



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

FACULTY OF ENGLISH
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2019

Contents

1	PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE 2018-19	3
1.1	Overview.....	3
1.1.1	Statistics.....	3
1.1.2	General Remarks	4
1.2	Conventions and Classification Criteria.....	5
1.3	Prizes	6
1.4	Administration and Analysis.....	6
1.5	Reports on Individual Papers.....	7
2	FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE.....	16
2.1	Overview.....	16
2.2	Statistics.....	16
2.3	Examiners and assessors	17
2.4	Training.....	18
2.5	Prizes	18
2.6	Reports on Individual Papers.....	18
2.6.1	Course I.....	18
2.6.2	Course II.....	32
2.7	EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS	35
2.7.1	PROFESSOR SIMON J JAMES.....	35
2.7.2	PROFESSOR JUDITH HAWLEY	38
2.7.3	PROFESSOR AD PUTTER.....	42
3	MST AND MPhil (MEDIEVAL STUDIES) IN ENGLISH.....	46
3.1	STATISTICS	46
3.2	EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	46
3.3	Chair of Examiners' Report.....	47
3.4	EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS	52
3.4.1	DR JANE GOLDMAN.....	52
3.4.2	DR FIONA GREEN	55
3.4.3	DR IAN JOHNSON.....	58
3.4.4	PROFESSOR CHRISTINA LUPTON	62
3.4.5	PROFESSOR JAVED MAJEED	65
3.4.6	PROFESSOR HELEN SMITH.....	68

1 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE 2018-19

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 Statistics

This year there were 223 candidates for the Preliminary Examination in English Language and Literature.

Joint Schools Candidates took optional English papers in the following numbers:

Paper 1: EML 32; HENG 15; CLENG 14

Paper 2: EML 2; HENG 3

Paper 3: EML 12; HENG 2

Paper 4: EML 18; HENG 10

Numbers and Percentages in each category:

2018-19	Total no. candidates:	%
Distinction	49	22
Pass	166	74.4
Partial Pass	3	1.35
Incomplete	4	1.8
Fail	1	0.45

Percentage of scripts awarded marks of 70+ for each paper:

Paper	2018-19	%
1 Introduction to English Language and Literature: Combined	37	16.6
1 Section A	47	21.1
1 Section B	47	21.1
2 Literature in English 650-1350	45	20.2
3 Literature in English 1830-1910	54	24.2
4 Literature in English 1910-Present	48	21.5

PERCENTAGES INCLUDING RECENT YEARS

i) English Prelims

	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15
Dist.	22	19.3	23.6	25.4	25.0
Pass	74.4	79.4	74.7	72.8	75.0
Fail/Part Pass	1.8	0.4	1.7	1.8	0.0
Inc.	1.8	0.9	0	0	0

ii) Percentage of scripts awarded marks of 70+ for selected papers:

Paper	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
1. Introduction to English Language and Literature: Combined	16.6	17	19.7	22.4	20.1
2. Literature in English 650-1350	20.2	18	21.9	25.6	17.9
3. Literature in English 1830-1910	24.2	16.1	22.3	22.9	24.5
4. Literature in English 1910-Present	21.5	20.6	23.8	23.8	24.1
Overall	20.6	17.9	22	23.7	23.7

1.1.2 General Remarks

Following 2015-16's implementation of a new Faculty policy whereby all postholders who are not on externally funded leave can expect to do some exam marking every year, with Assessors for the Preliminary Examination normally being postholders, this year's Board comprised of five permanent postholders and one departmental lecturer. The assessors comprised six postholders, one departmental lecturer and two college lecturers with substantial experience of teaching the papers in question. Each paper was marked by two Board members and two assessors. The marking process ran smoothly in general, though there was confusion among some assessors as to the importance of returning scripts and marks to the Examinations Secretary in good time; it is vital to the efficiency of examining that assessors adhere strictly to deadlines.

The Board endeavoured to maintain consistency in marking by means of the now well-established practice of co-moderation. Groups of examiners and assessors for each paper (or, in the case of Paper 1, for each section of the paper) met at least once during the marking process to calibrate their borderlines and to discuss any issues arising. Problematic scripts were considered, while sample scripts at the upper and lower ends of the marking scale were compared. Appropriate Board members also checked any marks that appeared to be discrepant, and the Board as whole was careful to ensure that penalties were applied consistently and appropriately across all four papers.

Candidates on the Pass/Distinction and Pass/Fail borderlines had relevant papers re-read by suitable members of the Board. In recent years, it has become customary for the Chair to undertake all such re-reading. This year, however, the volume of re-reading meant that it was shared out. All in all, 20 candidates had papers re-read between the First and Second Marks meetings of the Board.

The arrangements for taking account of specific learning difficulties were straightforward, and no issues arose. Relevant candidates were required, as usual, to record their SpLDs on pink forms which they attached to the front of their scripts. The process governing applications for the Consideration of Mitigating Circumstances (formerly FAPs) was also reasonably

unproblematic. All applications were submitted in good time and were clearly documented. The Proctors alerted the Chair and Examinations Secretary to each new Mitigating Circumstances application by email, but the forms themselves, and supporting documentation, were stored in an electronic database. On a couple of occasions, the Proctors sent an FHS Mitigating Circumstances application to the Prelims Chair (and vice versa); such errors are obviously undesirable, but were corrected as soon as they were noted. It is not clear why the number of such applications was so much lower this year than it has been in the recent past, but it certainly made the task facing the Medical and Special Cases Committee more manageable.

The procedures around the submission of Paper 1 portfolios require attention. The Chair and Examinations Secretary are notified by email of unauthorised late submissions, and are also advised that candidates have a window of time in which to explain to the Proctors their lateness before a penalty is imposed by the Exam Board. In most cases, if such explanations were forthcoming, the Proctors communicated them to the Chair in good time.

It is by no means unusual for the Proctors to grant Paper 1 extensions to candidates who, for medical or other reasons, either know in advance that they are going to submit late, or can see in retrospect that their late submission was unavoidable.

One other issue concerning Paper 1 arose this year; various colleagues expressed anxiety about the University's system of financially penalising students who submit assessments after the deadline without the Proctors' permission or retrospective excusal. At the moment, such students are required to pay £50 per missed deadline. Given the financial pressures under which students operate, and given the University's commitment to equality of access and opportunity, it would be pleasing to see the appropriateness of these penalties reconsidered.

After a surprisingly low percentage (19.3%) of distinctions last year, it was pleasing to see this year's average rise to 22%. This takes us close to 2016-17's 23.6% and 2015-16's 25.4%. The highest number of distinctions (54 candidates; 24.2%) was achieved in Paper 3 and the lowest number (37 candidates; 16.6%) was awarded for Paper 1A and 1B combined. This relatively low number does not accurately reflect the quality of work produced by candidates for this paper. 21.1% of candidates gained a distinction on Paper 1A alone, and the same percentage on Paper 1B. However, those who were working at a distinction level on 1A did not always do as well on 1B and vice versa, which led to the apparently low overall percentage of distinctions. In some ways, this is a problem as it masks the fact that excellent work is being done on the individual component parts of this paper.

Dr Annie Sutherland
Chair of Prelims Examiners
October 2019

1.2 Conventions and Classification Criteria

As in previous years, the conventions and classification criteria were communicated to candidates in two email circulars from the Chair of Examiners. Circulars were issued in Hilary and Trinity Term. The circular for Paper 1 also explained how to access the Paper and how and when to submit the completed portfolio.

1.3 Prizes

Prizes were awarded this year as follows:

Mrs Claude Beddington Prize (for best performance in the examination): Gabriella Bailey (New)
Passmore Edwards Prizes for Classics and English: Kitty Low (Wadham)

Ten further Gibbs Prizes:

Gabriella Bailey (New)
William Butler Denby (Magdalen)
Ben Jacob (Pembroke)
Kitty Low (Wadham)
Sarah Moorhouse (Oriental)
Stepan Mysko Von Schultze (ChristChurch)
Thomas Runciman (Jesus)
Lily Smart (St. Hilda's)
Joseph Turner (St. Anne's)
Flavia Velasquez Cotini (New)

1.4 Administration and Analysis

The Mark-It database was used for the processing of marks, and E-Vision for the recording of class lists and related data. Two particular issues arose this year. First of all, the means by which information is transferred from Mark-It to E-Vision is cumbersome; ensuring that the process was free from error was very time-consuming for the Examinations Secretary and the Chair.

Paper 1 was posted on Weblearn as a downloadable file at noon on Monday of week 4 of Trinity Term, and the link was sent to candidates by email. Candidates were also given the option of collecting a hard copy from the Examinations Secretary on the same day if they were unable to access the paper electronically. In addition to submitting paper copies of their completed portfolios to the Examinations School on the submission date, candidates were required to send an electronic version of their portfolio to an email address accessible by the Examinations Secretary, inserting their candidate number in the subject-line. It was the third year in which marks were recorded separately for Section A and Section B of the paper, to be automatically communicated to candidates.

As discussed above, a small number of candidates regularly submit incomplete Paper 1 portfolios. In recent years, the Examinations Secretary has worked hard to track down missing work and to ensure that submissions are complete. This, however, leads to considerable delay in the distribution of the portfolios to the examiners and assessors. The introduction of a compulsory checklist to be included by each candidate with each portfolio will make candidates responsible for the correctness and completeness of their own submission and shorten delay.

The timed papers took place in Examination Schools this year. The process ran reasonably smoothly; all scripts were delivered in good time to the correct examiners. As is always the case, several students did not know their candidate numbers, which resulted in some disturbance in the exam room. And as has been the case in recent years, the Chair had to respond to a significant number of Paper 1 portfolio queries from candidates. This was despite the fact that, in response to a request from JCC, the Board had circulated the portfolio

presentation guidelines from the Prelims Handbook to all students in the lead up to the release of the question paper. It is hoped that the proposed Paper 1 Checklist (discussed above) will obviate the need for the vast majority of these queries.

The Board would like to thank Angie Johnson, the Examinations Secretary, for her remarkable attention to detail and good humour in dealing with various complex and time-consuming issues and in navigating the various databases. Thanks are also due to Andy Davice for answering several queries and for his assistance in dealing with the Mitigating Circumstances applications.

1.5 Reports on Individual Papers

Paper 1: An Introduction to English Language and Literature

Section A

There were some excellent commentaries for this paper. Candidates chose imaginative passages that enabled them to construct powerful arguments through close analysis of the language. The best scripts showed accurate and judicious deployment of linguistic terminology, sensitive and appropriate use of electronic corpora and search tools (if relevant to the question), and in answer to question 8 a robust and scholarly attention to the changes in English language over time.

Question 2 drew some excellent work on non-binary linguistic expression and acute arguments about its significance and its challenges. There was creative and probing work in answer to question 3 on figurative language: fine theoretical thinking matched with attention to linguistic description. Some very intelligent answers to this question occasionally drifted away from the detail of the passages to more philosophical abstract discussion. Candidates who write on this topic in future papers are advised not to lose sight of the requirement in the rubric for close analysis. Question 7 produced some finely analytic work on dictionary entries compared with vocabulary used in context; weaker answers here tended to use dictionaries as unquestioned authorities rather than sites for exploration. Question 4 was a popular choice. The best answers here did not simply illustrate the quotation but challenged its implications through the evidence drawn from the passages. It was a surprise that question 5 drew very little response given the opportunity to write on media language and/or language and race.

There was more flexibility in type of questions this year to enable candidates, if they so wished, to select aspects of a quotation for discussion. There was some very fine analysis of discourse, context and pragmatics in answer to question 6. Weaker answers tended to list rhetorical terminology especially in speeches by Trump and his adversaries which didn't engage closely enough with the argumentative potential of the question. Question 1 solicited some finely judged commentaries that took full advantage of the scope of writing on non-standard and standard English. Overall, it was a genuine pleasure to read the work submitted for this paper. The passages chosen were from a huge variety of media, genre and discourse: poetry, prose fiction, drama. Official transcripts of speeches or dialogue were also popular (though candidates are reminded that it is important to use published transcripts of any material originally delivered in oral form). Social media sites yielded fruitful commentaries, though occasionally candidates did not gloss media specific symbols or abbreviations. There was some excellent choice of journalism passages, and sometimes the less predictable ones produced more

nuanced analysis. Advertising also was a creative domain though it is important when searching to make sure that the date and where the advert appeared form part of the discussion.

Where commentaries were less impressive, there were a number of recurring issues. In analysis of, say, US English, it is important to use US derived dictionaries and corpora. Some discussion of literary texts lost close focus on the language though this is becoming much less common. Some passages did not make a good pair for discussion because they were either too far apart in subject matter, or because there was too much similarity in their language profiles to generate robust discussion. The best answers on gender, whether to question 2 or question 4 went well beyond the still (sadly) prevalent equation of the word 'gender' with 'woman'. The work of critics such as Dale Spender and Robin Lakoff was sometimes used uncritically. Some scripts produced a litany of terminology without examining its implication and/or referred constantly to 'the word X'. More precise formulations of this phrase were 'the adjective X' or the 'preposition X'. That is not to suggest that every word need be grammatically tagged, but it is important to show some knowledge of the parts of speech, and also that vocabulary may have contested meanings. Discussion of language and power did not always locate the context of the passages which attenuated the power of the argument. Some answers on figurative language were confined only to Lakoff and Johnson, and took figurative language as a given. Some passages reached the maximum of 70 lines allowed and diminished the opportunity for close analysis because there was simply too much material. Some candidates submitted passages which were separate segments of a whole piece separated by ellipses. A brief ellipsis is permissible, but not a series of excerpts.

The most significant factor in lower marked commentaries was failure to comply with the presentation rubric. Some commentaries were submitted without the passages attached. It is impossible to mark this work without them and candidates were penalised. Fortunately some were available through the electronic submission. Several commentaries failed to include line numbers. This makes it hard both for the candidate to analyse closely, and for the examiner to read closely; it is not a cosmetic requirement. Some passages were printed out in such a small font, or photocopied thus that a magnifying glass was called for. Dates of texts were often given as the modern edition when the language was much earlier. The original date of composition is important for providing the right context. Bibliographies often needed work: some were not alphabetised; some were missing; many were wildly inconsistent in formatting. Word counts were often absent. Also page numbers: this is again, not cosmetic. Next year all candidates will be provided with a tick box checklist to ensure that they have submitted their work correctly so that otherwise very good work does not get penalised for formatting which is essential to the legibility of the work.

Section B

All of the questions on this part of the paper were tackled. The most popular were question 2 ('literature is a form of play'), question 4 ('the proper shape of the narrative'), and question 11 (history / identity). Together these three questions accounted for 43% of the responses. The least popular were question 3 (communicative vs. literary language), question 6 (lyric poetry and memorability), and question 13 (literature vs. theory), which together accounted for only 9% of responses.

There was a very welcome diversity of approach. Some students focused primarily on works of literary theory, demonstrating a clear understanding of the possibilities and limits of particular critical ideas. Others worked out their arguments through close readings of literary texts, demonstrating that literary writing is not simply an object to be illuminated by theory, and how it engages its own forms of thinking. Regardless of the approach, all of the strong essays featured a close engagement with the question, and developed a coherent and lucid argument about some aspect of the nature and value of literature.

