



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

**FACULTY OF ENGLISH
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2020

Contents

1. PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE 2019-20.....	4
2. FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE	5
Part I.....	5
A. STATISTICS.....	5
B. NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES	5
C. POTENTIAL FUTURE CHANGES TO THIS YEAR'S PROCEDURES	6
D. CANDIDATE AWARENESS OF EXAM CONVENTIONS.....	7
Part II.....	7
A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION	7
B. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES AND BREAKDOWN OF THE RESULTS BY GENDER.....	7
C. DETAILED NUMBERS ON CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE IN EACH PART OF THE EXAMINATION.....	7
D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS.....	8
Course I.....	8
Paper 1: Shakespeare Portfolio	8
Paper A (CII Paper 3): Literature in English, 1350-1550	9
Paper B: Literature in English, 1660-1830	10
Paper 6: Special Options.....	11
1. Film Criticism.....	11
2. Others and J. M. Coetzee	11
3. LGBTQIA: Wilde to the Present.....	12
4. The Avant-Garde	12
5. The Literary Essay.....	12
6. Writing Feminisms/Feminist Writing.....	13
7. Postcolonial Literature	13
8. Writing Lives.....	14
9. Literature and Science	14
10. Fairytales, Folklore and Fantasy.....	14
11. Tragedy.....	14
12. Texts in Motion: Literary and Material Forms, 1550-1800	15
13. Literature, Culture and Politics in the 1930s.....	15
14. Political Reading.....	15
15. In Defence of Poetry	16
16. Border Crossings 1350-1645	16
17. Early Modern Literature & Crime.....	16
18. Hit and Myth: Re-Inventing the Medieval for the Modern Age.....	17

19.	Contemporary Drama on the British Stage.....	17
20.	The Good Life: Morality, Film, Literature.....	17
	Paper 7: Dissertation	18
	Course II.....	19
	Paper A: Literature in English, 650-1100 (see above, CI Paper A1, for 1350-1550).....	19
	Paper 2: Lyric.....	19
	Paper 4: History of the English Language to c.1800.....	20
E.	COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTIFIABLE INDIVIDUALS AND OTHER MATERIAL WHICH WOULD USUALLY BE TREATED AS RESERVED BUSINESS	20
F.	NAMES OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS	20
	Part III: EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS (UG).....	21
	FHS Appendix: Communications to students regarding exam conventions and other arrangements	31
	Guidance for Candidates for English FHS, 2020	31
	Letter for English Finalists on Classification, 20 April 2020	33
	English FHS 2020 FAQs	35
3.	M.ST AND M.PHIL (MEDIEVAL STUDIES) IN ENGLISH (INCLUDING M.ST IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES).....	40
	Part I.....	40
	A. STATISTICS.....	40
	B. EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES	40
	C. CHANGES FOR THE FACULTY TO CONSIDER	41
	D. PUBLICATION OF EXAMINATION CONVENTIONS	41
	Part II.....	41
	A. GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE EXAMINATION	41
	B. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ISSUES.....	41
	C. DETAILED NUMBERS	41
	D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS.....	41
	E. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUALS.....	41
	F. THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS.....	41
	M.St. and M.Phil. in English, Chair of Examiners' Report for 2019-20	42
	A. Process	42
	B. Administration	44
	C. Criteria	44
	D. External Examiners' Comments.....	44
	EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS (PGT)	47

**1. PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
2019-20**

Prelims examinations were not held this year due to Covid-19 restrictions.

2. FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Part I

A. STATISTICS

There were 223 candidates, of whom 10 took Course II.

Class	Number			Percentage (%)		
	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
I	93	(79)	(87)	41.7%	(33.9%)	(39.7%)
II.I	127	(154)	(127)	57.0%	(66.1%)	(58.0%)
II.II	2	(0)	(2)	0.9%	(0)	(0.9%)
III	0	(0)	(0)	0	(0)	(0)
Pass	1	(0)	(0)	0.4%	(0)	(0)
Fail	0	(0)	(0)	0	(0)	(0)

One 'alternative first' was awarded (requiring three of five marks at 70+ and an average of 67.5+).

All scripts in coursework, and all essays in the remote written papers, were double blind marked. In accordance with the Guide for Examiners, scripts/essays were third-marked wherever markers 1 and 2 could not reach agreement, and automatically third-marked in cases where the initial marks varied by 15 marks or two classes.

No scaling or cohort-wide adjustment of marks was necessary or undertaken.

No candidate made an application for DDH.

B. NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown, and closure of the University's buildings and libraries led to the wholesale restructuring of the written examinations. In recognition of the many difficulties faced by candidates, the overall assessment was reduced by half, and the weighting of the written examinations within the overall marks profile was also reduced.

The four three-hour written closed-book examinations in Course I (Papers 2, 3, 4, 5) were combined into two four-hour remote open-book examinations (Papers A and B), counted as two of five papers (alongside Paper 6, Shakespeare, and the Dissertation), instead of four of seven. In Course II Papers 1 and 3 were combined into a four-hour remote open-book examination (Paper A); Paper 2 became a 2.5 hour remote open-book examination; these were counted as two of six papers (alongside Paper 4, Paper 6, Shakespeare/Material Text, and the Dissertation), instead of three of seven. The written exams therefore accounted for 40% (instead of 57%) of the marks profile in Course I, and 33% (instead of 43%) of the marks profile in Course II.

A new classification scheme was devised for the five Course I and six Course II papers:

First	<p><i>EITHER:</i> Two marks of 70 or above, an average mark of 68.5 or greater and no mark below 50.</p> <p><i>OR:</i> Three or more marks of 70 or above, an average mark of 67.5 or greater and no mark below 50.</p>
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II.i	Two marks of 60 or above, an average mark of 59 or greater and no mark below 40.
II.ii	Two marks of 50 or above, an average mark of 49.5 or greater and no mark below 30.
III	Average mark of 40 or greater and not more than one mark below 30.
Pass	Average mark of 30 or greater. Not more than two marks below 30.

A further new mechanism was the University's 2020 Safety Net procedure. This provided that wherever (1) a candidate's overall performance in remotely administered exams was significantly below the level of achievement indicated by their previously submitted work; and (2) the student's Self-Assessment or MCE indicated very serious impact on that student's performance in the remote written examinations, the Board would be permitted to implement the 2020 Safety Net procedure, by which: (1) the candidate's highest coursework mark is counted twice; (2) the candidate's lowest remote written exam mark is disregarded; (3) the result is averaged. Classification then proceeds on that average, with the proviso that the double-counted top mark does NOT count as two units (i.e., a double-weighted coursework mark of 70+ cannot produce a first in the absence of another 70+ mark).

The same assessment criteria were used for the remote open-book examinations as have previously been used in marking written examinations. Where candidates had included content which would not have been available in an offline, closed-book, handwritten examination, it was neither rewarded nor penalized.

The combination of two papers into one required an adjusted marking process. Rather than the two markers' comparing and agreeing marks for whole scripts, individual essays were each double-blind marked and then given an agreed, or third, mark; these agreed marks, averaged, then produced the final mark for the paper.

C. POTENTIAL FUTURE CHANGES TO THIS YEAR'S PROCEDURES

This year's examination format was an emergency response to an unanticipated situation. In that context it succeeded admirably, producing robust assessment and classification, with further necessary adjustments limited to action in response to individual MCE declarations. Nonetheless, some concerns were raised by examiners and assessors about the essentially different nature of a remote, open-book examination, and our need to adapt to the implications of this format.

Students were encouraged by the University and faculty to treat the 2020 exercise as a typed version of the normal written examination, in which instead of having to memorize all quotations they could also consult their notes – and hence simply to type exam-essay answers in the standard one-hour slot. It was abundantly clear that only a very small minority of candidates approached the exercise in precisely this manner.

Wider research shows that this style of assessment calls for more substantial changes in order to be most effective. The current term for the non-invigilated remote exam is OBOW:

'open book, open web'; standard practice is to use significantly longer submission windows. The model for effective assessment in these circumstances is one that recognizes the resources available to the student, and sets tasks that test the students' learning and performance within that context. In designing proposals for remotely administered exams in 2021, we are guided by these principles.

D. CANDIDATE AWARENESS OF EXAM CONVENTIONS

Candidates received the Examination Circulars (available on Canvas) prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Once the new examination format was developed, they received new 'Guidance for Candidates for English FHS, 2020'; a 'Letter for English Finalists on Classification, 20 April 2020'; and a series of 'English FHS 2020 FAQs'. See FHS appendix for documents.

The University also provided a variety of guidance.

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

This year's examination must be assessed and reflected upon in context of the extraordinary measures taken to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Candidates are hugely to be congratulated on the high standard of their overall performance, which in many cases was achieved against the background of severe challenge, and in all cases in a time of great anxiety and difficulty. For the same reasons, as Chair I want to express great gratitude to the Board examiners, and all assessors and markers, for their work in this difficult period.

As intended, the reduced assessment regime broadly mitigated the adverse effects of the pandemic: prior to any adjustments made in recognition of candidates' individual MCEs, the cohort's marks produced 40.4% classifications of First. The final proportion of 41.7% firsts, while the highest ever seen in English, is not wholly unprecedented (2018: 39.7%). In any case, there is no intention of retaining the combined papers by which the assessment was halved. In future years, even given the necessity of pandemic-controlling measures, it is proposed that the four separate papers be reinstated, unless similar emergency measures should again be required.

B. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES AND BREAKDOWN OF THE RESULTS BY GENDER

See Section E.

C. DETAILED NUMBERS ON CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE IN EACH PART OF THE EXAMINATION

The majority of papers in English Course I and Course II are compulsory, with a wide range of specialized options taken within Paper 6 (a 6,000 word extended essay, or a written exam for a small number of language options) and Paper 7 (the 8,000 word dissertation).

The newly-designed Papers A and B showed good consistency of performance with candidates' prior performance in submitted papers, and with the performance in written exams of cohorts in previous years.

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

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

Course I

Paper 1: Shakespeare Portfolio

251 candidates took this paper, including 13 English and Modern Languages, 10 Classics and English, and 9 History and English candidates. The overall standard of work was very high and showed sustained and independent engagement with relevant materials. The very best portfolios this year contained work of publishable quality; many included polished responses that were the result of thoughtful and diligent personal research. The Examiners rewarded clarity of argument and quality of analysis as evidenced across the portfolio as a whole. This meant that well-proposed topics, balanced arguments, precision in close readings and an adventurous spirit did well. Most essays were on Shakespeare's drama and thematic approaches were the most popular.

This year a high number of candidates included work on the main tragedies (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Lear*) in their portfolios. The comedies *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It* along with *Henry IV*, *Tempest*, *Cymbeline* and *Coriolanus* also received a good deal of consideration. Wider range from across Shakespeare's canon (including the poetry) often allowed candidates to produce more rigorously considered and more confidently positioned responses. Some very careful lexical work that applied the supplementary materials found in scholarly editions to advantage or was otherwise informed by skilled use of databases was submitted. The weaker portfolios seen this year often concentrated on a very narrow range of texts and without any identification of further contextual opportunities or demonstrations of knowledge of the rest of Shakespeare's works. While most candidates had read a wide range of critics and showed at least adequate understanding of the major shifts within Shakespeare studies, weaker essays were often over-reliant on limited (sometimes dated) critical texts. Over-reliance on a single lecture (i.e. retooled lecture material lacking any further independent extension of the theme or intellectual challenge) also resulted in less successful essays. Few portfolios set Shakespeare's writing in the context of his contemporaries; those that did tended to be strong and some of the best essays this year discussed Shakespeare with other contemporary authors. There was more work submitted on 18thc print cultures than on either 17thc or 19thc contexts.

The Examiners were impressed by the variety and scope of many portfolios. There were rigorously argued essays across a range of materials; some imaginatively framed topics across the Shakespeare canon; engagement with theory or with a breadth of critical methods and issues; approaches ranging from close reading to forays into Shakespearean legacies and reception history. There was some interesting work on the modern politics of

Shakespeare's plays, including issues of disability, gender, and age in casting and in film adaptations. Less well-focussed essays often came with convoluted or over-lengthy titles, whilst well-chosen shorter titles often proved an early indicator of effective preparation and focussed thinking. Essays on adaptation this year were (in the main) of a high standard because they applied the appropriate analytical skills independently and balanced their interest in reception/alternative media with new insights into the underpinning Shakespearean texts. Such approaches proved far less successful when reliant on critical secondary literature or when overly descriptive or when the focus wandered too far from Shakespeare. The same was true of work that looked at Shakespeare in popular or contemporary culture.

