

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM FOR TAUGHT COURSES 2020-21

Name	Simon Werrett		
Home Institution	University College London		
Email Address	s.werrett@ucl.ac.uk		
Name(s) of course(s) examined <i>e.g. Tripos Part/ MPhil</i>	NST2HP Natural Sciences Tripos Part 2 History and Philosophy of Science		
Level ( <i>Delete as appropriate</i> )	Undergraduate		
Year of Appointment		2 <sup>nd</sup>	

	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?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2. Are you satisfied that you received sufficient programme materials (handbooks, regulations, marking and classing criteria) in a timely manner?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3. Are you satisfied that you were consulted adequately on draft examination papers, and that your comments and suggestions were taken into consideration?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4. Are you satisfied that the assessment was pitched at the appropriate level?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
5. Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
6. Do the assessment processes measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
7. Are you satisfied that issues raised on your previous report form have been properly considered and, where applicable, acted upon?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8. Did you receive a written response from the Department to your previous report form? (Yes, on October 15, 2020)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

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?

*The standards of teaching and coursework in Part II remain impressive. Assessment in the form of primary source essays, dissertations and examinations continued this year, with adjustments for the pandemic. Students submitted one 5,000-word primary source essay, not two 3,000-word essays as previously, and the word limit for the dissertation was reduced to 8,000 words to align them with weighting elsewhere. The change has enabled more in-depth and focused primary source essays while the dissertations continued to be of a high overall standard.*

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)?

*In this second year of the Covid-19 pandemic, the staff of HPS have done an excellent job of transferring teaching online, which requires a great deal of effort, and managing an assessment and examination process in an unprecedented situation.*

*A number of mitigations were made for this situation, with details clearly presented on Moodle. Examinations were switched from the normal arrangement to online open-book exams for students, with 24 hours to return answers. Papers were not divided into sections, and students answered 3, not 4 questions. These arrangements were agreed upon in consultation with the students.*

*Judging from the exam scripts, this was a successful approach. Students' work was quite consistently well-presented and arguments well-organized, suggesting that they took time to polish answers into the best form possible. It may be that having more time enabled this. Some concern was expressed in the examiners' meeting that this polish was due to answers being pre-prepared. Constructive proposals to avoid this – such as using more exam questions cutting across topics – were given in the meeting.*

*I am satisfied that internal marking has been appropriately and consistently applied, is accurate and consistent and that classifications are of an appropriate standard.*

*Methods of assessment and the determination of final grades were fair and properly conducted.*

*Exams, dissertations and primary source essays were double-blind marked. Examiners recorded their comments and could be reviewed when agreeing or disagreeing on marks. In cases of disagreement, markers discussed and agreed upon a final mark.*

*As external examiner, I reviewed a sample of exam scripts for each paper, and a sample of dissertations and primary source essays. I am satisfied that the marks awarded were fair.*

*As external examiner, I also reviewed work by candidates who were at a borderline between degree classes. I am satisfied that the work of borderline candidates was thoroughly considered.*

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)?

*I have seen scripts across the top, middle and bottom of the range, borderline candidates, mark sheets and evidence of internal moderation. In cases of borderline marks or wide ranges I have offered remarks to indicate if I believe the mark is justified and I am happy that the marks have been so justified in the cases I reviewed.*

*Examination marks were available in a spreadsheet, with comments included for some papers and not*

*for others. When requested, the external examiner was able to see comments on exam answers that had not been included in the spreadsheets (e.g. where the marker had written them on paper). During the examiners' meeting, marks that seemed particularly high or low were double-checked to ensure no errors were made.*

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

*None*

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

*It may be helpful next year, if online examinations are used, to have a system to automatically check for plagiarism, if this is available. This was not available in 2021, but there was an option to check individual papers if needed.*

Please describe here any recommendations for improvement.

*The examiners' meeting raised some issues around detection of plagiarism and pre-preparation in online exams, and a number of very constructive ideas were presented by staff to manage these concerns. So my only recommendation would be to follow up on these during the year, which process seems in place already.*

Please highlight any good practice you encountered.

*From the continued high quality of the work and assessment, I judge the current practice to be working well.*

*There is excellent support for students to learn from seminars and exemplars indicating what is expected and how to achieve it. It is notable how essays were well written and carefully structured arguments.*

*Double-blind marking provides diverse feedback to students and ensures marks are well-considered and unbiased.*

*Staff are clearly devoting much effort to ensuring that the assessment and examination process is as fair and effective for students as possible.*

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 second year as external examiner. I have seen improvements since last year. In 2020 markers criticized some primary source papers for not focusing enough on the source, but that was not a*

*problem in 2021. The opportunity for diverse approaches in answers was indicated in the guidance online, and students have approached sources accordingly. Reducing the number of primary source essays from two to one may have helped improve the focus of answers and certainly has allowed greater depth of discussion.*

Do you have any other comments?

*Thanks to Staffan Müller-Wille, David Thompson, and the staff of HPS for their assistance in 2019-21.*

Thank you for completing the Examiners Report form.

**Please now forward to [vcexternalexaminers@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:vcexternalexaminers@admin.cam.ac.uk) by July 31<sup>st</sup>** for undergraduate examinations, **1<sup>st</sup> October** for Masters Degrees, and **12<sup>th</sup> October** for resits.

Please also forward copies to your Chair of Examiners.