Equally striking was the diversity of material that was tackled. Candidates are clearly being exposed to a wide variety of critical approaches, many of which are very contemporary. There was little sign of the dutiful survey of canonical theorists or texts that examiners have complained about in the past. However weaker answers appeared unaware of the contribution of major critics and theorists to the debates they were discussing, and had a weak or non-existent grasp of their hinterland. Essays sometimes presented ideas in a very atomised way, suggesting that the candidate was unaware of the historical genesis of the ideas under discussion, and of how schools and debates intersect.

Many answers engaged with literary criticism rather than literary theory. While this is certainly permissible, at times the candidates who took this approach struggled to define the larger questions at stake in a particular literary critical discussion, meaning that the argument got lost in the detail. A related issue is the use of literary texts, and the cross-pollination that is clearly taking place between paper 1b and (especially) papers 3 and 4. These different papers are of course meant to be mutually informing, and it is good to see candidates using knowledge and ideas from one paper to enrich understanding in another. However it is important to note that essays for 1b should address the particular kind of questions posed on this paper, which are about general matters to do with the nature and value of literature. If literary texts or aspects of literary history are being used, then the wider implications of the material under discussion should be foregrounded and clearly specified within the argument.

A number of candidates failed to engage with either the terms or even the spirit of the prompt, choosing instead to make a quick pivot into an essay that read as pre-fabricated. Given the amount of time students have to compose their response, that level of irrelevance cannot be excused, and it was invariably penalised. In some cases, essays tried to do more than was feasible in 2,000 words, bringing too many thinkers and texts into contact. These essays tended to be descriptive and rushed, and offered relatively superficial readings. Candidates who gave themselves more time to engage thoroughly with a particular theorist or author tended to perform better than those who gave very quick summaries of many theorists or authors, as they were able to show a more sophisticated engagement with the materials. However this was not universally the case, and the strongest essays were deftly able to demonstrate range as well as depth. Many essays gave misleading or puzzling characterizations of key ideas from thinkers such as Saussure, Bakhtin, Derrida, etc. When such characterizations appeared quickly and then were not used or developed, it gave a strong impression that the candidate simply did not understand the material under discussion.

As last year's examiners' report also commented, several weaker essays on theatre provided potted histories of statements about drama from Aristotle to the present, rather than engaging in detail with the most relevant works of dramatic theory for the question. Many responses to question 4 ('the proper shape of the narrative'), and question 11 (history / identity) were lacking

in sophistication, tending to rely upon unexamined assumptions about how literary texts might be said to represent or express an identity, and the merits of their doing so.

Another point of continuity with last year's report is that a number of candidates lost marks due to inadequate care in presentation. This included grammar and spelling mistakes, and poor attention to the style and citation guidelines in the Prelims handbook.

Paper 2: Early Medieval Literature, c. 650-1350

The examiners were impressed by the overall quality of work on Paper 2 this year. The majority of candidates are clearly engaging with the language and literature of this period both enthusiastically and critically. At the top of the scale, there was some remarkably sophisticated and assured work which it was an absolute pleasure to read.

In terms of essays, the best scripts dealt in detail with texts in their original language, while also having a sense of ongoing critical debate around the materials discussed. It was pleasing to see that relatively few candidates infringed the rubric requiring them to demonstrate substantial knowledge of at least three texts across the two essays; the majority of essays covered an appropriate range of material and those candidates who did infringe this rubric were penalised accordingly. Candidates who failed to show knowledge of texts in their original language across the two essays were also penalised and, in some cases, failed. In this context, it is worth repeating a point made in last year's Examiners' Report: it is impossible to do well in this paper unless one demonstrates an adequate knowledge of either Old or Early Middle English. It is also worth reminding candidates of the general rule that no more than 1/3rd of a paper should focus on texts originally written in a language other than English. For example, if a candidate wishes to write on Anglo-Norman or Latin material (either in translation or in the original), they should do so for no more than the equivalent of one essay.

It is important to emphasise that there is not one 'set' way of doing well in the essay section of this paper. Many candidates who wrote on a wide range of texts were marked very favourably, while others who covered a similar range were less successful. As long as the basic requirement of at least three texts across the two essays is met, the marks awarded are based entirely on the *quality* of the candidate's engagement and analysis of the material in question. It is just as possible to gain a distinction for an essay which covers one or two texts in perceptive detail as it is to gain a distinction for an essay which covers a wider range of material in a nuanced fashion. This year, some very good essay work crossed the divide between pre- and post-Conquest material. This coverage is not necessary to get a good mark (a lot of good scripts did not do it) but it is possible, and many of the candidates who had worked on both sides of the Conquest had clearly benefited from the experience. In general, whatever their particular focus, the very best of the essays were those which responded directly and thoughtfully to the title quotation.

All of the 19 essay questions on the paper were attempted, though some were much more popular than others. A significant number of candidates chose to respond to Question 3, on gender and/or women. Many of these essays were very sophisticated and assured; some focussed successfully on close readings of either Old English or later medieval material and others ranged across the pre- and post-Conquest periods, teasing out continuities and apparent differences. A few candidates problematically equated gender with 'women' but many engaged

more subtly with the title quotation and prompt. Another popular question was 7, which invited candidates to think about distinctions between the human and the non-human. Several wrote about monsters in the *Beowulf* manuscript in this context, and some of those essays were very good. Others chose to respond with reference to, for example, the riddles and their animation of inanimate objects, or the saints and their 'superhuman' qualities. Many of these essays were ingenious, creative and a real pleasure to read. As always, transience proved a popular topic, so Question 9 (a quotation from the *Loue-Ron* of Thomas Hales) was frequently attempted, most often with reference to Old English elegiac writing. The best of these essays managed to interrogate the quotation, thinking carefully about the ways in which Hales' words are both applicable to – and problematized by – Anglo-Saxon thoughts about the human experience of time and loss.

In the commentary section of the paper, very few candidates wrote on the Middle English passages. Of the two Old English extracts, *The Dream of the Rood* was significantly more popular than *The Battle of Maldon*. The best of the candidates writing on *Maldon* knew the poem well enough to comment in detail about the ways in which Byrhtnoth's speech echoed and twisted the language of the Viking messenger, while the weaker scripts tended to make observations about the high density of language related to war and weapons which could be said of almost any part of the poem. With reference to the *Rood* commentaries, nearly all were much stronger on the first third of the passage than the rest of it, and some barely mentioned anything from 'Nu ðu miht gehyran' onward. Among the many good commentaries, however, there were a lot of thoughtful responses to the effect of the hypermetric lines and relevant observations about overlexicalization and alliteration and other structural features. It is, though, worth pointing out that while an awareness of (for example) alliteration, metrical variety, repetition and variation are necessary and welcome, some candidates relied too much on generally saying that these features were present, without pointing out why they were interesting or how they made a difference. As ever, the weakest commentaries on both extracts either tended towards vague summary of the text from which the passage was taken or exhibited very limited understanding of the original language; unfortunately, these two characteristics were sometimes to be found in conjunction.

The failure to refer to line numbers made some of the commentaries very difficult to follow, particularly when the candidate didn't happen to move sequentially through the passage. The provision of titles indicating the text from which the passage was taken, introduced for the first time this year, did not seem to have a significant impact (either positive or negative) on overall performance, but we hope that it eased candidates' pre-exam anxiety over the (mis)identification of passages. It is a practice which will be continued in future years.

Paper 3: Literature in English, 1830-1910

All questions on the paper were answered, with a welcome treatment of both canonical and non-canonical texts. Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell, Tennyson, Browning (EB and R), Carlyle, Darwin, Ruskin, Rossetti (DG and C), Hopkins, Swinburne, Wilde were among the most frequently discussed authors; Trollope, Thackeray, Arnold, Pater, Collins, Braddon less frequently; while others such as Kingsley, Hemans, Webster, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Symons added range to several candidates' essays. The standard was pleasingly high, with several scripts reaching into the higher Distinction bracket and others forming a notable cluster of high Passes and low Distinctions. The very best scripts were of remarkable quality, and were a pleasure to

read. These essays produced fine, agile readings of the texts in relation to contemporary contexts or relevant literary or conceptual frameworks and incisive argument. The most distinctive answers revealed the value of exploring a wider context for textual analysis (whether theoretical, literary, or historical) and they often sustained robust critical perspectives on the title question/quotation while formulating independent argument. Deft close reading was informed by a sense of genre and literary precedent, and these answers found elegant, sophisticated ways of balancing breadth and depth. The best answers demonstrated an awareness of the literariness of their chosen texts, and scrutinized the author's poetic, narrative or dramatic strategies. The large majority of candidates displayed an impressive ability to anchor their argument in detailed quotations from both primary and secondary texts. Stronger candidates were admirably ready to engage actively with critics and to argue against received opinions.

There were, however, a number of pervasive issues. Less successful responses tended to offer loose generalisations about the 'Victorian era' and nineteenth-century social conditions and attitudes, offering stale allusions to a 'crisis of faith', or about the period as a time of 'unprecedented change', rather than situating their literary arguments accurately with precise contextual evidence. Quotations were sometimes randomly selected without relevance to the particular points they were supposed to support, and an over-reliance on very familiar material or examples tended to create predictable answers. While popular texts such as *Hard Times*, *Middlemarch*, *Bleak House* or 'My Last Duchess' and 'Porphyria's Lover' were often treated to sophisticated analysis, the weaker answers tended to draw on over-used aspects of these texts to present assertions lacking in focus. In several cases a tendency to write over-long introductions and/or conclusions limited the space for sustained analysis and developing argument. On the other hand, lack of engagement with the terms of the title-quotation when explicitly called for weakened a number of answers.

Choice and number of texts for consideration in a single essay also presented some problems. Some scripts tended to take on too much (jumping from one author to another in quick succession) or too little (for example, a study of just two or three short lyrics). Some candidates responded to questions by referring to two disparate texts without constructing an overarching argument to validate their pairing; the best candidates were not content to offer a comparison simply because their chosen authors happened to discuss the same themes, but asked why it might make sense to place certain authors or texts in dialogue.

The best candidates were intellectually ambitious and creative. Some of the most engaging arguments on literature and science revealed how Darwin's influence works *differently* across distinctive genres. Some of the best answers on poetic innovation in the period addressed the genre's competition with the novel and other forms and produced fine readings of *In Memoriam*, *Aurora Leigh* and *The Ring and the Book*. Others produced exquisitely close analyses of language and form in writers such as Emily Dickinson and Hopkins. Some dynamically explored the distinctiveness of the American literary field, while some not only identified non-canonical texts, but thought about and analysed them with rigour. Others engaged with issues of race, gender, and empire in non-reductive and nuanced ways. Some candidates acknowledged the sheer variety of their authors' careers and output – as in, for example, Eliot's letters, fiction, and essays. These fully realised the complexities, contradictions and inconsistencies within a single text or across a group of texts and gave a good sense of an author's development over time.

Paper 4: Literature in English, 1910-Present

The best answers explicitly addressed the question and quotation, developed a clearly articulated argument, drew substantially on the texts discussed, and used historical and/or theoretical contextual knowledge judiciously. Some of the strongest essays examined the position of different texts within a single author's oeuvre, exploring the dialogue between different moments in a developing intellectual trajectory. Other successful answers considered the way in which texts by several authors were in dialogue with each other about a particular question (such as racial identity, or urban experience, or the experience of commodity culture). Other equally strong essays examined the way a substantial or complex single text engaged or disrupted a particular critical paradigm or theory. In particular, strong essays were differentiated from weaker work by the fact that they made clear the genuine relevance of the chosen text or texts to the question, and (if dealing with more than one text), gave a strong rationale for comparing texts, which was attentive to difference as well as similarity.

Weaker answers often invoked historical contexts or statements about genres or forms in an over-generalised way, or conducted their discussion at some remove from the specificities of the primary texts. In such essays, re-descriptions of plot or summaries of secondary criticism supplanted sustained critical analysis. One of the major trends in weaker and middling essays was a failure to structure an argument that made effective use of comparison. Many answers featured two texts, drawn from very different historical moments, placed together on a slight thematic pretext, from which it was extremely difficult to build a cogent and substantial argument. Candidates frequently presented different texts as repetitions of the same point, rather than as developments or significant variations. In last year's report it was observed that the best essays 'nearly always took a good range of work into account (at least two substantial works)'. It may be the case that candidates have taken this observation too literally as a recipe for success (which it is not), while ignoring the examiners' proviso that such comparisons always had a clear rationale, in which 'comparison and contrast between the works contributed to the development of the argument'.

It was noticeable that the theoretical lessons that Paper 1b is designed to teach had not been learned in relation to this paper. Many essays featured unexamined assumptions around authorial intention, 'reality', narrative, character and identity. The examiners also noted a number of points around lack of ambition and intellectual ownership of ideas. Range, depth, and precision are all identified in the marking criteria. If a candidate decides to answer on a single text, that text should be substantial and complex enough to enable an answer of range and depth, as well as precision. When a reading of a single text was good, which was often the case, it could nevertheless be let down by lacking intellectual reach—if it was not developed into an argument that could comment on a cultural or historical situation, or a theoretical question, or a developing oeuvre. For a single text answer to be successful, relevant historical or theoretical contextualisation is required to frame the significance of the reading. A related point is the tendency of candidates to avoid addressing the more challenging or unfamiliar parts of a writer's oeuvre. While there was a large amount of work on Joyce, a surprising amount clustered on the early writings, without addressing *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*. Discussions of Pound discussed his imagist poems and 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley', but rarely broached *The Cantos*. There were many essays on *The Waste Land*, but much less work on *Ash Wednesday* or *Four Quartets*. Virginia Woolf's oeuvre was better represented, though very little attention was paid to her fiction prior to *Jacob's Room*, and most essays focused on *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the*

Lighthouse. The use of literary criticism was an area that differentiated candidates very markedly. The weakest essays tended to side line criticism entirely, writing essays that ignored critical debates. The middle range of essays typically quoted critics as a form of authoritative description, without actually engaging with their arguments. The best essays displayed independence: critical opinions were quoted in a discriminating way, in order to extend, qualify, or create debate with the candidate's own argument.

