

External Examiner's Report

Examiner: Professor Philip D. O'Neill, University of Nottingham

Examiner for: Honour School of Mathematics and Statistics (Part A) (Year 2) 2009-10

General Remarks

This was the first year of my appointment. Overall my impressions are positive ones; the system in place appears to work well and the students are being examined at an appropriate level. More detailed comments on individual aspects are given below.

1. Academic standards

The exam questions within my remit were certainly at the right level. There was a range of material so that weaker and stronger students could be differentiated. The harder parts of the questions in particular were appropriate to stretch the best students.

2. Assessment processes

The relevant papers (individual exam scripts, summary documents etc.) were made available to me on arrival. All of the scripts I saw appeared to have been marked correctly. The final meeting of Part A examiners was conducted in an efficient manner. The business of adjusting scaling maps (i.e. the conversion from raw marks on a paper to the University standardised mark) was considered at some length, as it should be. Although the final outcome appeared satisfactory, I do wonder if there is scope for a more systematic or transparent approach upon which the scaling can be based, at least prior to final minor changes at borderlines.

3. Standards of student performance

As would be expected, the cohort of students in question is highly talented mathematically and the performance reflected this. I was especially struck by the weaker students, almost all of whom managed to produce material of sufficient quality to pass each paper.

4. Comparison with other HE institutions

The material being examined is certainly comparable with that in courses offered by other leading UK Mathematics and Statistics departments. As mentioned above the student performance is strong, with particular relative strength among the weaker students compared to those in other UK institutions.

5. Issues for further consideration

The consideration of Medical certificates at the meeting of examiners might benefit from a more systematic approach. Although on the one hand any attempt to compensate a student by awarding a mark above that which they actually obtained is going to be subjective, on the other hand it should at least be possible to treat different students in the same manner, or to agree a convention that is used as a first resort.