A few candidates opted for less conventional essay forms. Examples of this included work that offered analytical accounts of the staging of particular plays or scenes, or in other cases, attempts at editing a section of a play, often with a particular performance vision in mind. The best essays that accompanied such work foregrounded their own interpretive and analytical thinking as represented by the edited passage or staged performance, and incorporated rigorous close attention to the primary material itself. Less strong versions of this work tended to summarise and explain editorial or directorial choices without grounding these choices within a fully coherent argumentative framework.

The presentation of work for the portfolio this year was generally of a high standard and gave due regard to the importance of correct footnoting and consistency within bibliographical citations. The Shakespeare portfolios were submitted before the disruptions caused by the global pandemic. The Examiners are pleased to note the quality of thought and scholarship produced on this paper in FHS 2020.

Paper A (CII Paper 3): Literature in English, 1350-1550

The examiners for Paper A were unanimous in praising the very high standard of work achieved under very difficult circumstances this year. The range achieved by candidates was particularly impressive, in terms of both the set of authors and texts studied and the variety of critical approaches taken. As usual, stronger answers addressed the titular quotation directly and relevantly, often demonstrating a very sophisticated understanding of the issues at stake and tailoring their material and line of argument so as to address these issues head on. Less successful essays engaged more loosely with the quotation, either by reproducing arguments that were generally rather than specifically appropriate or by responding to particular words in the quotation without giving sufficient attention to their meaning in context. Candidates are reminded of the need to read titular quotations carefully and critically. In general, detailed engagement with primary and secondary sources was a strong feature of work for this paper, although some candidates struggled to strike a balance between expounding information and analysing that information in the service of an argument. The most impressive essays employed critical writing critically, engaging with, rather than relying upon, other people's opinions. A small number of scripts were marred by a lack of clarity in expressing and organizing ideas.

Examiners highlighted the wide range of prose, verse, and dramatic texts studied for section A1, with some notably good work on early Tudor writing (especially Skelton, More, Wyatt, and Surrey). As in recent years, particular attention was paid to devotional texts, with

Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich very much to the fore. Much of this work successfully interrogated critical terms such as 'affective piety' and located the texts within a European context. Some essays, however, focused on the content of these texts to the exclusion of any consideration of their literary form and linguistic strategies. Medieval and early Tudor drama also proved a popular topic, although question 18 was sometimes taken as an opportunity to write on any aspect of this topic rather than an invitation to address the purpose of medieval drama specifically.

Examiners for section A2 highlighted rigorous argumentation as a particular feature of the work produced this year. The attention paid to language, rhetoric, and form was highly impressive (particularly in relation to the work of Tasso, Drayton, and Jonson). Question 4 elicited several excellent meditations on print and coterie manuscript circulation. Other areas of particular strength included the various uses of translation in the period and interrogations of same-sex desire, race, and colonialism. Several generally less popular texts and authors featured prominently this year, including the Marprelate pamphlets, Marston, the Cavalier poets, and Cowley. The Interregnum was well represented particularly, and unusually, through female authors. In some cases, work for this section was weakened by too many general statements or by limited range.

Paper B: Literature in English, 1660-1830

Strong and well-focused work was not in short supply in 2020, and there was some truly exceptional work. A number of essays were written to an impressively high standard, with focused and persuasive argumentation, a wealth of textual and contextual detail, clear and engaging critical prose, etc. As we say every year, the best answers engaged directly with the question and managed to convey both breadth and depth in their understanding of the period.

On the other hand, there were a significant number of scripts of notable polish and equally striking irrelevance. Even with the addition of prescriptive questions to some of the quotations, too many candidates are still failing to attend properly to the specific terms and argument of a quotation. Overall, the best essays demonstrated a clear and, often, witty engagement with the prompt itself, and it is worth reminding candidates that the relevance of the essay to the prompt/question is necessary to producing a fresh intellectually engaged and engaging essay.

B1: There were some especially strong essays on difficult authors (e.g. Milton, Cavendish, Pope, Swift, Montagu, and Richardson) that experimented with a variety of approaches and fruitful pairings: i.e. placing Milton alongside the new science and/or women writers; Pope and landscape gardening or English *Romanitas*; Swift and religious politics (including postcolonial methods of reading); the novel in relation to contemporary or earlier dramatic writing; women's writing and gender and/or sexuality. The best essays showed a wide and, also, deep understanding of the authors/fields discussed and showed particular strengths in terms of close reading and literary history (e.g. 'The Battle of the Books'; romance, the rise of the novel, and amatory fiction; labouring poets against the backdrop of the georgic as a genre).

Better work could be done on questions pertaining to drama in terms of distinguishing performance from performativity; work on women's writers, while most welcome, should avoid artificially limiting itself to paratextual material and/or plot summaries (notably, in relation to Behn). More work on religious politics would have strengthened a number of essays, though there were a few that showcased refreshing work in this regard (Dryden; Restoration drama; libertinism/libertine culture). Welcome work was done in the fields of material culture and book history as well as coterie cultures; more in-depth research would have strengthened essays on eighteenth-century literature and empire / postcolonial readings of the Enlightenment.

B2: Many of the essays on poetry this year were thought particularly good: some interesting and thoughtful work on Burns, Clare, Coleridge, Keats, Smith, Wordsworth. The essays on Austen and Gothic tended to follow more predictable tracks, but here there was good work when the candidate ventured beyond the usual suspects and thought in ways which made a concept (e.g. 'imagination') appear contested rather than straightforward.

Weaker scripts were let down by a dismayingly restricted range (e.g. two short poems) on the discussion of which sometimes grand historical generalisations (the "romantic" view of this or that) were based; some candidates worked through several paired-off poems with no rationale offered or even implied for their pairing; some scripts dashed through numerous texts and dropped names at breakneck speed without finding time to say much critically engaged about any of them; and quite a few were marred by an imperfect grasp of the intellectual history they confidently adduced (the thought of Adam Smith appeared in some very odd forms, and Burke was rarely adduced to much purpose other than as a bogeyman). The relationship between Christianity and slavery was sometimes under-argued.

Paper 6: Special Options

1. Film Criticism

Thirteen candidates took this option. The quality of the work on film that the students produce from only five weeks of teaching is impressive. Most of the essays were about films that were not studied on the option and this showed an ability to apply skills and concepts. The students engaged with the films analytically and imaginatively. There were a few welcome occurrences this year. One was the way the students implicitly set themselves critical questions, rather than simply titling with topics. Another was the focus on aesthetic qualities. Another was picking up on long standing appraisals of certain films or directors and holding them up for renewed scrutiny.

2. Others and J. M. Coetzee

Seven candidates took this option. All essays placed Coetzee in literary, cultural, or philosophical contexts that were apt, persuasively justified, and in many cases genuinely imaginative. The very best essays were startlingly ambitious in what they were using Coetzee to do—Coetzee becoming a way into a larger theoretical question or historical problem—but a conspicuous strength of the full run of essays was the confident maturity with which candidates framed their arguments theoretically. There was occasionally a

tendency to write ‘around’ Coetzee’s novels where more detailed textual analysis would only have made the candidate’s claims stronger.

3. LGBTQIA: Wilde to the Present

Ten candidates took this option. The standard of essays was generally very good, addressing a wide range of queer texts and writers from circa 1870 to the present day. The best essays felt like discrete research projects, with a particular, narrow focus, a distinct body of material that was considered in depth, and a clear set of research questions that it felt, by the end, had been answered. Many developed ideas or topics touched on in seminars by reading more widely and delving more deeply into that particular question or issue. The more middling essays were often less focused, considering a disparate selection of texts without providing a sufficient rationale for putting them together; it wasn’t always clear what had informed their selection. Weaker essays ranged only marginally beyond the reading list for the classes, sticking to the same primary and theoretical texts discussed in class, and doing so without sufficient historical contextualization, leading to distorted readings of the texts under consideration. More thorough contextualization may also have resolved some of the difficulties these essays had in wedding close attention to literary texts with a broader theoretical or literary historical argument. Two critical trends are also worth noting. First, that there was a worrying tendency not to engage with more recent theoretical work; taken in the round, one might get the impression from these essays that little of note exists in queer theory that wasn’t written by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, or Leo Bersani. Secondly, the conflation of ‘queer’, ‘gay’, ‘homosexual’, and ‘radical’ in many essays risked reductive readings of the politics of the texts in question: queer sexuality is linked, but not synonymous, with queer politics—nor is queer sexuality identical with radical politics. The best work, though, showed impressively how the literariness of texts can contribute meaningfully to our understanding of sexuality.

4. The Avant-Garde

Eleven candidates took this option. The essays for this course encompassed an exciting and independent range of topics including Barnes, Beckett, Dada, digital textuality, European aesthetics, feminism, Joyce, Loy, *The Little Review*, Stein, Stieglitz, Wilde, etc. Many made an effort to research new material. Most topics were well conceived and delineated. The strongest essays used their research to analyse a well-focused topic in depth, focusing appropriately on ideas, themes and formal features. The best essays made claims that were supported by careful demonstrations of relevant evidence. They also made the stakes of their argument evident to readers and didn’t hesitate to state them explicitly. Better essays acknowledged critical precursors and engaged with them appropriately. They also went beyond simple comparing and contrasting to demonstrate how such an exercise illuminates a set of ideas or aesthetics; it is not enough to say that two authors are different and leave it at that. Weaker essays remained at a more general, descriptive level; made claims unsubstantiated by the evidence provided; suffered from lack of proofreading and often had problems with grammar and citation.

5. The Literary Essay

Fifteen candidates took this option. Candidates wrote on material from the earliest English essays to contemporary essayists, though the majority of candidates focused on the twentieth century or later, and the eighteenth-century and Romantic essayists were conspicuous by their absence. The best performances offered original arguments made on the basis of substantial research, sometimes uncovering neglected or little-read essayists and bringing them into dialogue with the broader issues of the history of the essay. Essays which took as their focus a conceptual idea or topic, treated across various essayists or a period in the essay's history, tended to be stronger than those which used a single author as the organizing principle. All of the essays reflected on the definitional problems or characteristic qualities of the essay as a genre, suggesting that the wider discussions of the class, even where directed at material other than that treated in the submissions, fed into their gestation.

6. Writing Feminisms/Feminist Writing

Eight candidates took this option. Essays were particularly strong across the board, and addressed texts spanning thousands of years – from Homer to the recently published. They explored a wide range of authors and genres, in English and in translation, high and low: the Epic, poetry, novels, short stories, plays, life-writing, auto-theory, graphic novels. Essays focused on a broad range of topics, including: intersectionality; gender and race; gender and postcolonialism; trans and nonbinary identity; fictive and queer kinship; illness and mental illness; literary experimentalism; translation. Essays explored a wide spectrum of feminist theory and criticism, with a strong interest in intersectional, African-American, black lesbian, postcolonial and trans feminisms. Feminist approaches were fruitfully combined with poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, phenomenological and existentialist, African-American, critical race, postcolonial, queer, transgender and New Materialist theory and criticism. 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.

7. Postcolonial Literature

Fourteen candidates took this option. The Postcolonial Literature paper produced a varied and generally high quality collection of essays this year. Perhaps the most notable trend is that only five out of the fourteen essays focused on primary materials from the set readings. The others engaged with the debates of the course by focusing explicitly on the theoretical materials that also form part of the core reading for the course, but bringing new primary materials into dialogue with it (under the supervision of course tutors in essay consultations). On the whole this was a successful strategy, and points to the formative influence of the early presentation and writing assignments that encourage students to engage with the theoretical materials. There is some real scholarly ambition evident in the way these essays took on established theoretical texts and debates, and at its best a sense of the primary materials as generative spaces for thinking and theorising about the

postcolonial. On the other hand, essays that read familiar texts within well-established critical terms sometimes struggled to find a clear critical voice.

8. Writing Lives

Fifteen candidates took this option. The course ranged through a vast chronological sweep and the submitted essays engaged with texts ranging from the middle ages to the present day. All the work was of a very high standard and much of it was outstanding. The best work was ambitious in its focus, taking a carefully chosen selection of texts in order to fully engage with ideas of what it means to write a life. Candidates engaged with a range of critical approaches: narratology and time; relationships between the photographic and textual selves; dismantling cultural subjectivity, fragmentation and belatedness, the archived self; and the academic self; and what 'voice' and 'origins' might mean. One common challenge faced by some candidates centred on the logic of text selection. Candidates who wrote about multiple texts from quite different genres did, on occasion, find themselves struggling to find sufficient room in their essays to address how the issue of genre played into the complexities of life writing; and also the issue of mediated voices. Overall however, the essays showed rich and creative engagement with the subject in every sense of that word.

