



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

**FACULTY OF
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**EXAMINERS' REPORTS
2015**

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PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

2014 - 2015

PART I

A. STATISTICS

There were 228 candidates for the Preliminary Examination in English Language and Literature this year, 18 candidates for the Preliminary Examination in English and Modern Languages, 5 candidates for the Preliminary Examination in Classics and English (Course II: Qualifying Examination), 9 for the Preliminary Examination in Classics and English (Course I) and 8 for the Preliminary Examination in History and English. 8 candidates withdrew from the Preliminary Examination in English Language and Literature during the course of the year. None of the candidates was required to re-sit any of the papers in the Long Vacation.

Medical certificates and other Proctorial communications were presented on behalf of 25 candidates, and alternative arrangements were requested on behalf of 25 candidates. As was the case last year, all materials were taken into consideration by the Medical Cases sub-committee, and its recommendations were discussed by the full Board at the first marks meeting. Among the electronic innovations centrally introduced during the academic year, a new system was put in place for the recording of 'Factors Affecting Performance'. This enabled fuller and more systematic documentation of adverse circumstances affecting candidates. Various kinds of submitted material (from colleges and medical practitioners, for example, as well as from the candidates themselves in some cases) were thus better integrated, aiding the Board's deliberations and allowing its decisions to be recorded in a standard form. The Chair found this system helpful overall, despite the extra paperwork that it generated. There were 10 late submissions of the Paper 1 portfolio this year, as compared with 5 last year and 15 in 2013. In a large majority of these cases, the Proctors gave permission for the late penalty to be waived due to adverse circumstances.

1. English Prelims: numbers and percentages in each category

2014-15	Total no candidates: 228	%
Distinction	57	25.0
Pass	171	75.0
Fail/Partial Pass	0	0
Incomplete	0	0

2. English Prelims: Percentage of scripts awarded marks of 70+ for selected papers

Paper	2014-15	%
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1 Introduction to English Lang and Lit	46	20.1
2 650-1350	41	17.9
3 1830-1910	56	24.5
4 1910 to Present	55	24.1

3. PAST STATISTICS

i) English Prelims (from 2012-13) and Moderations (until 2011-12): numbers and percentages in each category

Category					%	%
	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12	2010-11	2013-14	2012-13
Dist.	59	46	51	48	25.2	19.5
Pass	175	186	167	176	74.78	79.1
Fail/Part. Pass	0	2	2	0	0	0.85
Inc.	1	1			0.4	0.42

ii) English Prelims and Moderations: Percentage of scripts awarded marks of 70+ for selected papers

Prelims

Paper	2014	2013
1	20.9	20.5
2	19.2	23.1
3	19.6	10.7
4	23.9	25.5
Overall	25.2	19.6

Moderations

Paper	2012	2011	2010
1	27.7	22.8	26.5
2a/4a	21.9	13.3	28.9

2b/4b	19.9	24.7	28.2
3a	23.4	27.5	16.0
3b	27.2 [11 scripts]	30.8 [13 scripts]	9.6 [33 scripts]
Overall	24.0	23.8	24.1

4. Preliminary Examination in English and Modern Languages

The 18 candidates all passed. 4 achieved Distinctions overall, and 1 further candidate achieved a Distinction in English.

5. Preliminary Examination in History and English

The 8 candidates all passed. 5 achieved Distinctions.

6. Preliminary Examination in Classics and English

Course I: The 9 candidates all passed and 5 achieved Distinctions.

Course II: The 5 candidates all passed.

B. GENERAL REMARKS

This year, the number of Distinctions awarded (25%) was virtually the same as last year (25.2%), and both figures are slightly but not insignificantly higher than the number awarded in 2013 (19.5%) when the new syllabus was first examined at this level. As was the case last year, there were no failures related to academic performance in any of the papers. As this consistency of excellent performance across the last two years indicates, the examiners found much work of extremely high quality in all four papers, a high standard that also marked much of the work by candidates in the joint schools, in each of which there was a very pleasing number of Distinctions. This was the third year of the new syllabus, and data are steadily accumulating that will facilitate a review of this syllabus in due course. On the evidence of the last three years, it would seem that the syllabus is bedding down extremely successfully and that candidates are tackling its various demands, challenges and opportunities seriously and creatively.

Procedures for the marking of Paper 1 were the same as last year. Portfolios were marked before the start of the written examinations. Following the successful process of co-moderation last year, small groups of markers met during the marking process in order that those new to the examining of the portfolio could compare their findings with those of more experienced markers. Scripts at either end of the range of marks, and other potentially problematic findings, were scrutinised at this stage, as were the emerging marks profiles. As happened last year, this process was extended to the marking of Papers 2, 3 and 4, particularly to ensure that there was parity between the ways in which more and less experienced examiners were interpreting the marks and classification criteria circulated to candidates prior to the examination. Again, as last year, this work ensured that final scrutiny of individual markers' profiles by the Board revealed no anomalies and no need for the scaling of marks. It is recommended again, therefore, that co-moderation before the final submission of marks should remain an integral part of the examining process, no matter how experienced the examiners involved.

As is mentioned briefly in the examiners' report on Paper 1 below, some individuals' work for Section A was at least potentially compromised this year because a significant number of candidates were not able to access the BYU corpora at a crucial point in Trinity Term. While candidates were reassured by the Chair that this would be taken into account, and the relevant examiners were duly informed of the problem, we would wish to signal in this report our dissatisfaction with this occurrence, which is a Library/IT issue. It is not unreasonable to expect that many candidates will be using BYU and similar corpora at the same time during Weeks 4 and 5 of Trinity Term, and the viability of portfolio work such as this depends, at least in part, on the unencumbered availability of such corpora. We would urge those most closely concerned with the scrutiny of databases, subscriptions and relevant quotas of users to look into this matter well ahead of Trinity Term 2016.

In other respects, however, the examiners' experiences of this paper did not differ hugely from the findings of 2014, with Sections A and B generating similar ranges of marks. The percentage of Distinctions generated by the paper (20.1) remains close to a notional ideal (in 2014 the percentage was 20.9; in 2013, 20.5). All questions were answered, and it is clear that in general candidates are extremely well informed about its various foci, aims and demands. However, it should be noted that this year, as last year, the Chair was subjected quite late in the year to a number of questions about the paper, all of which could and should have been directed to candidates' tutors much earlier on, and we would respectfully urge candidates to make as much use as possible of the many opportunities afforded them for consultation with tutors about the interpretation of questions and the kinds of materials permissible for use in essays. In particular, it was clear from some of the questions the Chair received that insufficient use is being made of previous examiners' reports when candidates and their tutors are familiarising themselves with the remit of this paper. We cannot repeat the same material from year to year, but we would particularly draw candidates' and tutors' attention to the very helpful summary provided by the 2013 examiners of the kinds of approaches that their candidates took to Section B answers, since the structure and remit of B essays in particular seems to have generated a certain amount of anxiety among candidates this year. They wrote:

"Examiners noted a wide variety of approaches. These included

- using the question as a prompt for a critical discussion of the work of two, or even one, theorists.
- offering a more wide-ranging theoretical discussion augmented by literary examples.
- using literary works as a way of interrogating theoretical positions and stances.
- outlining and developing the literary in theory, reading theory with the interpretive frameworks usually reserved for literary texts, and examining relatable principles of structure, composition, and hermeneutics.

All approaches were treated equally and all approaches found some candidates reaching distinction level."

Six of the portfolios were identified for re-reading in their entirety. This resulted in six upward adjustments to final marks, including five to Distinction level. Across the remaining three examination papers, 37 scripts were re-read on the same grounds, although many readings resulting in no changes to the final mark.

As last year, Paper 2 (Early Medieval Literature c. 650-1350) had the lowest number of Distinctions (17.9%), which is slightly lower than last year (19.2%) and significantly lower than 2013 (23%). This does not reflect the plethora of enterprising and focused responses to this paper that the examiners have encountered over the last two years, and it is possible that this

year, as last, rubric violations played a part in lowering some candidates' marks. There is more scope on this paper for a disparity between commentary and essay skills (and hence marks) to become evident, and this might serve as one possible topic for reflection when the new syllabus as a whole is being evaluated (together with the implications, and the findings, that will emerge from a similar scrutiny of FHS Paper 2). In the meantime, we commend candidates for acquiring, in so many cases, a sophisticated grasp of unfamiliar and challenging material in a relatively short period of time. The paper remains extremely enjoyable to examine, and it is clear that candidates are responding constructively to the many opportunities that it affords for intellectual exploration.

Paper 3 (Literature in English 1830-1910) met with some excellent and creative work this year, and we note the almost identical number of Distinctions generated by this paper and Paper 4 (24.5 and 24.1 respectively). However, one point forcefully made by the examiners in their report on the paper is the number of rubric violations they encountered. This occurred because some candidates were spreading their material too thinly, despite warnings about this on the Circular and elsewhere. Candidates should be encouraged to think as flexibly as possible about the different ways in which they might dispose the material on which they have worked during the year, and to focus hard on showing the range and depth of their knowledge in the examination.

Paper 4 (Literature in English, 1910 to the present) similarly generated a wide range of critical and creative responses. Here we underline a point made by the examiners of this paper about the tendencies, displayed by some candidates, either to under- or over-nourish answers, whether by using too few materials or by citing too many, the latter approach inevitably resulting in superficiality. There are many possible forms that an excellent answer might take, and candidates are to be encouraged to experiment with different argumentative models throughout the year. This point is also made in relation to Paper 1, Section B, and it might benefit candidates to think about these papers together when addressing this question.

In conclusion, we bring to the attention of Faculty Board the final point made by the examiners for Paper 4 regarding presentation. The examiners' report for 2014 contained detailed comments about the difficulties that some scripts, whether typed or handwritten, posed to examiners, and while no handwritten scripts this year were deemed illegible and in need of typing, it remains the case that marking such scripts continues to present a considerable cognitive challenge when hand-writing is difficult, or liberal use is made of asterisks directing examiners hither and thither between booklets in order to reconstruct out-of-sequence arguments. There is no doubt that handwritten examinations will remain for the time being, and thus candidates should be advised to focus in their preparation on developing appropriate presentation skills.

C. CONVENTIONS OF CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA (INCLUDING JOINT SCHOOLS)

Following established practice, the criteria for classification were made known to students in both the main and joint schools in two circulars from the Chair of Examiners. Circulars were issued in Hilary Term (and in Trinity Term in the case of the written examinations for Classics and English). As last year, the circular for Paper 1 listed timing and delivery details as well as submission requirements and procedures pertaining to the portfolio submission.

