

University of Oxford External Examiner Report - 2024/25

Q Response ID: cmecrjpsg004zjr023v7bwuhs

C) Submitted: 15 Aug 2025 12:47 PM

C) Duration: 01:36:07

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

Jane

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

Hamlett

5. Please enter the name of your home institution

Royal Holloway, University of London

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 HHST:

Master of Philosophy in History Year 2; KHST: Master of Studies in History; THST: Master of Philosophy in History Year 1

10. Please select whether you have just completed your first year of your term of office as external Pyaminpr whpthpr you haves nnw rtnmnIptpri your PrltirP term of nffirtp nr whpthpr vnii arp in annthpr

year of your term of office

Other year of term of office

- 0. 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.**

24 July 2025

Part A

- 1. 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

- 2. 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

0. 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?

On the whole, the standard achieved by students is higher than at other universities. I currently teach at RHUL and have previously taught at Manchester, and have been an external assessor for Roehampton, Leeds Beckett, and Goldsmiths and more students tend to receive marks below 60 at these institutions. This is to be expected given the high calibre of the cohort attracted by the reputation of the institution. In general, the standard of writing is very high, and the candidates are particularly skilled in constructing arguments. The MPhil is also a longer and more intensive than comparable postgraduate courses so the standard of the work is higher. Overall, the MSt and the MPhil are both working very well in supporting students to produce high quality research projects.

1. 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).

Once again it is great to see that both programmes are working very well, as evidenced by the high marks achieved by students. Marks for the methodology essays ranged from 56-72 (Year 1 MPhil) and 57-76 (MSt); the options essay range was 53-85; the MSt dissertation range 53-85 and the MPhil dissertation range 56-81. It was good to see some students achieving marks in the 80s and high 70s, especially on the Option paper for which nine students received a mark of above 75. Very few students scored marks below 60: there were only two MSt dissertations and one MPhil dissertations in this category. (NB these figures are based on the marks available at the time of the board). These very strong marks demonstrate that the courses are both working well.

The structure of the degrees — in which students write methodology and option papers before tackling a larger dissertation project - appears to be working well and to effectively support student development. This is attested to by the strength of the work across the cohort and in particular some of the very strong dissertation projects. Of the work I reviewed I was particularly impressed with candidate A's MSt dissertation, which scored a 73 and candidate B's MPhil dissertation which scored a 69. Both pieces of work demonstrated a novel approach, excellent research and strong engagement with the existing secondary literature.

2. 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.

The assessment process has clearly been conducted rigorously and students have been treated fairly, in accordance with the University's regulations and guidance. All the work that I sampled had clear feedback attached and a clear explanation for the marks given. If there had been a difference of opinion between assessors it was made clear how an agreement had been reached. The policy of double marking is working very well to make sure that marks are fair — and in the very few cases where there was a significant disparity between the first and second marker, external adjudication was used to resolve this - and overall the system is working well.

3. 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.

No - there are no significant issues that need attention in my view.

4. 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.

The work I saw this year demonstrated that there continue to be very good practices amongst markers for these degrees. Feedback is detailed, appropriate and of high quality. The majority of markers are giving positive feedback as well as constructive criticism, which is often very valuable in building student confidence. It was very pleasing this year to see that a more consistent approach is now taken to providing feedback to students — with markers using a shared set of headings for this. This should help students understand feedback as well as giving a sense of a more cohesive and fair approach as marking

is carried out by many different members of staff according to their subject areas.

In previous years I noted that the top end of the marking range was not being used very much - this year high 70s and 80s have been awarded (see above) but not in large numbers and higher marks were given for the option essay than the dissertation. Marking practices for the two degrees are very robust and fair, but I do wonder if there might sometimes be scope to reward very strong work a little more. Given the quality of the student cohort in comparison with other institutions and the excellence of the work produced it might be expected that more students would achieve marks in the high 70s and 80s.

5. 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.

Overall the external scrutiny process for the two degrees worked well this year and the History Faculty Graduate Office worked very hard to support this - but I would note that the move, this year, of the Exam Board to a later date in the summer (coinciding with the first year of the school holidays) does make it more difficult for colleagues with school age children to be able to manage the scrutiny work required. Discussion at the Board suggested that the date had been moved back as a change in the extension system meant that a larger proportion of student work was reaching markers later than before. The later date of the Board also appeared to leave a very short window for adjudication before results were released to students at the end of the following week. This very tight timetable does appear to pose some risks for the university - as external examiners may not always be immediately contactable during the holiday period, or, may have limited scope at this time to provide the in-depth critical reading of student work and markers' comments that the job requires. Discussion at the Board revealed that there was no straightforward solution to this problem, so I'm not sure that it would be possible to move the Board back to an earlier date, but I think it is worth raising this issue as it could threaten the quality of the external adjudication process.

