Name of the student:	Alice Forsman
Title of the thesis:	The ideational leadership of the European Commission
Reviewer:	Dr Matt Broad

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD
(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

This thesis, which I very much enjoyed reading, focused on the 'ideational leadership' of the Juncker Commission to see whether its response to the migration crisis has been rooted in either liberal ideas – i.e., shared responsibility to assist migrants – or realism, which in effect was taken to mean the securitisation of migration. The introduction was neatly presented and proved an interesting read. But the opening two paragraphs were a tad platitudinous – the point made, that the Commission is a political actor in its own right, doubtless could have been sharper. I must admit, I also wasn't fully sure why so much emphasis was placed on 'ideas' here and throughout the entire thesis compared to say, policies or preference formation. To this end it seems to me that the student was making life difficult by emphasising 'leadership' and 'ideas' rather than talking about management of crises, or instead focusing on the Commission as a facet of what Bello called the 'spiralling of the securitisation of migration in the EU'. What, for me, was most clearly missing in the introduction however was a sense already of <u>why</u> we ought to care about the Commission's ideas – the relevance and rationale for the research question (which was a little verbose!) was never fully contextualised. That said, the student was already quite robust in defending choices relating to things like methodology and case selection, which was great to see.

The background section covering pp. 7–9 was useful. I wonder whether the notion of 'crisis' itself might have been unpacked more. What sort of ideas would we expect from the Commission more generally? Are there specific ideational quirks that the Commission is likely to extol during times of crisis? Does the type of crisis influence this? What (else) dictates how institutions, both within and outside the EU, respond to crises? The EU has long coped with crises, be they political, economic (euro) etc. – so how have previous Commissions dealt with such challenges, and would we expect Juncker's response to Syrian migration to have been similar or different? The introduction claimed to 'avoid the topic of ideology' (6) but surely ideology is precisely one of those factors that influence political responses (just look at how governments of different political persuasions responded to Covid!). The literature review, for its part, was sensibly divided and highly informative. And it managed to cover a lot of ground in terms of scholars. But it wasn't always directly relevant to the research question – at times it read as if the student was relaying everything they knew about the Commission as an actor within the EU. The section 'relevance of the study' (pp. 20–21) was welcomed, but this confused me still more. If the thesis is about more than just individual Commission presidents, then fine. But I needed to know more about the Commission as a 'policy entrepreneur' – how does this work in practice? Is it something about the external process of policymaking that affects the Commission's ideas (non-state actors, lobbying etc.)? Or the internal aspect (personnel – in other words, do people – the actual staff who work in the Berlaymont and the degree to which they gel – matter?)? Or is it rather about institutional jostling (so, for instance, are the Commission's ideas reined in when they have powerful states who disagree with them?)? All put another way, what goes into constructing the 'power of ideas'?

2. ANALYSIS
(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

Realism and liberalism were each well explained, although one could I suppose argue that the Commission's ideas might easily draw on both or neither – the either/or dichotomy might have been nuanced a bit. The methodology was a highpoint of the thesis – convincing and detailed on both QCA and source selection. Where the student chose to set out their stall, they did so convincingly.

3. CONCLUSIONS
(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

Having undertaken the QCA, the thesis did an excellent job of presenting the findings from the documentation consulted. By the student's own admission, the conclusions reached weren't always surprising – the securitisation literature tells us much of what the student confirmed, even if their way into the subject differed quite substantially.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE
(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The thesis was nicely put together, and well written throughout bar the odd typo and grammar mistake. Scholarly apparatus was near perfect.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT
(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

This was an intriguing thesis on a topic of obvious contemporary relevance. The question was verbose and might have been better justified and situated. Various concepts and theoretical assumptions also needed unpacking. The literature review not only seemed a bit disjointed but also ignored important, and arguably more relevant, literature pertinent to the subject. And the findings, while robustly outlined, weren't the most surprising. But the methodology was so well-reasoned and convincing. What is more, the student evidently knew their stuff – it was a pleasure to read.

Grade (A-F):	B
Date:	Signature:

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
A (91-100)	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7.5-8.4	16.4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): "Outstanding performance with only minor errors";
Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';
Good (C): "Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors";
Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';
Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';
Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.