



3<sup>rd</sup> November 2009

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

### **MSc in Applied Statistics 2008–2009**

I am pleased to submit my Annual Report as External Examiner. My report follows the six points listed in the **Examining at Oxford** document.

## **1 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.

## **2 Rigour, Equity and Fairness of Assessment Procedures**

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. The Examiners' Meeting was fair and very efficient. All appropriate evidence was considered thoroughly. All assessment procedures were fairly conducted within institutional regulations and guidance.

### 3 Standard of Student Performance

This year seven of the students were awarded Distinctions, with two receiving prizes. The performance of these students was generally excellent; please see my additional comment under 'Issues' below. The performance of the other students, although showing the natural variation expected for an MSc in Applied Statistics, was generally high, with some very credible dissertation work being submitted.

### 4 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 top-rated journals.

### 5 Issues

The performance in the dissertation of one of the Distinction student was disappointing, with the Distinction being due to strong performances in the other three assessment elements. The Internal Examiners and I are keen that the award of a Distinction should also reflect high quality dissertation work. We therefore suggest that the phrase 'Distinction candidates will show excellence over a wide range of topics' in the Student Handbook is modified by the addition of 'including the dissertation'. I would also recommend changing the weightings of Paper 1, Paper 2, Assessed Practical Work and Dissertation to  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{6}$  and  $\frac{1}{3}$ .

I am very happy with all other aspects and have no further issues to raise.

## 6 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 ensure scrupulous assessment practices. The Assessed Practical Work involved imaginative tasks, clearly informed by staff consultancy and research activities. 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 would like to thank Professor Chris Holmes, Dr Nicolai Meinshausen, Professor Tom Snijders and Ms Jan Boylan for their valued collaboration and excellent organization during the academic year. 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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