It was very useful to see spreadsheets documenting markers comments on all work this year and I would like to thank the Graduate Faculty Team for providing these. I would like to make one small request in relation to these - could a column be included in all spreadsheets that includes the candidate's strand as well as their number? This would make them immediately sortable by subject area, and would help the externals identify work in their particular area.

6. B5. b) Now that your term of office is concluded, please provide an overview here. No

response

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

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2025

External examiner name:	Graham Barrett		
External examiner home institution:	Durham University		
Course(s) examined:	MSt and MPhil History (Medieval)		
Level: (<i>Please delete as appropriate</i>)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>		Yes	No	N/A
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? [<i>Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports</i>].	✓		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect: (i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and (ii) any applicable subject benchmark statement? [<i>Please refer to paragraph 7 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports</i>].	✓		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	✓		
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?	✓		
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?	✓		
<p><i>* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</i></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?*

As always, the 2024-25 cohort of MSt and MPhil History students has produced much great work across both the methodology and option papers and the dissertation itself, with a number of well-earned distinctions. The spread of marks is not only fair, but by some measure makes broader use of the spectrum than at comparable institutions of which I am aware. Where students have fallen down, it is generally through inadequate engagement with historical evidence in their writing, in other words by privileging works of other historians at the expense of originality. Given that relevant skills modules such as Latin or other medieval languages and palaeography, diplomatic, and codicology are not formally assessed and therefore remain invisible to the external examiner, it is hard to say whether the problem is at this level. But it is always worth considering if more can be done to ensure that students engage firsthand with the sources, especially since the resources available to them at Oxford are much greater than at most other institutions.

- 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).*

Performance and achievement, as noted above, are both more than satisfactory, and in line with standards across the sector. Where I have paused for thought is in the range of options available to students on the medieval strand of the MSt and MPhil History. Most students have chosen to take what one may call 'core' medieval options, either 'Saints and Sanctity' or 'Global Middle Ages', both of which offer excellent preparation for their dissertation research and writing. But two students on the MSt History, and one on the MPhil History, have opted for a non-medieval option, whether early modern or thematic in focus: 'Law and Empire', 'Microhistory', 'State and Society'. My concern is that, if the student also chooses to write their methodology essay on a topic which is not strictly medieval, then there is very little medieval about the degree, and with potential knock-on costs in the dissertation, which one may already see in this cohort. It is not a case of achievement so much as ensuring that all students balance optionality with specialism.

Looking across both the MSt and the MPhil History, there is a fine range of dissertations in terms of subject matter, including a handful on genuinely cutting-edge topics such as gender-critical approaches to medieval society and environmental history. It is perhaps surprising to see such a pronounced later medieval balance to the coverage, however, given that students take the late antique 'Saints and Sanctity' option paper more than any other (7:4). Normally at comparable institutions one sees dissertation topics track the interests of

staff as much as students: only two early medieval theses here raises a series of questions about staffing availability for supervision and the communication of dissertation options to students. Striking the right balance may matter less elsewhere, where the MSt/MPhil is often a terminal degree, but here it feeds through to the DPhil.

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.

Across the board, first and second markers show a clear commitment to the process, including for the most part when they are unable to agree on a final mark. There is full and complete explanation of all grades, and an evident commitment on the part of all staff, administrators, and course leaders to ensure that students gain the best results possible within the rigorous application of the University's regulations. Students can and should have total confidence in the fairness and generosity of their assessment. One notion of caution, however, relates to the make-up of the marking body. While I appreciate entirely that such matters can be complex and dependent on patterns of research leave and other teaching obligations, this year as in past years there is still a noticeable tendency for some ECRs on short-term contracts to be (especially second-) marking dissertations, which is not ideal, and does underlie some mark discrepancies.

For this cohort, I have adjudicated four cases of mark discrepancy, which is an entirely reasonable figure given the overall number of students. In two cases, the adjudication has been necessary simply because of marks on option papers at some variance from those on the methodology paper and the dissertation itself. In the other two cases, of inability to reach a consensus, both examiners have accounted for their decisions with justice and in considerable detail: in both cases the disagreement centres on how to evaluate a novel methodology, and as external examiner I have come down on the side of ensuring consistent engagement with the sources. I may suggest that in future tutors remind students at every stage of the absolute necessity of grounding their arguments in source analysis, regardless of or perhaps especially if their approach is cutting-edge.

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?