PART II

A. ADMINISTRATION

The Mark-It database was used as usual, and this year a suite of new electronic databases was made available to Chairs of examiners by EAP (Exams and Assessment Process). E-vision was introduced for the recording of class lists and related data. The examination paper for Prelims 1 portfolio submission was posted on Weblearn as a downloadable file at noon on Monday of week 4 of Trinity Term. As last year, an email was sent to the Faculty undergraduate mailing list with the link. Candidates were offered the option of collecting a hard copy from the Examinations Secretary on the same day (Monday of week 4) if they had difficulties accessing the material. As last year, candidates also submitted the electronic version of their portfolio to an email address accessible by the Examinations Secretary, inserting their candidate numbers in the subject-line of their email. Now in its second year, this method of electronic submission seems to be running smoothly.

The Board records its warmest thanks to Angie Johnson, the Examinations Secretary, who worked particularly hard to master, interpret and support the new electronic systems introduced by EAP, in addition to the usual hard work of liaising with other Faculties, the UAS Taught Degrees team and the Examination Schools. This was a particularly taxing year in that the Faculty was operating without an Undergraduate Studies Administrator during the crucial period in which Prelims took place, and the Chair warmly thanks Rachael Sanders who deputized during this period. The Chair is also grateful to Richard Sykes, who was involved in some crucial negotiations with the Proctors earlier in the year, and to Sadie Slater, who joined the Faculty during the last phase of this Prelims process.

The Board as originally constituted comprised 3 permanent post-holders, 1 Career Development Fellow, 1 Post-Doctoral Fellow and one Departmental Lecturer. In addition, 1 permanent postholder and 1 college lecturer were recruited to assist with the marking of Paper 1. During the course of the academic year, 1 examiner was taken ill and the marking in this case was divided between 1 permanent postholder and 2 college lecturers. In addition, the marking of another member of the board, who took paternity leave, was reassigned to a college lecturer. The proctors were informed about these circumstances at the appropriate time.

B. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES REPORT AND BREAKDOWN OF THE RESULTS BY GENDER

Candidates	2015	%
All Genders	228	100
Women	151	66.23
Men	77	33.77
Distinctions	number	%
All	57	25
Women	40	70% of distinctions, 17.5 of total, 26.5% of women

Men	17	30% of distinctions, 7.4 of total, 22.1% of men
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PAST STATISTICS

Prelims

Candidates	2014	%	2013	%
All genders	234	100	235	100
Women	160	68.37	146	62.1
Men	74	31.62	89	37.9
Distinctions:				
All	46	100	46	100
Women	35	59.3 (22% of women)	28	11.9 (19.1% of women)
Men	24	40.6 (32% of men)	18	7.6 (20.2% of men)

Moderations

		2012	2011	2010
Total no.	women	135 (61.4%)	140 (62.5%)	155 (65.4%)
Total no.	men	85 (38.6%)	84 (37.5%)	82 (34.6%)
Distinctions	Both genders	51 (23.2%)	48 (21.4%)	54 (22.8%)
Of which:	women	28 (20.7%)	27 (19.3%)	29 (18.7%)
	men	23 (27.1%)	21 (25%)	25 (30.5%)

It will be remembered that last year's results generated a complex narrative about gender, which will be briefly recapitulated here in order to establish a context for this year's results. Last year, female candidates achieved a significantly higher number (35), and considerably higher percentage (59.3) of Distinctions overall than did male candidates (24/40.6% respectively). But equally, 32% of men (a + 7.2% variance from a notional ideal whereby females perform the same as males) and 22% of women (a -3.3% variance) achieved Distinctions. This was a wider

gap than had emerged the previous year (when the figures were 20.2% and 19.2% respectively). Equally, last year, the number of female candidates rose to 160, whereas the number of male candidates declined to 74. This difference in performance was reflected across all of the papers last year, and colleagues and students are referred to last year's report for the relevant details and analysis.

It was, therefore, difficult to know what to expect this year. In the event, a slightly different picture has emerged. This year, women comprised two-thirds of the cohort, and earned two-thirds of the Distinctions. The real difference from last year is that the gap between the percentages of women and men obtaining Distinctions (26.4% of women, 22.1% of men) has somewhat narrowed the 10% difference that emerged last year. Each of the four papers has contributed to this in ways that also differ from the examiners' findings last year. Arguably the most notable results in this respect are those for Papers 3 and 4, which are almost uncannily identical. 24.5% of women and 24.78% of men achieved Distinctions on Paper 3; 24.5% of women and 23.4% of men achieved Distinctions on Paper 4. These papers, too, generated almost the same percentages of Distinctions overall (24.5% and 24.1% respectively). There was a very slight gap in the case of Paper 2, with 17.9% of women achieving Distinctions as compared with 18.2% of men (on a paper that generated 17.9% of Distinctions overall). A wider gap was perceptible in the case of Paper 1, on which men performed significantly better, achieving 23.4% of Distinctions as against 18.5% of women in the context of a paper that generated a healthy 20.1% of Distinctions overall. These last data interestingly complicate the view that portfolio-style assessments are inherently better attuned to learning styles often identified with female candidates.

When considering equality of opportunity more broadly, it is difficult to know how to weigh these data in the absence of other variables, such as the kinds of schools attended by candidates, performance at A-level or equivalent, and other contextual data. But they do at least show that performances can vary from year to year, which alone might support a challenge to the view that inequalities, at least as far as gender is concerned, are irrevocably entrenched in our processes.

PART III

1. Introduction to English Language and Literature

i) Paper 1 Section A

All questions on this part of the paper were answered, and the examiners once again commend the candidates for the seriousness and creativity with which they approached its distinctive tasks. It would appear that the majority of candidates are making constructive and thoughtful use of the plethora of resources available to them at both college and faculty level in order to familiarize themselves with the particular requirements of this section of the paper. The results of this hard work were clear this year: the examiners encountered some very nuanced work on linguistic detail, which was combined with trenchant argument in a manner that is extremely impressive for this stage of the course. There was an excellent range of texts used for commentary, and these were often analysed and incorporated into candidates' broader arguments with flair and imagination. There were also some extremely powerful readings of the language of literary texts, in particular, that showed deft integration of more and less traditional models of reading literary language, with candidates able to situate the linguistic and rhetorical

aspects of such texts in the context of a broader, unfolding and well-resourced argument about the wider issues broached by each question.

The following general comments emerged from the examiners' findings this year. First, the simple act of citation from critics, in an illustrative way, is not an adequate substitute for analysis of the language of the texts. Citations from critics must earn their place in an essay, and develop an argument of which the candidate is fully in charge. Equally, the uncritical citation of authorities goes against the grain of critical reflection that is at the heart of the study of literature, and can also undermine the impact of the accompanying linguistic analysis. Second, the examiners found much evidence of well-informed, critical and contextually-justifiable use of corpora and text tools, with the better responses not merely dutifully shoehorning these into an essay but using them in ways that contributed to an unfolding argument. The examiners this year were aware, in advance of marking the portfolios, that some candidates were locked out from electronic databases at precisely the moment (fourth week of Trinity Term) when they needed to use them, and were mindful of this when assigning marks. Third, some candidates used their own transcriptions of YouTube clips, for example, as their chosen text(s). While not absolutely inadmissible, this practice is very risky for candidates: unless they are already proficient in phonetic transcription, it is not a good idea to use the portfolio submission to experiment, possibly for the first time, with this kind of evidence, as it puts a great deal of pressure on the candidate to achieve a perfectly accurate text and submits them to kinds of scrutiny avoided by most other candidates. It might also be asked why, with such a wealth of printed material so readily available to them in English, and across such a wide range of genres and media, some candidates nevertheless feel the need to resort to hitherto-untranscribed material. Fourth, the examiners found that it was not a good idea, in this part of the paper, to substitute theoretical readings for close readings of language, as sometimes occurred this year in relation to the discussion of gender, for example. Candidates needed to reflect on the very different kinds of task asked of them in the two sections of the paper, and to understand that in this part, the argument must centre on the implications arising from close linguistic analysis of the commentary texts. Fifth, while candidates might wish to discuss matters arising from lecture materials, they should not, when constructing their own arguments, rely heavily on exactly the same texts as those used in lectures, nor should these texts be used for their own commentaries.

ii) Paper 1 Section B

All questions in this section of the paper were attempted, and the examiners were pleased to note that there were no misinterpretations of any of the questions; candidates seemed clear about what they were being asked. The quality of essays was good overall, and the performance of candidates this year would seem to indicate that the paper is functioning effectively in producing often very high-quality explorations of critical and theoretical perspectives on literature.

It is important that the material used by candidates is tailored so as to respond adequately and relevantly to the question in front of them. It is perfectly permissible, in either section of the paper, to rework material generated in the course of college work during the year, but the process of reworking should be regarded as an essential critical and creative step in the assembly of a portfolio. This year, the examiners found that some answers were too narrowly focused to allow a persuasive argument to develop. Others, conversely, skittered across a multitude of texts and did not give themselves time to make critical observations or build an argument. Stronger answers showed that candidates were thinking carefully and critically about the weight given to respective elements of their argument, and to the appropriateness of their

argumentative model. Several candidates rather lost sight of the precise terms of the question and settled instead for descriptive appreciation of literary texts that they had initially used as examples. This would seem to suggest that reflective drafting and redrafting is not always occurring when portfolios are being assembled.

iii) History and English paper 3: Introduction to English Language and Literature

All 8 History and English candidates submitted the Prelims 1 portfolio and three candidates achieved overall Distinctions on this paper (with 5 students for this joint school achieving Distinctions overall). Section A is identical with that taken by candidates in the main school, but Section B comprised questions designed to encourage candidates to reflect on the approaches, materials and methodologies specific to the joint school. Overall, the quality of the answers was pleasing. There were several outstanding scripts (including 4 Distinctions out of 8 in Section B alone). In terms of the key issue of interdisciplinarity, virtually all the answers comfortably brought together the methodologies and perspectives of history and English, choosing widely diverse primary sources to illustrate the efficacy of particular approaches. The materials ranged from 'The Dream of the Rood' and the documentary evidence surrounding Cortez's encounter with Moctezuma to the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell, Moby Dick, WW1 poetry, and the works of Heaney. Only one candidate attempted the question on the significance of the material form of texts, producing a brilliant, sophisticated, and erudite argument. Indeed, the best answers such as this one went beyond class reading to deepen their understanding of the chosen approach; by contrast, the one or two weaker scripts appeared limited in their frame of reference and reductive in their portrayal of the tenets of, say, New Historicism or New Formalism. Overall, the B section of the exam demonstrates the ability of HENG students fruitfully to engage with the complex theoretical thrust of the interdisciplinary course.