9. Literature and Science

Eight candidates took this option. Candidates took 'science' in a variety of ways and there was a pleasing range of approaches in the scripts. Several candidates showed a commendable grasp of the theoretical questions raised by cross-disciplinary work in this area, and the best showed the students' capacity to read the literary texts closely as well as exemplifying bigger arguments. Several scripts showed an excellent depth of knowledge, real pieces of scholarship; others were theoretically extremely sophisticated. Weaker scripts did not manage to sustain an argument, or treated the literary works they adduced only skimpily or schematically.

10. Fairytales, Folklore and Fantasy

Fifteen candidates took this option. Candidates employed a wide range of primary texts and historical periods on this option, with some inter-period work on show. Canon criticism and identity issues particularly emerged as themes. Those that met the challenge of this paper best showed well-contextualised analysis alongside energised engagement and skilful use of appropriate theory (e.g., feminism, genre criticism, etc). In the most successful scripts, the examiners noted a confident understanding of relevant critical fields. Examiners rewarded choice of materials that allowed depth of analysis, as much as breadth. Weaker scripts were characterised by largely un-historicised analysis and arguments that were not embedded in close reading.

11. Tragedy

Fifteen candidates took this option. 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 which moved with high sophistication between texts, developing analysis with a firm theoretical basis combined

with intelligent close reading. Real originality, literary sensitivity, and flair were on show in several essays that made unexpected comparisons between texts, sustaining and justifying them with analytical and theoretical precision. Weaker essays drifted into ill-defined areas broadly related to the idea of tragedy, or 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. There was some highly fruitful comparison of literature with a variety of visual media, and many candidates made good use of the freedom to discuss texts of their own choosing beyond the seminar reading list.

12. Texts in Motion: Literary and Material Forms, 1550-1800

Nine candidates took this option. Written work for this paper was in general of an excellent standard, and the very best work was outstanding in its sophistication and ambition. The strongest work responded both meticulously and imaginatively to the archival emphasis of this paper, and combined research into new print or manuscript texts (or in some cases objects) with theoretical reflection and/or literary sensitivity. Less strong work was still characterised by archival industry but was less engaged with the specifics of the texts under discussion, and was more inclined towards a survey of finds. Excellent use was made of college libraries: it was pleasing to see this relatively off-piste research going on at undergraduate level. Presentation and writing was good, often excellent. In general, there was a clear sense of the candidates' responding to the particular intellectual and methodological challenges and opportunities of this paper.

13. Literature, Culture and Politics in the 1930s

Fourteen candidates took this option. The course covered fiction, essays, memoirs, poetry, plays and documentary film from the 1930s, exploring topics including 'home and abroad', documentary culture, class and region, and responses to the coming of war. Writers discussed included Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell, H.D., Stevie Smith, Christopher Isherwood, Virginia Woolf and Patrick Hamilton. Essays covered a wide range of topics and students showed independence in their choice of topics. Both markers were impressed with the way the students worked within the remit of the course but found a diverse range of approaches to it. There was a pleasing combination of essays that led from the class materials and essays that brought in other texts and authors – e.g. Una Marson, Daphne du Maurier, Henry Miller and Walter Greenwood. Beyond that, our general sense of the essays was that stronger submissions pursued a distinct topic, which was well-researched, and presented with a clear and powerful argument. More middling work tended to resemble an extended tutorial essay, with a less discrete research-base and clarity of argumentation.

14. Political Reading

Eight candidates took this option. A wide range of topics was attempted, with the idea of reading publics in a digital age dominating. Essays examined the internet as a reading public and psychoanalytic readings of the digital unconscious. Critical race theory was deployed to read Blackness as voice and Black dissidence. Candidates also used the rubric of the course ('political reading') to dwell on reading politics, including the politics of the intersection of postcolonial, feminist, and poststructural theories. There was also engagement in a couple

of scripts with ideology and ‘interpellation’, as these applied to reading. At best, the candidates historically contextualised theoretical and philosophical works while also engaging with and rigorously analysing the abstractions of philosophical theory. Occasionally, the original insights of a given essay were overwhelmed by the critical interpretation of the theoretical or critical works. Candidates will do well to mark their distance and difference from the works they are interpreting closely: the resulting work should read like critical dialogue, not descriptive summary. A robust performance overall, with many successful interventions in contemporary culture and politics attempted through rigorous analyses of reading protocols, the value criteria of reading, and the formation of reading publics (and counterpublics).

15. In Defence of Poetry

Eight candidates took this option. A wide range of periods was represented among the essays submitted for this paper, though most students still opted for authors closer to the 20th-century end of the spectrum. All candidates chose authors whose work was included on the syllabus, though this was not strictly required. In the best essays, discussion of how poetic theory intersected with poetic practice resulted in genuinely illuminating insights. The best essays were well informed as well as imaginative, and they often were willing to think critically about theoretical prose texts alongside poems. They made use not only of poets’ published prose writings but also their letters, forming an argument about the poetry using information within as well as from outside of the poems themselves. Close readings were at the heart of the best essays—though such readings always incorporated knowledge drawn from contextual materials. The least successful essays were characterized by weak arguments, careless interpretation, and untidy presentation.

16. Border Crossings 1350-1645

Eight candidates took this option. The overall standard of work on this paper was high. All the extended essays showed initiative, and demonstrated close critical attention to a wide range of medieval and early modern texts. In some cases, candidates carefully engaged with primary texts in more than one language. The majority of candidates moved beyond the core texts on the paper, while also working with its theoretical readings and approach in order to examine borders of various kinds. Nearly all of the candidates included visual materials in their essays, including paintings, manuscript illuminations and maps. These materials were handled with varying levels of skill and detail, but all showed a good awareness of how material culture can help to illuminate literary texts. The strongest essays made clear at their outset how borders and acts of ‘border crossing’ related to the primary materials under discussion. They engaged and handled theoretical insights from Gloria Anzaldúa, Hannah Arendt and Etienne Balibar, among others, with care and an admirable critical awareness of the dangers of anachronism when using modern materials to discuss the pre- and early modern. The weaker essays often relied on a more impressionistic or loosely defined sense of border or border crossing, and/or failed to make clear their principal of selection for their primary texts. Standards of expression and presentation were generally very good.

17. Early Modern Literature & Crime

Fifteen candidates took this option. The submitted essays showed that candidates had engaged closely with a range of primary texts and had an understanding of the option's core themes, and there was substantial evidence of excellent work. The range of topics covered by the essays was impressive, and demonstrated a clear enthusiasm for the opportunities this option gives to read non-canonical texts, examine early modern print culture, and read non-canonical texts. Topics included witchcraft, religious dissent, representations of executions, criminal biographies, and London as a 'criminal' space, with a recurrent interest in gender. Methodological interests – e.g., legal, narratological, social, theological, and theoretical – supported the submitted work intelligently, and close readings were thorough and insightful. Scrutiny both of the 'criminal' body and of the internal rhetorical strategies within pamphlets, ballads, novels, etc., was undertaken, and most of the essays were well structured and clearly argued.

18. Hit and Myth: Re-Inventing the Medieval for the Modern Age

Eight candidates took this option. As in previous years, it was pleasing to see students tackling an impressive range of material, fruitfully exploring modern adaptations of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Celtic and Arthurian texts through the lens of later literary and cultural movements such as romanticism, national philology, modernism and the Celtic Revival. All the written work was of a high standard, with some highly original and imaginative research. The strongest submissions demonstrated a deep grasp of critical issues such as periodicity, medievalism and translation theory, as well as taking appropriate care over presentation, scholarly apparatus and formatting.

19. Contemporary Drama on the British Stage

Fifteen candidates took this option. The standard of essays was impressively high, with students addressing a wide range of issues and topics in relation a host of different plays and performances. Issues addressed included race and representation, sexuality and affect, verbatim plays and the concept of political 'truth', gender and identity formation, audience expectations and the dynamics of reception, ecology and responsibility. The strongest essays combined an attentive and closely attuned analysis of the precise dynamics of performance, with a wider grasp of political, social and theatrical resonances, and a clear engagement with critical debates and theories. Creative and effective use was made of detailed knowledge of the particularities of production and reception, and there was impressive evidence of original and imaginative thinking about the mechanisms of theatrical production and its communicative potential. Some candidates drew intelligently and effectively on reviews, blogs and interviews to discuss reception and audience location, but some weaker essays tended to assert or assume audience responses without grounding them in evidence. Venue, economics, design, audience composition, and acting styles were brought to bear on questions of meaning and affect in a number of deeply researched and clearly argued essays.

20. The Good Life: Morality, Film, Literature

Twelve candidates took this option. Candidates for this paper wrote on a gratifyingly wide range of subjects, and according to a broad diversity of methodological frames. The overall standard was high. A number of extended essays took as their subject an author or theme

from the seminar classes (e.g., Iris Murdoch, or animal rights), but always with a new point of view or approach than anything we had considered in class. A number of entirely new topics (particularly in film or race studies) were also introduced. Particularly strong work made formal claims about the formal differences in moral thinking across different genres, attention to which was part of the explicit aims of the course. Weaker papers tended to be ones that took an entirely new topic, but failed to bring to it enough of the explicit themes of aesthetics, ethics and morality, or which touched on them only in passing.

Paper 7: Dissertation

The best dissertations were characterised by the following features:

- clarity of research method;
- work based on a particular and focused research question;
- coherent and sophisticated argument, rather than mere assemblage of material;
- clarity not only about what the work was setting out to achieve, but why, critically speaking, it was worth achieving;
- careful justification of the selection of material to be covered: which may be as focused as a single author, or as wide as a topic or question considered in transhistorical perspective through multiple comparisons – the key is that the choice of material and approach is justified intellectually, and appropriate to the length of a dissertation;
- awareness of the wider significance of particular issues discussed, though what counts as breadth varied according to topic: in one essay it might mean demonstrating a command of a particular author's works, in another it means covering several texts that are thematically or formally related;
- full awareness of context, both historical and literary, remembering that modern and contemporary literature is as much in need of contextualisation as the writing of any other period;
- close and attentive textual analysis and detailed reading;
- care in defining terms;
- meticulous attention to documentation and bibliography.

Candidates should bear in mind that the best comparative work clearly addresses the method employed, taking care to justify why particular authors or texts were set alongside one another, and to what end.

As in previous years, it was extremely pleasing to see a number of candidates show such confidence in their undertaking of original archival research. Since digital archives are becoming increasingly prevalent, it is hoped that this will, in future, make available to all students online resources that currently involve in-person archival visits.

Excellent work was produced across a range of critical modes, and the range of topics and approaches chosen was impressively wide, including all forms and genres (poetry, prose, drama, essays, fiction and non-fiction, and the paraliterary and hybrid), across the full chronological range from Old English to the present, with a great deal of work in American and world literature, and some substantial interdisciplinary work addressing relationships between literature and other media (music, art, film, podcasts, video games, and other hybrid genres). The key in each case was to attend to the specific formal and stylistic

features of the objects under analysis, such that the particular way the text, image, or narrative was constructed contributed to the author's claims for its significance, however that significance was couched (and here too there was variety, with some students making arguments about intellectual history, others offering symptomatic readings, and still others insisting on the philosophical importance of literary techniques). Work on the history of the book and material text studies appeared in all periods, as did some impressive archival and manuscript work.

A number of dissertations concerned critically marginal figures. Weaker dissertations used this starting-point to view authors in isolation, or to short-circuit abruptly between texts and broadly-conceived historical contexts. Stronger work showed how the writing of critically marginal authors can be illuminated when brought into contact with existing critical fields, while at the same time challenging the assumptions and boundaries of those very same critical fields.

However, the essays were overwhelmingly about white authors, and showed little awareness of critical and theoretical discussions of how race has shaped literary fields. Better attention was paid to gender and sexuality, and to how these function within a complex dynamic between literature and culture more broadly. In general, candidates who considered the ways that the social positioning of texts and authors contributes to their form and meaning produced more sophisticated analyses.

