

External Examiners Report on the MSc in Integrated Immunology University of Oxford (2009-10)

I have acted as External Examiner on this course for the academic year 2009-10, which is my second year. There have been three opportunities for me to assess the students, end of Michaelmas Term (December 2009), end of Hilary Term (March 2010) and end of Trinity Term (September 2010). As previously I have had the opportunity to assess the standards of the students work by seeing their written work, examination scripts and project work, as appropriate, and also by oral examination. I have been able to oversee and comment on the marks awarded and make recommendations regarding the award of passes and/or distinctions.

My overall impression is one of continuing high standards. As before, the quality of teaching and learning is very high, as is the academic standard expected of the students. Overall the students have met these standards. I have been satisfied with the design, structure and marking of assessments. The assessment procedures are very vigorous and are designed to allow the students to exhibit a full range of skills, including their written, oral and interpretive skills and, perhaps most importantly for a degree of this kind, their laboratory and technical skills. The examinations have been designed to allow students equity of treatment, particularly bearing in mind that quite a large proportion of students are from overseas and they may be used to different systems of examination and also that English may not be their first language. As far as I am aware, the examinations have been conducted within institutional regulations and guidance.

Overall this year the performance of the students has been good and this has been reflected in the high pass rate and the award of distinctions, though I would say that the standard has perhaps not been quite as high as last year with a greater range of student abilities. Throughout the examinations procedure there has always been the opportunity to comment on various aspects of the course and the examinations and these have always been acted on quickly. Again, at the December examination it was commented that some of the students relied rather heavily on the use of review rather than primary literature as a source of information in their library reports and it was noticed that in subsequent reports this was not so much the case. In particular this year there was one case of blatant plagiarism (from a student who it should be noted had never written an essay before) and this was acted on very quickly. Subsequently controls have been introduced, particularly the use of "Turnitin", which should prevent this happening again.

I have had experience in examining on other MSc courses at a similar level at other comparable UK HEIs and would say that the standards of student achievements on this course are at least comparable if not greater. There are a number of instances of good practice that are evident in this course. Of particular note is the thoroughness and fairness with which the students are examined, they are given ample opportunity to display their knowledge in a variety of different examination formats. Many of the students have improved their performance quite noticeably over the course of the year.

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