

University of Oxford External Examiner Report - 2024/25

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EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT for the academic year 2024/25

1. Please check your title is correct, and select another option if needed

Dr

2. If you entered other, please specify

No response

3. Please check your first name(s) is correct, and amend if needed

Lucy

4. Please check your last name is correct, and amend if needed

Parker

5. Please enter the name of your home institution

University of Nottingham (at the time, now University of Oxford)

6. Please check the course level of the course(s) you acted as external examiner for is correct, and select another option if needed

Postgraduate

7. Please check the Division(s) responsible for that the course(s) that you acted as external examiner for comes under are correct, and amend if needed

Humanities Division

8. Please check the Faculty/Department(s) responsible for that the course(s) that you acted as external examiner for comes under are correct, and amend if needed

Faculty of History

9. Please check the course(s) that you acted as external examiner for are correct, and amend if needed

HLAB: Master of Philosophy in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies; KLAB: Master of Studies in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies; TLAB: Master of Philosophy in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies

10. Please select whether you have just completed your first year of your term of office as external

examiner, whether you have now completed your entire term of office, or whether you are in another year of your term of office

Last year of term of office

11. Please check the date the final Examination Board took place is correct, and amend if needed. If you acted at external examiner for multiple courses which had separate Examination Board meetings, please check the correct date for the latest Examination Board meeting is showing, and amend if needed.

02 July 2025

Part A

12. Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?

(Please refer to paragraph 15 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

12.1 A1. i) Academic standards of students

Yes

12.2 A1. ii) Academic achievements of students

Yes

13. Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:

(Please refer to paragraph 16 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

13.1 A2. i) The frameworks for higher education qualifications?

Yes

13.2 A2. ii) Any applicable subject benchmark statement?

Yes

14. In relation to the academic process:

14.1 A3. Does it measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?

Yes

14.2 A4. Is it conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?

Yes

15. In relation to the information and evidence provided to you:

15.1 A5. Did you receive it in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

Yes

16. Regarding your previous report, please indicate whether you:

16.1 A6. Received a written response to your previous report?

Not applicable

16.2 A7. Are satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?

Not applicable

Part B

17. B1. 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 standard of the student work was generally of a high quality and comparable to that achieved by top students at other higher education institutions of which I have experience.

18. B1. 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).

I found the quality of student work on the whole to be very good, and the assessment procedures to be fair and rigorous. I was impressed in general by the quality of writing by the students, and was pleased to see attention clearly being paid by some to making their work elegant as well as functional. The coursework covered an impressively varied range of topics which suggests that they are being well supported in developing and pursuing their own interests. I didn't see any obvious signs of AI use, though I would be interested to hear whether the programme offers students guidance on this. The specialist and in depth nature of the work required does seem a good counter to the risks of AI.

The work compared favourably to that of Masters level programmes at other institutions with which I am familiar.

19. B2. 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.

In terms of assessment procedures, I found the marks given to be fair and the explanations for marks given helpful. Most examiners gave close first marks, which suggests a shared set of expectations and well understood frameworks, at least among the markers. In a few cases it would have been helpful to add in a justification for agreed mark – occasionally first marks were across grade boundaries and the ultimate decision was not explained. Generally I found the markers' comments and feedback to be very helpful and productive for the students. I did think perhaps the feedback on the MPhil theses was relatively short for research pieces of such length, since presumably they aren't being given additional written comments on the script itself.

In terms of the marks, there was a general lack of really high marks – most distinction level marks were in the low 70s. Since this is the first time I've acted as external examiner, I'm not sure if this is typical or an unusual year. I did think some of the first class work I read could perhaps have been marked a bit higher, certainly when I compare it to other institutions which tend to award more marks in the high 70s or even 80s, but that said I found the explanations given by markers for their marks to be reasonable and justified. It was notably that none of the MPhil theses marked so far scored higher than 70. This may well just be atypical and I wouldn't want to jump to conclusions on the basis of such a small sample size – if it's a pattern for the programme I wonder if the students need more support in year 2 as one would hope that research pieces in year 2 of an MPhil would show high levels of achievement.

The only other matter I wanted to comment on was the use of original language source material in essays and dissertations. I wasn't always clear what was expected from students – I got the impression that in year 1, original source language engagement was desirable but not necessary, but that by year 2 question marks would be raised if little linguistic engagement was shown. But some markers seemed perhaps more concerned with this than others, and I wasn't sure how clearly these expectations were outlined to the students. I did also feel sometimes that linguistic skills were commented on more negatively than positively – criticisms of inaccuracies in transliteration or lack of use of original language, but relatively little praise for attempted engagement with languages – and that signs of real skills such as use of unedited manuscript material could have been rewarded more highly. But this is obviously a reflection of the rigour and ambition of the programme, and its commitment to training students in late antique languages, which is much to be commended.

20. B3. Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University? If you acted as external examiner for multiple courses, please indicate whether the issues related to all or selected courses.

As noted above, I felt the marks awarded to first-class work may have been lower than those awarded at other comparable institutions.

As noted above, I wondered if the feedback given on MPhil theses was a bit brief on occasions. At my previous institution, students would typically be given inline feedback on the submitted work (i.e. comments about specific points at the relevant pages of the work) as well as an overall summative comment.

In addition I thought it might be helpful to clarify with students expectations surrounding original language usage in their coursework and to confirm that these were consistent across markers.

21. B4. 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 noted above, I wondered if the feedback given on MPhil theses was a bit brief on occasions. At my previous institution, students would typically be given inline feedback on the submitted work (i.e. comments about specific points at the relevant pages of the work) as well as an overall summative comment.

22. B5. a) 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.

No additional comments.

23. B5. b) Now that your term of office is concluded, please provide an overview here.

I have only served in this role for one year, since I was brought in as emergency cover.

Thank you for completing your 2024/25 external examiner report for the University of Oxford