Course II

Paper A: Literature in English, 650-1100 (see above, CI Paper A1, for 1350-1550)

The standard of work for this paper was generally very good, marked by high levels of ambition and independence of argument. The range of material considered and the variety of critical approaches taken were very impressive. Candidates for this paper seem to have responded extremely well to the unique circumstances of the examination, which perhaps brought to the fore topics and texts with which the candidates were particularly engaged. There were very few well-worn arguments or familiar combinations of texts on display. The strongest essays engaged directly and precisely with the relevant questions, making judicious and critical use of primary and secondary texts. Some essays would, however, have benefitted from more attention to argumentation. Verse texts proved, as usual, more popular than prose: there was plenty of attention to major hagiographical narrative poems (such as *Elene*, *Andreas*, and *Guthlac A*), but also some excellent work on less frequently studied poems such as *The Husband's Message*, *Seasons for Fasting*, and *The Rune Poem*. The Exeter Book riddles were less prominent than in recent years and there was relatively little direct engagement with *Beowulf* (or heroic literature more generally). Attention to Old English prose focused mainly upon the 'Alfredian' canon. With some notable exceptions, homiletic material did not feature very heavily this year. It was pleasing to see that, once again, candidates were engaging in a sophisticated fashion with Anglo-Latin texts and authors as part of the early medieval literary tradition.

Paper 2: Lyric

The responses to the first examination for this new paper ranged from very good to excellent. Clearly this new paper is generating exciting work and students are working to a very high standard across languages, cultures and different modes within what might be called 'lyric'. Candidates answered a wide range of questions from the paper. Alongside Early and Late Middle English, there was excellent coverage of Persian, Irish, Welsh, French and Latin. Knowledge of literary heritage and intertextuality was scholarly and precise. Those candidates who wrote on manuscript context and the materiality of lyrics did so with aplomb. There was excellent attention to rubrication, textual transmission and variant readings; not just in English but across other languages too.

Candidates showed fine literary sensibility in their analysis of tropes, meaning and verse forms. They enriched this close reading with assured understanding of context: political; cultural, and theological. There was deft work on performance, spirituality, the natural and musical notation.

It was a genuine pleasure to read the essays on this paper.

Paper 4: History of the English Language to c.1800

The quality of the papers this year (submitted in 2019) was generally very good indeed, with candidates performing well across both the essay and commentary sections of the paper. There was a welcome diversity of topics, including strong work on the Great Vowel Shift, the language of the Peterborough Chronicle, and dictionaries and the construction speech communities. Candidates who rooted their work firmly within a historical sociolinguistic framework tended to produce more stimulating analysis in both parts of the paper. The best answers to part one had a firm grounding in linguistic theory and made use of judicious examples to illustrate their argument. The stronger commentaries showed very good analytical command across all levels of the language, while weaker answers tended to comment on linguistic features in a more arbitrary and impressionistic manner. There is a general tendency for candidates to gravitate towards the late Middle English and Early/Late Modern periods at the expense of Old and Early Middle English. Overall, however, this was a very strong set of papers.

E. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTIFIABLE INDIVIDUALS AND OTHER MATERIAL WHICH WOULD USUALLY BE TREATED AS RESERVED BUSINESS

[Moved to reserved section]

F. NAMES OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Prof. Laura Ashe (Chair), Prof. Helen Barr, Dr Anke Bernau (External), Dr Adam Guy, Dr Ben Higgins, Prof. Simon James (External), Dr Margaret Kean, Prof. Marina MacKay (Deputy Chair), Prof. Richard McCabe, Prof. Michèle Mendelssohn, Prof. Seamus Perry, Prof. Claire Preston (External), Prof. Diane Purkiss, Prof. Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, Dr Noël Sugimura, Dr David Taylor, Dr Daniel Thomas, Prof. David Womersley.

Part III: EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS (UG)

External examiner name:	Anke Bernau	
External examiner home institution:	University of Manchester	
Course examined:	FHS English Exam Board	
Level: (please delete as appropriate)	<u>Undergraduate</u>	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?				X
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?				X
<p>* 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".</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?**

I was asked to review work of 4 candidates whose final overall mark lay in the high 2.1 or first class categories - this work was very good to highly impressive. All of the students engaged enthusiastically with the chosen questions (across their papers/portfolios -), and the dissertations were a particular pleasure to read. The changes to the format of some exams (due to COVID-19) meant that it was difficult at times to tell whether students had fully honoured the exam code (treating it as if it were an exam taken in normal exam conditions), but this was handled well in the discussion at the Board.

- 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).**

Since I was asked to read the runs of scripts for students with strong marks overall, I can only comment on work that already received very good marks (rather than on the quality across the whole spectrum of marks). I can confirm that these marks reflected the high quality of the work. The work is comparable to, at times stronger than, that produced at other institutions at which I have undertaken the role of external examiner (as well as at my own - all Russell Group institutions).

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.

This was an unusual and difficult year for everyone involved - students, examiners, administrators and externals. I would like to commend Professor Laura Ashe, director of the exam board, for her thorough, rigorous and careful handling of the whole process. Involving externals at the MCE meeting was particularly helpful, as we could see how the impact of the lockdown was being handled, and what measures had been put into place to ensure both rigour and fairness. It was evident that a lot of thought had been given to mitigation (where needed), and the rules established were applied across the board, with great sensitivity.

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?

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.


There was not much diversity in assessment format - it might be worth thinking about expanding types of assessment. If the point of assessments is to enable students to do their best work - as well as to test a range of abilities - then a more varied mix of assessment types would do this better (and perhaps more fairly).

Good practice: it made a big difference when raw as well as agreed marks were noted on both markers' sheets, and where there was a clear explanation for how an agreed mark had been reached.

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.

- It would be useful for all marksheets to record 'raw' as well as 'agreed' marks (the absence of this information made the job particularly tricky when everything is being looked at online).
- Some agreed marks were not recorded on *either* marksheet, so it was necessary to contact the administrator for clarification, or to consult the Board's rankings document.
- It could be made clearer (in some instances) why a piece of work was thought to belong into a particular grade band - this was especially true in relation to the three separate bands available for a first-class mark. In some instances the feedback suggested a mark from a different band to that which was then awarded. Basically - matching the comments to the marking criteria more closely.
- The process of how an agreed mark was reached was not always clear (there were also instances of exemplarity clarity and transparency). It should always be clear - even if there is no huge difference between the two 'raw' marks - not least because this can become very important for a candidate whose overall result ends up being a borderline result.

Signed:	
Date:	28 July 2020

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 2019-20

External examiner name:	Professor Simon John James	
External examiner home institution:	Durham	
Course examined:	English Final Honours Schools	
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?	✓			
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?**

Standards achieved by students are on the whole very high indeed, meeting or exceeding those of my own institution and its predecessor, and of the other English programme for which I have been external examiner.

- 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 saw evidence of high student performance and achievement throughout. As before, students demonstrate not only tremendous range, but do so in multiple dimensions: in historical period, genre, theoretical and methodological approaches. A high, or even less high-performing run of scripts can contain work on a very wide range of literary texts indeed. The very best students write with the most extraordinary fluency, maturity, scholarship, and, indeed, deftness. Texts from the historical canon in particular are clearly taught as well here as they are in any English Department in the world.

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 whole process of the assessment process was conducted with the utmost rigour. The small number of cases of (clear) plagiarism were dealt with efficiently, judiciously and sympathetically – and not at all lightly. I was very impressed indeed with how swiftly and effectively the Board of Examiners seemed to have internalised the new examination procedures necessary for this year of all years: there was no, that I saw, flapping or 'working-through' from the remembered usual processes to the emergency ones required this year – this was tremendously impressive. Administrative staff operated indefatigably and willingly, and the Chair had clearly sacrificed a tremendous amount of time outside of normal working hours to make sure that when the Board met, information was as up to date as possible. The presentation of MCEs was remarkably lucid: it was very easy to cross-reference information with candidate number when a judgement needed to be made; the careful and empathetic contribution of the Deputy Chair and MCE sub-panel should also be acknowledged.

I have full confidence in the Board's final awarding of classes, in this difficult year. Very careful judgement indeed was exercised at borderlines and in the lower class bands; in every case, it was clear that justice was done and a lucid rationale informed and could be seen from the Board's actions. I may have departed a little on individual marks where I felt more generosity might have been shown to otherwise engaging work not presented as carefully as it might have been, for example, or to a (one might imagine) twenty-one year old's encounter with a particular theoretical school for the first time - but in no case would I

depart from a classification overall; and on the whole examiners' comments corresponded with the marks more transparently than in a few cases I have seen in previous years.

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?

Perhaps understandably, given the much higher level of risk present in what students saw in the fair and transparent assessment of their performance and abilities, we did see this time a few more cases of over-reporting of adverse circumstances. Some Oxford students completed their assessment in the most difficult, indeed heartbreaking to read, in some cases, environments; some might have been seen as pushing their luck somewhat in the narratives presented. More substantively (and, I hope here, helpfully) – I can imagine it must have been difficult to say, abandon study of a unique fourteenth-century manuscript then to complete one's dissertation at home - but an awareness of electronic resources available seemed to be lacking, in a few cases. No criticism is implied here, as students usually living within walking distance of one of the greatest libraries of the world and much more besides should indeed to be encouraged to make full use thereof – but as some form of further lockdown looks likely again at the time of writing, more schooling in the use of such resources might be borne in mind by Oxford tutors and librarians in the near future.

The purpose of involving the Proctors in cases of plagiarism and academic irregularity is not always wholly clear to a non-Oxford academic. Proctors may have a great deal or very little knowledge of the subject being examined – surely the closer to the Faculty such judgements are made, the more robust and accurate they are likely to be. The weblearn site was not updated, and guidelines for the report were not, as you acknowledge, sent until September. Completely understandable in the circumstances, but since you ask....

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 2019-20 externals did discuss with that year's Board the virtues of period papers having set texts that give opportunity for sustained engagement with a text. Students on this programme can, conceivably, do quite well with flashy and impressive if rather superficial brief exam essays which replicate the performance of flashy and impressive if rather superficial tutorial essays. These can still be rather good – and the very best work demonstrates depth and gravity alongside other virtues – but I'd encourage the Faculty to continue to reflect on its dependence on the third-year unseen three-hour examination as its predominant model of assessment, and the relationship between the modes of teaching delivery, and the means by which they are assessed.

(I've said this before, so no reply is expected: I'd just suggest keep on thinking.....)

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.

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be an external examiner for four years on this programme and I am grateful to all I have worked with, in particular the administrative staff and the three Chairs.

Signed:	<i>Simon J. James</i>
Date:	23.9.2020

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.

7 July 2020

External examiner's report, FHS English 2020

Overview of examining:

The care with which the Faculty examination board administered and assessed the work of students during the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic has been very impressive and confident. The submitted and examined work was of reassuringly high quality, and the way in which examiners read and commented on it was attentive, incisive, and illuminating. I am very confident that they conducted the process rigorously, fairly, and sympathetically and I especially thank Laura Ashe (Chair of Examiners), Angie Johnson, and Andy Davice, as well as the many members of the board with collective experience of past years' examining. The externals were asked to read across the work of candidates at the top of the list and at borderlines; they also attended the MCE meeting (with, this year, an unsurprisingly substantial agenda), as well as the two statutory exam board meetings and one extraordinary one that preceded them.

Quality of work:

I was asked to read across some low firsts and some 2.1/1 borderline candidates. I found the work to be of sometimes exceptional quality – this is typical of candidates at this level, who have some first-class work showing even if it is not consistently maintained. The range of works covered and of critical and historical contexts addressed was wonderful: I read splendid work on everything from *Gawain* to experimental British novels, often from the same candidate, often learned and imaginatively analytical. I noted with pleasure that the writing itself was almost always strong, even elegant, and often very striking. There were occasional difficulties with citational practice, mainly (I think) explained by the candidates' remoteness from their libraries and even in some cases from their own books and notes. Given the extreme difficulties of working, as most students did, without access to normal facilities and materials, the work was remarkably fine and trouble-free. All this suggests a thriving scholarly and pedagogical culture within the School: powerful teaching and guidance has obviously helped promising students to become outstanding ones. I am therefore in no doubt that the manner in which the FHS has been conducted more than meets the standard of a 'normal' year, and indeed of the other universities for which I have externalled. The quality of student work was at or above that being produced in those other universities.

Marking: In nearly every case I agreed wholly with the comments of the markers but I was often surprised that their sturdy-to-high praise was often not matched by their marks. It may be that I am a softer touch, but I do think it was sometimes difficult to detect how a set of very complimentary remarks on the fulfilment of all the stated criteria yielded a respectable 2.1 mark rather than something higher. If students see these remarks they will be often bemused by the discrepancy, as I was. The hybrid papers necessarily yoked quite different

periods and specialisms, and using a team of representative specialists to mark them has much merit; it meant, however, that no one marker had read any whole script, and that may have had the effect of eliminating credit for very good across-the-range writing in favour of strong performances and high marks in individual essays. In other words, I wonder whether, in cases where my sense of the overall quality was higher than the final agreed mark, I was responding to the total performance, and whether it would be useful in a future iteration of these hybrid exams to have examiners read the whole script. The marking range itself was properly used within the scripts and submissions I read: having just externalled at another collegiate university last week and having been given their top firsts to read, I am happy to confirm that this lower range of firsts I read for Oxford was appropriately ranked.

