

External Examiner comments on MSc Development Management courses 2013-14

DV431 (Development Management)

All marks fairly awarded with clear reasons offered and impressive feedback on the projects. Good exam questions in terms of the comprehensive coverage of the course content plus a new section on policy analysis which offers a good chance to apply thinking to real cases. As with last year, there is less sense than there used to be of students producing standardised sets of responses.

The project work enables students to develop a range of academic and consultancy-relevant skills. The inflationary effects on overall grades are still there but less markedly so (in part because of the 360 assessment?) and the new move to prevent student from passing if they fail the exam will further help here.

Two points of process: how are larger disagreements between markers moderated? In one case of a 9-mark difference a third marker was brought in but not on others. Second, the global marks given to the reports were not clear.

The questions suggest that some moves have been made to advance the curriculum in line with developments in the field, although students have not fully captured this in their responses (e.g. even distinction level students are not really engaging with the post-institutionalist literature on development).

DV424 (International Institutions and Late Development)

All marks fairly awarded and across a good, broad range too. There is some very good work at the higher end, generally distinguished by superior argumentation, critical analysis and use of theoretical frameworks. The level of feedback on the essays is very good. Two queries: are the essays moderated or only first-marked? And should [REDACTED] fall under the n9 rule?

DV409 (Ec Devt Policy)

The note on 'model answers' was very welcome. However, it was quite difficult to oversee this course on process rather than substantive grounds this year, as I was not shown how marks had been allocated to specific exam questions, or the comments which would explain why (same as last year), and neither were the essays sent through. The vast majority of students did better on the essay than the exam, sometimes considerably so. Is there a case for invoking the new change to DV431 here? As with other courses, is the essay marking moderated? Good to see the exam being augmented by a further piece of assessment.

DV447 Public Affairs, International Devt and Gendered Violence

No fails or distinctions. The feedback on essays is clear but rather limited. There is perhaps a degree of generosity in the assessment of some essays, with some fairly average work being rewarded at Merit level.

DV411 (Population & Devt)

There seems to be a broader array of marks here, including more within the Pass range as opposed to last year's heavier preponderance of Merits. Still no Fails despite some pretty weak papers (e.g. [REDACTED] perhaps in part because the questions allow for fairly descriptive responses ('Discuss...') rather than requiring the exercise of more demanding faculties (e.g. 'critically analyse', 'evaluate', 'compare' etc.). Is one point of assessment ideal, even with a well-framed set of exam questions which cover a lot of ground?

DV423 (Global Political Economy of Development)

Several excellent scripts at the top end, duly awarded with good/high distinctions. Some of the work lower down the scale seems to have been treated somewhat generously, with work rightly judged by markers to offer only 'Standard summaries' and containing 'no reference to the literature' rewarded at Merit level, and only five judged to be below Merit level (no fails). Very useful guidance provided to exam students on how to proceed. Some concern that one exam is the only point of assessment.

SH

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MSc Development Management – dissertations:

Re the dissertations, I'm happy to confirm all marks, which were all well-explained in useful commentaries from markers. More specifically,

Fails: can confirm all of these, although it would be good to be assured that [REDACTED] was double-marked as there's only one marksheet here - ?

Passes: fine.

Merit: somewhat concerning to see Merit level marks awarded for work that lacks theoretical depth and is largely descriptive in nature. e.g. a 68 is given by one marker for work that s/he admits is descriptive and lacks theoretical engagement...reduced to 65 after moderation but even seems somewhat generous given the concerns raised. Another gets 61 despite being acknowledged by markers to be more of a report rather than a dissertation study as such. Agree that [REDACTED] falls short, more of a 68 than a 70.

Distinctions: fine, particularly the Botswana study.

In general, it is interesting/troubling to note that all three fails and also some weaker passes were perhaps over-ambitious in their efforts to undertake primary research and also statistical analysis. The fact that one student in the sample got a very high mark whilst employing what seemed to be fairly sophisticated forms of statistical analysis suggests this may not be a systemic problem though but perhaps one related to the guidance of students in specific instances.