In terms of content, student achievement, and assessment, the MSt and MPhil History are sound. Where there is an issue, and indeed an increasingly unsustainable situation, however, is in the intersection of pastoral care with academic progression. In this year's cohort, there are relatively few instances of non-submission and of need for mitigation,

which is pleasing. But the management of late submission is too opaque: from the point of view of an external examiner, it is quite often difficult to work out why some late fines are waived by the Proctors and others are not, nor from lengthy discussion at the Board of Examiners does it seem possible under the current system to gain any clarity on the matter. One is disposed to have confidence in the integrity of such processes, but the point of external examining is that one should not rely on faith. Transparency is needed.

Even more problematic is extensions policy: this cohort has been granted a total of 143 extensions, working out to 1.2 per student, and with ten assessments not yet due at the time of the Board meeting, and others handed in barely a few days in advance of it. The problem is endemic to the sector, of course, but peculiarly complex at Oxford given the range of authorities involved in granting extensions, from the Colleges to the Proctors. From the perspective of ensuring quality and consistency across programmes, I note my particular concern here that where dissertations are being granted extensions of up to three months, moving the deadline from June to September, a formally nine-month degree is unofficially, non-transparently becoming a twelfth-month degree, for some.

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.*

In terms of teaching and learning, the MSt and MPhil History both do an excellent job of delivering optionality within the taught component alongside flexibility in the research element. The result is the range and relevance of topics tackled in dissertations, as well as in essays for methodology and option papers. I wonder as above, however, whether it is possible to tie skills acquisition more formally into the structure of the degree, for it to be less of an add-on and more of a core part of historical research than it is right now. The two History programmes also have the great good fortune of sitting next to an MSt in Medieval Studies, and it seems to me possible for there to be more mutual integration.

On the assessment front, relating specifically to the oversight afforded to the external examiners, great thanks are due as ever to the office team led by the Graduate Officer for putting everything together right up to the very last minute to ensure as complete of a Board of Examiners meeting as possible. But it is not, admittedly, best practice for the business of external examining to be routinely taking place the night before or morning of the meeting whereby decisions become official. This is a direct consequence of the timing of the meeting with respect to deadlines for submission and marking, which are in turn at the mercy of extensions policies. Everyone works to ensure that standards are maintained, but the circumstances are not ideal, and it should be possible to improve this by tackling the crisis in extensions. Purely on presentation, none of the examiners has been very taken with using spreadsheets to consolidate comments, especially on dissertations; the PDFs of previous years are preferable by far for reviewing feedback.

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.

This is my third year as external examiner for the medieval strand of the MSt and MPhil History. I am very happy to serve for a fourth year if that is possible, as it is a pleasure to engage with both colleagues and students at Oxford, and I have learned much from the process. In either case, I raise here a couple points which I see as priorities to address.

One is a plea for the compilation of statistics. This year, the complexity of marks and classifications spreadsheets has made it impossible to sort data by degree strands, by option papers, or indeed by marks and classifications, which in turn has made it more difficult to compile statistics and thereby assess trends. This has raised a query which all external examiners share: do we know whether marks and classifications are stable, or going up or down, over time? Similarly, on the extensions front, where my impression (anecdotally confirmed by all participants at the Board of Examiners) is of a system out of control and completely at odds with the academic integrity of degree programmes, do we know how extension numbers and durations are changing over time? Normally, including in my own experience at other peer institutions, external examiners are given robust sets of statistics, mapped over five- or even ten-year periods, not only to offer an overall picture of the programme and its development, essential for properly answering B3 and B4 of this form, but also to compare across the sector, as we are asked to do in B1 and B2. We are operating subjectively, almost blind, without programme statistics.

The other is to recommend urgent review of the timing of the Board of Examiners, with respect to submission and marking timelines. With the added pressure of extensions, there is simply not enough time to guarantee that assessments will have been handed in, let alone grades agreed, in time for review by external examiners. At present much depends on the extraordinary last-minute effort of the office team, which is admirable but has a knock-on effect on external examiners. If extensions continue to spiral, I can see the robustness of this element of the academic oversight of the programme being compromised. Unless extensions are reined in to support a decent turnaround for the July meeting, delaying the Board until September would be preferable by far, and still able to deliver degree results in time for autumn progression to the DPhil or graduation.

Signed:	Graham Barrett
Date:	6 October 2025

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.

University of Oxford External Examiner Report - 2024/25

📄 Response ID: cmfwfvkcj00bfl1026fvtrzp1

📅 Submitted: 23 Sep 2025 11:55 AM

🕒 Duration: 00:30:58

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

Tara

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

Alberts

5. Please enter the name of your home institution

University of York

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

HHST: Master of Philosophy in History Year 2; KHST: Master of Studies in History; THST: Master of Philosophy in History Year 1

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

Other 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.

