

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

Professor

2. If you entered other, please specify

No response

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

Saul

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

Dubow

5. Please enter the name of your home institution

University of Cambridge

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

KGIH: Master of Studies in Global and Imperial History

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.

16 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?

Yes

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

Yes

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?

My best point of comparison is the Cambridge MPhil in global history which I am closely involved with. I can affirm that Oxford's standards of marking and the quality of work submitted is fully comparable to ours.

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).

Student performance was commendable overall. Four distinctions in a cohort of 16 is about what would be expected from a top university with competitive admission criteria.

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.

Assessment is all double marked and well reasoned. The MPhil relies on a varied and experienced set of examiners. There were one or two instances where there was a significant divergence of opinion between markers (11 points) and this was referred to the external, quite properly. I was impressed by the rigour of the examination board and its chair. There was no inclination on the Board to 'push' borderline cases up.

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.

There is one major issue of concern, namely, a high proportion of late submissions. At the Board meeting, three candidates could not be classified. 11 out of 16 candidates required extensions. This has implications for equity (fellow students who comply with deadlines) as well as imposing undue pressure on examiners and the Board. Self-declaration may seem to solve a problem, but it creates different ones and, if not addressed, might also affect morale and confidence in the integrity of the programme. (In this context, it was odd to spend undue time discussing whether and how to penalise a submission that was logged a few minutes after the deadline.)

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 an external, it is difficult to have to rely on an Excel sheet to read comments by examiners. The problem is partly about presentation but I do have concerns that examiners might truncate their comments as well. One hopes that the student-facing reports are presented in a more accessible form.

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.

None that are unaddressed elsewhere

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

This is the fourth and final year of my engagement as external examiner. I have enjoyed the experience. The Oxford MSt is a high quality course that attracts excellent students and produces some outstanding work, dissertations especially. The depth and intellectual range of Oxford's teaching faculty is striking. The cohort clearly benefits from a range of approaches and choice of offerings. The numbers enrolled (seldom more than 15) makes this a bespoke programme with distinctive qualities; there may be room for some expansion without loss of quality and identity should this be seen as desirable. I remain of the opinion that an additional Option should be actively considered and that this would further enhance the programme, but I know there is not much appetite for this. As an external, I have felt fully involved in the Board's decisions and am grateful for the

support of Joe Shaugnessy and of successive chairs: Professors Belich, Devji and Thompson.

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