

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

Willem

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

Hollmann

5. Please enter the name of your home institution

University of Edinburgh

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 Linguistics, Philology, and Phonetics

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

HLPO: Master of Philosophy in Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics Year 1; HLPP: Master of Philosophy in Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics; KLPP: Master of Studies in Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics

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

First 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.

08 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:

No response

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 standards of the students' work compare favourably to what I have generally seen at other HEIs. I would qualify this assessment slightly by observing that because the postgraduate cohort is not very large (which is by no means a criticism), any attempt at comparing across institutions in a statistically genuinely meaningful manner would be difficult.

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).

Most of the work I have seen was of a very good and in some cases excellent standard. I was particularly impressed with the level of theoretical sophistication evident in many submissions, as well as the judicious use of advanced statistical analysis in several assignments. Overall, the work I reviewed was of a very good, and in several cases excellent, standard. I was particularly impressed by the theoretical sophistication evident in many submissions, as well as the judicious use of advanced statistical analyses in several assignments.

There was a helpful discussion of marks in Experimental Phonetics. On first glance the profile appeared high; however, closer examination showed that the work merited the marks awarded. As this is an elective, students may be especially motivated and well prepared. In addition, with a sample size of five, one would not necessarily expect the same distribution of marks as in larger cohorts.

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 rigour and conduct of the assessment process were excellent and clearly aligned with the University's regulations and guidance. In particular:

1. Draft examination questions were shared with me in good time, and the team was responsive to my (minor) comments.
2. The assessments set were appropriate in scope and level, and mapped well onto the stated learning outcomes.
3. Marking and moderation were conducted carefully and consistently, including for students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) and/or mitigating circumstances.
4. Students' work was made available to me online well in advance and in person the day before the Examination Board, facilitating thorough review.
5. Deliberations at the Examination Board were collegial, transparent and sensitive, with clear justifications recorded for decisions.

Collectively, these practices support equity of treatment and ensure a robust audit trail.

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.

I would like to commend colleagues in Linguistics — academic and Professional Services — for the quality of their work. I offer the following process-related observations, which may be of relevance to the Division and/or the University more broadly:

1. Generative AI: The Faculty is clearly engaging thoughtfully with the implications of generative AI. If not already in place, a clear University-level position — including guidance on responsible and ethical use, assessment design, and student/staff training — would be valuable. Such guidance will need regular review given the pace of change.
2. Access to marker comments: It was not entirely clear to me whether the system allows externals to see the full set of comments from both markers in all cases. If this is not currently standard, enabling it would be helpful, particularly where there are notable initial discrepancies between marks.
3. Extensions and workload: There appeared to be a high number of extensions. Whilst this is not unique to Oxford, it does create additional workload for both Professional Services colleagues and academics. I hope that this is recognised in Division and University workload planning and trust that appropriate support mechanisms are in place for students whose circumstances necessitate extensions.

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.

Good practice: The breadth and depth of the postgraduate offering in Linguistics are truly exemplary. The programme spans the discipline from philology — the historical foundation of the field — through comprehensive coverage of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics, to cutting-edge work in psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics. This breadth, combined with evidently high standards of supervision, provides students with excellent learning opportunities.

Recommendations: It may be beneficial to consider formalising provision in quantitative methods. While several students clearly possess strong quantitative skills — perhaps developed through supervision or bespoke support — a structured, regular (not necessarily compulsory) offering could help ensure consistent baseline competence across the cohort. This would support both the increasingly quantitative direction of the field and the development of transferable skills valuable beyond academia.

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.

I would like to record my particular thanks to Ms Camilla Rock, Academic Administrator of the Faculty, for exemplary communication and organisation before, during and after the July Examination Board. I am also grateful to Professor Colin Phillips and the rest of the Board for our interesting, open and constructive discussions. Overall, my first year as external examiner at Oxford has been a genuine pleasure.

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