

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM FOR TAUGHT COURSES

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Name(s) of course(s) examined <i>e.g. Tripos Part/ MPhil/ MRes</i>	Genetics Part II Tripos		
Academic year of examination	2022-2023		
Level (<i>Delete as appropriate</i>)	Undergraduate		
Year of Appointment			4th

	Yes	No	N/A
1. Are the academic standards set for the award appropriate for the qualification, and comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions?	x		
2. Are you satisfied that you received sufficient programme materials (handbooks, regulations, marking and classing criteria) in a timely manner?	x		
3. Are you satisfied that you were consulted adequately on draft examination papers, and that your comments and suggestions were taken into consideration?	x		
4. Are you satisfied that the assessment was pitched at the appropriate level?	x		
5. Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	x		
6. Do the assessment processes measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme?	x		
7. Are you satisfied that issues raised on your previous report form have been properly considered and, where applicable, acted upon?	x		
8. Did you receive a written response from the Department to your previous report form?	x		

If you replied No to any of the questions above, please expand here:

Do you have any concerns about the course, including standards and quality?

This is my fourth and final year as external examiner and I confirm that I remain confident about the standards upheld and the overall quality. The course covers a wide range of topics, and retains a high quality research opportunity through the research project.

There were, of course, some significant issues this year relating to industrial action. This was dealt with in an exemplary way I think by both the examiners and wider staff within the department. I think this is particularly commendable given that it is only recently been possible to transition to entirely normal practice following the pandemic and we are thus only recently emerged from a period of change.

Are you satisfied that the procedures associated with the assessment are efficient (e.g. timeframes, draft papers, questions, design and conduct of exam, meetings, vivas)?

This cohort of students has experienced an extremely disrupted period of time in which to do their degree and they potentially have less of a grounding in some core skills/subjects when entering their Part II as a result of this. Given this background, it is particularly pleasing to see the students demonstrate the broad extent of their knowledge and understanding in the written papers. The familiar format (question number, style) for papers I think helps here and it was clear from conversations during the *vivas* that students were very clear about what they should expect.

The procedures for assessment were very good throughout, with care taken to make sure that any outlying questions/papers could be identified and investigated further. We were able to discuss and evaluate individual papers in detail once the overall distribution of marks was known, taking into account the written feedback on each answer that was provided by assessors.

One issue that arose this year was a lack of consistency for marks awarded across papers for some individuals, with their performance varying greatly across papers or questions within papers. It is not clear what the underlying reasons for this are, but the detailed information made available as described above, meant that the examining team could look carefully at these and be confident that the marks awarded were appropriate.

The *vivas* took place in person, all on the same day in in the same room, and this worked well. I was pleased to have the chance to congratulate students in person on having reached the end of their degree under such challenging circumstances. Most students appeared relaxed although there was considerable anxiety related to the potential for their marks not to be complete this year due to factors outside their control.

The exam papers themselves were good. It is always helpful to have early oversight of these, and to make (minor) comments or suggestions. Overall I think they test breadth and depth of knowledge well whilst giving scope for individual students to select areas in which they may do best.

There were few (if any) issues with the exams themselves, and overall the timeframe in terms of the *viva* taking place fairly soon after the exams had finished I think was a good thing also.

Do you have any comments on marking and classing (e.g. range of marks, action around borderline marks, penalties, moderation, double marking, reconciliation of marks)?

I commend, as I have done in all previous years, all assessors for their detailed comments on individual answers for each of the papers. All marks were looked at in terms of their mean and overall distributions, and additional attention was paid to those marks provided by assessors who were new to the Part II examining system. The detailed feedback given by assessors meant that this level of detailed scrutiny was possible. Whilst it clearly requires a significant effort on the part of staff to do this, I strongly encourage this to be maintained.

Once all marking was complete, there were detailed discussions about the marks for students whose average placed them in a borderline area. At this stage information from the *vivas* was included in the discussion. As in previous years, *vivas* had been undertaken 'blind' and an assessment of performance was thus made without knowing how any individual student had performed in their written exams. All students were asked very similar questions to allow a comparable assessment to be made of quality of their answers. This information was made available to the other examiners at the exam board when those students in the borderline area had been identified.

Do you have any comments on the student experience of the course and/or their experience of the

assessment process?

As in previous years, the opportunity to undertake a research project is a clear highlight and students were happy to have had the chance to be part of their respective research laboratories. They were given an opportunity to discuss any problems faced during their period of study but there were clearly no major issues to report here other than anxiety about not having their work assessed due to industrial action this year, which did cause significant anxiety.

The overall impression remains that Genetics department staff create a really good environment for students to study in, and that students have a range of different 'next steps' in mind, that include further research or study, medical/veterinary clinical training and other destinations.

Do you have any comments on University policies (e.g. the role of the external examiner, policies around plagiarism, script annotation)?

All policies appear to be carefully thought through and implemented. I would recommend that the university takes the opportunity afforded by the marking issue to examine the range of ways in which individual departments responded to the situation. I suspect that there might be useful learning here from the different approaches taken.

Please describe here any recommendations for improvement.

I have no particular recommendations for improvement but encourage maintaining the project experience and continuing to ensure good communication with the student group so that students have a mechanism through which to highlight any issues as soon as they arise.

Please highlight any good practice you encountered.

The support system within the department works extremely well in that it provides a clear mechanism through which they can raise concerns before they become bigger problems.

The academic input to research projects remains a real highlight of the course and students have clearly enjoyed and benefitted from these opportunities with many of them indicating that they would like to do a Part 3 or research degree elsewhere.

Have you seen any evidence of grade inflation?

I have seen no evidence of grade inflation.

If this is your final year as external examiner? If so, have you seen improvements over your tenure? Has the Department acted on your advice?

This is my final year as external examiner. During my tenure I have worked with two sets of internal examiners, both of which worked extremely diligently to make sure that the process was smooth overall. All were responsive in terms of providing information, and discussing issues as they arose so that they could be dealt with.

The course remains strong, and has adapted to changing needs driven by the pandemic and then a return from it. It has been responsive to student feedback and remains an excellent course to provide both depth and breadth of knowledge in the overall subject area.

Do you have any other comments?

I would like to thank the internal examiners in particular this year for all their hard work to make this as straight forward as possible despite issues with the availability of marks.

Thank you for completing the External Examiner Report form.

Please now forward to vcexternalexaminers@admin.cam.ac.uk by July 31st for undergraduate examinations, **1st October** for Masters Degrees, and **12th October** for resits.

Please also forward a copy to your Chair of Examiners.