All the questions were attempted. The two most popular by some way were question 1 (Lawrence on the 'tragic age'), and 7 (Casanova on literature asserting independence from political and national issues), with questions 15 (Woolf on flinging representation to the winds) and 13 (Richardson on the insufficiency of formal frameworks) the runners up. Questions 19 (Lowell on the poet's audience) and 3 (West on material culture) attracted the smallest number of answers. As last year's report noted, the questions that invited candidates to discuss 'any aspect' of a quotation sometimes elicited essays very loosely related to the question, decontextualizing individual words and phrases. While the rubric of the question did not disallow this, the answers that engaged with the particular problems and tensions the question quotation raised had a level of subtlety and complexity that pre-prepared answers usually lacked. Some questions presented recurrent problems. In answering question 5 (a) ('Discuss how writers of the period have drawn on the work of their predecessors'), many candidates answered generally on tradition, allusion, or intertextuality, without any discussion of particular predecessors. In answering question 9, several candidates misunderstood the quotation, and argued against what they perceived as Lola Ridge's devaluing of 'concrete art expression' by women. In answering question 7, candidates struggled to think about the relationship between literature and politics in a conceptual way, and tended to ignore the specific terms of the question. In answering question 17 (Foucault on the soul and the body), a number of candidates simply inverted the relationship Foucault set up, sidestepping the whole point of the quotation. Those that did answer the question more directly frequently turned Foucault's 'soul' into 'self' or 'consciousness' or 'mind' or 'spirit', without taking the opportunity to examine the difference between Foucault's term and that of their chosen author.

There were a small number of rubric violations which resulted in mark penalties. These included: writing substantial parts of essays on work published before 1910; writing more than a third of a paper on a text not originally written in English; writing substantially on the same author in more than one question.

Beckett and Woolf were the most popular authors on this paper, followed by Eliot, Joyce, Mansfield, Bishop, Moore, Pound, and Yeats. But this does not capture the admirably wide range of works that were addressed, representing a variety of genres, dating from right across the period, and written by authors of many different nationalities. A near-complete list of authors addressed is: Achebe, Ackroyd, Adichie, Amis (Martin), Alexander (Elizabeth), Anand, Anderson (Sherwood), Arimah, Ashbery, Atwood, Auden, Auster, Baldwin, Baraka, Barker (Pat), Barnes (Djuna and Julian), Barth, Beckett, Betjeman, Bird (Hera Lindsay), Bishop, Bowen, Brathwaite, Brooke, Brooks (Gwendolyn), Burgess, Burroughs, Butterworth, Capote, Carson, Carter, Carver, Cather, Chiang, Churchill, Coetzee, Crane, Cummings, Cusk, DeLillo, Diaz, Dixon, Eliot, Ellis (Brett Easton), Ellison, Faulkner, Fitzgerald (F. Scott and Penelope), Flint, Forster, Foster Wallace, Fowles, Frame, Frost, Gass, Ginsberg, Glaspell, Green, Gunn, Hall (Radclyffe), Hamid (Mohsin), Hansberry, Hare, Harrison (Tony), H.D., Heaney, Hemingway, Hollinghurst, Hughes (Langston and Ted), Hulme, Hurston, Huxley, Isherwood, Ishiguro, Jackson (Shirley), Jacobs-Jenkins, Jones (David), Joyce, Kane, Kavenagh, Kerouac, Keyes, Kincaid, Kunzru, Kureshi,

Kushner, Larkin, Lawrence, Lee (Harper), Lessing, Lewis (Wyndham), Lord Kitchener, Lorde, Lowell (Robert), Loy, MacNeice, Malamud, Mansfield, McCarthy, McCullers, McEwan, McKay, Merrill, Mighty Sparrow, Miller, Minnis (Chelsey), Mirrlees, Monro, Moore, Morrison, Murray (Les), Nabokov, Naipaul, Nelson, Nin, Nottage, Nugent, O'Brien, O'Casey, O'Connor, O'Hara, Okigbo, Orwell, Osborne, Owen, Pinter, Plath, Pound, Pym, Pynchon, Raban, Rankine, Rhys, Rich, Riley, Rose-Innes, Roth, Roy, Robinson (Marilyn), Rushdie, Sassoon, Selvon, Sexton, Sheers, Shepard, Sinclair (Iain), Smart, Smith (Ali, Stevie, and Zadie), Sontag, Soyinka, Spark, Stein, Steinbeck, Stoppard, Suleri, Sullivan (Hannah), Tartt, Toomer, Vonnegut, Walcott, Walters, Waugh, Webb (Charles), West (Rebecca), Williams (Tennessee and William Carlos), Wilson (August), Woolf, Wright, Yeats.

2 FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL IN CLASSICS AND ENGLISH, ENGLISH AND MODERN LANGUAGES AND HISTORY AND ENGLISH

2.1 Overview

I begin with strong thanks to the FHS Board, who were all wonderfully helpful in setting and marking papers and in contributing to decisions on our practice. Particular thanks are due to Emma Smith for her role as Deputy Chair, where she was especially valuable in the Mitigating Circumstances discussions and in the Final Marks Meeting. Beyond this the Faculty as a whole was willing and efficient when it came to assessing and agreeing marks. All of this, of course, is coordinated by Angie Johnson, whose experience and dedication does so much to make the job of Chair a manageable one. The demands of her job are clearly growing in this more information-hungry and stress-prone age. I thank her warmly for working above and beyond. Andy Davice was also very helpful, especially when it came to the Mitigating Circumstances Sub-Committee. My thanks go out to the staff of the Examination Schools and the Proctors' office. The Board congratulates the FHS cohort of 2019 for their performance in Finals. On the whole, the standard was very high and performances at the top were truly outstanding, with the Externals remarking that they felt some of the submissions worthy of publication in journals they edit.

There were no penalties for late submissions of papers examined by submitted work. There were, however, a very large number of late submissions for which Proctorial exemptions from penalties were given.

Professor Bart van Es
Chair of FHS Examiners
October 2019

2.2 Statistics

There were 233 candidates, of whom 16 took Course II.

The breakdown of results is as follows:

Outcome	1st	2.1	2.2	3	Pass
Numbers	79	154	0	0	0

No 'Alternative Firsts' (requiring four marks at or above 70 but only the lower average of 67.5) were awarded.

Percentages including recent years:

	1 st	2.1	2.2	3	Pass
2014	26%	72%	1%	0%	0.5%
2015	27.8%	71%	0.8%	0%	0%
2016	31.4%	67.2%	1.3%	0%	0%
2017	31.1%	67.5%	1.3%	0%	0%
2018	39.7%	58.0%	0.9%	0.5%	0.9%
2019	33.9%	66.1%	0%	0%	0%

The number of Firsts awarded was significantly lower than last year (in 2018 there were 87 Firsts). As is clear from the above table, the percentage of Firsts awarded has risen fairly steadily in the last half decade. The 2018 percentage, however, looks to have been outlier.

The External Examiners (who were all also in place in 2017 and 2018) gave particular scrutiny to the 2.1/1st Class borderline and expressed satisfaction that classification there was entirely correct. Although the distinction between a high 2.1 and a First can be a fine one, it is, nevertheless, quite marked.

The Externals did express some concern about the lack of 2.2 classifications. In their opinion, the work by candidates at the bottom of the ranking was sometimes marked a little too leniently.

2.3 Examiners and assessors

All papers were double blind marked. In accordance with the Guide to Examiners, all papers were automatically third marked in cases where the initial marks varied by 15 marks or more or by two classes. Cases of such variance were fairly rare, but large marks disparities were sometimes generated by disagreement between examiners on the relevance criterion. In light of this, candidates are strongly advised to do as much as they can to make the case for the relevance of their work to the title quotation. Such relevance needs to be something more substantial than the fixing on a single word.

Six markers were used to assess each of Course I's papers 1 to 5. A 'semi-circular' marking system to blur the boundaries between marking pairs was used. Statistical material provided at the First Marks Meeting on marker profiles and the distribution of marks across papers was carefully considered. Borderline and special cases were identified in advance of the First Marks Meeting and were individually scrutinised not only for their place in the rank order but also in comparison with others with similar marks profiles and averages. As noted above, the External Examiners read the scripts of borderline candidates in their entirety. They also read the full run of scripts of candidates at the top and the bottom end of the ranking.

2.4 Training

The Chair held a training session in Michaelmas term for those new to Oxford marking. He also met one-to-one with individual markers at various points to provide advice.

2.5 Prizes

Prizes were awarded this year as follows:

Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize (Paper 1: Shakespeare Portfolio): Laura Hackett (Brasenose)

Gibbs Prize for the Best Dissertation (Paper 7): Dan Evans (Pembroke)

Gibbs Prize for Best Extended Essay (Paper 6): Caitlin Coulson (Harris Manchester)

Gibbs Prize for Best Overall Performance in Course I: John Colley (Jesus)

Gibbs Prize for Best Overall Performance in Course II: Dan Evans (Pembroke)

Gibbs Prize for Best performance in a 3-hour timed examination: John Colley (Jesus)

Eight further Gibbs Prizes for distinguished performance (awarded in order of average, excluding existing prize winners)

1. Georgina Quach (St Catherine's)
2. Nicholas Smart (New College)
3. Constance Kampfner (Jesus)
4. William Baker (Corpus Christi)
5. Isabelle Stuart (Balliol)
6. Thomas Rees (Trinity)
7. Hugo Murphy (Magdalen)
8. Daniel Fried (New College)

2.6 Reports on Individual Papers

Examiners Reports are not submitted for papers with 3 candidates or fewer.

2.6.1 Course I

FHS Examiners Reports 2018-2019

SUBMITTED PAPERS

Paper 1: Shakespeare Portfolio

259 candidates took this paper (a number that includes Joint Schools). The general standard was high with some exceptional submissions. The best work tended to come from candidates with a well-defined subject or approach who combined detailed contextual or theoretical elements with refined and nuanced close-readings. While the range of texts and topics was quite wide – including aspects of textual bibliography, genre, style, performance, adaptation

and reception (on stage, screen, and in the visual arts) – there was less engagement with Shakespeare’s non-dramatic work, or his relationship with his contemporary playwrights, or with Early Modern theatre criticism or controversy. Some fine essays engaged with the specificities of dramatic form and their deeper implications for the ways in which theatre interrogates modes of knowing and being. The best portfolios displayed an admirable ability to locate their chosen texts within the wider canon of Shakespeare’s work, but many others seemed rather narrowly focussed with a sort of tunnel vision on their chosen texts that precluded productive comparisons and contrasts. In some instances the quest for ‘originality’ prompted the choice of comparatively obscure, technical topics that afforded little opportunity for wider critical development. By contrast, some of the most genuinely original essays produced innovative readings, particularly at the stylistic level, of major texts. There were some excellent cross-generic studies that yielded highly innovative insights, but in other cases questions of genre were less well handled, displaying a lack of understanding of the complexity of the issues involved. Generally speaking, essays on various aspects of adaptation and reception were less well handled than others, with candidates resorting more to description, and even synopsis, than analysis. There was also a tendency in such instances to lose sight of the implications of the study for the interpretation of the original Shakespearean texts. Essays on audience response tended to resort to broad generalizations rather than engaging with particular reviews or related archival evidence, and many essays on film adaptation showed little acquaintance with the language of film criticism. The range of candidates’ critical reading was sometimes disappointing with essays on textual bibliography and performance relying heavily on a handful of well-known studies, and there was a notable tendency for historical, social, and intellectual backgrounds to be rather sketchy or display a limited understanding of the field. Finally, a significant number of portfolios failed to meet the expected standards of presentation with poor proof-reading, inconsistent modes of footnoting and referencing, syntactical errors, and poorly constructed bibliographies.

Paper 6: Special Options

Border Crossings

8 candidates took this paper. The overall standard of work for this paper was high, with most candidates exploring varieties of borders in a rich array of medieval and early modern texts, and drawing upon a range of relevant critical and theoretical material. Candidates also made particularly effective use of material culture, often using the trajectories through which objects moved in the pre-modern world to illuminate the dynamics of the texts upon which they were focusing. While the strongest extended essays moved deftly between different kinds of texts and materials, the weaker ones sometimes leapt between texts, contexts and periods without paying sufficient attention to the nature of the conceptual moves that they were making, or justifying them in sufficient detail.

Comparative Literature

14 candidates took this paper. The standard of work was high. The literatures brought into comparative relationship with English were French, Italian, Spanish, German and Russian. Many essays paired writers in a shared time-frame (ranging from the early modern period to the present); others explored translations or multilingual writing. The best work combined excellent close reading and contextualisation with a strong methodological frame; where essays were less successful it tended to be because the comparative discussion was less clearly justified.

Contemporary Canadian Literature and Cosmopolitanism

9 candidates took this paper. The standard of this paper was good. This paper considers the cultural, intellectual, and historical influences on contemporary Canadian writing and the best essays did one of 2 things: either they covered a wide variety of texts and intricately knit them together, or they examined a narrow range of texts in great depth. The topics addressed included style and affect, touch and mourning, cinema, social justice. The range of texts covered included the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the writings of Eden Robinson, David Chariandy, Dionne Brand, and Philippe Falardeau.

Film Criticism

17 candidates took this paper and, as always, the overall standard was impressive. Nearly all the work showed initiative and resourcefulness. Inevitably given the condensed time available for teaching, the option tends to emphasise skills and critical method, and the students showed they could ably transfer these to the films of their choice. Students engaged with the films analytically and imaginatively.

Hit & Myth: Re-inventing the Medieval for the Modern Age

15 candidates took this paper and produced pleasingly diverse work focussed on post-medieval responses to and adaptations of medieval materials. The standard was generally impressive. The Poetic Edda and Malory proved popular this year, but across the group a wide range of medieval texts in several languages were addressed. Post-medieval works tackled included films, music and visual art, as well as prose and verse. The majority of candidates chose to write on twentieth- and twenty-first-century medievalisms, but there was excellent work on earlier periods. Most showed good understanding of medieval as well as medievalist materials, with the best work offering precise and engaged analysis of both. Several candidates made productive use of theoretical approaches, and there was thoughtful consideration of historical context and the politics of medievalisms. The candidates' enthusiasm for their topics was evident: the majority of pieces were thoughtful and well researched. Where weaknesses emerged, these were generally in structure and argumentation. Some submissions tried to cover too much loosely-related material, and several contained first-class analysis within 2:1

framing. Presentation standards were variable: candidates are reminded that care should be taken with referencing, formatting and prose style. The strongest submissions clearly showed candidates taking full advantage of the opportunity to develop and refine topics over the term.

Literature and Revolution

13 candidates took this paper. The general standard of work for 'Literature and Revolution' was high. The paper invites inter-disciplinary work and most of the essays dealt well with the methodological challenges that this entails, integrating close textual analysis with ideas drawn from the history of political thought. In weaker responses the text and its formal dimensions got a little lost in the pursuit 'big' ideas. Very occasionally, students produced readings of texts that seemed entirely removed from the concerns of the paper. A diverse range of authors and topics were chosen - from the historiography of the French Revolution to the politics of emotion in Gaskell to philosophies of history in Naipaul - and students were largely successful in delimiting their object of inquiry to allow for a focussed 5000-6000-word essay. Most essays tended to concentrate on a particular historical moment, but those that engaged in cross-historical comparisons generally avoided crude anachronism.