2. Early Medieval Literature c. 650 - 1350

The examiners were pleased by the seriousness, care and evident enjoyment with which most candidates approached this paper. All the essay questions were answered, but as was the case last year, the vast majority of candidates focused on Old English material for both commentary and essay work. Last year the examiners noted 'a small handful' of commentaries on *Havelok* or *Ancrene Wisse*; this year there were even fewer. Equally, in the essays, very few candidates took the opportunity to weave together pre- and post-Conquest literary materials, although the small cohort that did so often wrote memorably and with distinction, bringing together texts such as *Maldon*, *Roland* and the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, or *Beowulf* and *Havelok*, for example, in nuanced and persuasive ways. Others, while often commenting on one of the Old English extracts, also wrote sharply in their essays on a range of individual post-Conquest texts and authors, including Wulfstan, Marian lyrics, or the *Lufe Ron*, as well as the post-Conquest commentary texts.

There was much impressive work this year, some outstanding in its precise and sensitive attention to the implications of tone and stance in individual texts. In addition to writing enterprisingly on the texts stipulated for commentary, many candidates addressed a wide range of further materials including the various contents of the Exeter Book (in which case, beyond *The Wife's Lament*, the *Seafarer* and the *Ruin*, the Riddles and the *Guthlac* poems proved particularly popular, with *Juliana* also making several appearances), *Daniel*, *Exodus*, *Judith*, *Brunanburh* and the Old English Bede. Many candidates were also commendably well-informed about the critical, cultural and conceptual hinterlands of these and other texts, offering learned

and well-tailored discussions of Boethius, Macrobius or Capellanus, for example, in order to deepen their discussions of vernacular materials. Others wrote sharply and sceptically about the usefulness (or otherwise) of modern genre-theories in relation to this literature.

There was much skilful commentary-work, with most candidates choosing the passage from the *Wanderer*. Many candidates wrote in persuasive and informed ways about, for example, lexical density and collocation, kennings, parallelism, semantic fields, voice and perspective, gnomic utterances and the vexed question of speech-boundaries in the *Wanderer* (and how this in turn might affect readings of different parts of the poem). A common problem that emerged in this part of the paper was the loose or uncritical or ill-defined uses of the term 'pathetic fallacy' in relation to the passage from the *Wanderer*. On the other hand, the strongest candidates were judicious about not over-stating the implications of particular features such as hypermetric lines, and did not assign automatic or universal values to stylistic features such as double alliteration. In general we would urge candidates not to feel that they *must* comment on every feature of a commentary extract; rather, we would encourage them to be selective and discriminating when assembling their arguments.

As happened last year, some scripts this year fell foul of the rubric – made clear in the Circular to Candidates and on the front of the examination paper itself – that stipulates that candidates should write on at least THREE texts across the TWO essays. The rubric for an examination should be noted in good time and adhered to throughout the exam; this comment also applies for Paper 3 below, which caused similar problems for some candidates.

3. Literature in English 1830-1910

All questions were attempted, with Q. 2 (Women); Q. 10 (manners/social convention); Q. 18 (moral/plot); and Q. 19 ('I' and 'thee') proving especially popular. Q. 11 (imperialism/exploration) promoted some truly excellent responses, often, but not always, making use of Conrad. Imaginative use was made of Q. 8 (human/animal life) and Q. 16 (playfulness/seriousness). The quality of answers overall was extremely high. The very best engaged with the questions posed with imagination and flair, making use of remarkably assured familiarity with an impressive range of material, both fictional and non-fictional.

Candidates are to be commended for proposing often sensitive and on occasionally highly original links between texts and contexts. There were some especially well-informed discussions of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry in relation to his work and that of other Pre-Raphaelites, though mentions of other artists or aspects of visual culture were rare. Many candidates also displayed useful self-awareness in approaching what may be thought of as the standard topics on this paper – gender, class, and faith and doubt – offering arguments that were carefully keyed into the specific issues raised by the texts under consideration. The best answers used the quotation accompanying the question to significant effect, taking from it key terms or ideas which then sustained the entire argument. It is disappointing, however, that a considerable number of candidates did not address the quotations on the question paper and it is hoped that this can be strongly encouraged henceforward: often the boldest and most interesting work is to be found in a candidate's engaged and questioning reaction to those unseen provocations. Weaker answers often ignored the specificities of the question and offered what read like prepared answers—especially in relation to questions 2 and 3, which contrary to appearances were not only questions about “gender” and “the condition of England”. Weaker answers also tended to replay existing critical arguments on canonical texts—Gilbert and Gubar, for example, being taken as ‘the gospel’ concerning women's literature—showing a lack of originality in both argument and choice of material.

Stronger answers ranged widely across the literature of the period whilst being attentive to changing historical contexts, and brought texts into motivated and illuminating comparisons. They offered well-supported and insightful arguments rather than plot summaries and generalisations. They also showed an impressive attention to aspects of literary form and style, with analyses of poetic rhythm and meter being particularly rewarding in how arguments were from such attentive formal analyses. Many candidates clearly took pleasure in writing and developing their arguments, expressing themselves with energy and flair, and making the scripts a pleasure to read.

Answers tended to stick to a relatively limited number of authors. In the novel: Eliot, Gaskell, Dickens, the Brontës and Hardy, and in poetry: Tennyson, Browning, Barrett Browning, and the Rossettis. Though less frequently written on, several authors were consistently the subject of work of an exceptional standard: Beerbohm, Hopkins, Lear, Melville, Swinburne, and Whitman. Wilde's works were addressed in their diversity across the scripts, with candidates roaming beyond the familiar society comedies and *Dorian Gray* to explore his critical prose and his children's fiction. There were also good, sustained comparative discussions of his work notably in relation to Shaw's early drama, though drama otherwise was not often considered. American authors, particularly, Whitman, Emerson, Melville, Douglass, and Dickinson were put to good use, often alongside canonical English writers (Dickens and Eliot, for instance) but occasionally alongside those traditionally less well attended to—e.g. Gissing and Trollope. There were also some especially impressive discussions of African-American writing and slave narratives and some rewarding attempts to consider literature in its broadest sense, with discussions of religious sermons, political speeches, and literature in periodicals—such material serving to both offer more nuanced historical contexts and to think critically about what and who defines “literature” in the period.

As a final note, a worrying trend this year was the frequency of rubric violations. In some instances this was flagrant, i.e. using the same text substantially in more than one answer. In one or two instances the same texts/authors were used in ALL three responses. The rubric on the examination paper read ‘You should NOT write more than one answer substantially on the same author’.

4. Literature in English, 1910 to the present day

The answers presented for this paper varied widely in scope, approach and quality, though overall a pleasing amount of good work was done. Of the questions set, no. 23 (on digital media) was the only one not attempted. Qu. 21 (on short stories), 19 (on close reading and ‘close writing’) and 7 (on being concerned with the very poor) were the least frequently chosen. All the others attracted fairly equal numbers of takers. Qu. 9 (‘The art of losing isn't hard to master’) was interpreted in various persuasively inventive ways. Some answers to qu. 1 assumed that Marinetti was thinking of a text's *dramatis personae* (rather than its aspect or quality) when he wrote that ‘no work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece’: the examiners allowed this interpretation. On the other hand, candidates who did not understand or even enquire into the meaning of the word ‘diaspora’ in qu. 17 lost marks.

Very many essays were written about a rather small group of writers. Joyce, Eliot, Beckett, Yeats, Woolf, and Pound (in that order) were substantially the most popular authors, followed by Plath, Heaney, Pinter, Auden, Coetzee, Mansfield and Hill. Often the most inventive and sophisticated work was done when candidates resisted the gravitational pull of these heavyweights and wrote about less obvious figures such as Quin, Nichols, Anne Carson, Doctorow or Selvon, frequently setting up interesting theoretical and historical contexts (eg Mina

Loy with reference to little magazines). But, overall, the examiners felt that many candidates would have benefited if they had carried over into this paper – and especially into discussions involving narrative voice or gender identity – more of the awareness they have presumably developed during their work for Paper 1.

It was heartening to see several candidates making the most of the permission to discuss foreign and translated texts (up to about a third of each essay) so as to explore – for instance – how Ibsen mattered to Joyce or Dante to Heaney. On the other hand, a few candidates infringed the rubric instruction not to write more than one answer substantially on the same author, and were penalised accordingly. As in previous years, the best essays offered shrewd interrogations of the terms of the question, ranged across authors in an historically informed way, built on criticism and theory as they developed their arguments, showed sensitivity to the texture of the language, and were written with panache.

Finally, it was clear from many scripts that handwriting is no longer a natural mode of communication for our students. A badly handwritten script can take three or four times as long to read as a typed one: given the amount this costs in person-hours, surely the time has come for the University to provide secure word-processing terminals for timed exams.

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN CLASSICS AND ENGLISH

2014-15

PART I

A. STATISTICS.

(a) Numbers and percentages in each category:

	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Distinction	5	2		56%	33.3%	
Pass	4	3	6	44%	50%	100%
Fail		1			16.67%	

(b) **Vivas** were not used.

(c) As last year, **marking** of English scripts was single (in line with the practice for the main School) and that for Classics was double.

B. New examining methods and procedures.

This was the third year of the new syllabus for Classics and English. Candidates had been informed via the Circular that the 5 papers were equally weighted; but furthermore, in line with a recommendation from the Joint Standing Committee from Classics and English (itself following a recommendation of the syllabus reform committee), the criterion for the awarding of classes in Course 1 was the average of the average Classics mark (derived from 3 papers) and the average English mark (derived from 2), thereby giving each subject equal weight. This method was fractionally more generous to candidates than a simple averaging of the five marks would have been.

PART II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

As will be apparent from the table above, this was a very pleasing year for the Joint School in general, and the examiners expressed their satisfaction at the Exams Board (though note in particular the comments on unseen translation in Course 1, below). With regard to Course 1, the Craven Prize (Classics) and the Passmore Edwards Prize (English) were both shared between Caroline Ritchie (Trinity) and Molly Janz (Magdalen). There were also some outstanding

performances in Course 2, and none was less than satisfactory. The Gibbs Prize for the best overall performance in Course II/CML was awarded to Molly Willett (Corpus Christi).

The examiners took into account notification from the Proctors that there was noise disturbance caused by building work in the vicinity of the Examination Schools on 24th June.

B. NUMBERS AND PERFORMANCE

There were 9 candidates for Course I, all of whom took each of the 5 papers, and 5 candidates for the qualifying examination in Course 2. All candidates passed.

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Paper 1: Introduction to English Language and Literature

Readers of this report are also referred to the lengthier report on Paper 1 in the Examiners' Report for the Preliminary Examination in English Language and Literature 2014-15.

There were 9 candidates for this paper, which was examined by portfolio submission in week 5 of Trinity Term, and performances in the Joint School generated uniformly satisfactory, and in several cases outstanding, overall marks. It seemed clear from this year's performances that candidates in the Joint School had a sound understanding of the differences between the kinds of tasks required in Sections A and B of the paper. The strongest essays by candidates in the Joint School demonstrated the following qualities: meticulous care and mastery of the subject matter; an ability, when addressing answers in Section A, to pay careful and discriminating attention to relevant linguistic detail when discussing the commentary texts, and to situate this aspect of the discussion within the broader context of a theoretical framework drawing on wider reading relevant to the chosen topic; a sound grasp of critical and technical vocabularies relevant to the task at hand; and an ability, where relevant, to use electronic resources critically and creatively. Problems occurred when candidates fell back on impressionistic or unclear language (e.g. 'a poetic tone'; failure to define key terms with sufficient precision), did not support their Section A commentaries with evidence from wider reading on the chosen topic, simply noted linguistic details without commenting on their relevance or significance to the particular argument under construction, or addressed one part of a question more fully or convincingly than another.

