Assessment Criteria for Written Essays
Public Legal Education for Start-Ups
Centre for Commercial Law Studies

These guidelines cover the criteria for the assessment of taught modules through examination, as well as extended written work. The criteria build upon and supplement the Queen Mary University of London Assessment Handbook, which is available at: https://www.qmul.ac.uk/governance-and-legal-services/media/dgls-media/policy-zone/2024-25/Assessment-Handbook-2024-25-FINAL.pdf with updates to the Assessment Handbook for 2024-25 summarised here: https://www.qmul.ac.uk/governance-and-legal-services/media/dgls-media/policy-zone/2024-25/Academic-Regulations-2024-25---summary-of-changes.pdf.

These criteria also take into account the Master's Degree Characteristics Statement (February 2020), which has been issued by The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), and describes the distinctive features of master's degrees in the UK. The Characteristics Statement is available at: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/master%27s-degree-characteristics-statement.pdf.

Students should note that in all cases two internal examiners carry out the summative assessment of examinations and extended written work, according to the standards set out below, while external examiners review the LLM examination process as a whole.

The following is broken down into the levels of award that can be achieved under the LLM: Distinction (70+), Merit (60-69), Pass (50-59), and Fail (0-49).

Distinction (70+)

An answer falling into the mark range 70% + shows mastery over the subject, is well-structured and displays a clear and logical argument displaying personal reflection informed by wider reading of articles and/or other commentaries and a good grasp of detail (as evidenced by the choice of relevant examples which are well integrated into the answer's structure). The answer should be complete, with no errors or omissions.

Distinction-level answers are ones that are exceptionally good and which excel in several of the following criteria:

- Comprehensiveness and accuracy
- Clarity of argument and expression
- Integration of a range of materials
- Evidence of wider reading
- Depth of insight into the theoretical issues

- Excellent use of written English containing few, if any, grammatical errors

Excellence in several of these areas should be in addition to the qualities expected of an upper Merit answer. A Distinction answer is generally expected to spot especially complex or difficult points, and to make use of more sophisticated analysis than an upper Merit answer.

To obtain a high distinction mark (i.e. 75% +), there will usually be some evidence of exceptional originality, sophisticated and intelligent critical analysis and expression.

Merit (60-69)

A substantially correct answer which meets a good number but not all of the above criteria, including evidencing mastery of the basic principles.

Such answers display an acceptable level of competence, as indicated by the following qualities:
- Generally accurate answer to the question, though with some omissions and errors
- An answer that is largely based on lecture material and required reading but without much evidence of broader reading
- Clear presentation
- Some inadequate development of arguments
- May contain some material which is not relevant to the question posed
- Competent written English but may contain some grammatical errors

Pass (54-59)
A basic understanding of the main issues, but not coherently or correctly presented.

Such answers demonstrate knowledge or understanding of the general area but tend to be weak in one or more of the following ways:
- Overly descriptive
- Does not answer the question directly
- Misses key points of information
- Contains significant inaccuracies
- Covers material sparsely, possibly in note form
- Contains assertions not sufficiently supported by authority or evidence
- Displays an inability to follow an argument throughout
- Poorly structured
- No evidence of wider reading

Pass (50-54)

Indicates an answer that narrowly avoids the fail category. It represents the minimum acceptable standard for the award of a degree. There is just sufficient information to indicate that the student has familiarity with the subject area. Such answers typically contain:

- Coverage of the basic material, with numerous errors, omissions or irrelevances
- Loose and disorganised structure
- Poor development of arguments
- Poor standard of English, many grammatical errors

Fail (0-49)

Fails to meet the minimum requirements of the assessment criteria.

Such answers typically contain one or more of the following:
- Evidence of a lack of basic understanding
- Many errors or omissions
- Evidence of a lack of understanding or appropriate reading
- Failure to answer the question posed, by, e.g., answering a different question from that set by the examiner
- Disorganised presentation
- Very poor use of English, such as poor grammar and spelling and incoherent statements
- Fails to complete the examination by answering too few questions