Literature and Science

14 students took this option, and this year's work was generally of a very high standard and a pleasure to read. From the outset the course encourages students to devise their own independent research project, and students responded well to this framework. The very best essays showed an alertness to key words in literary texts that were not conspicuously technical but which, through careful historical contextualization, could be shown to have scientific connotations, and they pursued the literary implications of those connections. Essays varied in terms of the number of literary texts examined: some took only one novel or non-fictional text, but richly contextualized it in relation a wide range of literary and non-literary texts, discourses, and ideas; others focused on around three literary texts but related them to a narrower range of contextual material. Some were adventurous in their choice of texts, while others found new things to say about canonical works. The best essays framed their work in relation to relevant secondary literature, and were not afraid, when appropriate, to engage critically with leading figures in the field. The weakest essays went astray in various ways: by imagining a direct and unmediated relation between literary texts and their scientific contexts; by choosing themes that were too broad; by failing to analyse and define key terms in their analysis; by failing to set up an over-arching argument; and, to a lesser extent, by expression that was inappropriately colloquial or imprecise. Nevertheless, even the weaker ones had moments of originality and independence.

Others and J. M. Coetzee

10 candidates took this paper, which considers Coetzee's work into dialogue with a range of different thinkers, writers, artists, and forms. The course's encouragement to students to think

with Coetzee in this way produced some excellent work and allowed students to revisit some established areas of scholarly debate on new terms (the language of African or postcolonial literature, English in its many world variants, the relationship between literature and other art forms, the relationship between literature and politics, etc). At its best it produced some original scholarship and insights into Coetzee's work, and many of the essays drew upon published accounts of the Coetzee archive or indeed original archival material. It is worth noting that the course rubric presents a challenge to students in terms of how they frame and develop the various kinds of comparison at stake here. The strongest candidates were able to define and justify their choice of texts, and develop a clear and illuminating argument. The weaker essays struggled to articulate the value of bringing together the materials they deployed, or fell back on oversimple ways of describing literary texts and literary dialogue.

Otherworlds and Underworlds

15 candidates took this paper. The option was designed to allow for the comparison of classical, medieval, and modern literatures in several languages and it produced some very impressive submissions. In particular, the hope that Book 6 of Virgil's Aeneid would be taken as a touchstone was richly repaid. Work was received which looked at the Homeric background to Virgil's underworld or compared Virgil with Lucan, while other candidates looked ahead to Dante. The best candidates in this mode engaged impressively with the critical heritage and scholarly consensus in Classics and Modern Languages; in general many candidates clearly enjoyed exploring a second discipline with some rigour. There was a strong medieval focus in much of the work, with particularly good work on concepts of the otherworld in Marie de France and medieval Welsh and Irish texts. There was especially good material also on purgatorial otherworlds in Dante, Peter of Cornwall, and Marie. Some candidates looked further afield, considering texts drawing on German and French fairytales and Slavic folklore, or looking at contemporary novels. There were some problems: some topics were ill-defined or arbitrary, and a number of essays felt broken-backed in that the comparison between texts of different genres, forms, or eras was not worked through effectively. That said, there were some exceptionally creative and scholarly pieces submitted for this option, which repaid its eclecticism.

Poetics of Evidence

There were 9 candidates for this option. 'Poetics of Evidence' introduced students to the idea that legal and moral standards of truth and proof are poetically made, just as fiction is. The course ranged from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries and covered a range of genres, so students had to think hard about how to select their material and structure their investigation of its evidential poetics. On the whole, this challenge was met extremely well by this year's group of students, almost all of whom were able to range chronologically in their discussion of evidential paradigms and their relation to fiction. About half the cohort paid attention to early modern literary texts (sixteenth century plays, early museum catalogues, witchcraft pamphlets)

while the other half concentrated on more modern texts (nineteenth-century novels, detective fiction, short stories). Most of the essays in both groups, however, were alive to distinctions between models of truth/proof (ethical witnessing, oath-taking, description, narrative order) and handled these creatively and well.

Possibilities of Criticism

13 candidates took this paper. The work produced by students on this paper was very largely of high quality, with a number of essays displaying real ingeniousness and critical invention. Students were invited either to write critiques of formally innovative criticism, or to assay their own versions of the same, the only criterion being that their methods should be justified by how they help reveal or respond to their chosen texts, or to the act of criticism itself. Set texts that proved particularly inspirational as subject or model included works by Kierkegaard, Simone Weil, Maggie Nelson, Coetzee, Geoff Dyer, and Derrida, but students drew upon an encouragingly wide range of thinkers and approaches. Students experimented variously with dialogical criticism, citational collages, autobiographical reflection, columnar text, deconstructive book history, dramatic reconstructions, as well as conventional discursive essays; the range of subjects was similarly eclectic, including (among others) medieval women's writing, Wordsworth, Ibsen, Dickinson, Lowell, Bob Dylan, Kendrick Lamar, Rachel Cusk, and contemporary activist theatre. While general standard of presentation was good, it should be noted that some candidates were marked down for poor referencing and scholarly method. This option encourages methodological innovation, but candidates should note that this does not mean that errors of fact, punctuation, etc. can be ignored.

Postcolonial Literature

15 candidates took this paper. Overall the standard was very good indeed. There is a strong trans-regional/national and comparative element to this paper, which when approached in an informed way that pays attention as much to differences as overlaps produces some insightful essays, as in this batch, though single-author and one region papers were well-handled also. Candidates tended to move away from writing on the core texts on the paper, which in the case of more confident and well-read candidates paid off as they drew on a wide range of primary materials to interrogate the key questions of the course – the way in which colonial and postcolonial histories and politics are continuously reworked at the level of language and culture – while also working with the theoretical resources of the course. The range of topics that the candidates developed was very wide indeed, extending from South East Asian novels to the travel writing of Graham Greene. Nearly all the essays were distinguished by an in-depth engagement with the issues, a good use of sources, and deft handling of secondary critical materials including world literature theory. The main problems seemed to arise from poor proofing and weak citation mechanics, in far too many essays. Candidates should be strongly encouraged to print out their work and to check it before submission.

Reading and Critique

11 candidates took this option. Taken together the essays addressed the full range of critical and theoretical materials that formed the reading list. The best essays identified a specific corner of a theoretical or critical question about reading and plumbed its depths. These essays understood how good engagement with theoretical and critical materials requires the same careful attention to detail required of a more traditionally literary essay. These more successful essays also delineated the parameters of their claims with care. The less successful essays tended to grab at various theoretical and critical concepts, intermixing them without regard for how they differed in detail and thus in substance. There was also a tendency in the less successful essays toward the journalistic, almost jingoistic language of the manifesto. While the language of the manifesto can be very compelling, it tends to be thin on detailed analysis, since such analysis is not its aim.

Texts in Motion: literary and material forms, 1550-1800

11 candidates took this paper. Written work for this paper was in general of an excellent standard. The best essays responded to the archival emphasis of this paper, and found exciting and little-studied materials; almost all candidates were able to combine attention to this archival specificity, with a drawing out of broader implications in terms of the relationships between literary and material forms. Candidates were in general able to locate their arguments within a broad critical field, showing good awareness of recent scholarly work. The best candidates were able to think creatively and rigorously about texts that moved between media; some candidates consulted manuscript materials in libraries outside of Oxford, and there was also laudable industry shown in dealing with multiple copies of texts scattered across college libraries. There was very good work on the history of collecting and institutional taxonomies of knowledge. Some essays were too descriptive and delayed or never fully articulated a sufficiently analytical engagement with the materials: this was in part perhaps due to the novelty of the materials being discussed. The level of presentation and the quality of the writing was in general very impressive indeed. Overall, there was a very pleasing sense of the candidates successfully responding to the spirit and ambitions of this paper.

The Avant-Garde

14 candidates took this option. An impressive range of material was covered across and within individual essays. Novels, plays, poetry, film, periodicals, visual art and music were all considered. The standard of responses was, on the whole, high. The most exceptional work was carried out by candidates who were prepared to use material from seminars as a springboard or framework as they explored topics and texts that they had lighted upon independently. These candidates were also agile and authoritative when it came to comparing literary texts with musical compositions, soundscapes and sculpture, as they accurately deployed and related

distinct critical vocabularies. Elsewhere, there were several pleasing single author essays on Loy, Beckett and Lewis. There were also commendable attempts to associate historic and contemporary avant-garde movements/artists, especially when it came to writing on film. Of the less successful essays, some were hampered by indecision: candidates found it difficult to maintain a clear focal point and ended up producing responses which contained the beginnings of several (often potentially very good) essays. Others stumbled over overly-complex technical or theoretical vocabulary: arguments would have been that much clearer and persuasive if they had been expressed in plain terms. One thing that future candidates should note is that there must be a clear rationale for including images and illustrations. It is not enough to simply include appendices and hope that the examiner will divine their significance. Candidates should also take care to present their essays according to the Faculty's clear formatting guidelines.

The Literary Essay

14 candidates took this paper. Essays covered a wide range of topics: contemporary writers on the black body and walking; the 'ekphrastic essay' in the nineteenth century; Dali's reworking of Montaigne; misquotation in the early modern essay; and much else besides. The best work was independently argued and conceptually agile, and often struck a productive balance between deft, sensitive close reading and discussion of wider cultural and theoretical contexts. Many of the strongest pieces focused on the work of one writer in sustained detail, while also allowing other voices/perspectives to deepen and enrich the argument at strategic points. Less strong essays tended towards the descriptive rather than the analytical; or they didn't delimit the scope of their investigations with enough care and as result too many ideas and sources competed for space. In the latter cases, secondary criticism often threatened to swamp (rather than to inform) the student's own readings. One other feature of the weaker essays was a lack of structure and/or progression: in some, the argument was not developed but merely reiterated as the piece proceeded; in others, the argument tended to jump haphazardly from point to point. Overall, though, the standard of the work on this course was exceptionally high—sophisticated, imaginative, a pleasure to read.

Tragedy

13 candidates took this option. The standard was generally high. This paper encourages comparative work across a great variety of periods and genres, from ancient to contemporary, and some of the best essays used this freedom to construct commanding arguments that moved with high sophistication between texts. Others used this broad comparative groundwork as a theoretical foundation, producing close examinations of modern and contemporary works that revealed their particular engagements with profound themes and questions. In both cases, high achievement was made possible by a firm theoretical basis combined with intelligent close reading. Weaker essays limited themselves to (sometimes merely descriptive, or arbitrary) comparisons between two or three texts without a wider sense of intertextuality, generic expectations, or influence, which left the argument ungrounded. Candidates made good use of

the freedom to discuss texts of their own choosing beyond the seminar reading list; of the set texts, some thoroughly brilliant work was done on *Antigone*, *Caché*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *Angels in America*.

Writing Feminisms/Feminist Writing

There were 15 candidates who took this option. Essays were strong across the board, and addressed texts spanning thousands of years – from ancient to contemporary. They explored a wide range of materials and authors, in English and in translation, high and low: poetry, novels, short stories, drama, film, Young Adult literature, journalism, erotica, memoir, life-writing, autobiography, criticism, autotheory. Feminist approaches were fruitfully combined with intersectional, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, African-American, New Materialist, queer and transgender theory and criticism. Essays focused on a broad range of topics, including: nonbinary identity, domestic space, national identity, airports, postcolonial education, black feminism, suffrage, pornography, rape, myth. The strongest essays demonstrated wide critical reading and combined close readings with attentive exploration of relevant feminist theory. A few of the essays made up for a lack of style or clumsy presentation with innovative research into their topics; the best essays exhibited beautifully-crafted and lucid prose with original claims backed up by examples from the text and engagement with relevant criticism. Weaker essays tended to let their arguments run away with them or did not demonstrate enough knowledge of their subject matter. Overall, the essays contributed in fascinating ways to current debates in feminist thinking.

Writing Lives

There were 15 candidates who took this option. The standard of work for this paper was high. The essays varied in subject matter and approach: some focused on one particular author such as Edmund Gosse or Samuel Beckett; others crossed time e.g. comparing Wordsworth and Lemn Sissay, or *Tottel's Miscellany* and *Refugee Tales*, or Hoccleve's *Complaint* and Helen Macdonald's *H is for Hawk*. Comparative essays worked well when there was a clear rationale as to why these texts were being considered together. Candidates used a variety of different theoretical approaches, and some effectively considered authors' own autobiographical impulses as well as their biographers' perspectives. Quite a few candidates were interested in topics relating to grief, childhood, memory, and illness, and most wrote sensitively and intelligently about the way that these concepts are depicted and problematised in textual form. The best candidates included some detailed close readings, and demonstrated a thorough understanding of the theories or methodologies which they were deploying. The most effective essays tended to be rooted in some of the core texts from the module, while also bringing in further texts. The best essays also had clear arguments; the less strong pieces of work either seemed more 'theme' based and did not clearly develop, or became somewhat fragmentary and did not take their arguments through to a conclusion. While some students wrote beautiful prose and also presented and referenced their work accurately, others produced essays that

suffered from typos, misplaced apostrophes, lack of pagination, incomplete sentences, and inadequate referencing. In general, it was clear that most students had engaged with real commitment and enthusiasm with the ideas underpinning this paper, and produced fascinating and thoughtful work.

Paper 7: Dissertation

233 candidates from English, 6 Candidates from Classics and English, and 24 Candidates from English and Modern Languages submitted dissertations. The standard was very high, with top marks reaching the mid 80s and very few submissions dropping below 60. Over 40% of dissertations were awarded marks of 70 or above. Candidates are evidently passionate about the work they do for this paper. The dissertation is an impressive endpoint for the course at Oxford, with students really showing what they have learnt (in terms both of method and content) over the best part of three years.

In the past, the Chair's report on the dissertation has included specific discussion of work by period and topic band (e.g. '1900-1950' or 'children's literature'). This year, while it did receive verbal reports on the dissertation under these headings, the Board decided against issuing written reports in this way. The dissertation is not restricted to period or topic boundaries. It can focus on single works or authors; cross-period themes or critical approaches; clusters of writers in personal contact; groups of writers across periods tied together comparatively; specific genres, institutions, or historical events; formal features; and many other things. For this reason, it is unhelpful to report on the dissertation under sub-categories. A few things, however, are worth pointing out.

First, it is permissible to produce a dissertation on Shakespeare (either alone or in comparison with others). Extreme care must be taken, however, not to duplicate material that has been used in Paper 1. This year only one or two candidates produced dissertations that touched on Shakespeare's work.

Second, candidates should be wary of writing dissertations in areas where there is little or no existing academic critical discussion. While it is possible to write on authors on whom no direct critical work has been published, in such cases it is advisable to connect the dissertation to wider methodological movements or historical events. Weaker dissertations this year often operated in a critical void.

Third, a dissertation needs to have scope. It is important to demonstrate to the examiner that substantial research (ideally including primary research) has been done. A small number of dissertations this year looked too much like expanded tutorial essays and were marked down as a result.

Fourth, originality of some sort is vital for a dissertation, but this does not mean that the most successful dissertations are likely to focus on little-known texts. Very strong work was done this year on major canonical texts (e.g. *Paradise Lost*).