Some observations and suggestions:

The attempt to replicate written exams remotely was commendable, and it was one solution to the sudden logistical crisis of the pandemic. However, I wonder if this mode might be reconsidered if current conditions persist in the coming academic year. I read a total of 24 timed essays produced remotely as elements of Paper A (1350-1550) and Paper B (1660-1830). Not a single one bore *any* relation to a typical one-hour written essay produced under exam conditions that I have ever marked. Open-book exams will of course have a texture of quotation and argument that's distinct from closed-book exams, but all those that I read were structured and instantiated like submitted portfolio essays and it was essentially incredible that they could have been produced in exam-fashion. There was no way of monitoring these exams remotely in any meaningful way: based on the MCE applications, it's clear that some students had to leave Oxford hurriedly, without their books and notes, or had an awful domestic environment in which to do the exams; by contrast many others must have been very well-equipped and situated. Some students may have adhered to the honour code and written from scratch within the confines of the one-hour essay (and may have suffered for their honesty); others may have strategically prepared in ways that allowed them to shape material they already had to hand. Some very few may simply be brilliant and able to marshal fluent and shapely arguments in such short order. In short, I had no idea what kind of work I was actually reading, and no sense of how it might be fairly marked. I would, in other words, eliminate the examined aspect of the FHS if next year's iteration is similarly constrained: it is unworkable, in my view, as a mode of examination (either to sit or to mark with consistency), and it is bound to accentuate the many inequities that already exist among the student cohort. This was made disturbingly clear by the quantity and kinds of MCE application received, which were submitted by well over 50% of that cohort and were believable even though unverifiable. Submitted work does not do away with those inequities but they flatten out the disparities considerably.

Timing and other processes: Everything was very clearly explained and arranged by Professor Ashe with Angie Johnson and Andy Davice, who were unfailingly helpful in all aspects of the system and process. I would only suggest that the turnaround for externals – about a day and a half on either side of a weekend – was not ideal. I was able to give the entire interval to the task, but many with childcare and other domestic duties would have found this fairly tricky. The remaining difficulties I observed were entirely the responsibility of the University rather than the Faculty.

1. Turnitin should be fully adopted by the University, and along the lines of most other universities, where students themselves submit all their work via that portal. This saves time, aids markers, and reminds student that they are on their mettle to behave

with honour. At present examiners can only with tremendous difficulty consult the Turnitin results.

2. Students complained in their MCE submissions, in some cases with some acerbity, about the mixed and confused communications from the University authorities in the period leading up to submission of work and to examinations. The current crisis has naturally created all sorts of unforeseen stresses and complications, but compared to my own university and to the one for which I am also currently externalling, decisions and procedures here seem to have been devised either too late or inconsistently.
3. There were a number of silences and miscues affecting examiners: for some time it was unclear whether externals would be engaged at all; and I was particularly alarmed about the safety net, specifically devised to support borderline students who may have experienced severe difficulties during the pandemic. We carefully discussed this in a number of cases, at length, and mitigations were scrupulously applied. However, following the first examiners' meeting, the Chair was belatedly informed that, despite her attempts in previous months to nail down exactly how it was to be used and logged, the safety-net could not after all be registered by the University. The Chair now undertakes to write to these students after their results are delivered, to tell them that they received the benefit of the safety net. This is a troubling and needless failure on the part of the University bodies that make such arrangements. It wasted much time for the examiners and most of all for Professor Ashe.

These are just a few examples of mismanagement, and they may be owing to the sudden onset of the pandemic and subsequent lockdown. Still, it is to be hoped that nothing of the same sort will occur next spring if remote examining remains in place.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CE Preston', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Claire Preston

FHS Appendix: Communications to students regarding exam conventions and other arrangements

Guidance for Candidates for English FHS, 2020

From: Professor Laura Ashe, Chair of English FHS Examining Board

This document includes details of the changes made to examining this year, listed as documented in the FHS Handbook, 2018-20, and to be used alongside it. Overall the written examination has been shortened and (slightly altered) to make it more manageable: fewer essays are required, you may have notes and books with you, there will be no commentary or translation, and you will be given more time than in the usual examination format (and students with standing arrangements for extra time will have that on top). In English Course I, the four period papers are represented by TWO examinations, giving a total of six essays; candidates will write *either ONE or TWO* essays for each of the periods. There are corresponding reductions in Course II and joint schools' papers (see details below). We are all absolutely committed to mitigating the impact of the pandemic on academic performance as much as we can, giving full consideration to your individual circumstances and particularly your mental and physical needs, following the University's guidance on remote examinations.

Handbook changes/additions

2.6.2-5 FHS papers 2, 3, 4, 5: Changes to examination structure in Course I

New FHS Paper A: FHS papers 2 (1350-1550) and 3 (1550-1660) will be examined together in a four-hour timed remote examination. Candidates will be asked to answer three questions, including at least one from Section 1 (1350-1550) and at least one from Section 2 (1550-1660). There will be no reduction in the number and choice of questions offered in each period. All questions are equally weighted. There will be no commentary exercise in Section 1, and *Troilus & Criseyde* may be used in any answer in Section 1.

New FHS Paper B: FHS papers 4 (1660-1760) and 5 (1760-1830) will be examined together in a four-hour timed remote examination. Candidates will be asked to answer three questions, including at least one from Section 1 (1660-1760) and at least one from Section 2 (1760-1830). There will be no reduction in the number and choice of questions offered in each period. All questions are equally weighted.

2.6.6 Other FHS written papers (paper 6, joint schools options): Changes to examination structure

Joint schools candidates taking one or two written period papers on the English side will take shortened versions as follows: FHS papers 2 (CII.3) (1350-1550), 3 (1550-1660), 4 (1660-1760) and 5 (1760-1830) will each be examined in a two hours and forty minutes' timed remote examination. Candidates will be asked to answer two questions, equally weighted. There will be no reduction in the number and choice of essay questions offered in each paper. There will be no commentary exercise in Paper 2, and *Troilus & Criseyde* may be used in any answer in Paper 2. Candidates taking two papers which have been combined in the main school (either BOTH papers 2 and 3, or BOTH papers 4 and 5) will take the main school's new combined Paper A or B, as detailed above. Joint schools candidates taking the Course II paper

Medieval and Related Literatures 1066-1550 (Lyric) will take the new shortened version as detailed below.

Candidates taking the written Paper 6 options (Medieval Welsh for Beginners; Old & Middle Irish for beginners) will be examined in a two hours and forty minutes' timed remote examination. Candidates will be asked to answer two questions, equally weighted. There will be no translation exercise.

2.7.1-3 CII FHS papers 1, 2, 3: Changes to examination structure in Course II

New Course II Paper A: CII FHS papers 1 (650-1100) and 3 (1350-1550) will be examined together in a four-hour timed remote examination. Candidates will be asked to answer three questions, including at least one from Section 1 (650-1100) and at least one from Section 2 (1350-1550). There will be no reduction in the number and choice of questions offered in each period. All questions are equally weighted. There will be no commentary exercise in Section 2, and *Troilus & Criseyde* may be used in any answer in Section 2.

Adapted Course II Paper 2: CII FHS paper 2 (Medieval and Related Literatures, 1066-1550: Lyric) will be examined in a two-hour timed remote examination. Candidates will be asked to answer one question. There will be no reduction in the number and choice of questions offered. Joint schools candidates for this paper will take the same version.

3.1.1 Marking and Classification Criteria

Papers A and B in Course I will count as two of five papers (alongside Paper 6, Shakespeare, and the Dissertation), instead of four of seven. Papers A and 2 in Course II will count as two of six papers (alongside Paper 4, Paper 6, Shakespeare/Material Text, and the Dissertation), instead of three of seven. The written exams will therefore have a lower overall weighting in the marks profile and classification: they account for 40% (instead of 57%) of the marks profile in Course I, and 33% (instead of 43%) of the marks profile in Course II. (Note to candidates taking Medieval Welsh or Irish: the situation is slightly different because you have three remote written exams, but classification will be calculated in the same way, as below.)

Classification over the total of five Course I or six Course II papers is as follows: First	<i>EITHER:</i> Two marks of 70 or above, an average mark of 68.5 or greater and no mark below 50. <i>OR:</i> Three or more marks of 70 or above, an average mark of 67.5 or greater and no mark below 50.
II.i	Two marks of 60 or above, an average mark of 59 or greater and no mark below 40.
II.ii	Two marks of 50 or above, an average mark of 49.5 or greater and no mark below 30.
III	Average mark of 40 or greater and not more than one mark below 30.
Pass	Average mark of 30 or greater. Not more than two marks below 30.

Grade distribution

As part of the main run of classification, measures will be taken to ensure that the grade distribution is in line with recent years (so there are not significantly higher or lower

numbers of Firsts than is usual). These measures may include scaling of whole papers or runs of marks.

Individual Student Self-Assessment and MCEs

A subset of the board will meet to discuss the individual notices given by Student Self-Assessment and MCEs, banding the seriousness of each notice on a scale of 1-3, with 1 indicating minor impact, 2 indicating moderate impact, and 3 indicating very serious impact. The banding information will be used at the final Board of Examiners meeting to adjudicate on the merits of candidates, and in some cases limited action will be taken to make adjustments to individual marks and/or to the final classification. Such actions will be considered by the Board of Examiners on the basis of both the notice banding information and the scripts/submissions and marks.

Particular attention this year will be paid wherever a candidate's overall performance in remotely administered exams is significantly below the level of achievement indicated by their previously submitted work; where that occurs, and the student's Self-Assessment or MCE indicates very serious impact on that student's performance in the remote written examinations, it will be possible for examiners to go beyond the usual limited action at the grade borderlines, and deploy the University's 2020 Safety Net procedure. This works as follows:

- The candidate's highest coursework mark will be counted twice;
- the candidate's lowest remote written exam mark will be disregarded;
- the result will be averaged.

Classification will then proceed, with the proviso that the double-counted top mark does NOT count as two units (i.e., a double-weighted coursework mark of 70+ cannot produce a first in the absence of another 70+ mark).

Letter for English Finalists on Classification, 20 April 2020

Dear Finalists,

Classification procedures in English FHS 2020

First of all, I hope you and your families are all keeping safe and well in this extremely difficult time. I am sorry that we have had to add to your uncertainty during these anxious weeks, and I am very grateful for your forbearance and understanding as we have worked toward a solution to the various challenges presented by the current situation. We have done so because we believe that your hard and serious work over the course of your degree should be properly rewarded, with an examination process adapted to these circumstances, and alert to all your individual situations, so that you can graduate with a degree that reflects your achievements. You will be aware that the University has this morning released its high level proposals for classification, including its 'safety net' policy. This document is necessarily a little confusing because it covers all subjects, at both Finals and MSt level, and as you will anticipate, that means a huge degree of variation. The purpose of this letter is therefore to explain exactly how classification will work in English Finals, and how we have adapted our assessment and marking procedures to these circumstances. At the end you will find the full details set out.

The two most important points to make, in line with University policy across all subjects, are that (1) we will award classifications in line with the grade distributions of recent years: that is, we will not give substantially higher or lower numbers of firsts, 2.1s, and 2.2s than normal; and

(2) we will attend to the circumstances of each individual candidate, paying particular attention where mitigating factors have disproportionately affected candidates' performance in the remote examinations.

To take point (1) first: In English, we have responded to the necessity for remote examinations by shortening and/or combining our written papers, reducing the number of assessment units required by up to 50%, and reducing the overall weighting of the written exams in the marks and classification profile. (Other subjects have taken different routes, such as retaining all papers but classifying only on some of them.) We have produced an adapted classification regime based on the reduced number of papers, which you can see in full below. On the basis of that we will examine the overall marks and classification pattern, and if necessary, we will undertake scaling or other adjustment of whole papers or runs of marks, in order to ensure that the grade distribution is not out of line with normal expectations. All of these measures have been and will be taken across the board, in recognition of the exceptional circumstances which will affect each and every one of you, to ensure that our overall grade distribution is fair and comparable with previous years.

Secondly, our point (2): individual circumstances. A sub-committee of the Exam Board will meet to discuss all candidate Self-Assessments and Mitigating Circumstances statements, and these notices will each be graded according to the seriousness of their impact on candidates' performance. As in the usual way, the Board may make small adjustments to candidates' marks, or to their final classification, in the light of these notices. In addition to the usual procedure, furthermore, in cases where there was a very serious impact on a candidate's performance in the remote exams, and those marks fall significantly below the level of achievement indicated by their previously submitted coursework, it will be possible for examiners to go beyond the usual limited action at the grade borderlines, and deploy the University's 2020 Safety Net procedure: details of that can be found below.