Paper 2: Literature in English 1550-1660 (Excluding the plays of Shakespeare)

It was a pleasure to mark this paper. The quality of the answers this year absolutely vindicates the decision to retain a Renaissance literature paper in the Preliminary Examination for Course 1. Candidates ranged widely in their choice of questions from form/imagery in religious poetry and literary treatment of sexual desire to imaginings of early modern London, translation, uses of rhetoric, and adaptation of classical genres. Generally, the answers were eloquent, vigorously argued, analytically sophisticated and sensitive to context. The best ones capitalised on familiarity with Greek and Latin sources. There were 5 outstanding scripts that obtained Distinctions, and others were highly competent.

Paper 3: Unseen Translation from Greek and Latin

Of the nine scripts, one was in the 70-85 range, 8 were in the 50-69 range (three were on the Greek, five on the Latin passages). Again this year, this paper tended to produce the weakest

performances, but there were some translations of a very high standard. In general, however, the translations were rather impressionistic, with numerous conflations and confusions.

Paper 4: Greek and Latin Essay Questions

Of the 9 scripts, 4 were in the 70-85 range, and 5 in the 60-69 range. The best essays were those that combined conceptual sophistication with close textual reference, and did not tow a party line. The essay on Aeneas' character tended to the apologetic, seeing Aeneas as "relatable" (rather than seeing that Aeneas' under-characterisation from the sheer paucity of direct speech allowed to him is itself a problem that needs to be addressed). Candidates tended to have a lot to say about *clientela* in Petronius and Juvenal; it was good to see the different assessments of the attitudes of each author. The essay on the treatment of time was treated best by those who were able to narrow the question down and impose a structure on their answer, instead of throwing in everything but the kitchen sink. The essay on exposition and dramatisation was answered best by those who thought about what the terms meant. Defining the terms of the question is essential, never more so than in a challenging question like this.

The essay on theoretical approaches to ancient literature was not answered by many candidates and needed BOTH conceptual sophistication AND close textual reference to fill out an answer.

Paper 5: Greek and Latin Translation and Comment

There were 9 scripts, 4 in the 70-85 range, and 5 in the 60-69 range. There were some excellent translations this year; but for some, there was still too much approximation, where the general sense of the passage was conveyed but the rendering indicated that the candidate had not grasped how the individual words fitted together (and, in the worst cases, howlers — such as taking the neuter *aliud* to refer to another *man*, ie. an animate human being). Occasionally this vitiated the commentaries, which made points that rested upon misinterpretation. However, the commentaries in general were well done: the best were generous in length, with good, sharp, observant detail, and were able to command sophisticated terminology for the analysis of rhetoric and stylistics. They were also able to explicate detail when explication was called for (e.g. the mythography of the Propertius passage). The weaker answers tended to revert to paraphrase and to the procrustean A-level quest for alliteration and emphatic positioning (for which there seemed to be no clear criteria: the beginnings, ends, and middles of lines all managed to be colonised by the seekers after emphasis), with dubious hypotheses built on shaky foundations.

Classics and English Qualifying Examination (Course 2)

As last year, all candidates are to be commended, and the examiners were agreed that this course seems to be fulfilling its aims extremely well. Of the 5 candidates, 3 took the Latin option and 2 the Greek. Although the qualifying examination is taken on a pass/fail basis, it should be recorded that very few marks for individual papers were below 70 this year, with some others in the very high 60s, all of which testifies to the commitment and calibre displayed by this year's cohort.

F. Members of the Board of Examiners

Dr Mishtooni Bose (Chair)

Dr Paulina Kewes

Prof Fiona Macintosh

Prof Jane Lightfoot

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH AND MODERN LANGUAGES

2014-15

Extract from MML Prelims Report

JOINT SCHOOLS

As in previous years, the final meeting of the main school dealt with MLL and CML candidates.

This year, the Chair or Vice-Chair chaired separate HML, PML, EMEL and EML, for all of which there is a separate meeting. Since meetings for HML and CML took place after the main ML final meeting, marks for History and English were not available at the ML pre-final meeting. Meetings went smoothly with review of all marks and special cases. In the case of HML, it appears that the software package used by History is unable to extract a separate list of History joint school results in time for its preliminary meeting. It would clearly be desirable if final marks could be arrived at on the day before the final Joint School meeting, but where that is not possible, the Chair needs to double-check all final lists and the OSS entries carefully.

Only the Chair and Vice-Chair of ML and one or two representatives from the other subject attend the final meeting of Joint Schools. This ensures a balanced committee, and worked very efficiently. Both sides of the Joint Schools seemed pleased with the operation.

Dr Cláudia Pazos-Alonso

Chair of Prelims 2015

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN HISTORY AND ENGLISH EXAMINERS' REPORT

2014-15

PART I

A. STATISTICS

All candidates

Class	No						%					
	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
D	5	4	3	4	3	3	62.5	50	30	28.6	27.3	50
P	3	4	7	9	8	2	37.5	50	70	64.3	72.7	33.3
PP	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	7.1	0	16.7
Fail		-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-

All candidates, divided by male and female

Class	Number										Percentage (%) of gender									
	2015		2014		2013		2012		2011		2015		2014		2013		2012		2011	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
D	2	3	2	2	0	3	4	0	0	3	66.7	60	100	33.3	0	42.9	100	0	0	42.9
P	1	2	0	4	3	4	0	9	4	4	33.3	40	0	66.7	100	57.1	0	90	100	57.1
PP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

B. EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

2014-15 was the third year of the new English Language and Literature syllabus. There were no changes this year to examining procedures for any of the papers.

- C. As last year, the criteria for classification were made known to students in two circulars from the Chair of Examiners, one relevant for portfolio essays and the other for timed examinations. The first listed timing and delivery details as well as presentation requirements and procedures pertaining to the portfolio submission. Both circulars drew

attention to the difference in criteria and requirements, where applicable, between English Prelims and the Joint Schools Preliminary examinations.

The portfolio examination paper, consisting of section A (Approaches to Language) and section B (Approaches to Literature), was released by the English Faculty on the Monday of week 4 of Trinity Term. Portfolio submission consisted of two pieces of written work between 1,500 and 2,000 words each (including footnotes but excluding bibliography). Candidates taking Prelims in History and English submitted portfolios on the Wednesday of week 6 of Trinity Term.

- D. The examination paper for portfolio submission was posted on Weblearn as a downloadable file at noon on Monday of week 4 of Trinity Term. An email was sent to the Faculty undergraduate mailing list with the link. Candidates were offered the option of collecting a hard copy from the Examinations Secretary on the same day (Monday of week 4) if they had difficulties accessing the material.

PART II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

There were 8 candidates in the cohort (3M, 5F), five of whom achieved a Distinction (2M, 3F). The majority (5) took History of the British Isles VI (1815-1924), while 2 took HBI 2 (1042-1330) and one took HBI I (300-1087). A diverse range of optional subjects in History was studied, with no discernible pattern or distinct preference among the candidates. On the English side, 4 candidates opted for the 1830 - 1910 period paper, 2 took the Modern Literature option, and two took the Early Medieval Literature paper.

As in previous years, English Paper 1: Introduction to English Language and Literature, continued to be set separately for History and English students and involved a different submission schedule. Section B (Approaches to Literature) continues to be dedicated to the interdisciplinary perspectives relevant to History and English candidates, and thus differs in content and approach from the Section B taken by candidates in English and its other joint schools.

This year, the Chair received notice of noise disturbance from building works near the Examination Schools in both the morning and the afternoon on one of the days when optional subjects in History were being examined. As requested by the Proctors, the Board of Examiners took this report into account when considering candidates' results.

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

Results in 2012 and 2013 were markedly contrasted: no female candidate achieved a distinction in 2012, while all three distinctions in 2013 were achieved by women. In 2014, the distinctions were equally divided between women and men. This year, 3 women and 2 men achieved distinctions. We concur with last year's board that the numbers involved are too small to draw any other definitive conclusions from these figures. There were no further equality and diversity issues arising from this year's examination.

Members of the Board of Examiners

- Dr Mishtooni Bose (Chair)
- Prof. Joanna Innes
- Dr Jane Garnett
- Dr Katherine Zieman

FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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

2014-15

2014-15 was a complex year of FHS examining in which the old and new syllabi in English ran side by side. This required a Herculean effort on the part of the Faculty in terms of setting and marking papers, and I wish to thank all my colleagues for the cheerfulness, timeliness and expertise with which they answered emails, agreed to do things, and marked thousands upon thousands of words. Particular thanks go to the Board, the deputy Chair Siân Grønlie, and the externals this year, who all rose willingly to the challenge of new paperwork and procedures. Angie Johnson, above all, was instrumental in ensuring that all ran smoothly, and she deserves especial thanks for the humane and careful way in which she marshalled those taking the old regulations syllabus through to the finishing post. My thanks also go to the staff at the Examination Schools for their help in a complex year. To the candidates and their tutors, the Board would like to extend our congratulations on the hard work, ability, enthusiasm and skill they brought to the new methods and subjects of the revised syllabus.

This was a year of innovation, not only in respect of the new syllabus and its associated new procedures in examining, but also the new University-wide system for the consideration of Factors Affecting Performance (FAPs).

1. Statistics

There were 252 candidates, 17 of whom took Course 2

Outcome	1st	2.1	2.2	3	Pass
Numbers	70	179	2	0	0

Percentages including recent years

	1 st	2.1	2.2	3	Pass
2011	24.7%	74.1%	1.2%	0%	0%
2012	31%	66.1%	2.9%	0%	0%
2013	33.9%	65.2%	0.9%	0%	0%
2014	26%	72%	1%	0%	0.5%
2015	27.8%	71%	0.8%	0%	0%

66 standard-route Firsts and 4 alternative-route Firsts were awarded this year. All proceeded smoothly with the setting and examining of both old and new Course I and Course II papers,

and the results for the new syllabus are in line with those of recent years. Wherever possible, 'old' and 'new' papers with similar date boundaries or subjects were timetabled against one another in the Exam Schools, thus ensuring a degree of streamlining in our processes. There were no problems with the new dates for submissions, or with other practicalities arising from the new syllabus, and no reports or suspected cases of plagiarism.