WRITTEN PAPERS

Paper 2 Literature in English 1350-1550

There were 243 candidates for this paper. All essay questions were done at least once, with 18 and 4 as the most popular by some margin, followed by 12, 7, and 8. There was lots of sophisticated work, and an impressive range of texts covered across the cohort, with particularly notable attention being paid to devotional texts. There was a relative lack of focus on material culture (certainly compared to recent years), and on longer texts such as *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales*. Equally, the full range of Henrician literature was neglected in comparison with (for example) the work produced by last year's cohort, and where it was discussed, this was largely through Wyatt/Surrey/Tottel's *Miscellany*, with rare appearances by Skelton, or Medwall and the drama.

The examiners noted that some candidates showed a lack of attention to historical/cultural or critical contexts; in the strongest scripts, by contrast, candidates showed keen awareness of current and sometimes older critical discussions concerning their chosen authors or texts, and were able to argue their case in relation to such discussions. There was also a number of essays on single authors/texts in which candidates seemed to feel the need to include, but were actually undermined by, a throw-away paragraph on another author/text at the end. Candidates are reminded that there is no explicit rubric preventing them from tackling a question via a single author: what gives the impression of a lack of range will be, for example, thinness of evidence, an unwillingness to engage with detail or complexity, or lack of knowledge of critical or other contexts. In some cases, there was evidence of misplaced ingenuity in twisting questions out of all recognition in order to fit material. Some problems, however, are readily preventable: a number of candidates put the wrong question number, or no number at all, on their scripts, which causes serious difficulties for examiners trying to ascertain whether or not candidates have used irrelevant material.

There was a significant amount of work this year on what are strictly pre-1350 texts and authors (Herebert, Rolle, *Ancrene Wisse*). Sometimes pre-1350 material was used briefly, and entirely defensibly, to establish a critical context, but sometimes it occupied the greater part of the essay. It must be emphasised that examiners have no objections to a candidate using pre-1350 texts briefly and with critical awareness in an essay, for clearly defined purposes. In addition, candidates are explicitly permitted to write on texts in the Auchinleck Manuscript, such as *Orfeo*, *The King of Tars*, or *Amis and Amiloun*, without having to justify their use. Equally, it is entirely understandable that an author such as Rolle, who had a significant and substantial literary presence after 1350, should be discussed on this paper. It is important, however, that candidates demonstrate awareness of the date ranges (actual, possible or probable) of pre-1350 texts (e.g. 'early fourteenth century' or 'c. 1325') and that they justify referring to non-Auchinleck examples on this paper. Some candidates went to considerable scholarly trouble to justify their discussion of pre-1350 material, e.g. on the grounds that they were discussing a text

for which there was at least one post-1350 manuscript witness. This kind of engagement was useful, but such awareness was rarely demonstrated in many of the examples encountered this year. Clearly, it is difficult to date many texts from this period: lyrics, for example, are particularly challenging in this respect, and the examiners are aware that commonly-used anthologies of lyrics frequently include pre- and post-1350 material. But one of the merits of this particular paper is that it provides plenty of opportunity to develop skills such as the critical sifting of such materials, and the establishing of criteria for the inclusion of particular texts/authors as part of candidates' preparation.

In the case of the commentary, passage A was overwhelmingly preferred this year. The strongest commentaries were impressively attentive to uncertainties or fluctuations in tone, acute about characterisation and sensitive when considering the relationship between form and content at particular moments. Some candidates also reflected judiciously about the stereotypical language of courtly love and its impact on passage A. Some persistent trends included over-reading the significance of rhyme, particularly in relation to e.g. *sevene/hevene*; assumption that punctuation is authorial; lack of attention to specifically poetic features; misuse of the term 'proverbial'; and a determination to interpret a swathe of phenomena with reference to Boethius. Also in the case of passage A, examiners noted a persistent misunderstanding of lines 6-7 (and Pandarus' role generally), misreading of the 'drinking' imagery in the final stanza, and especially an almost complete refusal to acknowledge the fact that Criseyde does speak in the passage, let alone to consider the implications of what she says for issues of agency. Some made rather heavy weather of references to the 'goddess', with line 20 giving rise to long dissertations on Christian anachronism, which was not pertinent here. The missed opportunities were frequently surprising: notably, in even the strongest commentaries on passage A, candidates typically discussed the imagery concerning birds at a thematic level without commenting on the implications of its occurring in a rhetorical question, which might have afforded plenty of opportunity to reflect on the role and tone of narratorial commentary at this point.

Paper 3 Literature in English 1550-1660

228 candidates sat this paper. There was a range of good work for this paper, with noteworthy essays on non-fictional prose including Browne, Florio's Montaigne, Nashe, and Bacon, on women's writing, and on Spenserian allegory. The most popular authors continue to be Jonson, Sidney, Donne, and Herbert, often with limited range and rather familiar arguments. There was some lively interest in non-traditional literary forms including Henslowe's diary and tomb inscriptions, and some strong outward-looking work on travel and trade and their literary traces. It was very good indeed to see good representation of writing by women (and not just in answers on 'gender'), and candidates are encouraged to think widely across this canon. Essays on London literature needed more stress on the imaginative resources of prose and dramatic fictions, as they tended to be dominated by inert social history descriptions. Work on material texts was most successful when combining this within a broader answer: discussion of paratexts

or title pages without larger critical frameworks tended to be less effective. Work on the drama continues to be generally disappointing: confined to a small canon of plays by Kyd, Jonson, Middleton and Ford, inattentive to staging or the specifics of theatre, and tending towards the moralistic. The examiners were again struck by how much work clusters in the middle of the period covered by the paper, and want particularly to remind candidates of the early and later decades, and of the possibility to write on authors whose works straddle the period boundary (there was little of early Marvell, Phillips, Hutchinson or Milton).

Much of the general advice from last year's report continues to be relevant. Highly specific, niche essays that are entirely preprepared and then dumped onto the quotation are less likely to gain high marks than more flexible material that can be reframed and reorganised according to the specifics of the question chosen. Some candidates' work for the paper seemed very narrow, so that, for instance, they sometimes seemed entirely unfamiliar with the authors or contexts for the quotations set. The best performances on this paper gave a sense of range, intellectual flexibility, and a larger understanding of the critical and historical contexts. They also were well-written: candidates are reminded to think about style as much as 'content' as they prepare for examination.

Paper 4 Literature in English 1660-1760

223 candidates sat this paper. The examiners were satisfied by the overall standard achieved by the candidates taking this paper. All questions were attempted, with attention spread evenly across the paper, although a few questions (Q6, Q14, Q16, Q18) were less popular with candidates. Strong work showed a thoughtful engagement with the questions, a clear sense of the distinctiveness of the period, consistency across all three answers, the ability to synthesise relevant contexts and critical opinions in order to further an argument, and secure knowledge of a good range of literary texts. These candidates wrote well-structured essays, which were illustrated in detail. The very best work was well-informed about the period, and showed curiosity in approaches to the questions, as well as a deft selection of material, fluent writing, and consistent relevance. Close-reading is an important component in successful answers, particularly when it is used to further an argument, not just illustrate a point. It was very good to see candidates competently combining and comparing texts and authors from across genres and across the period.

The feature that was most obvious in weaker work was lack of relevance. The examiners reward creativity and scholarship but expect candidates to demonstrate an understanding of the implications of the questions they choose. This understanding shouldn't just relate to the literary texts or topics that candidates choose to write about, but to the distinctiveness of the literary period covered by this paper. A lack of understanding of these implications is often the result of candidates focusing too narrowly on single words or short phrases from the questions. The examiners remind candidates about the importance of range in their choice of texts. Some candidates used a single text for two answers and then two texts for the third. Although this

fulfils the terms of the rubric, unless narrowness is balanced with patience, thoroughness, analytical depth and detail, and/or a wider sense of period or an author's work, overall it demonstrates limitation rather than potential.

Paper 5 1760-1830

249 candidates sat this paper. All questions on the paper were tackled. The best answers showed evidence of enthusiastic and intelligent wide reading in both well-known canonical authors and less familiar authors and topics, and engaged incisively with the terms of the quotations. Weaker responses shoehorned pre-prepared tutorial essays into places where it was thought they best fitted, without any sense of engaging with the terms of the quotation. Given the range of literature that this period paper encompasses, some areas and authors were surprisingly neglected. Candidates sometimes revealed rather limited knowledge of the period in their responses to the quotations and their authors.

A large proportion of answers addressed poetry. Popular poets were Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley, with some very good work on Blake and Burns. Poets were often brought into striking conjunction, for example Clare and Keats. There was some lively work on women Romantic poets, including Mary Robinson, Felicia Hemans, and Charlotte Smith's elegiac sonnets and longer poems. There was very little on the poetry at the start of this period and (with the exception of Clare) few answers on laboring class writers such as Ann Yearsley, Robert Bloomfield or Elizabeth Hands. Some candidates wrote well on forms such as hymns, songs or verse satire, others mixed poetry with prose to produce imaginative answers on a great variety of topics.

Interest in the novel seems to have waned, with few answers on Sterne (other than the *Sentimental Journey*) and fewer on Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker*. Austen attracted a significant number of responses, with a particular focus on the early works, though the thematic focus was often quite narrow. Most of the frequently encountered fictional texts had Gothic and oriental associations, the most popular being *Vathek*, *Hogg's Memoirs and Confessions* and *Frankenstein*. As usual, questions on the Gothic novel were very variable in scope and quality. Although there were many answers on Wollstonecraft's fiction – often in relation to sensibility – there was comparatively little work on Frances Burney, Inchbald, Hays, Ferrier or Smith as novelist. Edgeworth and Owenson both featured in essays on Irish writing of the period. Walter Scott, conversely, attracted almost no interest this year.

There was comparatively little interest in drama. Essays on the Georgian theatre addressed Sheridan and Goldsmith but showed less interest in minor but culturally indicative figures like Foote and the Colmans, though Cumberland appears intermittently. Essays on Joanna Baillie tended to get little further than proving why her work is unperformable. Few candidates wrote on the unperformed but performable plays of Frances Burney, or on Byron's drama. There was some discussion of the periodical essayists, including Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey. The few responses on Samuel Johnson adroitly focused on his journalism and his fictional work *Rasselas*, but there were very few mentions of his biographer Boswell. Life writing in general, with the

exception of De Quincey's *Confessions* and a few answers featuring Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals*, attracted little attention, travel writing even less. There were comparatively few answers on the controversies provoked by the French Revolution, though there were some well-informed answers on national identity, often with a four nations or global perspective. Political engagement was often focused on the slavery debate. Here there was some wide-ranging work, with Phillis Wheatley and Equiano featuring largely, though often with no sense of them as literary craftsmen rather than as polemicists. Several candidates showed an interest in Orientalism, usually confining themselves to eighteenth century texts like *Rasselas* and *Vathek*, though there was some interest in Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. There was some good work on Romantic aesthetics, including the Picturesque, the Sublime, fragmentation, the imagination, and the relationship between literature and the visual arts. There were very few answers on the scientific writings of the period.

It is worth drawing to the attention of students (and tutors?) that the rubric for this paper specifically includes the treatment of the foundation of the American republic. Hence there is an opportunity to address American authors such as Crèvecoeur, Franklin, Bartram, Brockden Brown, Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper, and texts treating native American Indians.

All of the examiners and assessors for this paper criticized the pervasive habit of 'downloading' previously written and pre-prepared essays which had little or no relevance to the quotations. These essays sometimes resembled obscure learned articles on a small particular topic, rather than an active and engaged response to the precise terms of the quotation.

2.6.2 Course II

SUBMITTED PAPERS

The Material Text

There were five candidates for this paper. All the portfolios were of a very high standard, with students demonstrating sensitivity to a pleasingly wide range of medieval textual culture. All five candidates wrote their commentaries on the Nowell Codex extract. The best commentaries demonstrated engagement with a wide range of critical issues, including scribal performance, illustration, capitalisation, punctuation, ruling scribal and editorial emendations, signs of readership, damage, quiring, layout, as well as paying attention both to the manuscript itself and the edition provided. Weaker scripts fell down in one or more of these areas. Essay topics ranged from inscribed objects and text and image to the reception of the material text, across the whole medieval period. In both parts of the exam, candidates made excellent use of a very wide range of relevant criticism. For the most part scholarly apparatus and presentation was of a very high standard.

Paper 4 [Year 2 – TT 2018] The History of the Language

17 candidates took this paper. The quality of work produced for this paper was generally very impressive, with candidates taking a good range of approaches to various topics. Students generally performed well across both parts of the paper, with the best answers for both the essays and commentaries drawing on detailed linguistic evidence in support of their argument. The commentaries drew from a decent range of passages across all the periods covered by the paper, with candidates drawing judiciously on linguistic theory to back up their analyses. Less successful responses to both parts of the paper tended to be a little more impressionistic in their engagement, particularly when it came to phonology and syntax.

WRITTEN PAPERS

Paper 1 Literature in English 650-1100

There were 17 candidates for this paper. Each of the questions was attempted at least once, apart from 12, 16, 19, and 20. The most popular questions by some way were Q3 (on sources and adaptation) and Q6 (on teaching and worldly transience). Also popular were Q7 (on intimacy and/or separation) and Q10 (the grieving mother in *Solomon and Saturn II*).

It was pleasing to see that this paper continues to produce work on an impressively wide variety of texts and topics, accurately reflecting the richness and variety of Anglo-Saxon literary culture. In addition to the usual range of literary texts, candidates engaged to good effect with both manuscript compilation and illustration and the material culture of Anglo-Saxon England. As usual, *Beowulf* and the canonical 'Alfredian' translations (including their paratexts) featured prominently, alongside verse and prose hagiography (mainly Ælfric and Cynewulf) and the elegies and riddles from the Exeter Book. There was also welcome attention to lesser-studied texts such as *Andreas*, the Exeter 'Physiologus' texts, a variety of metrical charms and prayers, and non-hagiographical prose homilies. Candidates also drew very productively on the wider Latinate literary traditions of this period.

The best work produced for this paper situated the relevant texts confidently within their literary-historical and cultural contexts and engaged insightfully with both established critical traditions and impressively up-to-date scholarship. Less strong work tended to offer slightly limited conclusions based on a more restricted consideration of the literary culture of the period.

Paper 2 Medieval Literature and Related Literatures 1066-1550

16 Course II candidates took this paper, in the last year of the 'Romance' theme. Only questions 3 and 9 were not attempted; the most popular were questions 8 and 6, on the supernatural, and on romance as 'a stand-in for the Middle Ages itself'.

In general the standard was very high, and the examiners were favourably impressed by the range of knowledge and depth of analysis on show. The variety of languages and literatures receiving attention was excellent – alongside plenty of Middle English, insular and continental French, Old Norse, and Welsh, essays appeared this year on German, Iberian, Italian, and Hebrew literature. This paper does not require that non-English language works be encountered in their original language (and there is no penalty for working only with translations), but nevertheless it was pleasing and impressive to see good use of brief quotations in several languages. The best essays combined a wide range of knowledge and evidence with strong lines of argument, using the questions and prompts to excavate the workings of the texts under discussion. Weaker efforts tended to fall into descriptive patterns, offering lots of examples without pushing the argument further. Nevertheless, candidates seem to have come to good terms with the paper's requirement of only two, 90 minute essays; the best used this scope to produce compelling, wide-ranging, and occasionally thoroughly commanding responses to the questions. It is to be hoped that such high standards will continue with the move to the new theme of 'Lyric'.

