

Examination Conventions

These Conventions apply to the cohort starting in October 2009 and thereafter

Introduction

These conventions have been approved by the Chemistry Academic Board (CAB) and MPLS. They should be read together with the current *Examination Regulations* and this Handbook. CAB reviews the conventions, regulations and handbook annually, and the Examination Conventions may be subject to minor adjustment during any academic year. The Examiners have discretion to deviate slightly from what is laid down, where appropriate and according to circumstances.

If any student or academic staff member finds any part of the Regulations, Conventions or Handbook obscure, enquiries should be addressed to the Chairman of CAB, through the Faculty office in the first instance (nina.jupp@chem.ox.ac.uk). Such enquiries are welcome, as clarification helps everybody. It is not appropriate to address the Chairmen of Examiners on such matters.

Prelims

See especially the relevant part of the *Examination Regulations*: (p105-106 in the 2010 edition), but general regulations found elsewhere also apply.

Each paper will be marked out of 100, according to the outline marking scheme printed on the question paper. Marks will be rescaled if necessary to eliminate imbalance between papers.

The pass mark on each paper will be 40; no compensation will be allowed on any of the three Chemistry papers, but a fail mark in Mathematics of 38 or higher will be allowed as a pass, provided that the candidate passes all three Chemistry papers and has an aggregate mark on all four papers of 180 or more. The aggregate will be the simple sum of all four marks without any weighting.

Distinctions are usually awarded to approximately the top 30% of candidates.

Except in special circumstances no candidate may sit Prelims without having completed the IT stint and the practical work stint in each of the three laboratories, as specified in the course handbook

No student may enter for Part IA unless they have already passed all parts of Prelims.

Parts IA and IB

See *Examination Regulations*, (p175-178 in the 2010 edition), but general regulations found elsewhere also apply.

Parts IA and IB, together with the practical course and Part II, are conceived as parts of one examining process. The primary purpose of Parts IA, IB and the Practical course is to identify those who are worthy of Honours. Within this group, classification depends on performance in Parts IA, IB, the practical course and Part II together, weighted 15:50:10:25 respectively.

Part IA consists of three General Papers, and is taken at the end of year two. Each General Paper is two and a half hours and students will be expected to attempt six out of eight questions.

Part IB consists of six General Papers and one Option Paper, and is taken at the end of year three. General Papers are two and a half hours and students will be expected to attempt four out of six questions. The Option Paper is three hours, and students will be expected to attempt three questions from a wide choice.

All papers will be marked according to the outline marking scheme shown on the question paper. The mark will be reported as a percentage. The three General Papers in Part IA have equal weight. The six General Papers in Part IB have equal weight, and will contribute 40% towards the final degree. The Option paper will contribute 10%.

There will be no pass/fail mark in Part IA; all candidates who complete this Part of the examination will have their marks carried forward to Part IB, and candidates will not be permitted to take Part IA again. Practical work will not be taken into account for Part IA.

Except in special circumstances, no candidate may qualify for Honours in Part IB without having completed satisfactorily the second and third year practical courses, and the IT practicals (as outlined below, a reduced third year course may be offered if a Supplementary Subject has been passed).

The second year practical course consists of a stint of 10 days in each of the three laboratories. The normal third year practical stint is 12 days, with a free choice of experiments across the three laboratories, plus the third year IT practical. A candidate who has not completed the core requirement outlined above may still qualify for a Pass Degree if they have satisfactorily completed at least 20 days of the second and third year laboratory course in addition to the first year requirement. Below this limit a candidate will automatically fail Part IB.

The views of the External Examiners are considered carefully before any candidate is denied Honours. The honours threshold is expected to be about 40%. Students below this borderline may be called for a *viva voce* examination with an examination board normally consisting of the Chairman of Examiners and the External examiners.

Medical and other certificates received through the proper channels will normally be considered when the candidate's full results are available after Part II. Exceptions are candidates at the Pass/Fail or Pass/Honours borderline after Part IB, and those who are candidates for Prizes. Examination boards may take account of medical and other certificates covering a single paper by an appropriate adjustment of the mark.

Candidates who are judged not to be worthy of honours may not enter for Part II. The examiners may recommend that they be awarded a Pass Degree (B.A.) or that they fail outright. In recent years the number of outright failures in Part I has been 0 or 1 and the number of Pass degrees awarded has been 0-2 (total candidate numbers were of the order 150-190).

Distinctions in Supplementary Subjects will be recognised by a marks bonus after Part II of 10 (i.e. 1%). A pass or distinction in a Supplementary Subject may be offered as an alternative to half of the third year practical requirement. While the majority of candidates who choose to take a Supplementary Subject will take a single course during their second year, a Supplementary Subject may be taken in years 2, 3, or 4, with the proviso that a maximum of three Supplementary Subjects may be passed. The bonus of 10 marks will be credited for each Supplementary Subject passed with Distinction, but only one Supplementary Subject pass may be offered in lieu of practical work. Candidates who achieve a pass may not retake the same Supplementary Subject examination in a subsequent year.