2. Examiners and Assessors

The change to a portfolio for Shakespeare meant that more markers were recruited for this paper than was typical for the old, timed Shakespeare paper; this higher staffing level will need to be carried forward given the sheer number of words contained in the portfolio format. Another change in examining procedure was the deployment in the large Course I period papers of a 'semi-circular' marking arrangement in order to blur the boundaries between marking pairs and introduce a degree of moderation across pairs. This necessitated two separate meetings for each marker in order to agree marks with their two co-markers, but it was beneficial overall and is commended to future Boards. The usual processes and conventions of double and third marking were used, without controversy or incident. Borderline and other cases were identified in advance of the first marks meeting and were scrutinised particularly carefully by the Board in this year of change. 13 papers were further marked during these two days; in 6 further cases an external re-read the entire run. Externals read the top performing Firsts in Course I and Course II and the runs of candidates either side of class borderlines. 13 full runs were therefore re-read this year. All candidates were given full discussion in the first and second marks meetings, and the marks and classifications were checked again by the Board before the rankings were confirmed.

3. Medical and Special Cases

The new, University-wide process of registering and considering Factors Affecting Performance (FAP) statements was initiated this year. As in previous years, a Medical and Special Cases sub-committee of the Board met in advance of the first marks meeting in order to consider these applications and any other, non-FAP, cases. The role of this committee was to recommend what, if any, action should be taken by the Board. The FAP applications were discussed in appropriate levels of detail by the sub-committee and, where applicable, were considered alongside the Alternative Arrangements in place for some candidates before recommendations were made. The view of this sub-committee and of the Board was that it would be helpful for the University to issue further standardised, University-wide advice on the parameters of action available to Boards in respect of FAPs, and in particular on the role that Alternative Arrangements play in the assessment of a FAP by Boards.

4. Gender

Gender statistics were monitored as usual.

FEMALE

	I	IIi	II.ii	III	Pass	Fail		
	36	115	1			1		153

%	23.5	75.2	0.7			0.7		
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MALE

	I	Ili	II.ii	III	Pass	Fail		
	34	64	1					99
%	34.3	64.6	1.0					

COMBINED

	I	Ili	II.ii	III	Pass	Fail		
	70	179	2			1		252
%	27.8	71.0	0.8			0.4		

It will be some years before sufficient data has been assembled to enable informed comment on the relative performances of men and women in the new syllabus, but these statistics were nonetheless discussed by the Board.

5. Training

Individual training and advice was given this year to markers who were new to Oxford marking or had specific queries, particularly in respect of the new Paper 6.

6. External Examiners

The presence of our external examiners on the Medical and Special Cases sub-committee was particularly helpful this year with the new system of FAPs in operation.

7. Prizes

10 Gibbs Prizes were awarded this year in the following categories:

Best overall performance in Course I of the Honour School: Harriet Smith-Hughes, St Catherine's College

Best overall performance in Course II of the Honour School: Anna McCully Stewart, Wadham College

Best extended essay, Paper 6: Frank Lawton, Magdalen College

Best dissertation, Paper 7: Caterina Guariento, Hertford College

Best performance in a three hour timed examination: Helena Sutcliffe, Pembroke College

Distinguished Performances:

Harry Begg, Corpus Christi College

Joel Diggory, St John's College

Hannah Lucas, Corpus Christi College

Georgina Wilson, Balliol College

Eliza Haughton-Shaw, St Anne's College

Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize: jointly won by Hannah Lucas, Corpus Christi College, and Isaac Nowell, Balliol College.

REPORTS ON INDIVIDUAL PAPERS

Where there are fewer than four candidates for a paper, no report is provided.

Course 1

Paper 1 Shakespeare Portfolio

223 candidates took this paper. The examiners were impressed by the quality of the portfolios and enjoyed reading them. Without doubt, there has been a marked and encouraging lift in standard and in the range of material studied as a result of the introduction of examination by portfolio. The frequently-voiced complaint by examiners, that candidates had not progressed from 'A-level standard' exam answers, was not heard this year, and the marks awarded were on a wide spectrum, without, as formerly, a bunching of marks at the lower end of the 2:1. At the top of the school some very high marks indeed were given. Nearly all the scripts demonstrated a high degree of thought, engagement, enjoyment and initiative. Almost all plays and many of the poems were discussed, while the most canonical plays were treated with originality and in unexpected and fruitful combinations. At the top of the school there was, as we would expect, stellar research-lead work of all kinds. At the bottom were basic and predictable essays which had apparently received rudimentary attention before submission.

Candidates should appreciate the importance of a tightly defined topic. Some had difficulty in focussing essays, and some essays attempted an impossibly broad spread of reference. Several essays presented a titular quotation which was not addressed, or was not developed into a matter for debate. Some candidates floundered in giving their essays a title at all, and did not appear to realise how important this was. Commentaries, with notable exceptions, were often a weakness in an otherwise excellent portfolio. Some candidates seemed unsure how to attempt them, for example producing descriptive work without an appropriate focus. Where commentaries were successful, they presented a close argument of some kind, often textual-critical.

Many candidates demonstrated an impressive technical knowledge of textual variants, theatre history, or reception, plainly reflecting enthusiastic and skilled teaching. However, there were also many excellent portfolios which developed critical enquiries of a theoretical, literary-interpretative, musicological, material-contextual, performance-directed or politically informed nature. We would urge candidates to pursue a deep and wide knowledge of the plays and poems as there is no privileged area of study which 'you need to do to get a First'. It was above all very heartening to see that our candidates were clearly pursuing interests and enthusiasms of their own and working with independence and engagement.

Paper 2 (CII Paper 3) 1350-1550

230 candidates took this Paper. The most popular commentary passage was 1(a) from book III, prompting many accounts of character interaction and the psychology of the protagonists (including the narrator), as well as discussions of generic interplay and different levels of style. While some of the commentaries were loose and speculative, the best ones included some sophisticated analysis of form and versification; detailed commentary on lexis, register, form, and figurative language was combined with a confident interpretation of the passage as a whole. Almost everyone, helped by the provision of book and line numbers, managed to place the passages correctly, and a number wrote accurately (rather than generally) about the relationship of the passages to Boccaccio and other intertexts. There were, on the other hand, several mistranslations: 'if that I breke youre defence' (1a, line 26) was universally understood as if it were modern English, even though (as some pointed out) this makes no sense in the context; and parts of Criseyde's letter in 1b also proved difficult for candidates to understand, with quite a few taking literally the expression 'how ye ne do but holden me in honde' (1b, line 26). Mistranslation also affected some of the essays, especially answers to question 16 ('our rude language') and 19 ('What vailleth troth'), where nearly everybody translated 'vailleth' as 'veils'. This resulted in the essays being penalized for irrelevance; candidates are reminded that basic competence in Middle English language is a prerequisite for this paper.

The best scripts covered a range of texts from across the period and different authors/genres, and candidates responded with precision and engagement to the specific questions on the paper. It was pleasing to see so many good and scholarly answers on early Tudor literature, with Skelton, More, Wyatt and Surrey proving popular choices. In this respect, the new paper appears to be functioning well. There were many answers on Chaucer's dream poetry (for questions 2 and 3), the Gawain-poet, and Malory (for questions 5 and 6); there was also some very good work on visionary and devotional writing. Candidates who engaged with recent scholarship and key theoretical arguments and ideas did so, for the most part, successfully. There was relatively little on early fifteenth-century poetry, on alliterative poetry (other than Gawain) and on Langland and Gower, although essays on Langland tended to be impressive. In general, though, candidates might be advised to spend longer planning and organizing their material before they start to write, so as to create a clear structure within which to explore their ideas and readings.

Some scripts were penalized for inadequate range, i.e. more than one non-commentary essay on a single author (Chaucer, the Gawain-poet, Malory), and some candidates based entire essays around a small number of very short texts (such as lyrics). Candidates must ensure they show depth and range commensurate with a period paper (and should re-read the instructions in the handbook). An uncomfortable number of candidates are still downloading material that has been previously prepared, with little or no relevance to the quotation or question chosen. This happened most often in response to stand-alone quotations: questions 9, 10, and 11 were used variously as prompts to write on just about anything within the period, and 'place' in question 14 was interpreted very loosely by most. Likewise, virtually nobody wrote on verse form in response to question 3, which was taken as a general point about the value of fiction rather than – as specified – 'drasty rymyng'. The questions demanding more precise and focused responses (8, 16, 17) were the least popular on the paper, but those who answered them did so noticeably well.

Paper 3 (CII Paper 6a) 1550-1660

213 candidates took this paper. The general standard of work was sound and satisfactory, with some exceptional performances at the upper end of the first-class range. All 20 questions were attempted, but often with little attention to the tenor of the quotations. In many cases a single term was taken out of context to enable the downloading of a 'prepared' essay – and always to the candidate's detriment. The finest performances were from those who engaged with the quotation in a rigorous manner to produce cogent, argumentative responses well supported by detailed attention to the language of the chosen texts. Indeed the best answers generally tended to pay close attention to the formal qualities of texts and the literary nature of language; weaker answers used texts as something like documents of social history. The great majority of responses fell within the later Elizabethan and Jacobean periods (in relation both to authors and topics), but there was also some good work on the Interregnum, particularly on Milton and Marvell. As has also been the case in previous years, Donne and Herbert formed a common combination of authors, with Marlowe being the subject of a very large proportion of essays. In both cases, it proved difficult for candidates to differentiate their work from familiar and standard responses on these authors and relatively few attempts resulted in first-class essays. Very evident in many of the answers was an awareness of the importance of paratexts, authorial personae, and issues relating to the history of the printed book. Less in evidence was engagement with the manuscript culture of the period, although the topic evoked a few first-class essays. Knowledge of women's writing in the period was patchy with many 'template' responses and little deep engagement with the issue of female authorship or rhetoric. Certain topics – such as travel literature, religious controversy, and urban culture – produced rather superficial surveys of the material with little sense of the complexity of the problems involved. Too many responses consisted of thematic narrations almost entirely innocent of critical support. Essays on poetry and drama predominated overall, while prose works tended to be treated more with attention to content than style or genre. By contrast, some very good, nuanced work was produced on issues of translation and intertextuality. Knowledge of the social, intellectual, and political contexts of literature was variable, with key-terms such as 'humanism', 'republicanism' and 'Calvinism' used rather loosely. The best candidates demonstrated originality and ambition in their responses – whether in terms of unusual combinations of material, less familiar topics, or a particularly sophisticated line of argument – and it is to be hoped that future candidates will be encouraged to display such range and originality.

