners, which meant that the decision on what measures would be appropriate in the light of the circumstances were taken without knowledge of the student's performance, which is appropriate. It also meant the special circumstances could be dealt with anonymously in the Board.

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?

Last year I commented on the fact that decisions on extended deadlines taken in colleges without consideration of the work of the board caused some difficulties. This appeared not to be a problem this year.

A formal line of communication between the Faculty Board and the Chair of the Board of Examiners would be helpful to the work of the Board. There were some decisions made by the Faculty Board, such as changes to dissertation topics, which influence the choice of examiners, but that appear not to have been communicated in a timely fashion to the Chair of the Board. A structural solution to this issue should be found.

In one case, there was overlap between an essay and a dissertation that I think was close to being inappropriate. I did not think that any action needed to be taken in this case, but I would recommend

that the need to avoid using any material for more than one piece of assessment is emphasised to students in future, and that if possible some way of monitoring this is found.

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.*

I don't see anything of the teaching methods, but the students' learning as judged through the assessment is impressive in many cases. The assessment is quite traditional, but students are giving ample scope for taking their work in an individual direction.

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.

It was a pleasure to act as external examiner, and I am grateful to colleagues, both academic and support staff, for the efficient way in which they ran the process and organised my visit.

Signed:	
Date:	6 July 2018

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.