Candidates for the joint degrees will be hearing simultaneously from the other Schools involved. In each case, joint schools candidates will be taking the shortened and/or combined papers of the English main school, for parity with English, while the weighting of the English papers within the overall marks profile remains the same; and the overall classification will follow the procedures of the other school, for parity with them. Each faculty has devised its own procedures to work with their varying paper combinations; but in all cases, a normal proportion of firsts will be awarded, and all individual circumstances will be taken into consideration. Overall, therefore, between the measures we are taking across the board, and the attention we will give to each individual's circumstances, we are confident that we can assess your performance fairly, in order to make sure that you are awarded a degree that reflects your hard work and your personal achievements.

I very much hope that you find this reassuring, and that you feel confident in preparing for these final assessments. This is not the finals term that any of us expected, and I am very sorry for all the disappointment and anxiety you must feel. I wish you all the very best, both in your work, and personally; now, and for the future.

Yours sincerely,
Laura Ashe Chair, FHS English

English FHS 2020 FAQs

English FHS 2020: Frequently Asked Questions

How will marks and classification be calculated? *Updated*

Papers A and B in Course I will count as two of five papers (alongside Paper 6, Shakespeare, and the Dissertation), instead of four of seven. Papers A and 2 in Course II will count as two of six papers (alongside Paper 4, Paper 6, Shakespeare/Material Text, and the Dissertation), instead of three of seven. The written exams will therefore have a lower overall weighting in the marks profile and classification: they account for 40% (instead of 57%) of the marks profile in Course I, and 33% (instead of 43%) of the marks profile in Course II. (Note to candidates taking Medieval Welsh or Irish: the situation is slightly different because you have three remote written exams, but classification will be calculated in the same way, as below.)

Classification over the total of five Course I or six Course II papers is as follows: First	<i>EITHER:</i> Two marks of 70 or above, an average mark of 68.5 or greater and no mark below 50. <i>OR:</i> Three or more marks of 70 or above, an average mark of 67.5 or greater and no mark below 50.
II.i	Two marks of 60 or above, an average mark of 59 or greater and no mark below 40.
II.ii	Two marks of 50 or above, an average mark of 49.5 or greater and no mark below 30.
III	Average mark of 40 or greater and not more than one mark below 30.
Pass	Average mark of 30 or greater. Not more than two marks below 30.

Grade distribution

As part of the main run of classification, measures will be taken to ensure that the grade distribution is in line with recent years (so there are not significantly higher or lower numbers of Firsts than is usual). These measures may include scaling of whole papers or runs of marks.

Individual Student Self-Assessment and MCEs

A subset of the board will meet to discuss the individual notices given by Student Self-Assessment and MCEs, banding the seriousness of each notice on a scale of 1-3, with 1 indicating minor impact, 2 indicating moderate impact, and 3 indicating very serious impact. The banding information will be used at the final Board of Examiners meeting to adjudicate on the merits of candidates, and in some cases limited action will be taken to make adjustments to individual marks and/or to the final classification. Such actions will be considered by the Board of Examiners on the basis of both the notice banding information and the scripts/submissions and marks.

Particular attention this year will be paid wherever a candidate's overall performance in remotely administered exams is significantly below the level of achievement indicated by

their previously submitted work; where that occurs, and the student's Self-Assessment or MCE indicates very serious impact on that student's performance in the remote written examinations, it will be possible for examiners to go beyond the usual limited action at the grade borderlines, and deploy the University's 2020 Safety Net procedure. This works as follows:

- The candidate's highest coursework mark will be counted twice;
- the candidate's lowest remote written exam mark will be disregarded;
- the result will be averaged.

Classification will then proceed, with the proviso that the double-counted top mark does NOT count as two units (i.e., a double-weighted coursework mark of 70+ cannot produce a first in the absence of another 70+ mark).

Will each section of the new combined papers be marked by separate examiners?

Yes, using the examiners originally assigned to the four period papers, and following an adapted marking procedure as follows:

- a) Each question is marked independently by two markers. Markers use a comment sheet to note their assessment of each question against the criteria.
- b) An individual raw mark is given for each question, after which the two markers confer in order to reach an agreed mark for each question.
- c) The agreed marks for the questions are averaged to produce an overall mark for the paper. The mark for each paper is expressed as a whole number, rounding up from 0.5 (e.g. a mark of 39.5 would become 40).
- d) If agreement is not reached about the mark for any question, a third reader examines the script and raw marks and comments, to decide on an agreed mark. Their mark must be within the range identified by the initial markers. Where the initial raw marks are at a variance of 15 marks or more, or two classes, they are automatically referred for third marking. After third marking, the final agreed mark for each question is fed into the average to produce an overall mark for the paper.

Will the combined papers comprise the full standard number of questions for each paper?

Yes: we are reproducing the whole papers as originally set in each section, so there will be full choice from all themes. The extra time taken to read through the questions is allowed for in the increased examination time; this was deemed preferable to reducing the number of themes covered by the questions.

How much breadth and range do we need to show in the combined papers?

Updated

You need not worry that you should try to show the same range across one or two essays that you would have shown across three in the original period paper format. Think of the combined papers as a chance to showcase your best work, selected from across the whole span of 1350 to 1830.

Can I handwrite my exams?

The default assumption is that you will type your essays and then upload your script to Weblearn; do take advantage of the practice assignments on the Weblearn site to check that you are confident in downloading sample question papers and uploading documents, and practise typing under timed conditions if you feel this will be difficult for you. If you ultimately feel unable to type your exams then there will be an opportunity to register to handwrite your answers. Your script will then need to be scanned or photographed, and uploaded to Weblearn. Technical help will be available over email.

How long should my exam answers be?

Your answers should be the normal length for a written examination – typically c. 900-1200 words for each essay. Given that you only have a small amount of extra time, this should not be something you need to worry about.

Do I need to give full references for quotations?

No: the usual expectations for written exams apply, so where necessary you would give just the author name or text title, or both, when citing primary or secondary texts.

Should I worry that being open-book means I am supposed to know the provenance or context of all the quotations?

No! The questions were all chosen with the limitations of a normal written examination in mind, and we are not asking anything extra of you in these adapted circumstances. You are free to apply a quotation/question to any author(s) unless specified otherwise, and you are not expected to have any extra knowledge about the quotations.

How much should I revise for the new combined papers?

You are writing half as many essays, so you only need about half as many topics/texts/authors. You might want to prepare something like two main areas for each of the periods, knowing that in the exam you will write two essays in one period, and one in the other, depending on how the questions suit your materials.

How should I revise differently for an open-book exam, or work differently during it?

You will still need to be absolutely familiar with your chosen texts, and commit a good number of quotations to memory, because you will not have time to go hunting through your texts and notes during the exam. You can of course organize and arrange your notes around you so you can rapidly find the quotation you need, for example, or fill your books with bookmarks, but in general, plan to rely more on your memory than finding things on the spot. *Don't* be tempted to go hunting in your computer's hard drive for your old essays, even to copy & paste quotations – this is dangerous; you'll end up reading that essay, being tempted to use bits of it – and that will take up time, distract you from your answer, and knock your confidence.

What constitutes cheating in an open-book exam?

The honour code you agree to asserts that your answers will be wholly and only your own work, produced in the time available, according to the rubric of the examination. That means, simply, starting with a blank document, and typing into it. Keep your notes around you in hard copy, if possible, and type your quotations out in real time – exactly as you would write them out in the examination room. Don't use the internet except for consulting primary texts you can only access that way (and set them up ready; don't eat up your exam time searching for things); don't copy & paste material from elsewhere on your computer (and that would never help you to answer the question, anyway). These exams are remote, and cannot be invigilated, so we are relying on your honesty and integrity.

What if I am delayed uploading my answer script?

The times at which you download the exam paper and upload your answer script give us the four-hour (or shorter) time of your exam. We expect you to be uploading your script as close as possible to that time. If you have difficulty uploading, you can demonstrate the time when you finished the paper by emailing it to us.

What if I am worried my home situation will affect my exam timing? *Updated*

Your Self-Assessment will be taken into full consideration as part of the overall classification procedure. However, if you fear that circumstances may make it impossible for you to begin the exam at the time expected, please alert us to this ahead of time if possible.

What will the rubrics say?

New combined papers:

- **Course I Paper A (4hrs):** Answer *three* questions, including *at least one* from Section 1 (1350-1550) and *at least one* from Section 2 (1550-1660). All questions are equally weighted.
- **Course I Paper B (4hrs):** Answer *three* questions, including *at least one* from Section 1 (1660-1760) and *at least one* from Section 2 (1760-1830). All questions are equally weighted.
- **Course II Paper A (4hrs):** Answer *three* questions, including *at least one* from Section A (650-1100) and *at least one* from Section B (1350-1550). All questions are equally weighted.

Except where specified, themes can be applied to any author or authors of your choice within the periods. You should pay careful attention in your answers to the precise terms of the quotations and questions. Candidates should not repeat material across different parts of the examination.

Shortened papers:

Course II Paper 2 (2hrs): Answer *one* question. You should pay careful attention in your answer to the precise terms of the quotation and/or question. Candidates should show ONE or BOTH of the following in some part of their essay: (a) knowledge of literature originally written in languages other than English; (b) knowledge of texts from the earlier period (1000–1350). Candidates should not repeat material across different parts of the examination.

- **Joint Schools papers Literature in English 1350-1550 / 1550-1660 / 1660-1760 / 1760-1830 (2hrs40):** Answer *two* questions. Except where specified, themes can be applied to any author or authors of your choice. You should pay careful attention in your answers to the precise terms of the quotations and questions. Candidates should not repeat material across different parts of the examination.
- **Medieval Welsh for Beginners (2hrs40):** Answer *two* questions. You should pay attention in your answers to the precise terms of the question.
- **Old and Middle Irish for Beginners (2hrs40):** Answer *two* questions. You should pay attention in your answers to the precise terms of the question.

Will there still be prizes awarded for exam performance?

Yes: once we have full marks profiles for all candidates and have finalized our classification procedures for greatest fairness, we will proceed with classification, ranking, and the awarding of prizes. We have prizes for the best performance in the Shakespeare portfolio, in Paper 6, and in the Dissertation; and for the best overall performance in Course I, and the best overall performance in Course II: these will all stand as normal. The usual prize for 'best performance in a 3-hour timed examination' will not be awarded; instead there will be

nine (instead of eight) further prizes for distinguished performance (awarded in order of average, excluding existing prize winners).

3. M.ST AND M.PHIL (MIEVIAL STUDIES) IN ENGLISH (INCLUDING M.ST IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES)

Part I

A. STATISTICS

Numbers and percentages in each class/category

There were 96 candidates

Outcome	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Numbers	44	35	11	1	5

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 onwards, Merit or Pass)	Fail	Incomplete
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%
2020	46%	48%*	1%	5%

2020 * 37% at Merit and 11% pass

2019 * 35% at Merit (65-69), 21% at Pass (50-64)

Vivas

Vivas were not used.

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.

B. EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

For 2019-20, the traditional practice of releasing on-course marks was reintroduced, after being discontinued for 2018-19 (with, it was generally agreed, adverse consequences).

As in previous years, 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. This year, complete runs of scripts for individual candidates of higher, medium, and lower achievement, were sent to externals.

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

C. CHANGES FOR THE FACULTY TO CONSIDER

See Chair's Report below

D. 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.

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE EXAMINATION

See attached report.

B. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ISSUES

[Moved to reserved section]

C. DETAILED NUMBERS

N/a for MSt.

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

N/a for MSt.

E. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUALS

N/a

F. THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Internal

Professor Adam Smyth (Chair)

Professor Christine Gerrard

Ms Jeri Johnson

Professor Peter McCullough

Professor Peter McDonald (St Hugh's)

Professor Peter McDonald (Christ Church)
Professor Heather O'Donoghue
Professor Dirk Van Hulle

External

Professor Raluca Radulescu (Bangor)
Dr Jane Goldman (Glasgow)
Dr Fiona Green (Cambridge)
Professor Christina Lupton (Warwick)
Professor Javed Majeed (KCL)
Professor Helen Smith (York)

M.St. and M.Phil. in English, Chair of Examiners' Report for 2019-20

A. Process

As a result of COVID-19, this was an extraordinary year for the MSt/MPhil, and the most significant features of the examination process were the attempts to accommodate the very difficult circumstances students faced. Outlined below are the main changes that were made for this year:

Hilary Term B and C essays:

- 10-day extension to all submissions
- Students able to add a note (up to 200 words) explaining how their essay was affected in particular by the new circumstances
- A blanket Mitigating Circumstances issued meaning that the Exam Board could respond with appropriate generosity to these essays, including, in extreme cases, removing essays from a candidate's profile.