Part II

See *Examination Regulations*: (p178-179 in the 2010 edition)

Part II is examined by Thesis and by *viva voce* examination. The Chairman of the Part II Examiners will circulate instructions on the preparation of theses and information about other pertinent matters in Hilary Term. Candidates may be penalised for failure to conform.

Theses will be read by two Examiners, each of whom will mark out of 100. Because of the wide range of subject matter in Part II projects it is not appropriate to prescribe a single marking scheme, but a set of guidelines is available on the departmental web page.

The two principal readers of the thesis will lead the discussion during the viva, which will be marked out of 20. Thesis marks may only be altered following the viva with the agreement of a third examiner and the Chairman. Other than in exceptional circumstances, the viva cannot result in a decrease in the thesis marks.

Additional Supplementary Subjects may be taken during the Part II year, and any Distinctions gained will be credited at 10 marks, as outlined previously. However, no retrospective compensation for shortfalls in practical work or IT work reported to the Part IB examiners will be allowed.

The two thesis marks and the viva mark will be added to give the Part II mark. The Part II mark will be aggregated with the total (scaled) Part I mark with a weighting 25:75, and expressed as a mark out of 1000. Bonuses for Distinctions in Supplementary Subjects will be added after aggregation.

Supervisors will be asked to report on the work of all candidates and on any special difficulties or advantages the candidates may have had, although the Supervisor's report makes no numerical contribution to the final mark.

In deciding final classifications, account will be taken of any medical or other proper certificates received in Part IA, IB or Part II.

Marking conventions

All written papers are marked according to an outline marking scheme printed on the examination paper. Examiners have discretion to vary this scheme as necessary. Papers will either be double-marked or the marks checked against the marking scheme by a second examiner. The University Standard Scale will be used for each paper, in which 70%, 60%, 50% and 40% mark the class boundaries.

If in the academic judgement of the examiners the raw marks do not conform to this standard, when compared against the class descriptors (below), the marks will be rescaled. If scaling is used, details will be provided in the Chairman's report.

A mark of zero shall be awarded for any part or parts of questions that have not been answered.

All parts of questions answered will be marked unless clearly crossed out by the candidate. The best set of marks consistent with the examination rubric will be taken.

Discrepancies between the marks awarded by different examiners will be resolved as follows. Marks should be averaged if they differ by less than 10% of the maximum available, with a third marker arbitrating if they differ by more than this and the markers cannot agree.

Practical marks will be awarded according to a detailed scheme that assesses the pre-lab, practical skills and the write-up. Practical marks may be scaled to ensure uniformity of standard between experiments and markers. The final sign-off will be performed by a senior demonstrator. The practical mark will be reported as a percentage, and will be a weighted average of the marks for all the practicals that contribute to the appropriate requirement (252 or 216 credit hours, according to whether a Supplementary Subject has been passed). The relative weight of each practical in this average will be advertised in the laboratory manual.

Classification

The class borderlines will be drawn at 70%, 60%, 50% and 40%. Each paper will contribute the following proportions to the maximum aggregate mark:

Each Part IA paper	5%
Each Part IB General paper	6.67%
Part IB Option paper	10%
Part I Practical course	10%
Part II	25%

It is expected that the percentages of the classes awarded will be in the ranges of recent years, i.e. I, 33-42%; Ii, 42-50 %; Iii, 10-15%; III, 0-5%. These ranges are not mandatory however, and occasionally a candidate's thesis and viva are deemed inadequate for any class of M.Chem. degree. Such candidates are not included in the Part II list, but they remain entitled to the unclassified B.A. Honours degree gained after Part IB.

The following Qualitative Descriptors of Classes have been adopted:-

Class I The candidate shows excellent problem-solving skills and excellent knowledge of the material over a wide range of topics, and is able to use that knowledge in unfamiliar contexts.

Class Iii The candidate shows good or very good problem-solving skills, and good or very good knowledge of much of the material over a wide range of topics.

- Class Iiii* The candidate shows basic problem-solving skills and adequate knowledge of most of the material.
- Class III* The candidate shows reasonable understanding of at least part of the basic material and some problem-solving skills. Although there may be a few good answers, the majority of answers will contain errors in calculations and/or show incomplete understanding of the topics.
- Pass* The candidate shows some limited grasp of basic material over a restricted range of topics, but with large gaps in understanding. There need not be any good quality answers, but there will be indications of some competence.
- Fail* The candidate shows inadequate grasp of the basic material. The work is likely to show major misunderstanding and confusion, and/or inaccurate calculations; the answers to most of the questions attempted are likely to be fragmentary only.

The interpretation of these Descriptors is at the discretion of the Examiners