

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2018



External examiner name:	Ianthi Maria Tsimpli	
External examiner home institution:	University of Cambridge	
Course examined:	MPhil / MSt in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology	
Level: (please <i>delete as appropriate</i>)	Undergraduate	Postgraduate

Please complete both Parts A and B.

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

Academic standards achieved by the students are comparable to those achieved by students at other higher education institutions.

- b. Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

The students' performance is of good standard. There is a good distribution of marks in the MPhil cohort with two students having been awarded a Distinction, 5 graduated with Pass and one Fail. Although I have been informed that the number of Distinctions is lower compared to the previous year, the spread of marks is good and thus does not seem to me to raise any particular concern. Regarding the MSt students, 2 were awarded Distinction, one Merit and 7 Pass. Again, the spread of marks is good. There was a good number of dissertations (5/8) which were awarded Distinction and I had the opportunity to appreciate the research, structure and organization skills that MPhil students have acquired during their studies.

I would like to single out Paper A which seems to me to be an excellent paper assessing core areas of linguistics, and which is required of MPhil and MSt students. I have reviewed many scripts from this paper and I noted that there was a relatively high number of students who failed the paper (4 out of 25) and very few achieved a 70+ mark. Although the paper is demanding at the appropriate level required for postgraduate students of Linguistics, there is lower performance in the Syntax section compared to the other sections of the Paper showing some lack of balance in the students' performance. The Syntax questions did not strike me as particularly difficult but around one third of the students had scores lower than 50. It is possible that for students with less background in Linguistics, this paper is more demanding, hence the lower scores. It would be useful perhaps to consider the scores awarded in this Paper in the last few years and assess them in relation to the background of the candidates on one hand, or in relation to any discrepancies found between the sections of the Paper. Results from the latter could possibly call for a more uniform approach to the examination criteria and to the comments that assessors offer to match the grades awarded.

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.

The assessment process was rigorous; the students' lists were anonymized and there was equity of treatment for students. There was a pre-meeting of the Mitigating Circumstances Panel in which I participated and discussed five cases which were then considered in the main meeting. Although the assessment process is overall rigorous, I would like to note that not providing separate marks to different answers in a paper, nor comments on the marks makes the reviewing of problematic cases including borderline, failing or where markers disagree, difficult. I noted some inconsistency in this respect because in some papers, markers do provide comments while in others they don't. Some uniformity in this respect would help the overview of the assessment process as well as the evaluation of the assessment of individual scripts and papers overall.

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?

As it is my first year as external examiner, I did not see any issues that should be brought to the attention of supervising committees other than the issues related to assessment and marking which I specified in B2.

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.*

The breadth of topics that students can choose from and the impressive level of research and learning outcomes that some of the students achieve, as well as the overall very high standard of the course are commendable. It may be worth considering for subjects that students seem to perform lower in, e.g. Syntax, to include different ways of assessment throughout the academic year to ensure that students' gaps are identified and dealt with before the exam at the end of the academic year.

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.

I would like to thank the Chair and the other members of the Board as well as the Faculty administrator for providing me with the necessary information and documentation to perform my duties as external examiner.

Signed:	
Date:	17/11/2019

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.