24 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?

No

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

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

No

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

No

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 range of marks awarded to students seemed broadly in line with other institutions of which I have had experience. The standard of work was generally high, and met subject benchmarking for history. I was impressed by a number of the dissertations that I was able to sample. Students were clearly encouraged to push themselves to make original contributions to the literature where possible and the standard of the work achieved at the end of the course demonstrated how many of them were well prepared for further doctoral study.

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).

Students are clearly well trained in methodology and historiography and have devised some genuinely original research projects. The standard of writing was generally high and the work that I sampled suggested that students were achieving a similar distribution of marks across their modules as I have seen in York. However, it is very difficult to draw firm conclusions about the spread and distribution of marks across this cohort and between cohorts over time as no statistical data was provided to examiners. Indeed, we were not provided with a representative sample this year, just asked to choose a sample ourselves, without any data to assist in making this selection. Without more detailed data about mark distributions, marker profiles etc it is very difficult to form anything other than an impressionistic sense of student performance across cohorts, programmes and papers.

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.

The examinations team for the history department was rigorous and fair in their processes. However, as I have mentioned in the past, I am concerned about a few issues. First, the timeliness and accessibility of sampling material sent to externals. This year we were given a little more time to work through our samples and dissertations for adjudication. But the online system was incredibly unwieldy, and it was not an easy task to identify a 'representative' sample of papers. Second, as I mentioned above, it was impossible to get an overall sense of the spread and distribution of marks over each paper, the distribution of marks across the cohort, and the mark profile of the various papers/markers in comparison. Without these sort of data, I wonder how the faculty could identify issues with student achievement, marking parity etc. should they arise? Finally, while I appreciate the time and care that was taken in considering borderline cases during the exam board, I do worry about parity over time. I would urge exam boards at the very least to keep a record of decisions made in terms of adjusting raw marks or having papers remarked, to ensure that these are consistent over time.

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 above with regards to more detailed analysis of mark distributions which are done as standard at many institutions. This will allow comparison over time and against national patterns of achievement.

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.

N/A

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.

N/A

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

No response

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

University of Oxford External Examiner Report - 2024/25

📄 Response ID: cmesl7rxj003xl202482xu43h

📅 Submitted: 26 Aug 2025 2:34 PM

🕒 Duration: 00:34:39

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

Peter

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

Jackson

5. Please enter the name of your home institution

University of Glasgow

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

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

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24 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?

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?

The standard of achievement for both of the programmes for which I am external examiner was very high. In terms of their achievement in relation to other programmes with which I am (or was) familiar, the standard of student work is as high or higher than at other UK institutions.

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).

It is worth mentioning that students on the MSt programme tend on the whole to be more able and achieve better results than those on the MPhil programme. But student performance on both is of a high standard and compares very favourably with other institutions with which I am familiar. My sense, but this does not rest on any rigorous comparative analysis, is that standards for the masters programmes in history at Oxford are somewhat higher than at many other institutions. The result might well be that the students' final marks are little lower than marks they would receive for the same work at many other institutions in the UK.

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.

The assessment process is very rigorous indeed. It is also clear that consistent care is given to ensuring fairness. Care is also given to ensuring that all decisions are taken in line with the regulations and guidance that govern assessment at the University and Subject level. I would also add that the quality of feedback, while at times a little uneven, is exceptional overall. This is one of the most impressive aspects of the assessment process in the programmes for which I am external examiner.

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.

This observation relates to both the Mphil and the MSt programmes. I have two suggestions:

1. The timing of the exam schedule: I am not sure whether there is anything to be done about this, but the time between assessment deadlines and the exam board is so short that administrators come under extreme pressure to get everything in order in time for the exam board. This problem is exacerbated very considerably by the practice of granting blanket extensions. Possible solutions might be setting earlier deadlines or moving the exam board back to mid to late-August.
2. The use of spreadsheets to collate feedback for the exam board (and for external examiners) is far from ideal. If the exam board process remains online (and it works fairly well otherwise), I think a better solution should be devised for ensuring externals and board members have access to the information they need.

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.

I do not have any substantive suggestions on this score. Both masters programmes offer superb teaching by leading international experts. Ideally, students should have more optional courses from which to choose. But I am very aware of the difficulties in balancing teaching requirements across levels and across programmes.

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.

The staff involved in teaching History at the masters level at Oxford are an exceptionally dedicated group. The assessment process is extremely rigorous. Staff take great care to observe marking criteria and to ensure fairness in the process as a whole. The result are first class offerings on both the MSt and Mphil programmes in History at Oxford.

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

No response

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