Dissertations:

- 6-week extension to submission deadline, resulting in the Final Exam board being moved to 20th August.
- Topics, where necessary, and in the light of the suddenly limited access to archives and libraries, revised and reformulated, led by supervisor guidance.
- While the word count limit and the title 'dissertation' were retained, the normal short-weight rule for penalising under-length work was suspended. The intention behind this was that students who had lost access to crucial materials, and had to redesign topics, should feel able to write shorter essay-length pieces of work (e.g. 6,000-7,000 words) without fear of penalty. Such pieces would be judged on their own terms, and not as short versions of a 10,000-word dissertation.
- New safety net ruling: no-detriment policy for the Trinity Term dissertation, stipulating, in essence, that the dissertation would count towards the calculation of the final average mark only if the dissertation raises that average.

'Declare to Deserve'

- Students could apply for DDH or DDM at any point during Trinity term, no later than 14 days after the date of their final assessment.

- ‘Declare to Deserve’ could be awarded when a student had been unable to complete their summative assessments for legitimate reasons, and the examination board is satisfied that they would have been likely to have obtained an Honours degree.

The knock-on effects of these changes to the administration of the exam process were considerable, including the rescheduling of meetings (including the Final Exam board, which moved to 20th August), and in many cases the reallocation of markers. To a large extent as a result of these adverse circumstances, the number of extensions this year – beyond those granted to everyone – was extremely high and meant that some students had not submitted their dissertations in time for the Final Board. 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.

There are a number of other procedural points that arose across the meetings and need to be noted:

1. The Board noted and discussed the procedure to adopt for considering marks for those candidates with SPLD forms. It was felt that the forms and the advice on those forms is confusing and potentially contradictory, and that Education Committee should explore.
2. In response to a question from an external examiner, the Board considered whether the B-course favoured previous Oxford undergraduates over students who had studied at other institutions, but no clear advantage was apparent.

General outline of the year’s meetings

There were four new internal examiners this year (Christine Gerrard, Peter McDonald (St Hugh’s), Heather O’Donoghue, Dirk Van Hulle), with five continuing from last year (Adam Smyth (Chair), Jeri Johnson, Peter McCullough, Professor Peter McDonald (Christ Church)). Of the externals, one was new (Raluca Radulescu) with five continuing from last year (Jane Goldman, Fiona Green, Christina Lupton, Javed Majeed, Helen Smith).

At the first meeting of the internal examiners, 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 external examiners, and the recommendations of the Graduate Studies Committee.

At the meeting in 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 in 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), Jeri Johnson, Christine Gerrard) met to consider mitigating circumstances and proposed responses to individual cases to be considered by the Final Examination Board. The Committee carefully considered all of the SPLD cases.

At the Final Examination Board, examiners were reminded of the changes to the assessment process. 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 – and the Marilyn Butler Prize – for the candidate with the highest Dissertation mark – were awarded. The external examiners offered sustained and 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, particularly given the unique circumstances endured by all.

B. Administration

This year the administrative burden was particularly significant, due to the redesigning of the assessment procedure, the torrent of student enquiries, and the very large number of extensions and late submissions, and the consequent and often very complicated correspondence with Proctors, Education Committee, individual colleges, and sometimes other offices. Administration for the examination was undertaken primarily 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

n/a

D. External Examiners' Comments

The detailed written reports of the external examiners are attached. Summaries of key points articulated by the external examiners in the Final Exam Board meeting, and in their written reports, follow below.

Jane Goldman (1900-tpd)

Jane spoke of the 'pleasurable experience' of serving as external examiner, and noted how well Oxford MSt/MPhil teaching had responded to the Covid-19 context: '[t]he administrative and academic teams are to be congratulated on successfully negotiating this exceptionally challenging year.' The academic standards achieved by students on this MSt compare, Jane thought, very well with those of MLitt students in English Literature at Glasgow, my own institution. Jane noted students 'strengths in relating literary texts to historical and cultural contexts, in imaginative engagement with archival materials, along with admirable close literary analysis of texts and sources, and often thorough engagement with critical reception', while also noting that 'sustained engagement with literary theory' was missing. Jane noted in some work a tendency towards critical survey rather than theoretical engagement, although the critical survey was often delivered to a very high level. Jane applauded the attention to literary form in the work she had read. Marking was scrupulous and 'the assessment process was conducted most efficiently and fairly and with the greatest rigour in what has been an exceptional year.' Jane noted, as she had in the previous year, her surprise that the dissertation is not more heavily weighted. 'The exam

board was most efficiently run, given it was online by Teams, and the connection was occasionally flawed’.

Fiona Green (1830-1914; American)

Fiona thanked Sue Clark for her great efficiency. Fiona thought that students ‘demonstrated standards of achievement equal to those achieved by Master’s students at institutions with which I’m familiar ... in line with those at Cambridge, for example.’ ‘[T]he very best essays are publishable.’ Fiona noted the clear value of double-marking, and found the markers’ comments helpful. Marking was judicious, especially in the upper range. Fiona in particular applauded criticism by markers of readings of literature which were crudely instrumental (where poetry was made merely to illustrate a prior historical point). Not all markers completed the box to describe how they agreed a mark when scores differed, and not all markers used phrases from the assessment criteria. Fiona found it very helpful to see the list of selected dissertation topics. Fiona noted that the pressure to respond to some of most urgent recent work in literary studies, particularly the decolonising agenda, seemed very well met by the American and World courses, but less well in the other post-1830 strands. ‘Due attention had been paid by examiners to extenuating circumstances in view of the Coronavirus pandemic, and the timetable adjusted accordingly.’ Fiona noted that ‘[i]t was particularly useful to see the sample sets of work—the ‘full runs’— from individual candidates.’

Christina Lupton (1700-1830)

Christina thanked Sue Clark for all her work and noted how smoothly and well the examining process had been run. Marking was careful and fair; ‘there is impressive evidence of dialogue between examiners and of attention to detail in the grading of each paper. The feedback to students is always rich, and in many cases this year I found it exceptionally constructive and generous.’ Christina noted that across the 18th-century strand, dissertations were not in general as exciting as in previous years, and, in particular, topics were often conservative and rooted in quite old criticism, and that this was particularly marked for work based on single male authors. While ‘[t]he standard of writing is higher than at any institution I’ve taught in, and the ability of the students to locate and work with primary materials is unrivalled...the familiarity of students with current debates in eighteenth-century literary studies is fairly poor, and the confidence of students when it comes to working with literary and social theory is lower than at most other institutions I’ve taught in.’ As Christina noted last year, ‘there is real room for improvement ... [in] course offerings... students writing on canonical male authors are encouraged to produce ... close, aesthetically minded readings of the texts before them, while students taking courses on female authors are reading their work more as an artefact of social and literary history. This hierarchy of approaches seems unfortunate to me, and it is one that doesn’t hold at other institutions I know.’ Christina wondered whether, with libraries and archives closed for the dissertations, students lacked theoretical frameworks to enable them to produce other kinds of non-archival work.

Javed Majeed (World Literatures in English)

Javed thanked Sue Clark and Emily Richards for excellent and helpful work, and noted the good range of student work he had been sent. Javed noted that student work is ‘in general equal to and in some cases considerably higher than those achieved by students at other

HEIs', but that 'the work at this level at other HEIs is generally more open to interdisciplinary approaches'. Javed noted that marking was judicious; but he also noted that, for dissertations, there was a lack of discussion of translation and translation theory in world literature, even when those dissertations were dealing with English translations of texts: there was a lack of reflection 'on how processes of translation may have affected their primary textual base.'

Raluca Radulescu (650-1550)

Raluca thanked Sue Clark for all her excellent work. Raluca applauded 'the rigour and conduct of the assessment process'. She was 'very impressed with the administrative support given to me as new external examiner, with each and every query being answered in a timely manner', and noted that '[t]he chairing of the final board was collegial and transparent about process, and fairness to students was clearly prioritised while open discussion was encouraged as and when necessary.' Raluca noted that, as someone serving her first year as an external examiner, that the overall structure of the course made more sense after the meeting than before. Raluca applauded the range of marking; the dissertation topics she read were bold and often audacious in the best sense. Markers might use phrases from the assessment criteria more consistently in the marking. The Covid-19 measures were sensible and suitable.

Helen Smith (1550-1700)

Helen thanked Sue Clark and Adam Smyth 'for their efficiency and clear guidance, especially in this extraordinary year'. Helen noted that '[t]he accommodations and adjustments made in response to the Covid-19 pandemic were clear, generous and appropriate. A number of students benefited from the 'safety net' position, and this was an appropriate reflection of their capacities and achievement across the year. The chance to read full runs of work for particular candidates was very useful. The highest scoring early modern work was hugely impressive, demonstrating an excellent and upward trajectory, and giving a good sense of the candidate's interests at the intersections between literature and the history of science, histories of knowledge, and material texts. '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. Students are well prepared for doctoral study at any HE institution.' Markers' comments were clear and lucidly recorded how disagreements were resolved. In general, markers gave clear, concise explanations of how they had resolved disagreements, and it was helpful to see this. Helen noted the relative absence of theory from the written work, and that the real erudition in the best work can occasionally tip over to a less welcome pomposity.

I am grateful to my colleagues for their help, professionalism, and cheerful efficiency in the running of this process during the tumultuous academic year 2019-20. This is my final year as Chair; I wish Jeri Johnson best wishes for what I hope will be a less extraordinary 2020-21.

Professor Adam Smyth
Chair of M.St. Examiners
October 2020

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS (PGT)

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2020

External examiner name:	Jane Goldman		
External examiner home institution:	University of Glasgow		
Course examined:	MSt in English Studies		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		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>* 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".</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?*

The academic standards achieved by students on this Mst compare very well with those of Mlitt students in English Literature at Glasgow, my own institution. The Oxford degree is over 9 months whereas ours is a full year and allows for a lengthier dissertation. Nevertheless Oxford students produce impressive dissertations, and as at Glasgow the majority achieve Merit or Distinction on the course. The range of options available to students is rich and impressive, and, in relation to my own areas of expertise, commensurate with comparable courses at mine and other institutions. Along with work comparable with our MLitt in Modernities, I was particularly pleased and interested to read work from the excellent Virginia Woolf: Literary & Cultural Contexts, as I offer a similar module at Glasgow. The students' achievements at Distinction, Merit and Pass levels are commensurate.

- 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).*

I saw students' work from:

Michaelmas Term C
Virginia Woolf: Literary & Cultural Contexts
Victorian & Edwardian Drama
Literary London 1820-1920
Hilary Term B
Hilary Term C
Theory of the Novel
20th & 21st C Theatre
Dissertations

Student performance and achievement is on par for work in similar courses in my own university and the sector. The work I read shows strengths in relating literary texts to historical and cultural contexts, in imaginative engagement with archival materials, along with admirable close literary analysis of texts and sources, and often thorough engagement with critical reception. Less prominent is sustained engagement with literary theory, and perhaps a sense of how whatever period or context is in focus, there are broad subject wide theoretical matters and concepts that the student might touch base with. It was good to see courses where students were encouraged to think about the historical, contextual, or archival per se. I also see in my own and other institutions more encouragement of experimentation with the essay/dissertation form itself and with creative-critical responses. But that said, the standard of Oxford students' more conventional approach to essays is high.

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 most efficiently and fairly and with the greatest rigour in what has been an exceptional year. I have witnessed the utmost care and scrupulousness in responding to the impact of Covid on library access, teaching, dissertation supervision and assessment. The safety net ruling was well devised. I found the marking process to be exemplary. Blind double marking with very helpful feedback: lengthy commentary by both markers, taking up key terms from the criteria, marks matching the comments, and normally very helpful accounts of how divergent marks where they occurred were resolved. The exam board was most efficiently run, given it was online by Teams, and the connection was occasionally flawed. I was impressed by the care with which the board considered matters of short fall or excess in the dissertation word count, and with the application of the safety net ruling in general. It was useful to have more information provided in the package of pre-board materials, such as on the range of dissertation topics.

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.*

Re assessment, see above on blind double marking and markers' comments, and the very fair safety net ruling in response to Covid.

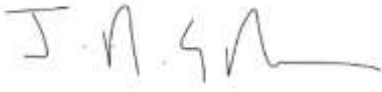
I commented last year on the truly distinctive strength of students' archival work, and very much hope that the Covid factor in the coming session does not inhibit that too much.