Paper 3 [see Course I Paper 2]

Paper 6c Options

Old Norse

Three candidates took this option.

Medieval Welsh Language and Literature I

Two candidates took this option.

Medieval Welsh Language and Literature II

One candidate took this option.

Medieval Irish

Three candidates took this option.

The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England

One candidate took this option.

2.7 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS



EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2019

2.7.1 PROFESSOR SIMON J JAMES

External examiner home institution:	Durham	
Course(s) examined:	English	
Level: (please delete as appropriate)	Undergraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	y			
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	y			
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	y			
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	y			
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	y			
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?	y			
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?	Yes, in so far as the Faculty has power to do so			

** If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A / Other".*

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- a. *How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?*

I am at an institution comparable to Durham and I have previously externally examined at an English Department in a post-92 institution, and worked briefly at a third University. Oxford students meet or exceed the academic standards I have experienced in these places.

- b. *Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

Achievement overall is high and at the top end very, very high indeed. Even students at the lower end of the cohort seem to be located there because of factors which have inhibited their capacity to perform at their best, rather than because of lack of subject knowledge or disciplinary skills. I read full runs of papers from one of the top firsts, and from some students with predominantly Upper Second performances awarded firsts overall. These are clearly English students as good as any in the sector.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

The conduct of the process was exemplary. The chairing of the meetings was rigorous, professional and efficient. All members of the Board, externals included, were given the right opportunities to contribute and time was well used. Professor van Es is to be congratulated on an absolutely model term as Chair of the Board.

Marking was also rigorous and fair. The limit of my departure from marks I would have given to the work I saw was never more than a small number up or down: I have full confidence that every classification decision made by this year's Board was wholly correct.

B3. Issues

Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?

I note, as must every external examiner in every HE programme in 2019, the epidemic of mental health which afflicts our student body. I am not sufficiently qualified to suggest a panacea here; my own institution is no less troubled in this respect..... Does the fact of, unusually, all the work counting towards the degree being submitted in the third year exacerbate this issue? Does your Counselling Service have a view?

I believe that every request made by a student (in the hundreds) to the proctors was granted. If there is a system of *de facto* no deadlines, I wonder what is the purpose of deadlines? Do students make these requests in the knowledge that they will not be refused?

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

Again, I like the model of assessment for Shakespeare, which encourages inventive, even creative responses from students, on a topic/author on which even good students are tempted to coast a little. Indeed, I like it more perhaps than its examiners: this is the one paper on which, marking 'blind', my imagined marks were generally a little higher. Do the examiners for this paper think the essays should be a little longer? (I am not a Shakespeare expert in my research specialism, mind, so do feel free to disregard this judgement.)

At its best, this is a tremendously capacious programme, and everything that it does can be said to be done well: encompassing, e.g., reflections on Icelandic translation, comparative work, textual editing, queer readings, performance history, literature as theology, literature and science, digital methods ... Within the constraints of the curriculum (see below), students and tutors confect a marvellously varied syllabus, and clearly much exacting and stimulating effort goes into allowing every student to find and develop their own interests within each paper.

B5. Any other comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

I was very struck in my first year by the range and unusual or surprising nature of the text and author choices made by candidates in examinations. In my third year, I am now a little more suspicious. I wonder if the practice of the weekly tutorial essay in a paper ultimately assessed 100% by unseen exam risks slightly over-rewarding the flashy or the eye-catching at the expense of deep and sustained subject knowledge. There should always be space for daring and imagination in our discipline, of course, but, with the exception of the very best scripts, I saw more evidence of sustained reflection and deep knowledge in the dissertation and Paper 7 than, inevitably, in exam answers. Any system that depends on exams, and this one does very heavily, will have to contend with students' tendency to dump pre-anticipated answers in exam, perhaps, here, answers that received positive formative feedback. Does the lengthy format of examinations encourage this kind of response? A series of thirty or forty quotations, of which examiners expect candidates to recognise the source might not always be the best way to test for knowledge and capacity to argue – and I did see some variance between examiners on what constituted 'relevance' in answering the questions. Perhaps you might consider framing more questions as questions, thus encouraging exam answers to actually prosecute a case?

My mind has remained unchanged, however, on the issue of the curriculum. Oxford is conspicuously out of step with the rest of the subject community on its English degree's terminal assessment resting so heavily on unseen examinations on pre-1830 literature. It is for the Faculty to reflect on whether this difference is to be celebrated and cherished for its distinctiveness, or a matter of concern. I note with interest recent discussions of curriculum reform. I would urge such discussions to continue – rather than considered to be settled for a generation – and for reflection to range holistically across what you want an Oxford graduate to know and to do, not just on the marking out of the borders between literary periods. (Since I am asked....) Do you feel that there are unmet needs in the student body in terms of what they would like to study, and how they study it? How confident would you be in anticipating such needs in the student body of twenty years hence? How do these issues model your planned staff recruitment?

I hope that these reflections are not impertinent: I offer them as we are undergoing a similar process in my own institution.

Signed:	Simon J. James		
Date:	29.8.19		

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2019

2.7.2 PROFESSOR JUDITH HAWLEY

External examiner home institution:	Royal Holloway, University of London		
Course(s) examined:	BA ENGLISH, BA HISTORY AND ENGLISH		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)	Undergraduate		

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?		✓		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		✓		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?		✓		

A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?	✓		
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?			Mostly
* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A / Other".				

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- c. *How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?*

(My comments here refer to the Single Honours English degree.) Fewer firsts were awarded this year. Last year produced an unusually high number of first-class degrees. This year was more in line with previous years and with the sector. Candidates at Oxford enter with high A level grades, are taught very well and achieve appropriately high marks. I read the complete run of scripts of the candidate awarded the top first. I was extremely impressed by the quality of the work and consider this candidate is operating at PG levels. I also read the bottom six candidates, all of whom were awarded a 2.1. There were no 2.2s or 3rds this year at all. All of these candidates were flagged as having Mitigating Circumstances or SPLD. Some of the work they were producing would have received grades in the 2.2 band in other institutions. I commented in my first year that markers need to award 2.2 marks when the work meets the criteria for 2.2. Last year I felt that markers were using 2.2 marks appropriately and more frequently than the previous year. I suggest that the Faculty initiates a discussion on this issue, though I recognise that it is difficult given the structures of the university to involve all markers in this discussion.

- d. *Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

(My comments here refer to the Joint Honours History and English degree.) I was pleased to see that numbers had returned to previous levels, especially as this programme seems to attract a more diverse body of students. The standard of work was very high, in line with the Single Honours programme.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

I was very satisfied with the conduct of the examination process this year. The Faculty has acted on recommendations made by the externals. We were sent exam scripts in advance, as we requested and the treatment of borderline candidates in the Single Honours board has been changed to make it fairer and more rigorous. I would like to commend the way Prof van Es conducted the whole process with rigour, justice and good grace.

I still think it would be helpful if examiners were to note their reasons for agreeing marks where there is an initial disagreement of 10 or more marks. I also think that 2.2 marks should be used more rigorously.

It would also be useful if the Faculty initiated a discussion of the treatment of irrelevant material in examinations to ensure that markers are applying the criteria uniformly. In the sample of 7 candidates whose scripts I read, irrelevance of material was often remarked on, and sometimes – but not always penalized.

B3. Issues

Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?

The conduct of classification in both Faculties was made more difficult this year by the process of handling Mitigating Circumstances (formerly FAP). There are several issues here which I suggest are addressed:

1. The very high number of applications for Mitigating Circumstances. Sixty of the 230 candidates in English submitted MC evidence. The Meeting ran for several hours. In History, the volume of MC applications imposed a heavy burden on administrative staff which had a knock-on effect on the efficient running of the Classification Board. On the one hand, this generation seems to be more than usually prone to mental health problems; on the other, colleges are perhaps encouraging students to submit a form 'on the off chance'. Some of the applications we considered were for comparatively minor issues. It would be useful if tutors and students were made aware of how the board considers applications and paused to consider whether submitting an application is worthwhile.
2. The deadline for submission of MCs and indeed of work for assessment: some candidates were allowed to submit so late that there was not time for their circumstances to be considered by the MC Board. This potentially impacts the rigour of the process.
3. 379 pieces of work were submitted late this year, but here were no penalties for late submission. It seems as if late submission is treated as evidence of MCs. I suggest a review of this process is considered to see if it is fair to all candidates.
4. The MC Meeting was very efficiently prepared and run by the Chair, but the process of considering MCs was made very difficult by the fact that we are no longer permitted to look at candidates' marks. It is difficult to assess the impact of a circumstance if the Board is not allowed to compare a student's performance on other assessments not affected by the circumstance. This process places greater emphasis on Chair's action as only s/he is allowed to see the run of marks.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

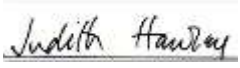
Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

The range of statistical evidence presented is to be applauded. It was especially useful to compare marking practices by individual and to see the Borderline Monitoring information that the Chair provided on the day of the first meeting. Information about the breakdown of marks by gender was discussed with due care and attention.

Paper 6 continues to provide staff and students opportunities to work on challenging topics and produce original research.

B5. Any other comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

Signed:	
Date:	24 July 2019

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2019

2.7.3 PROFESSOR AD PUTTER

External examiner home institution:	University of Bristol	
Course examined:	English FHS and English-Classics	
Level: (please <i>delete as appropriate</i>)	Undergraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	yes			
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	yes			
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	yes			
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	yes			
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	yes			
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?	yes			
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?	yes			
* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A / Other".					

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- a. *How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?*

The standards of Oxford University English students continue to be high, with the top end being especially impressive. Last year I read the top firsts and saw the best student work I have encountered in many years of external examining. This year I read the scripts of the student who was ranked second best, and I was hugely impressed with a dissertation that was of publishable quality. I read widely across the first / 2.1 border, and felt that work on this borderline had been very judiciously marked. If any of the top students continue in academia, they and the profession will have a bright future. At the lower levels (low first, 2.1 and 2.2), student work compares with that in my own institution and that in other English Departments of which I have experience as external examiner.

- b. *Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

Student performance last year was unusually high, with a significantly higher number of first-class degrees than before. As internal marking seemed to be entirely accurate, I attributed this not to grade inflation but to a very strong and highly motivated cohort. This was confirmed by results this year, with the number of firsts back to expected levels (c. 30%). The joint school (Classics and English) has a smaller number of students: student performance and achievement were comparable, judging by the degree classes awarded, except that there was one II.2 in the joint degree, and not a single one in the single-honours.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

The assessment process was handled with the greatest care and professionalism, and in full accordance with the guidance issued by the English Faculty and the University. The Chair of Exams deserves high praise for ensuring that there were no irregularities in the process and for implementing changes that I think have been wholly beneficial. The issue I raised last year, that the Faculty was faced with the departure of all externals at the same time, has also been addressed (one of the externals will continue for an extra year to ensure some continuity).

B3. Issues

Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?

One issue which the Faculty and probably the wider University will want to address is the high number of 'Factors-Affecting-Performance' cases that are going in. This is a trend in my own University also. Much time is taken up with these cases (and with the recording of responses) but only in a very small number of cases do these FAPS have any bearing on the final degree result. This message needs to be communicated to students and to those who advise students.

Another issue is the diversification of the curriculum. Reading a good number of scripts this year, it became very clear to me that students availed themselves of the dissertation and the essay portfolio to write on non-traditional topics. This of course puts much pressure on a small pool of markers and supervisors. Consideration of where future posts in English are needed could usefully begin by looking at the topics on which students choose to write their dissertation, not because I believe educating students is the same as giving them what they want, but because these topics, too, require learning and rigour, which experts in these areas can provide.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

Good Practice

I would like to single out for special praise the unrivalled opportunities that are offered by your Course 2. Apart from the ASNAC department (University of Cambridge) I cannot think of another University where students have the chance to become expert in earlier English literature and language, in related literatures and languages such as Old Norse, and even palaeography. It was also clear from this year's results that this is a course where students can thrive and achieve excellent results.

I would also commend the practice of double marking. This is an onerous system but it is the Rolls Royce of marking systems, and students can have every confidence that the mark they are awarded is just. The system of internal third marking also works exceptionally well in Oxford. The third marking I have seen shows that there really is an independent, third view, not just a splitting of differences between first and second markers.

B5. Any other comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

This is the end of my term. In my three years, I have found the system of double marking to be working very well. Students receive a truly excellent education, and are given opportunities at Oxford to fulfil their full potential. I had some concerns, in my first year, about some of the practices in exam boards (related to the treatment of borderline cases), and about the English Faculty's failure to send drafts of exam papers / essay questions to externals. I have been impressed, however, with the way concerns raised by externals have been addressed, and I am confident that I leave behind an assessment and examination system that is robust and fair. I would like to thank the Chair of Exams, Prof. Bart van Es, and the Faculty administrator Angie Johnson, and all members of the Board, for making my years of examining and my stays in Oxford an enjoyable experience.

Signed:



Date:

25 July 2019

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk, and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

3 MST AND MPHIL (MEDIEVAL STUDIES) IN ENGLISH

(including MSt in English and American Studies)

Professor Adam Smyth, Chair

3.1 STATISTICS

(1) Numbers and percentages in each class/category

There were 99 candidates

Outcome	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Numbers	32	35	21	2	9

Percentages including recent years (2019 saw the introduction of the Merit band for marks of 65-9, but for purposes of comparison, merit and pass are included as one)

	Distinction	Pass (for 2019, Merit or Pass)	Fail	Incomplete
2015	37.9%	56.5%	2.8%	N/A
2016	36.3%	52%	4.9%	5.9%
2017	43.2%	45.7%	6.2%	5%
2018	35.2%	54%	5.4%	5.4%
2019	32.3%	57%*	2%	9%**

* 35% at Merit (65-69), 21% at Pass (50-64)

** The rising number of incompletes is noted: these 9 incompletes relate to students who had extensions. 7 of the 9 have now submitted and their final marks will go through the long vacation meeting. The remaining 2 are ongoing.

(2) Vivas

Vivas were not used.

(3) Marking of Scripts

All essays and dissertations were double-marked. In cases where the first and second marker had been unable to agree a mark, essays were sent to the appropriate external examiners who acted as third markers.

3.2 EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

For 2018-19, a revised set of marking criteria and accompanying descriptors was deployed, with the following categories: 85+ 'Highest Distinction'; 80-84 'Very High Distinction'; 75-79 'High Distinction'; 70-74 'Distinction'; 65-69 'Merit'; 57-64 'Pass'; 50-56 'Low Pass'; 0-49 'Fail'.

The markers' feedback sheet was revised to include these descriptors, in an attempt (particularly in relation to the 'Higher Distinction' category) to encourage markers to make appropriate use of the range of marks.

