

**School of
Mathematics & Statistics**Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU UKProfessor G Robertson
Head of School

17th March 2009

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

External Examiner's Report on MSc/Dip in Applied Statistics (2007/8)

This is a well-run and attractive degree programme. Academic standards are high and the course admits students who are able to attain these standards. Those students falling just short of the standard required for a masters degree are awarded a diploma. The excellent quality of some of the examination scripts I read suggest that the teaching on this programme is of a very high standard.

The assessment procedures for examinations and dissertations were clear, ensured equal treatment for all students and rigorously applied. I had access to all materials needed by an external examiner and sufficient time to assess them.

I found the (double) marking of the exam papers (Paper I and Paper II) to be accurate. The recent change in the examination scale (when the pass mark was moved from 40 to 50) was well managed and, as far as I could see, had the effect of improving academic standards on this degree. The performance of candidates on Paper II remains lower than that on Paper I but this is to be expected as Paper II covers more difficult material than Paper I. However, certain examiners consistently set significantly more difficult questions on Paper II than the other examiners. Therefore this paper would benefit from more effort being put in at the checking stage to try to achieve a more uniform level of difficulty across the optional questions. The system for determining dissertation marks (by weighting together marks for six criteria) works well and generally produces consistent marks between examiners.

Each candidate was discussed in turn at the Examination Board, with very careful attention being given to borderline candidates and those with extenuating circumstances.

Overall, I was very happy with the performances and degrees awarded in 2007/8. The top students demonstrated excellent knowledge of the subject, with most students demonstrating reasonable knowledge.

Yours sincerely,

Prof R.J. Boys

Deputy Head of School