Paper 4 1660-1760

213 candidates took this paper. All twenty questions were attempted. The fullness of the answers from almost all candidates suggested a cohort comfortable with the format; there was almost no short-weight work, and very few answers seemed incomplete due to time constraints. A majority chose one or more of four questions, producing answers on: theodicy and/or free will in *Paradise Lost* (sometimes profitably varied by reference to Milton's other works, and Bunyan); 'wholeness' in poetry, variously (and often dubiously) defined; language and gender; and literature about place ('the country' and London – candidates showed little ability to distinguish between component parts of the latter, such as the City and 'the Town'). Also very prominent were answers on Defoe and 'realism'; male and female libertinism (invariably with reference to Rochester and Behn); Fielding (almost solely as a parodist of Richardson); the 'graveyard school'; satires by Pope, Swift, and Gay against Grub Street and 'the Moderns'; writing

associated with the Royal Society; periodical essays; and poetry about labour (usually Duck and Leapor). Significantly smaller numbers wrote about drama (the best showing a satisfying range and awareness of chronology), Richardson (overwhelmingly on *Pamela*; few seemed to know that it had a second part), Johnson's *Rasselas*, Eliza Haywood, and Marvell. The latter straddles the paper boundary, and it was surprising that most candidates who wrote on him were determined to use the pre-1660 nature and estate poetry on this paper (on the argument of its 1681 print publication, or by connecting it to later writers) rather than to engage the post-Restoration political verse or prose. Dryden attracted some attention, but not proportionate to his standing and influence in the period; the best work on him moved beyond 'MacFlecknoe' and the royal panegyrics. There were also rare sightings of Smart, Montagu, Butler, Hutchinson, Finch, Philips, Centlivre, Sterne, and others. Pope figured less in answers to the popular questions, but, of the 'major' authors, attracted the best work, often distinguished by fine attention to poetic technique, and a range of reference that went well beyond the *Dunciad* (Pope's work of choice for weaker answers).

There was a serious problem with answers being irrelevant to the title quotations, or being only tortuously related to them in an attempt to use prepared work; these were penalised. There was also insufficient attention paid even to the simple denotation of the title quotations, much less to their tenor. Few seemed to understand that Waller's 'soul's dark cottage' weathered by 'time' (Question 6) was the aging body; many were determined to interpret Mrs Scriblerus's dream of birthing an inkhorn as an auto-erotic episode (Question 12). But most problematic was Question 4, which very few candidates paused over long enough to identify as being from Satan's manipulative speech to the rebel angels in Book V, and instead charged ahead with answers describing this manifesto of diabolical politics as Milton's, or even God's. Average or weak work showed other common characteristics: treatment of single authors or texts without reference to wider period context; building an argument about a whole play, novel, or longer poem on only one character; sparse engagement with critics or large critical debates; description rather than argument (particularly in an ability to identify differences between authors, but not to explore or argue why those differences existed). Several sets of arguments with the same supporting examples were clearly discernible from popular lectures; students should remember that the best use of lecture material is the onward and independent development of it by the candidate. Finally, students and tutors may wish to consider why many answers for this paper cluster around texts and authors that can be said to endorse modern views on social issues, and whether this demonstrates a sufficiently mature interest in the history and literature of the period.

Paper 5 1760-1830

213 candidates took this paper. All questions were attempted. Originality of thought differentiated the distinguished from the less distinguished answers. The strongest answers reflected wide and independent reading and were intellectually curious. They typically examined both canonical and non-canonical works, ranging beyond familiar anthology pieces, and combined them in judicious and thoughtful ways. The best essays demonstrated impressive knowledge of literary history, and they were able to engage with texts in sophisticated -- as opposed to merely ideological or uncritically historical--ways. The weaker essays tended to be diffuse or more descriptive than analytic, rehearsing conventional arguments, using other critics as crutches for their arguments, or engaging indirectly with the chosen topics (e.g., shoe-horning a prepared essay on another topic in by rhetorical legerdemain). Too many essays failed to engage with the literature as literature, constructing an argument only in response to paraphrased ideas. There was surprisingly little formal or stylistic analysis (of poetry or prose).

There was some excellent writing on slave narratives, poetry by women, and lesser known works of canonical male authors. As in past years, the essays on Gothic fiction (notably on *Frankenstein*) were not particularly strong. There were relatively few answers on drama.

There were some interesting attempts to bring book history to bear on the essays, though relevance was here sometimes a problem. It was painfully obvious when a few sentences were tacked on to the beginning and end of a prepared essay in an attempt to 'engage.' The best essays responded directly to the question with relevant, precise information in ways that are possible only with wide and deep reading across the course of an undergraduate degree.

Paper 6 Special Options

Afrofabulation

11 candidates took this paper. The most popular authors were Octavia Butler, Jewelle Gomez, Toni Morrison and Samuel Delany; candidates also wrote on Martin Delany, Diana Evans, Michelle Cliff, Helen Oyeyemi, Bernadine Evaristo, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Anthony Joseph, Edward P. Jones, *The Spaceape* and *Del the Funky Homosapien*. A variety of ideas and contexts were drawn on to illuminate the nature of 'Afrofabulation': history, slavery, subjectivity, literary classification, film, the family, language, music, diaspora, prosthetics and – most popularly – the body. Overall, the standard was impressively high, with the best candidates demonstrating originality of thought, elegance of expression and a professional level of presentation. Weaker candidates showed commendable familiarity with primary texts but failed to structure a coherent argument, instead offering local analysis of characters and dialogue. But the examiners' prevailing impression was that this course has stimulated acute and imaginative work.

Anchorites to Asylums

13 candidates took this paper. Essays were pleasingly varied in approach and in their chosen topics, which included ideas of literary mind-mapping through architectural space; haptic experience in anchorite writing; a study of Warneford case books and the idea of somatic poetics in 20th century American poetry. Some distinguished, risky and ambitious first-class work was produced. The best essays were clear about their textual choices and methodological approach. Candidates who received distinction marks showed themselves to be both using, and critiquing, the theoretical material they had encountered – these essays also often let the literary material they'd encountered shine, and thought about the ways in which the literary texts were making their own theoretical, argumentative points about texts and bodies. Stronger candidates made ambitious links between texts, or between texts and theory, but these links had a clear logic, and their own critical voice was sustained throughout. The weaker essays had a variety of problems. Some candidates chose to discuss texts from differing time periods without clearly articulating how and why they were moving between them. Other essays were hampered by a writing style and structure which seemed to turn inwards, making it difficult for the examiners to follow a clear line of interest or argument. A few candidates were too reliant on secondary criticism, and had not seemed to read widely or in sufficient depth.

Children's Literature

15 candidates took this paper, with the majority of submissions in the 2.1 band. The best essays positioned their material within a tradition of children's literature, securing an important earlier antecedent or point of comparison. Those essays that took risks in tackling another aspect or genre of children's literature – illustrations, theatrical adaptations, or comparative editions – tended to do the best. The weaker essays tended to race through swathes of information, recounting what was clearly iterations of material from classes. Too many essays inclined to round up historical facts and data without much lively close-reading or textual engagement, offering a Wikipedia-style summary of information rather than a structured argument with judiciously selected materials.

Candidates are reminded of the importance of higher-level critical thinking, and the need to spend time developing a sustained and careful critical response to their primary materials before situating them within a supporting framework.

Comparative Literature

1 candidate took this paper.

Film Criticism

14 candidates took this paper. Candidates generally made original choices about which films to write about, deploying independent viewing and fresh research. Topics included the use of single settings, continuity, the senses, performance and gender, time, the relationship between fiction and reality, and editing. Given that for many candidates this is their first encounter with a new medium and a new discipline, the work was once again to be commended. In general, all the essays showed facility with close film analysis and interpretation but largely avoided, or struggled with, the evaluative dimension of criticism. Candidates are advised of the importance of finesse in structure and organisation, and assurance in managing topics.

Fin de Siecle

13 candidates took this paper. Overall, essays were good introductions with clearly defined rationales, arguments, and lively close readings. The better essays showed excellence in the choice of topic, with Hardy's proto-modernist pictorial style, spatial representation of Gothic London, and discussions of the politics of representation, gender, form and style producing strong performances. The majority of candidates were ambitious in their choice of *fin de siècle* texts and achieved insightful results, although at times such ambition came at the expense of depth in the argument. Similarly, whereas many essays showed panache and fluidity in style, a few tended towards bombast and grandiosity where the project lacked structural definition. Candidates excelled when fully immersed in both primary and secondary material, leading to engaged, original, and compelling discussions. Readings of Wilde that considered poetic form, for example, were distinctive for emerging from a careful and well organised response to appropriate scholarly work.

Some candidates leaped straight to close reading without sufficient signposting, rationale, or critical engagement. Some essays were lacking in analytical vocabulary—for example in discussions of Pater's aestheticism, in generalisations about British society, and in a common over-use of the term Gothic, without apparent awareness of its aesthetic historicity.

Despite these issues in structure and argumentation, the majority of candidates produced informed, engaging, and elegant discussions that spanned a full range of the texts and issues discussed across the course. Many candidates pursued independent research into critical approaches beyond those suggested, with the strongest consulting areas of scholarship such as the periodical history of *The Yellow Book*, or the cultural history of the theatre and anti-Semitic constructions of a Shylock Jew figure in 1890s London. Almost all essays contained typographical and citation style errors, and a few dispensed with a title altogether.

Forming Literary Character

12 candidates took this paper. Several students wrote pieces of work that were strikingly ambitious, mature, and perceptive; the best of them worked closely and cumulatively on a wide range of primary materials, paying astute attention to the details of how character has been imagined, constructed, performed, and received. Other strong essays engaged with theories of literary character (from whatever period) and developed a coherent argument by testing those theories against the evidence of literary practice. The weaker essays revealed a conception of character that was ill defined as well as (in some cases) founded on a very slender selection of inaccurately represented texts. When attempting to draw together very disparate works from across widely scattered periods and genres candidates are reminded to attend closely to structure and to explain the principles of selection. Candidates should also note (as ever) the need for accuracy in their citations from any source and for clear, consistent presentation of their references in footnotes and in the bibliography.

Beowulf to Lancelot

6 candidates took this paper. The standard was high, both in terms of wide frames of reference and (for the most part) in plentiful quotation of and close attention to the primary sources. The best essays engaged with an impressive number of texts in an extremely thoughtful and sensitive fashion. It was refreshing to see that while most candidates opted for novelty of theme, those essays that dealt with some of the hoarier old chestnuts of Old and Middle English scholarship (Christianity and the Germanic warrior ideal; the quest-motif in romance) did so by bringing fresh insight and an original angle to the issues. It was clear that the candidates as a group had been encouraged to roam widely over the primary sources, and to make apt and precise comparisons and contrasts.

Overall, there was a straight split between those who chose to write mainly on the earlier period and those who focused on later material. There was very little overlap among any of the responses with regard to the ways in which even the most obvious of the headline texts (such as *Beowulf* or Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes) were handled, and it seems clear that within the broader parameters of the paper candidates took up the challenge of exploring their own individual interests and ideas. There was, however, variation in the extent to which candidates seemed prepared to quote material in the original and it was clear that some candidates (perhaps inevitably) were far more comfortable than others with the linguistic challenges that they faced; judicious use of pertinent and well-placed quotation generally produced the highest marks. A further striking feature, and one which was perhaps the only disappointment in an otherwise extremely impressive set of responses, was how few of the candidates took the initiative to make meaningful comparisons between the Old and Middle English periods and texts; those that did seemed in general less comfortable in doing so, and quickly plumped back to their preferred period. But this is perhaps a minor quibble: overall, the standard was extremely high.