For 2018-19, the release of on-course marks was discontinued: students received only written feedback. Previously, students had received feedback and marks on their work in week 6 of HT and TT. The release of marks was discontinued in response to (i) a sense that the 6th week feedback meant students didn't have time to respond to it as formative feedback (since HT essays are due in 10th week and the TT dissertation in 8th week); (ii) associated concerns raised by students about the stress caused by on-course marks; and (iii) a desire to bring English in line with other faculties. One consequence of this change was that there was no need for formal board meetings involving externals during the year, before the Final Exam Board on 9 July.

As in the previous year, blind double marking was retained, with each marker submitting marks and comment sheets to the Graduate Studies Committee prior to discussion with the other marker. Course tutors served as first markers for the B and C essays. In cases where internal markers were unable to reach agreement, the essays, marks and comments were sent to the appropriate external examiner for adjudication. In addition, samples of essays and dissertations with high and low marks were sent to the externals, along with any pieces of work for which the internal examiners' raw marks had fallen on either side of a border.

All feedback, for B-course essays, C-course essays, and dissertations, across for all strands, was read by the Chair.

CHANGES FOR THE FACULTY TO CONSIDER

See Chair's Report below

PUBLICATION OF EXAMINATION CONVENTIONS

The document, 'Marking and Distinction Criteria', was sent to all candidates early in Michaelmas term and circulated to all markers at appropriate points in the year. Another document covering the specific criteria for the MPhil was sent to MPhil candidates separately.

DETAILED NUMBERS

n/a for MSt.

COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

n/a for MSt.

COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUALS

n/a

THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Professor Adam Smyth (Chair)

Professor Elleke Boehmer

Dr David Dwan

Professor Nick Halmi

Ms Jeri Johnson

Professor Peter McCullough

Professor Peter McDonald

Dr Helen L Spencer

External

Dr Ian Johnson (St Andrew's)

Dr Jane Goldman (Glasgow)

Dr Fiona Green (Cambridge)

Professor Christina Lupton (Warwick)

Professor Javed Majeed (KCL)

Professor Helen Smith (York)

3.3 Chair of Examiners' Report

A. Process

There were three new internal examiners this year (Peter McCullough, Peter McDonald, Helen L Spencer), with five continuing from last year (Elleke Boehmer, David Dwan, Nick Halmi, Jeri Johnson,

Adam Smyth). Of the externals, five were new (Jane Goldman, Fiona Green, Christina Lupton, Javed Majeed, Helen Smith), with one continuing from last year (Ian Johnson). At the first meeting of the internal examiners on 29th October, the timetable was approved, and markers were allocated for Michaelmas and Hilary C options, and for B-courses. The Board discussed all the points raised in last year's reports from the Chair and the five external examiners, and the recommendations of the Graduate Studies Committee. The following actions were taken:

1. The Board considered and accepted the revised examination conventions in terms of the scale for marks (as noted above), with a new pass mark of 50, and a new merit category (65-9).
2. The Board noted that as a result of changes to the mark scales, the routes to an overall Distinction were new (a mark of 70 or above in the Dissertation and an overall average of 70 across the four elements of the course, with no mark below 60; or a mark of 68 or above in the Dissertation and an overall average of 72 across the four elements of the course, with no mark below 60). A Merit would be awarded for a mark of 65 or above in the Dissertation and an overall average of 65 across the four elements of the course; and no mark below 57.
3. The Board noted and accepted a revised and it was hoped more helpful description of B-course essays for the Handbook.
4. The Board noted and accepted new marker comment sheets.
5. The Board noted, discussed and accepted that, as outlined above, whilst feedback would continue to be sent to students throughout the year, it would no longer include marks. This change meant that externals would no longer need to be present for termly meetings.
6. Difficulties had been experienced in past years securing the agreement of sufficient numbers of faculty members to mark dissertations. This year Ros Ballaster, Chair of Faculty Board, would send an email to all postholders about dissertation marking pointing out the expectation so far as this is concerned. To this end, the board noted that one dissertation supervisor is strongly preferable, since dissertation supervisors do not mark dissertations.

At the meeting on 4th February, marks for the B and C essays were confirmed; late submissions, and work under- or over-length were discussed in relation to penalties. At the meeting of 20th May, marks for the B and C essays were confirmed; late submissions, and work under- or over-length were discussed in relation to penalties.

Special Cases Committee (Adam Smyth (Chair), David Dwan, Elleke Boehmer) met on 20 May and 9 July to consider mitigating circumstances and proposed responses to individual cases to be considered by the Final Examination Board.

At the Final Examination Board, examiners confirmed the marks awarded to dissertations; agreed the imposition of penalties for late, over- or under-length work; accepted the recommendations from the Special Cases Committee; and classified the candidates. The Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize – awarded to the candidate whose Dissertation on a relevant topic achieved the highest marks – was not awarded this year (as 2017-18). The Marilyn Butler Prize was awarded to the candidate whose Dissertation achieved the highest mark overall. The external examiners made very helpful contributions to the various discussions and were, throughout the process, exemplary in their responses to every request and in their scrutiny of the process.

The high number of extensions this year meant that some students had not submitted their dissertations in time for the Final Board, so their work has to be marked during the long vacation. There were also some B and C essays from earlier terms that had not been submitted by the time of the Final Board. Where an extension had been granted, the Special Cases committee took into account that an adjustment to the examining process had already been made.

Further points to note for 2019-20 and beyond:

1. There was universal agreement that the new policy of not releasing on-course marks was not a success: in general, the policy seems to have generated more student anxiety, not less, and also caused difficulties for those students applying for PhD/DPhil courses who would normally want

to cite strong MSt marks as evidence of promise. It was agreed that the current situation is not tenable and the policy will be reversed for 2019-20.

2. There was some discussion, at the Final Exam Board, about the lack of clarity relating to candidates whose submitted written work departed considerably from the proposal, submitted earlier (see reports by Dr Goldman and Professor Smith). The Board agreed that no punitive action was required, but noted that the Handbook is clear about the need to remain reasonably close to the proposed, approved topic. When students submit proposed essay topics, they will be reminded of the importance of staying on topic for the actual submission.

B. Administration

The burden on administrative staff is significant and this year grew even more onerous, due to the very large number of extensions and late submissions, and the consequent and often complicated correspondence with Proctors, Education Committee, individual colleges, and sometimes other offices. This is on top of the fact that the numbers of candidates and options means that the entire examination is already an administrative challenge. Efforts would be taken to eliminate as far as possible unnecessary administrative demands. Administration for the examination was undertaken by Sue Clark, with Emily Richards and Andy Davice providing assistance at important points. Thanks are due to all those involved, particularly to Sue Clark, whose excellent work was crucial to the smooth-running of the year.

C. Criteria

The criteria and related descriptors were comprehensively revised for 2018-9, as noted above: 85+ 'Highest Distinction'; 80-84 'Very High Distinction'; 75-79 'High Distinction'; 70-74 'Distinction'; 65-69 'Merit'; 57-64 'Pass'; 50-56 'Low Pass'; 0-49 'Fail'.

D. External Examiners' Comments

The detailed written reports of the external examiners are attached. Summaries of key points follow below.

Dr Ian Johnson judged the standard of medieval work to be 'impressively high standard, comparable if not markedly superior' to comparable institutions. Dr Johnson discerned improvement in student work over the three terms, and was particularly impressed by B-essays ('particularly distinctive and successful on a national level'). Assessment was conducted with 'rigour, painstaking conscientiousness, academic expertise, clarity, precision, and consistency.' Dr Johnson applauded the use of very high marks for outstanding work. Administration was 'conducted with impeccable friendly efficiency and fairness.' Chairing of the exam board 'was exemplary: collegial, transparent about process, constructively open to discussion – and always putting the students first'. Dr Johnson noted that the short turn-round time in the summer for externals ('less than a week') is 'unacceptably short'. Dr Johnson applauded the 'presence of an abstract at the head of the dissertations, and noted that the burden of marking essays should be distributed equitably across the faculty.

Dr Jane Goldman described '[f]antastic work' by students, and evidence of excellent pedagogy, although Dr Goldman noted that the 9-month 'time constraint' meant there was therefore 'less scope for development, experiment and re-thinking once a research topic is undertaken.' Dr Goldman noted an emphasis on periodicity and historical context, and an admirable, intellectually stimulating engagement with archives: '[t]he archival work undertaken on this course is a truly distinctive strength.' Assessment is conducted with '[t]he highest rigour'; feedback is 'highly conscientious and constructive', with a 'sensitive and reflective dialogue between markers.' The board was conducted conscientiously and efficiently. Dr Goldman noted that in some cases students departed from the scope of the original brief proposal, replicated on the assessment forms: some markers expressed concern over this, but Dr Goldman thought that 'such departures are often indicative of healthy intellectual progress toward

independent critical thought.’ Dr Goldman also suggested a higher weighting for the dissertation, and encouraged ‘markers to reach higher into the upper marks on occasion for work of the very highest distinction’, noting that ‘comparable student work in other institutions ... would be rewarded by the highest mark possible.’

Dr Fiona Green considered the standard of work to be comparable with her institution, Cambridge University, and ‘higher than the examples I have seen at other HE institutions in the UK and Ireland.’ Dr Green was particularly impressed with the ‘conceptual and theoretical sophistication of a number of the C course essays’ and with the ‘argumentative coherence of the better dissertations.’ B course essays in the later period, World, and American Literatures strands included ‘excellent archival work.’ Assessment is ‘rigorous and fair, and aligns with University regulations’. Dr Green suggests that the faculty consider ‘automatic third marking where first and second marks differ significantly’.

Professor Christina Lupton judged that student work ‘stands out from comparable work ... for its polish, quality as research, and for the close reading skills ... particularly of poetry.’ The B-course makes this programme distinctive, although Professor Lupton wondered whether the B course may in some instances ‘be catering more effectively to students already familiar with the research environment’. Student work for the eighteenth or nineteenth-century is sometimes ‘quite narrow and biographically and/or bibliographically focused’, and students tend to avoid writing about theory: Professor Lupton saw no ‘engagement with feminism, gender or media theory, or theories of class.’ Marking was fair and rigorous. Professor Lupton noted that some markers disagreed about the level of ambition and scope required for a strong dissertation ([u]nder what conditions can one write a top dissertation on one text or one author?), and encouraged faculty reflection on this. Professor Lupton was concerned that ‘one course on poetry and philosophy seemed to be producing work focused entirely on male writers, while another on Eighteenth-Century Women’s Poetry was doing the opposite.’

Professor Javed Majeed noted that ‘student performance is on the whole more consistently above average than student performances in other HEIs’. Assessment was in general ‘rigorous and equitable’, with good use of a wide range of marks. ‘The office was quick to respond to queries.’ Professor Majeed suggested that the ‘World Literature Book History’ outline be augmented to bring it into line with other descriptions.

Professor Helen Smith noted that student work matched student work on comparable degree programmes; the best work was ‘highly sophisticated: carefully-researched, stylishly written, and capable of considerable insight and powerful analysis.’ In general, the top students are ‘extremely well prepared for doctoral study.’ Faculty ‘engage seriously and fully with student work, and there are numerous examples of best practice in the detailed and thoughtful comments of many markers.’ Professor Smith noted that ‘students on the Renaissance strand did not show a significant upward trajectory, and that performance on the B-course bibliographical exercise was not always strong.’ Assessment was fair and ‘in accordance with the University’s regulations.’ Professor Smith noted that thought needs to be given to cases when dissertations deviate considerably from the previous proposal. Professor Smith noted ‘a number of instances in which student work was not sent to a third marker despite a discrepancy of 10 marks or more’, and encouraged such work to be sent to externals.

Overall, and with some local exceptions, the external examiners were very positive, sometimes extremely positive, about the standard of student work, the rigorous process of assessment, and the excellent work of the administrative team.

I am grateful to my colleagues for their help, professionalism, and cheerful efficiency in the running of this process during the academic year 2018-19, and I look forward to future work together.

Professor Adam Smyth
Chair of M.St. Examiners
October 2019

3.4 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS



EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2019

3.4.1 DR JANE GOLDMAN

External examiner home institution: GLASGOW

Course(s) examined: MST IN ENGLISH STUDIES

Level: (please delete as appropriate) POSTGRADUATE

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
	<i>Please (/) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	/		
A2	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	/		
A3	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	/		
A4	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	/		
A5	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	/		
A6	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?			/
A7	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?			/
<p><i>* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A / Other".</i></p>				

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- a. *How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?*

This is my first year as External. Standards are on a par with those achieved by MLitt students in English Literature at my own institution, whose course is 1 year in length. Oxford's Mst is only 9 months so the work is compressed and the dissertation length and scope are not as extensive, but the standard of work is excellent within this framework, and the standard of work achieved for dissertations under this time constraint is commendable. The use of Merit and Distinction is also good practice and in keeping with comparable courses elsewhere.

- b. *Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

Fantastic work by students, evidence of excellent pedagogy, mediating toward doctoral work, and on par with work for similar courses in my own institution and the sector. There is an emphasis on periodicity and historical context, and an admirable, intellectually stimulating engagement with archives.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

The highest rigour is applied to the assessment process, which ensures equity of treatment and scrupulous fairness, including preservation of student anonymity. There is evidence of highly conscientious and constructive feedback derived from double-blind marking, and evidence of sensitive and reflective dialogue between markers, although I gather Externals are not shown the markers' final comments in the revised form in which they are given to students. The board was conducted most conscientiously and efficiently.

B3. Issues

Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?

No.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

The archival work undertaken on this course is a truly distinctive strength. Students show admirable facility in relating complex, skilled close-readings to historical contexts, and to textual genetics and material book history.

B5. Any other comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

Because of the 9-month period of the course the dissertations, which are a little shorter in length, a little narrower in scope (rather like extended essays), are undertaken in a shorter time frame than on other comparable taught postgraduate courses in other institutions. The course is certainly efficient within these time constraints, and the work I read is truly impressive. But the time constraint means there is therefore less scope for development, experiment and re-thinking once a research topic is undertaken.

I noticed an odd emphasis on the students' original prospectus which is replicated on the assessment forms (but which is not part of the formal assessment); and occasionally markers expressed concern over departure from it, whereas such departures are often indicative of healthy intellectual progress toward independent critical thought.

If the dissertation is at the heart of taught postgraduate degrees, then perhaps weighting might be rethought to reflect that.

Having seen the run of marks at the board, and witnessed discussions of potential prize-winning dissertations, I would urge markers to reach higher into the upper marks on occasion for work of the very highest distinction. The percentage assessment tends to make some markers shy of going beyond 80%, and to never award 100%. Yet comparable student work in other institutions where the assessment scale is on 22 points would be rewarded by the highest mark possible.

It would be helpful for Externals to see the comments that actually go back to students alongside those on the markers' dialogue forms. And perhaps it would be better to kill two birds with one stone, and allow students to see the original dialogue (albeit with only the agreed mark)?

In the main, it has been a pleasure and an education to read the work I was shown and to witness such scrupulous care and dedication in the delivery and assessment of this Mst course. I attach my comments on the assessment of the individual dissertations I received.