The course handbook is also exemplary.

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.

It was a pleasure and an education to read the students' work, and to witness the thoughtful, conscientious responses by markers. I was pleased to see a good reach into upper marks for work of distinction where appropriate. The administrative and academic teams are to be congratulated on successfully negotiating this exceptionally challenging year. While the formal board was very well conducted online, I would hope that there will be a return to normal on site and in person meetings as soon as it is safe to do so. I for one felt the loss this year of the opportunity too for more informal discussion and exchange with Oxford colleagues and fellow examiners.

Signed:	
Date:	26 August 2020

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 2020

External examiner name:	Fiona Green		
External examiner home institution:	University of Cambridge		
Course examined:	M.St. English Language and Literature		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		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>* 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".</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?*

The coursework and dissertations I read for adjudication and for moderation (Michaelmas term C essays on American fiction; Hilary term essays on contemporary poetry, literary institutions, and Henry James and his legacy; dissertations on a variety of modern and contemporary topics) demonstrated standards of achievement equal to those achieved by Master's students at institutions with which I'm familiar. Standards are very much in line with those at Cambridge, for example.

- 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).*

Oxford M.St. students demonstrate high-level skills in literary historical research, and in critical argument. They write well and clearly. There was parity of expectation and performance across and between the different C Courses I examined. Distinction level work is equal to that at other institutions; the very best essays are publishable.

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 found the marking of the essays and dissertations I saw for moderation to be judicious and exacting. In particular, in the upper range, I saw sophisticated conceptual work properly rewarded, with clarity of argument highly prized. I was pleased to note, too, in the module on contemporary poetry and in some American dissertations an aversion among examiners to the instrumentalising of literary texts—poetry brought in to illustrate sociological observations, for example. Literary texts had to do some work in generating and fostering the larger argument.

Due attention had been paid by examiners to extenuating circumstances in view of the Coronavirus pandemic, and the timetable adjusted accordingly.

It was particularly useful to see the sample sets of work—the 'full runs'—from individual candidates. I'd seen some of the individual pieces of work in other contexts—when moderating the C course, or as ANFs. But it's very revealing indeed to see whole candidates, especially at the top end, and to examine the variety of thinking and research that develops across the year.

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.*

It was revealing this year to see a list of selected dissertation topics. This raised one query in relation to four post-1830 strands in particular: what effect does the existence of the American and World Literatures strands have on the 1830-1914, and 1900-present courses, as far as dissertation topics is concerned? Pressure to respond to some of most urgent recent and current work in literary studies, and especially to the decolonising agenda, seems very well met by the American and World literature courses; but perhaps the existence of those courses takes the pressure off 1830-1914, and 1900-present strands. The dissertation topics in those areas seemed more conventional—and in some cases old-fashioned. This may be false impression since we saw a selected list. Would it be possible to see the whole list of topics?

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:	19 September 2020

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 2020

External examiner name:	Xiofan Amy Li		
External examiner home institution:	School of European Languages, Culture and Society University College London		
Course examined:	MSt in Comparative Literature & Critical Translation		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		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?	✓ (comparable and representing one of the highest academic standards in the UK)		
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?			✓ (this is the first)

				time I am examining this degree programme)
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?			✓
<p>* 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”.</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 a very high achieving cohort of students, with clear strengths in critical thinking and writing skills, plus a wide range of thematic interests in literature. 73% of the 11-student cohort achieve an average of 70 and above, and 10 out of 11 students achieve a high pass or merit (average 60+). This reflects the rigorous entry selection for this degree programme, as well as the excellent quality of teaching and learning. Compared to other UK universities where I have experience (Cambridge, SOAS, UCL, Kent), the academic standards achieved by these students are among the highest I have seen.

- 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).*

I'm happy to see that, despite the pandemic situation that hit students' dissertation work the hardest, students have been able to continue to produce work of very high quality – with several dissertations in the high distinction (75+) range – that aptly reflects their academic abilities.

I also particularly enjoyed reading the feedback on the core essays, which is very detailed and precisely points out the critical development of the student's essay as well as its merits and defects. These comments are very helpful for students' learning process. The comments also showed that students discussed an impressive range of texts and references (including and beyond critics and references mentioned in the Mst handbook), with a generally high level of theoretical sophistication.

The options students took in Michaelmas and Hilary terms reflect a wide range of topics offered by MML, English, and the Oriental Institute. Some students achieved their best marks in the optional modules, with the highest mark standing at 85.

Compared to comparable modules and programmes in Comparative Literature, English, and Modern Languages in other UK universities, student performance is outstanding. Many

students who achieved a First Class in their overall result clearly show extremely high potential to continue to do doctoral research. Overall, the academic standards of this Mst and the achievement of its students show that this Mst programme is one of the strongest in Comparative Literature and literary translation studies in the UK.

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 marking of students' work has been judicious, thoughtful, and balanced. The assessment standards and process upholds the high academic standards that are expected of this degree programme.

Simultaneously, the safety net adjustment for calculating overall results have ensured that students are not penalised for the disruption which Covid has caused. Mitigating circumstances submitted by students were considered carefully on a case by case basis, which has ensured that students' individual circumstances are taken into account while their work is fairly assessed.

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 some slight differences between marking practices in MML, English, and the Oriental Institute, mainly concerning whether decimals in final marks are rounded up or not. As this Mst degree spans options and collaborative teaching from all three faculties, it is preferable to agree upon one consistent way of presenting final marks that is particular to this Mst degree programme. The feedback of staff members from different faculties also occasionally varied more significantly in terms of the length of feedback and style of comments. Programme convenors are aware of this issue and discussed it at the examiners' meeting.

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.*

During 2019-20, the programme convenors have stayed regularly in touch with the students and held coffee/tea sessions fortnightly (before the Covid-19 situation) to encourage students to talk informally about their academic work and feel more integrated in the academic environment and the cohort. This is very good practice which I believe will continue to be helpful to future students, even if some coffee sessions will need to be held virtually on MS Teams in the new academic year.

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:	Xiaofan Amy Li 
Date:	01 Sept 2020

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

External examiner name:	Christina Lupton		
External examiner home institution:	University of Warwick		
Course examined:	MSt in English Studies		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A					
Please (✓) as applicable*		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?	X			
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?			X	
<p>* 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".</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?*

The standard of writing is higher than at any institution I've taught in, and the ability of the students to locate and work with primary materials is unrivalled. On the other hand, the familiarity of students with current debates in eighteenth-century literary studies is fairly poor, and the confidence of students when it comes to working with literary and social theory is lower than at most other institutions I've taught in.

- 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).*

Students on the MSt in English seem to acquire excellent research and close reading skills, which shows up in their development across the course. This year I found their choice of Dissertation topics rather narrow and uninspired. This may reflect the fact that they were shaping their projects under such unusually difficult conditions rather than any weakness in the course. At other universities this year I've seen a lot of students, even those working in historical periods, trying to connect their work to concerns in the present (I've read, for example, several eighteenth-century projects on Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, and on slavery). But this does not seem to have been the response of the Oxford MSt students with eighteenth-century dissertation topics.

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 find the assessment process thorough and fair. There is impressive evidence of dialogue between examiners and of attention to detail in the grading of each paper. The feedback to students is always rich, and in many cases this year I found it exceptionally constructive and generous.

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?

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.*

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2020

External examiner name:	Javed Majeed		
External examiner home institution:	King's College London		
Course examined:			
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		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>* 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".</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?*

The academic standards achieved are in general equal to and in some cases (considerably higher than those achieved by students at other HEIs. However, the work at this level at other HEIs is generally more open to interdisciplinary approaches

- 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).*

The student performance is on the whole more consistently above average than student performances in other HEIs. 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 write well, and the issues which one encounters in other HEIs when it comes to standards of writing amongst less able candidates are absent.

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 rigorous and fair. Markers 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. On the whole, markers also use the whole range of marks when assessing candidates' work. The office was quick to respond to queries.

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?

It might be useful for candidates to have a clear statement of policy in regard to using translated texts as primary material, particularly if their primary material consists entirely of translated texts. For those who have a working or advanced knowledge of the source languages/texts, some guidance on how to engage with the source texts might be useful. For such students, if they are working across languages, joint supervisory arrangements with colleagues in other Faculties (for example, Modern Languages, the Oriental Faculty) could be helpful.

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.

Please see under B3 above.

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:	J. Majeed
Date:	11/09/2020

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 2020

External examiner name:	Raluca Radulescu (Prof.)	
External examiner home institution:	Bangor University	
Course examined:	MSt in English	
Level: (please delete as appropriate)	Undergraduate	Postgraduate

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A					
Please (✓) as applicable*		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?			N/A	
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?	✓			
<p>* 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".</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?*

The academic standards achieved by the students definitely compare with those achieved by students at several other higher education institutions in the UK and Ireland of which I have experience, and sometimes exceed those.

- 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).*

I have been impressed with student performances in medieval literature, the section I am responsible for; it is clearly a reflection of the high calibre of the students, as well as thorough supervisory input. I am yet to find my way through the system in terms of the structure of the programme and the various expectations in relation to the components of the programme, as the COVID situation has not allowed travel and hence exchanges with the other external examiners on this programme. I am, however, pleased to see that students have been encouraged to persevere in their in-depth study of aspects of the medieval manuscript, for example, even though there was no access to the resources in lockdown. I also note that novel approaches to the study of manuscripts have been nurtured in supervision, and rewarded, relative to the scope of the project(s) undertaken. Elsewhere, novel angles in the study of classic texts has led to interesting and stimulating work, which at times exceeds expectations at this 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.

I have, overall, been very comfortable with the feedback I have encountered on assessments (both essays and dissertations) and the rigour and conduct of the assessment process. Clear and fair comments, rigorous attention to classification of marks, and overall consistent application of the same principles are among the factors that persuade me that the assessment process is robust and staff maintain the highest standards in teaching and assessment. Anonymous marking is in place, though evidently the markers might have an idea of the identity of the students, and the arrangements put in place to mitigate the effects of COVID19 lockdown, i.e. lack of access to libraries and resources have been on a par with those in other institutions I work at or am external examiner at.

I have been very impressed with the administrative support given to me as new external examiner, with each and every query being answered in a timely manner. The chairing of the final board was collegial and transparent about process, and fairness to students was clearly prioritised while open discussion was encouraged as and when necessary.

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?

It is my first year as external examiner and the circumstances have not allowed me to fully oversee the whole process – including by talking to the other external examiners and members of the examination board – but I am happy to confirm that I have not spotted any major issues that need to be brought to the attention of the supervising committees. I would only raise a point about parity in terms of summary feedback /marking summary among the different scripts /submissions I have seen, in that there is a great degree of variation between the length of comments offered on submissions, which may lead to some students expressing dissatisfaction. Nonetheless, even in cases where feedback was shorter, the mark awarded was justified by the marker.

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.*

I am happy to confirm, as I have done above, that the high calibre of the teaching and supervision on this programme is reflected in the students' performances. The innovative idea of having an abstract of the dissertation submitted in advance is to be commended, as it allows the markers to see how the project has progressed/been tailored along the way.

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 am happy to confirm that comments and suggestions made by the preceding external examiner have been taken on board, though I did note (above) that in some cases shorter summative comments/feedback still appear on some scripts, which may (justifiably) lead to some students raising concerns.

Signed:	R. L. Radulescu
Date:	15 September 2020

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 2020

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

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		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>* 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".</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?*

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 (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).*

As was the case last year, I had the opportunity to read a range of essays from across the degree and got a very good taste of the variety and scope of the student work. It was especially helpful to see the full run of marks for four students. The highest of these was hugely impressive, demonstrating an excellent upward trajectory and a rich and stimulating set of critical and analytical interests. The lowest run was highly consistent; it was a shame not to see the student develop more in response to the feedback and advice they received. Work at the top end was of an excellent standard: carefully-researched, stylishly written, and capable of considerable insight and powerful analysis. 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. Students are well prepared for doctoral study at any HE institution.

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. I was pleased to see clear statements of how disagreements had been resolved; these were thoughtful, clear and fair.

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?

As previously, it would be interesting to see the feedback that is received by students, and for the Faculty to reflect on the current practice of writing detailed feedback for internal purposes


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.

Very warm thanks to Sue, Emily and Adam for their efficiency and clear guidance, especially in this extraordinary year. The accommodations and adjustments made in response to the Covid-19 pandemic were clear, generous and appropriate. A number of students benefited from the 'safety net' position, and this was an appropriate reflection of their capacities and achievement across the year.

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:	17 th September 2020

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