

16<sup>th</sup> October 2010



The Vice-Chancellor  
**c/o Mrs Sally Powell, Academic Policy Support**  
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Dear Vice-Chancellor,

### **MSc in Applied Statistics 2009–2010**

I am pleased to submit my Annual Report as External Examiner. My report follows the six points listed in the **Guidelines for writing reports** document.

#### **(i) Appropriateness of Academic Standards**

Academic standards are completely appropriate for the award. Academic standards on the Oxford MSc in Applied Statistics are equal to, if not higher than those of comparable universities. As before, the best performing students showed very high levels of statistical, mathematical, analytical and critical skills.

#### **(ii) Rigour, Equity and Fairness of Assessment Procedures**

I was sent the draft examination papers in March. I visited Oxford twice during the academic year. I was able to scrutinize the examination scripts and other assessment material during my first visit. I was given electronic access to the dissertations before my second visit, and I looked at fourteen in some detail.

The assessments covered the material set out in the Student Handbook and were constructed to allow students to show their full range of abilities, both theoretical and practical.

The double blind marking procedure, together with careful consideration of cases where markers show some disagreement, ensure the rigour and equity of treatment for all students across the range of assessments.

The Examiners' Meeting was fair and very efficient. All appropriate evidence was considered thoroughly. Very careful attention was given to borderline students and students with an examination average of less than 40%. All assessment procedures were fairly conducted within institutional regulations and guidance.

### **(iii) Standard of Student Performance**

This year seven of the students were awarded Distinctions, with one receiving a prize. The performance of these students was generally excellent. The performance of the other successful students, although showing the natural variation expected for an MSc in Applied Statistics, was generally high, with some very credible dissertation work being submitted.

### **(iv) Comparability of Standards and Student Achievements**

In general, the performance of students on the Oxford MSc in Applied Statistics is equal to, if not higher than the performance of students on similar programmes at comparable universities. Some of the Distinction students produced dissertations of exceptionally high quality, worthy of publication in good theoretical or applied journals.

### **(v) Response to a Previous Issues**

The modifications made to the examination conventions to emphasize the importance of the dissertation in determining whether or not a candidate is awarded a distinction proved to be extremely helpful. I am pleased that the revised 2009–10 conventions will be retained for 2010–11.

**I have no issues to raise this year.**

### **(vi) Good Practice**

There is much good practice on the Oxford MSc in Applied Statistics. The breadth of topics available is wide, ranging from the more theoretical to the more applied areas of the discipline. The standard of teaching is clearly high across all topics. As already mentioned, double blind marking, together with careful consideration of borderline students and those averaging less than 40% in the examinations, ensures scrupulous assessment practices. I was particularly impressed by several of the dissertations. In general, the dissertation topics were well chosen and involved substantial and instructive applied work. Students had ample scope and support to conduct their own line of research.

I found that being supplied with electronic access to the dissertations before my second visit was an extremely helpful practice, and one that should be continued.

## General Comments

I thank Professor Brian Ripley for informing me of some modifications to the MSc in Applied Statistics for 2010–11. I am delighted at the changes involving R programming and data mining. I believe that these strengthen the MSc, ensuring that it remains at the cutting edge of the discipline and allowing it to benefit even more from staff expertise.

Professor Tom Snijders has come to the end of his term of office as an Examiner. I would like to express to Professor Snijders my warm thanks for all his thorough and insightful work as an Examiner. I would also like to thank Professor Brian Ripley (Chairman) and Dr Nicolai Meinshausen for all their efforts as Examiners during the academic year. I am also grateful to Ms Jan Boylan and the other administrative staff of the Department of Statistics for their valued collaboration and excellent organization. I had access to all the materials that I needed and sufficient time to consider them. The fine efforts of all staff ensure the outstanding success of this important MSc programme.



Yours sincerely,



Julian Stander

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