Signed:



Date:

30 July 2019

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2019

3.4.2 DR FIONA GREEN

External examiner home institution:	University of Cambridge		
Course(s) examined:	M.St., English		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	✓			
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓			
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	✓			
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓			
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓			
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?				✓
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?				✓

** If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A / Other".*

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- a. *How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?*

I read sample essays from the Michaelmas and Hilary term 'B' and 'C' courses, and sample dissertations, as well as two pieces of work that required adjudication. The standard is comparable with work at Masters level at my own institution, and higher than the examples I have seen at other HE institutions in the UK and Ireland.

- b. *Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

I was particularly impressed with the conceptual and theoretical sophistication of a number of the C course essays I read, and with the argumentative coherence of the better dissertations. The B course essays in the later period strands and in World, and American Literatures included excellent archival work.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

The assessment process is rigorous and fair, and aligns with University regulations and guidance. The process of double blind marking is careful and conscientious, with agreed marks and examiners' comments tallying accurately with helpfully detailed assessment criteria.

B3. Issues

Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?

I recommend that the faculty consider automatic third marking where first and second marks differ significantly (what counts as 'significantly' to be determined by the faculty).

There was some debate at the examiners' meeting regarding 'borderline' candidates. The relevant documentation might be clarified on this point.

The faculty might consider sending sample full runs of individual candidates' work to externals, and/or sending full runs for adjudication at the Distinction borderline where the final mark is 69.75.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities


Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the

learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

The M.St. is a demanding course as a whole, and demanding too within the C course elements, some of which require very substantial reading by week zero, and that students participate in identifying the focus of seminars. Several C courses described in the course details booklet are distinctive in their pedagogical designs, involving workshops, different kinds of group preparation, or a summative colloquium that opens the seminar, eventually, to a wider circle of academics.

B5. Any other comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

Signed:	
Date:	25 July 2019

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2019

3.4.3 DR IAN JOHNSON

External examiner home institution:	University of St Andrews
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Course(s) examined:	English
Level: (please <i>delete as appropriate</i>)	Postgraduate
<i>Please complete both Parts A and B.</i>	

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?		✓		
A2	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		✓		
A3	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?		✓		
A4	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?		✓		
A5	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?		✓		
A6	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?		✓		
A7	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?		✓		
<i>* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A / Other".</i>					

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- a. *How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?*

As external examiner I am responsible for the medieval area. As with the previous two years, the standard of work achieved across all medieval courses is of an impressively high standard, comparable if not markedly superior – in scholarship, intellectual ambition, technical skills, articulation, scholarly apparatus and originality – to the work that I have experienced in other higher education institutions in these islands.

- b. *Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

Please see my previous comment. As with previous years, the assessed work that I have been asked to comment on has, with regard to all three terms, been impressive across the board. Even when an individual student performance has not exactly been stellar it has invariably shown signs of effective teaching and vivid intellectual engagement. Once more, it is heartening to see that students are nurtured and encouraged in developing different approaches and academic styles in endeavouring to find their own voices and academic personalities. Thankfully, this is not somewhere where a particular institutional way of doing things is expected. Even so, despite this entertainment of diversity, there is a common understanding of what constitutes validity, rigour, adequacy of expression, scholarly ethics and stylistic decorum.

In the past some of my fellow externals have commented that students have too often failed to apply historical contexts adequately to their critical practice. I have not found this to be a problem in the past and I have certainly not found this to be a problem this year either.

I have gained an impression over the three terms of improvement in method and sophistication in student work. I remain particularly impressed by the achievement of students in the work conducted for the B-essays. The combining of codicological and palaeographic skills with, at times, highly advanced textual comment is particularly distinctive and successful on a national level.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

Reporting, grading and negotiation between examiners are, almost without exception, conducted with self-evident rigour, painstaking conscientiousness, academic expertise, clarity, precision, and consistency. I am reassured that there is equity of treatment for students. The productive dialogue of the examiners and the criteria that they employ relate transparently to the advertised grade descriptors. Great care is taken with the meanings of grades, especially when it comes to borderlines between classification zones. Colleagues are, I am pleased to see, becoming more confident not only in awarding very high marks to particularly outstanding work but also in presenting nuanced rationales for awarding different highly elevated grades, and they justify their decisions with good reason and evidence.

The administration of the assessment process and the management of the examiners' meeting have, as in previous years, been conducted with impeccable friendly efficiency and fairness. The chairing was exemplary: collegial, transparent about process, constructively open to discussion – and always putting the students first. All participants were given space to discuss issues and to raise any concerns.

B3 Issues

Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?

Although (as in my first two years) I answered question A5 positively, because I felt that I had in fact managed to discharge my role effectively, I feel that I should emphasize yet again that the turn-round time in the summer for external examiner scrutiny of assessments is unacceptably short. Less than a week is not reasonable when one is contending with routine professional demands, which can be particularly intense at this time of year.

B4 Good practice and enhancement opportunities

Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

As in previous years, my comments on the B essays are also comments on the clear excellence in the syllabus and the teaching practice on this part of the course.

B5 Any other comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

In as much as this is my final year as external examiner for the medieval part of your PGT courses, I would, first of all, like to take the opportunity in this overview to express my appreciation of, and particular thanks to, all administrative colleagues and current and previous chairs of the board for their guidance and kindness (and the huge hard work [often rather invisible and behind the scenes]) throughout this and earlier academic sessions.

Throughout my time as external examiner it has been indubitably the case that you are offering courses, teaching and assessment at the very highest levels. The calibre of student achievement is often astonishingly high but never uniform. The diversity, originality, ambitiousness and flair exhibited in student assessments are each year often remarkable and at times genuinely exciting. It is notable that the students who do least well are nevertheless inspired by your teaching and engaged and moving forward in their own ways.

It is good to see the presence of an abstract at the head of the dissertations (something I proposed last year). I would like to think that this has assisted students in keeping a methodological and organisational grip on what they are doing.

Looking from a longer perspective, the examiners' report forms are now completed in a satisfactory and convincing fashion across the board in a manner that was not universally the case when I started as external examiner. In my first year, due process was not being observed by a small number of assessors: some reports were unacceptably short and my fellow externals and I (together with internal members of the examiners' meeting) were unsettled by identity of wording in some examiners' individual reports, which simply should not have happened. For the last two years there has, in what I have seen, been no such sign of failure to observe due process.

One topic that has come up in the past, more than once in in formal discussions as well as in the examiners' meeting, is that it is not always easy to get some Oxford colleagues to agree to assess PGT work. I have been told anecdotally that some colleagues exempt themselves from such work on the grounds, for example, of insufficient specialist expertise, leaving other colleagues of no greater relevant specialism to pick up the workload. The University and the Faculty might like to take a view on the equitable distribution of assessment workloads at PGT level.

It has been a pleasure and an honour to act as external examiner. It is certainly been a memorable and positive experience for me. I would also like to thank the University and Oxford colleagues for their hospitality over the last three years and to wish them all the very best for their remarkable continuing success.

Signed:	Ian Johnson
Date:	4 August 2019

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2019

3.4.4 PROFESSOR CHRISTINA LUPTON

External examiner home institution:	University of Warwick/University of Copenhagen	
Course(s) examined:	M.St English	
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>		
		Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	X		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	X		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	X		
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	X		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	X		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?	n/a		
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?	n/a		

** If you answer “No” to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer “Yes” or “N/A / Other”.*

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- a. How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?*

The work of the Oxford M.St students stands out from comparable work I’ve seen for its polish, quality as research, and for the close reading skills the students exhibit, particularly of poetry.

- b. Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

The work I was reading, in the 1800 and 1900 strands of the M.St, was impressive in both its depth and range. The students clearly have access to many different courses and are able to develop their own interests because of the size of the programme. The bibliographic B course makes this masters programme distinctive from others in the country and helps locate the programme meaningfully in Oxford as an archive-rich environment. Most of the B course essays I saw made refreshing and exciting reading and suggested that students valued this aspect of the course. A few suggested otherwise, raising questions about whether the B course may be catering more effectively to students already familiar with the research environment than to those arriving from undergraduate programmes in which bibliographic skills are not taught at all.

In regard to other students writing on historical literature at this level, these PGT students do choose quite narrow and biographically and/or bibliographically focused subjects. They tend to avoid writing about theory. I saw none of the engagement with feminism, gender or media theory, or theories of class that I’d have encountered in comparable dissertations at Warwick, Sussex, or Michigan (the universities I know best). I suspect this may be because students studying eighteenth or nineteenth-century literature at Oxford see themselves as literary historians – clearly more theoretical courses are offered and enjoyed by those writing on contemporary issues.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University’s regulations and guidance.

The double-blind marking system seems to be working very well, with the students getting ample feedback and attention to the nuances of their work. I felt that marking operated fairly and that the best work was getting rewarded.

My only comment in this regard is that some disagreement between markers emerged over whether or not dissertations should be more ambitious/contextual in scope than essays. Is a dissertation that tries a little clumsily to incorporate a range of unexpected sources better than one that works expertly as a long close reading of one text or set of texts? Some examiners seemed to feel that narrowness was a problem in dissertation topics, while others faulted students for trying out more experimental combinations. Under what conditions can one write a top dissertation on one text or one author? I felt that more discussion at faculty level about the difference between a good essay and a good dissertation topic might be helpful in conveying expectations on this front more clearly to the students. It may not be possible to demand much more comparative or contextual topics from dissertations because they are written in a relatively short time – on the other hand, they are weighted more heavily in marking.

B3. Issues

Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?

Some of the courses offered to the student seemed coded in ways that surprised me a little – one course on poetry and philosophy seemed to be producing work focused entirely on male writers, while another on Eighteenth-Century Women’s Poetry was doing the opposite. Such pink and blue (or black and white) courses would be generally avoided in other postgraduate programmes I know.


B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

As someone who has worked with archives myself, I’d stress that the delicate nature of the B course when it comes to students who arrive at Oxford without any archival experience. ... Potentially, it’s the students with least cultural capital that stand to profit most from the B course – but it may be worth thinking a bit about how to make sure that its opportunities feel open to them when they are only at Oxford for 9 months. Perhaps more emphasis could be placed on the importance of finding, handling and describing the formats of digitally curated materials, which are remotely accessible and play such a central role in the emerging field of bibliographic studies?

B5. Any other comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

Signed:	
Date:	January 10 th , 2019

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2019

3.4.5 PROFESSOR JAVED MAJEED

External examiner home institution:	King's College London		
Course(s) examined:	M.St. in English Studies (primarily World Literatures in English)		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>		
		Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	✓		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	✓		

A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?			✓
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?			✓
* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A / Other".				

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- a. *How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?*

The academic standards achieved are in general equal to and in some cases (for example, in the case of candidates' essays for 'Material Texts, 1830-1914') considerably higher than those achieved by students at other HEIs.

- b. *Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

The student performance is on the whole more consistently above average than student performances in other HEIs, and there was, as is to be expected, less of a range of quality in the scripts I received as compared to other HEIs. In general, students also write well, and the issues which one encounters in other HEIs when it comes to standards of writing amongst less able candidates are generally absent (with the exception of one script I received, but this candidate failed the degree).

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

The conduct of the assessment process is on the whole rigorous and equitable. Markers were careful to justify their marks in relation to the published marking criteria and the comments focussed on the structure of arguments as well as points of detail, which is the standard practice across most Russell Group HEIs (with some exceptions). On the whole, markers also used the whole range of marks when assessing candidates' work. The office was quick to respond to queries about the conduct of the assessment process.

B3. Issues

Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?

There are no serious issues as such, but I noticed in the case of the markers' comments on one dissertation the first 9-10 lines of each of the comment sheets were identical. In one case, I received some essays in which the agreed mark was not entered, so I assumed I had to adjudicate which I did, but in fact this was not required – the mark had been agreed but just not entered into the agreed mark box.


B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

The 'World Literatures' A-course in the M.St. programme is comprehensive and the 'Material Texts' courses give the degree a distinctive intellectual edge. However, the 'World Literature Book History' outline is a bit sketchy compared to the outlines for 'Material Texts, 1830-1914' and 'Material Texts, post-1900'. Please also note that Gandhi is spelt 'Gandhi', not 'Ghandi'.

B5. Any other comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

Signed:	
Date:	5/08/2019

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2019

3.4.6 PROFESSOR HELEN SMITH

External examiner home institution:	University of York		
Course(s) examined:	MSt in English (1550-1700)		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	✓			
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓			
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	✓			
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓			
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓			
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?				✓
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?				✓

** If you answer “No” to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer “Yes” or “N/A / Other”.*

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- a. *How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?*

The academic standards achieved by the students are of a similar standard to those achieved by students on comparable degree programmes.

- b. *Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

Work at the top end was highly sophisticated: carefully-researched, stylishly written, and capable of considerable insight and powerful analysis. These students are extremely well prepared for doctoral study, should they choose to pursue it. Even students who performed less well showed evidence of thoughtful scholarship, a serious engagement with the subject, and a clear concern for good writing and effective expression. Given the short time available to students to write their dissertations, their achievements in this area were frequently impressive. In comparison with the other strands on the programme, I noted that students on the Renaissance strand did not show a significant upward trajectory, and that performance on the B-course bibliographical exercise was not always strong. As this is my first year as external examiner, I cannot say whether this is a recurring trend or a reflection of the particular cohort.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University’s regulations and guidance.

The assessment process was conducted fairly and in accordance with the University’s regulations and guidance. Student work is scrutinised fully, and marks were examined closely, both prior to and at the final examiners’ meeting. I was given access to an appropriate selection of material, which allowed me to gain a confident sense of the cohort as a whole, and the range of students’ achievements.

B3. Issues

Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?

Prior to the examiners' meeting, I was not aware that students do not see the comments which are scrutinised by the external, but instead see a digest prepared by the first examiner. This alleviated my concerns about the tone and style of some comments, though I still encourage markers to produce comments which could appropriately be read by the students, and which identify good performance and areas for improvement as well as flaws. The current practice appears to place a heavy load on first markers. The faculty might consider streamlining the process to reduce workloads. If the process is not changed, it would be helpful for external examiners to see the feedback which is returned to students.

For a single dissertation, I noticed direct repetition within the two markers' comments, which raised questions about the marking process in this particular instance. More generally, I found it odd to see the dissertation proposal presented as an abstract. This raised questions about how these are treated, and appropriate penalties for deviating from the agreed topic.

I saw a number of instances in which student work was not sent to a third marker despite a discrepancy of 10 marks or more, and/or a large gap across a borderline. I would encourage markers to be aware of the difficulties early career academics may face in negotiating marks with more senior colleagues, and to consider more routine recourse to third marking. The Faculty may also wish to discuss how far these significant differences in opinion reflect a lack of clarity or consensus around marking criteria.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities


Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

Members of the faculty engage seriously and fully with student work, and there are numerous examples of best practice in the detailed and thoughtful comments of many markers.

B5. Any other comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

Very warm thanks to Susan Clark and Adam Smyth for making the process of external examining very straightforward, and for clear and timely guidance and instructions throughout the year.

Signed:	
Date:	2 nd August 2019

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.