

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM FOR TAUGHT COURSES 2019-20

Name	Simon Werrett	
Home Institution	University College London	
Email Address	Gower St, London WC1E 6BT	
Name(s) of course(s) examined <i>e.g. Tripos Part/ MPhil</i>	Part II	
Level (<i>Delete as appropriate</i>)	Undergraduate	
Year of Appointment	1 st	

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

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

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

I was impressed with the overall standard of Part II and the high quality of students' work. Assessment has taken the form of primary source essays, dissertations, and examinations. Assessment and marking are of a standard similar to other HPS programmes that I am familiar with in the UK.

Exam questions were well-considered, usefully demanding and encouraged excellent and diverse answers. Students displayed an impressive ability to make strong and original arguments synthesizing and sometimes going beyond the material they have been taught.

Markers' comments were constructive and made clear strengths and weaknesses in the work being assessed.

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 an exceptional year involving strikes and the Covid-19 pandemic, I am satisfied that procedures associated with assessment were fair and efficient. Students were permitted to drop one element of the Part II scheme as mitigation for a strike and examinations were switched from the normal arrangement to online open-book exams for students. This does not seem to have adversely affected the quality of students' work, which is of a high standard. The measures taken appear to have been clearly communicated in a timely fashion.

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 carefully 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.

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)?

None

Please describe here any recommendations for improvement.

I have two recommendations:

(1) Primary Source Essays - Lower grades tended to be for essays not focusing enough on the source and taking it more as an inspiration for the essay or a starting point for something related but different. It may be a good idea to make clearer in future that the essays need to foreground the primary source. This is in the criteria of assessment, but maybe could be emphasized more. Plans to reduce the number of Primary Source essays to one make sense as a means to concentrate students on close reading of the source.

(2) In one case, a high mark of 82 was awarded. The mark was reasonable but I would recommend making clear in markers' comments why a very high mark was awarded. Generally, there should be a clear indication on why exceptional marks, low and high, have been given for work.

In the Exam Board meeting we discussed the usefulness of giving students their dissertation feedback, which is not currently made available. I would recommend some discussion of this matter going forward, as it may be useful for students to receive this feedback on their work. A proposal to reduce the dissertation length to 8000 words seems reasonable to me. There was also an indication that Option B in the Part II is being taken by fewer students, and may be worth revisiting.

Please highlight any good practice you encountered.

To judge by the quality of the work and assessment, the current practice is working very 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.

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?

First year

Do you have any other comments?

None

Thank you for completing the Examiners Report form.

Please now forward to ycexternalexaminers@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.