Intersections Between Language and Literature

7 candidates took this paper. They chose an impressively wide range of topics, drawing on 19th and 20th century source materials. All the essays were intellectually ambitious; some explored critical ideas and some examined specific features of language in their chosen texts/authors. At the top end of the range there was really excellent work, exhibiting strong and exploratory argument grounded in wide independent reading. Weaker work was over-dependent on secondary critical sources.

Literature and Science

12 candidates took this paper. Overall, the essays were of a high standard, with several exhibiting exceptional quality and originality. The topics chosen were notably varied and imaginative, reflecting the intellectual breadth of the course and attesting to a genuine interdisciplinary interest that students hadn't had the opportunity to develop elsewhere in their degree. At the top end were essays that stretched boundaries of knowledge and probed authors' works in ways that genuinely *required* the engagement with science, mathematics, and/or medicine. At the lower end were essays that seemed too narrowly focused or did not fully justify the interdisciplinary approach, let alone integrate the disciplines under discussion. Indeed, the biggest challenge seemed to be methodological: how to write well about disparate kinds of works and different knowledge domains, and how to achieve balance and cohesion in doing so. Balancing finely-tuned textual analysis with the investigation of large and often complex intellectual questions was also a challenge. It was good to see that many of the strongest essays showed a sense of the wider issues involved in the study of literature and science, such as the perennial 'two cultures' debate.

Not surprisingly, several essays addressed the question of how literary devices such as metaphor have been employed to convey particular scientific ideas. There was an overwhelming preference for nineteenth-century and modern literature. Scientific and medical areas of interest included physics, trauma, evolution, degeneration and mental illness. Authors discussed included Julian Huxley, Samuel Beckett, William Empson, Hart Crane, Thomas Hardy, Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Florence Nightingale, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Val McDermid, and Thomas Pynchon.

Postcolonial Literature

15 candidates took this paper. Their essays demonstrated a remarkable range in terms of subject matter and were all generally strong. The students were almost without exception clearly motivated by the course topics and issues; this enthusiasm and focus very much shaped the tone of the essays. The spectrum of topics ranged from Hong Kong poetry, through book history and education in South Africa, to Hispano-American writing of the Black Atlantic. As this might suggest the students tended to come to this Paper 6 with a distinct sense in mind of the special topic that they wished to develop under the aegis of the postcolonial.

The examiners felt that while the candidates were bold in their choice of primary texts and geopolitical context, a number of them used the canon of postcolonial theory as if it were universally applicable (Fanon on violence, Bhabha on hybridity, Said and Orientalism). This proved limiting, and ill-fitting, in some instances: candidates should use the ample secondary sources in this field more imaginatively and rigorously. To this we would add, in the case of

nearly all the candidates, that no matter how historically situated or politically astute the analysis may be, it should not be undertaken at the expense of the requisite critical attention to the form, language, and style of the literary works in question.

Post-War British Drama

15 candidates took this paper. Essays ranged across the full span of the course, taking on a wide diversity of issues and texts. A number of essays were of high quality, combining a strong theoretical framework, detailed and insightful close analysis, a clear engagement with the dynamics of performance and reception, and a robust readiness to challenge extant critical views. Where candidates engaged with reviews and details of production and performance, they did so effectively and intelligently. A number of essays offered some insightful close analysis, but lacked a coherent argument, taking the form of a series of thematically linked observations rather than a structured or progressive thesis. The weakest essays offered unsupported assertions, extrapolated meaning from flimsy evidence, or lacked any wider sense of historical, theatrical or theoretical context, treating the plays in rather random isolation. Across the board there was a need for more thorough proof-reading.

American Novel after 1945

15 candidates took this paper. Don DeLillo was the most popular author although candidates wrote on the full range of novels discussed during the course and also ventured beyond them into analyses of works by Kurt Vonnegut, Ralph Ellison, Jonathan Safran Foer, John Updike, Sergio de la Pava and Philip K. Dick. There was an impressive variety of topics, with religion appearing in several essays. The best work was ambitious and assured, handling complex topics with critical ease and bringing off the feat of using the novels' Americanness in an illuminating, rather than restrictive, way. The weaker essays were muddled and unconvincing and failed to show appropriate engagement with either primary or secondary texts.

Character of Comedy

15 candidates took this paper. As a group the essays ranged widely - in terms of history and approach - across different comic writers and writings, and some individual essays were equally ambitious in scope. The least successful essays tended to take the form of 'variations on a theme' - that is, they offered a few generalisations about an aspect of comedy before assembling a set of examples. More successful were those essays which had a sharper focus in terms of historical period or genre, thus allowing the candidate to generate an argument rather than a survey. Some of the best essays moved between the close reading of literary texts and a considered appreciation of their informing contexts with impressive fluency and style. A number also included reference to cinema, although here the quality of analysis was uneven, with only the best essays demonstrating the candidates' understanding of the differences as well as the overlaps between literature and film in terms of their creative resources. However, the generally high marks awarded for this option accurately reflected the qualities of originality and research demonstrated by the work submitted.

Icelandic Saga

4 candidates took this paper. The essays submitted were on the whole very good; some were outstandingly good given that the candidates were coming to Old Icelandic sagas as complete beginners. All of the candidates showed knowledgeable and enthusiastic engagement with the distinctive features of saga narratology, and most showed their wide reading by ranging beyond the texts specified for special study. Weaker work tended to feature familiar essay-writing problems with structuring arguments and making unsubstantiated generalisations, rather than difficulties in coming to terms with unfamiliar material, or poor understanding of the texts.

The Literary Essay

14 candidates took this paper. The essays submitted were almost all either very good or excellent, with a few truly superlative performances. The best showed impressive range and critical sophistication, applying complex conceptual frameworks to an array of authors, sometimes across periods; for some other submissions, however, range was a problem, where a very broad scope of material or very general topic required some more focus and direction. Conversely, though some strong pieces focused on the essayistic production of one or two authors, enabling close and revealing reading against a developed theoretical backdrop or wider themes in the history of the essay, other candidates had chosen topics or authors rather too narrow to allow them to demonstrate a range of critical thinking and detailed reading.

The scope of the course and the potential for essay topics spanned the whole period from the Renaissance to the present. About half of the submissions focused on the twentieth or twenty-first century; all periods were represented (though surprisingly few candidates wrote in detail on the Romantic essayists, or the nineteenth century). A few candidates analyzed 'essays' on film, television, radio, or electronic media, and showed sophisticated insight in doing so. It was striking that, though their previous papers had been almost entirely chronological, the candidates who chose cross-period topics handled them very elegantly.

The conceptual, critical, and theoretical sophistication of the writing was striking across the board. Only the weakest candidates had not shown considerable ingenuity and application in seeking out unusual, unanthologized, or obscure material. Almost all of the candidates demonstrated originality, and very frequently applied conceptual or critical material discussed in the course to primary texts which they had discovered on their own. There were, however, even in some of the best essays, sometimes problems with typos, incomplete sentences and botched syntax, and issues with academic norms of quotation and citation.

Therapeutic Reading in Medieval England: 1100-1500

6 candidates took this paper. The most impressive work was ambitious in scope, attentive both to current developments in secondary criticism and the nuances of primary material. These pieces were characterised by clarity of expression and force of argument, and included impressive amounts of independent research that was used to inform careful close-readings and support the overall argument. The best essays made tactical use of primary and secondary sources to build compelling arguments, often showing sensitivity to the semantic range of individual words both in Middle English and in Latin. Such careful analysis allowed the more confident and ambitious essays to demonstrate, rather than simply assert, the validity of their argumentative positions. Weaker essays, in contrast, showed less willingness to engage with more secondary criticism or the nuances of primary texts. These essays also showed evidence of structural problems, with abrupt transitions to different materials and sections that, overall,

detracted from cohesiveness. The examiners were disappointed to note that some essays showed little evidence of wide reading, and inconsistencies with formatting, referencing style, and overall presentation and proofing. Some of these essays relied heavily on one or two primary texts, or only engaged with the humoural aspects of medieval medicine rather than the non-naturals. Weaker essays rested content with simply asserting a point rather than demonstrating it through close-textual and contextual work. In addition, these essays often deployed terminology inconsistently, were inconsistent in quoting texts in translation, and were unable to sustain their arguments or readings. This resulted in essays that lacked clarity of expression and persuasiveness of argument.

Things, People and Texts

10 candidates took this paper. The essays were overall of a good standard, and displayed a wide range of interest in the material culture of the eighteenth century, and a real curiosity about the relationships between things and texts. In many cases the need to interrogate the textual alongside the material gave rise to innovative ways of looking at familiar canonical works. All the candidates showed a willingness to explore alternative forms of evidence, and in general the standard of analysis of very different kinds of evidence – visual, textual and material – was high. Some of the essays focused on distinct objects, and their role in the literature and culture of the period – these included fans, tea tables, pockets and chairs. Others looked at broader phenomena such as visiting and reading. The best essays were able to use the specifics of individual examples to illuminate broader patterns of sociability or politeness within contemporary literature, or to look at the tensions present in eighteenth century consumer culture. The strong essays showed evidence of original thinking and research. Weaker essays did not always successfully link through their examples and analysis to present a coherent argument. Some of the essays showed a carelessness in presentation and should have been proof-read more thoroughly.

Tragedy

15 candidates took this paper. Their essays were generally well-informed, cogent and efficiently presented, with some exceptional work in the areas of classical theatre and modern prose fiction. Several ambitious, comparative treatments of ancient and modern literature produced some excellent and original insights into many of the texts discussed. However, a recurrent problem was the failure adequately to define the notion of 'tragedy' in the very different periods, genres and contexts in which it was invoked. A marked lack of aesthetic historicity in some of the essays led to imprecise and bland use of critical terminology, considerably blunting the thrust of the argument. The weakest work showed signs of being material reheated from the period papers, rather than engaging with the scope of the course. The best offerings were those that announced a clear thesis at the outset, defined their terms of reference, and sustained their arguments with close attention to the language of their chosen texts, identifying the sources, nature and diction of the specific version of the 'tragic' to which the candidate responded. When this was done with discipline and ambition, the results were often brilliant.

Urban Forms

5 candidates took this paper. Candidates mostly chose to write on the more canonical authors and artists of the period (Pope, Swift, Hogarth, Gay, Addison, Steele, Defoe, Johnson), although some unusual topics and texts were selected and all linked the canonical works to a broader

and deeper range of cultural history than is usual. Essays were almost all very successful, although some candidates struggled to stretch their arguments over the length of the essay. Use of visual materials was pleasingly common, as was the use of databases of primary sources and a good range of secondary sources in literary, cultural and intellectual history (those employing the latter to good effect were among the most successful pieces). Overall, candidates seemed to relish the opportunity of enlarging their range of reference and argument, albeit from what remained a familiar corpus.

