IMESS DISSERTATION

Note: Please email the completed mark sheet to Year 2 coordinator
(cc Chiara Amini chiara.amini@ucl.ac.uk **and** fiona.rushworth@ucl.ac.uk)

Please note that IMESS students are <u>not</u> required to use a particular set of methods (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, or comparative) in their dissertation.

Student:	Simon Bill
Dissertation title:	Bandwagoning with the Belt and Road: Russia´s changing attitude towards the Chinese presence in Central Asia post-Crimea

	70+	69-65	60-61	59-55	54-50	<50
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Knowledge *Knowledge of problems involved, e.g. historical and social context, specialist literature on the topic. Evidence of capacity to gather information through a wide and appropriate range of reading, and to digest and process knowledge.*	X					
Analysis & Interpretation *Demonstrates a clear grasp of concepts. Application of appropriate methodology and understanding; willingness to apply an independent approach or interpretation recognition of alternative interpretations; Use of precise terminology and avoidance of ambiguity; avoidance of excessive generalisations or gross oversimplifications.*			X			
Structure & Argument *Demonstrates ability to structure work with clarity, relevance and coherence. Ability to argue a case; clear evidence of analysis and logical thought; recognition of an argument´s limitation or alternative views; Ability to use other evidence to support arguments and structure appropriately.*			X			
Presentation & Documentation *Accurate and consistently presented footnotes and bibliographic references; accuracy of grammar and spelling; correct and clear presentation of charts/graphs/tables or other data. Appropriate and correct referencing throughout. Correct and contextually correct handling of quotations.*	X					
Methodology *Understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.*			X			

ECTS Mark:		**Charles Mark:**	C	**Marker:**	Jan Šír
Deducted for late submission:				**Signed:**	
Deducted for inadequate referencing:				**Date:**	June 1, 2019

MARKING GUIDELINES

A (UCL mark 70+) = A (Charles mark- excellent): *Note: marks of over 80 are given rarely and only for truly exceptional pieces of work.* Distinctively sophisticated and focused analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

B (UCL mark 69-65) = B (Charles mark – very good)
C (UCL mark 64-60) = C (Charles mark – good): A high level of analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Good understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research. 65 or over equates to a B grade.

D (UCL mark 59-55) = D (Charles mark – satisfactory)
E (UCL mark 54-50) = E (Charles mark – sufficient): Demonstration of a critical use of sources and ability to engage in systematic inquiry. An ability to engage in sustained research work, demonstrating methodological awareness. 55 or over equates to a D grade.

F (UCL mark less than 50) = F (Charles mark - insufficient): Demonstrates failure to use sources and an inadequate ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Inadequate evidence of ability to engage in sustained research work and poor understanding of appropriate research techniques.

Please provide substantive and detailed feedback!

Comments, explaining strengths and weaknesses (_at least 300 words_):

The thesis is a contribution to the study of Russia's foreign policy under Putin. It seeks to examine Russia's shifting stance towards China in the post-Crimea period, particularly with respect to China's penetration of Central Asia as embodied in its Belt and Road Initiative. To explain this increasingly accommodating attitude of Moscow to Beijing, it attempts to apply the IR concept of "(soft) band-wagoning."

The thesis as is draws on a solid bulk of English-language literature that deals with both IR theories and the geopolitics of Central Asia. These sources appear to be sufficient for the given purpose, and are adequately selected. Similarly, the thesis demonstrates a good knowledge of the chosen empirical subject matter. The way the author presents the data including his interpretation is fitting, and his conclusions seem plausible and carefully worded. The text as such is also well written.

At the same time, the thesis has its shortcomings.

First and foremost, speaking of the theoretical underpinning, the conceptual framework appears rather loose and is only sketchily outlined. It is commendable that the author has devoted a good part of his literature review to a discussion of his main used terms/concepts of "bandwagoning"/"soft bandwagoning," "hedging," and "balancing"/"soft balancing." Regrettably, he has stopped short of orienting the entire debate towards an operational definition. Instead, he has merely conceded that "the scholarship has not rigorously defined these terms" and that there is a "lack of clear definitions" that "makes it difficult to differentiate" (p. 21). He is correct, but this has implications for the very applicability of his key used terms/concepts, given that his stated objective is application, and not theory-generating or refining.

This is then reflected also in the methodology, particularly in the delineation of the chosen case. Given the vast scope of Russian-Chinese relations, at some places the thesis lacks a clear focus, and some problem aspects are only touched upon, rather than elaborated in depth (see particularly sub-chapters 4.1 and 4.2). The overall organization of the thesis is fine, though.

Specific questions you would like addressing at the oral defence (_at least 2 questions_):

The concluding discussion of findings (subchapter 6.2, in particular) resembles a sincere admission of the very limits of the chosen theoretical instrumentarium for grasping the situation in Russian-Chinese relations. Having done the entire research, would you have an idea of how to refine your key used terms/concepts to make them a useful tool for analysis?