Writing Feminisms

7 candidates took this paper. Essays were well-informed by contemporary debates in feminist and gender politics, which was integrated with close analysis of style, formal devices and rhetorical performance. Materials under discussion in most essays ranged widely, including work on film, manuscript letters, socio-linguistics, and works in translation. Most essays demonstrated that students had engaged productively with the course materials and the key questions driving the course; good candidates proved themselves confident and discriminating writers of feminist discourse themselves. Weaker essays tended to conflate critical schools and arguments, make unconvincing links between works of very different genres and periods, and rely on claims for 'subversion' and 'transgression' without demonstrating a sound understanding of the extent and nature of the norms or practices subject to these challenges. Careful proof-reading at the end of the process, along with a willingness to signpost the structure of argument clearly for the examiner/reader, would always improve and polish the final product.

Paper 7 Dissertation

230 candidates took this paper. As was the case for paper 8 in the old syllabus, dissertations were divided into period or topic strands for marking. The category headings below are responsive to the topics put forward this year and are deployed solely for organisational purposes; they should not be taken by tutors or candidates as indicating any endorsement or otherwise of certain categories. Many dissertations spanned different categories, something the system was able to accommodate with ease (and no small degree of interest). Markers were united in their praise for the level of original research being undertaken in dissertations, and a good number were highlighted for making genuine contributions to scholarly debate. Areas in which improvements are advised include the focussed choice of a topic; a strongly sustained argument; and better attention to scholarly 'finish' and proofing.

Pre 1500

There were 3 candidates covering Old English topics and 17 covering Middle English topics. Among the ME dissertations, there was some very strong work on devotional literature, showing an impressive knowledge of theological discourse and carefully situated within the religious culture of the late Middle Ages. Among both OE and ME dissertations, there was also some impressively original work on material culture, manuscript transmission and illumination. The strongest dissertations were sophisticated and ambitious, combining strong theoretical underpinning with outstanding close reading and sustaining a focused argument. They made a careful selection of texts so as to combine close reading with a wider understanding of context. The weaker dissertations showed some unevenness, suggesting that difficulty had been

experienced in structuring a relatively long piece of work or in making convincing connections between the theoretical framework and the actual texts; they did not have a clearly delineated argument and/or relied too heavily on secondary criticism for their main points. Sometimes, too, the candidate's sheer enthusiasm for a particular text or research discovery caused them to lose sight of the larger picture. Most candidates were widely read in the secondary literature; among the weaker candidates, although attention to a range of primary texts was generally good, evidence of wide critical reading (especially relating to historical and cultural contexts) was patchy, with some very short bibliographies. Some of these essays exhibited poor referencing, proofing, and formatting; several of the essays appeared not really to be 'finished'.

1500-1600

Thirteen dissertations were categorised in this strand; submissions were generally secure and competent and occasionally outstanding. Several candidates took the new opportunity of studying a single author for their dissertation and the strongest essays ranged convincingly across a substantial proportion of a literary career, whilst maintaining a tight argument developed from insightful close reading. Weaker essays drew upon a single theme and used that as a link through which to examine a limited cluster of works. A number of dissertations considered relevant historical and intellectual contexts, such as cartography and travel, or the law. And other pieces were informed by a secure knowledge of literary themes, such as the reception of coterie poetry, classical mediation, or theatrical history. The more successful candidates in these instances were those who used relevant knowledge to illuminate their primary material and were equally able to produce controlled and significant arguments that could not have been expected from an undergraduate cohort without specific research. Whilst almost all candidates had clearly pursued relevant and meaningful reading for their dissertations, a number of pieces were unfortunately undermined by a failure to structure the material sufficiently well to present a coherent and cogent argument. Other candidates aimed for so broad a survey of material that the primary focus was inevitably subject to a shallow treatment. There was also a surprising lack of engagement with the manuscript culture of the period (given the rich holdings in Oxford collections), even in the case of particularly relevant topics.

The examiners would urge candidates to consider carefully the advice contained within the course handbook when choosing a topic for their dissertation. With a course structured to encourage students to begin their research during the long vacation at the end of their second year, and with the support of four tutorials, examiners anticipate informed and substantial pieces of independent work.

1600-1700

There were 12 dissertations in this period. They were, on the whole, impressive, and a testament to the benefits and opportunities afforded candidates by this addition to the syllabus. Although there was work that ranged across the century, a majority were on topics from the middle of the period (1640-70). Numbers, in comparison to the size of the whole cohort, though, were disappointing, and candidates should be disabused of any notion that choosing a topic from a period also covered by a Schools period paper necessarily 'guts' the latter – on the contrary, immersion in a topic for a dissertation will only *enrich* and *increase* the corresponding period paper.

The best performances displayed, first and foremost, not just engagement with, but also sheer enjoyment of, the chosen topic – clear evidence of the benefits of choosing carefully and not letting craven Finals ‘strategy’ overtake genuine interest and enjoyment. Stronger performances invested part of the length available in rich contextualisation, whether historical, interdisciplinary, or theoretical. They also made sure to offer trenchant reviews of pertinent critical histories or historical narratives, and then went on to add their own contributions to scholarly debate and discussion. Some candidates used original research in unique Bodleian resources (manuscripts as well as copy-specific early printed books) to great effect, though some who attempted this lacked the know-how to do the most with it. Other hallmarks of particularly strong essays included nuanced attention to things like paratexts and textual production and reception, or displayed great sensitivity to lexis and literary form. Candidates who succeeded with interdisciplinary approaches showed a mastery of the critical vocabulary and debates in the non-literary field (e.g. art history, architecture, book history). Several candidates’ work would have scored highly even at M.St. level.

The most common fault in weaker performances was an over-reliance on a single critic or secondary source, which severely compromised the dissertation’s originality. Some candidates’ work showed difficulty with the length by failing to provide clear structural markers for the parts of the argument, often resulting in undisciplined repetition of the same points, or a wandering lack of a clear argument at all. Conversely, there were some candidates whose attempts to articulate an argument forcefully tipped over into a tone that was either hectoring toward the reader, or condescending toward critics taken issue with. Weaker dissertations also tended to be descriptive rather than persuasive about an argument, and (particularly for less well known texts) gave insufficient context for their chosen texts. Given the length of time allowed candidates, egregious stylistic faults (poor grammar, failure to observe scholarly forms of citation, incorrect spelling) are inexcusable, and were penalised.

1700-1800

There were 13 dissertations in this period. The best dissertations combined knowledge of historical and cultural contexts with a close reading of textual detail. There was some particularly pleasing work on canonical authors such as Pope and Swift which showed awareness of recent critical revisionism within the field. The best essays showed a clear sense of argument and direction, the less successful essays a narrower range of textual focus and a less developed argumentative structure.

1800-1900

There were 50 candidates for the 1800-1900 period of Paper 7.

While there were, as expected, clusters of essays on the usual authors (George Eliot and the Brontës were well represented), a large number of candidates also proved remarkably willing to extend their enquiries into less well-trodden territory (queerness, William Morris, Samuel Butler, race, George Gissing, disability, female sci-fi). The standard of the dissertations was very variable, with some innovative work at the top end. The best dissertations were original in conception, deeply researched, and stylishly written. They clearly identified questions to be investigated and delineated what was at stake in responding to them. They also tended to take an inventive and/or up-to-date critical approach. Finding such an approach often seemed to

have been helped by a willingness to research less familiar authors, genres, or texts. When they treated a wide range of texts or authors, they also explicitly offered a rationale that justified the grouping. Relatively few dissertations attempted a clear argument rather than a set of variations or observations. Often a set of authors or texts were loosely grouped together under a common theme, but without any explanation in the essay's introduction as to why these specific examples had been chosen and what they might reveal.

Some of the topics were too ambitious to do justice to in a dissertation. Some successful essays drew on recent trends in Victorian studies including, for example, economic criticism, while others organised their arguments around original themes (architecture, composure, dialect). There was very little no engagement with editions, archival or manuscript materials (though this is not surprising at the undergraduate level). Where close readings were provided, these were in many cases insightful and illuminating. In several cases, however, the dissertations were expository rather than analytical. There was a tendency to make large claims based on a small set of texts, and a number of unsupported generalisations. There was very little writing on poetry and even dissertations discussing poetry paid little or no attention to poetic form. The Faculty's guidelines on footnotes and bibliographies were not always adhered to. A large proportion of the dissertations included poor spelling and grammar (plural possessives were a problem for many).

1900-1950

33 candidates wrote on this period of British Literature. Virginia Woolf was the most popular author, with 6 dissertations devoted solely to her writing, followed by T. S. Eliot on 4, and James Joyce, W. H. Auden and Edward Thomas on 2 each. There were some imaginative comparative pairings and groupings along both geographical and temporal axes but engagement with non-canonical authors was limited. Candidates tackled poetry, fiction, drama and non-fiction and a variety of sub-genres (life-writing, cartography, radio drama, nature writing). Literary texts were analysed in and against a number of contexts (visual culture, dance, exhibitions, architecture, war, politics, particle physics, sport, education); readings ranged from the phenomenological to the formal. Candidates were interested in, *inter alia*, subjectivity, humour, silence, space and place, the animal, gender, sublimity and censorship. Overall, the standard was extremely high. The best work was breath-taking: subtle, sophisticated, original, able to define and maintain complex arguments, displaying acute literary sensitivity and demonstrating assured familiarity with the topic. At the other end of the spectrum, thought and expression were muddier, arguments were more predictable and less well executed, and showiness sometimes took the place of depth. But the majority of candidates did well or very well: this period section of the dissertation is clearly thriving.

Contemporary

There were 48 dissertations in this strand. Most candidates employed a range of primary and secondary texts in their discussions, though some of the strongest dissertations were those which focused on a single author. The most successful had a very strong sense of argument and a careful and sustained focus on specific texts. The weaker tended to jump from text to text making general (and rather generic) observations. There was a tendency overall to make strong claims which either were not true or could not be supported, for example, 'no critic has touched on this before'. The stronger studies, however, argued in much more subtle ways with the existing criticism and bore out their arguments through careful (and sometimes really excellent)

close reading. These better dissertations were necessarily quite different from each other because, to their credit, the authors had taken on genuinely surprising and critically underworked areas, but they were consistent in one respect: that they showed an impressive understanding of the relationship between their topic and their text selections; the weakest seemed almost arbitrary in this respect, and in other respects also typically indicated little or no knowledge of the broader field of post-war literature beyond the particular author or authors under discussion.

There was a tendency to treat modern fiction in particular in a historically/literary-historically decontextualised way; it was noticeable that although a number of candidates showed strong command of relevant *theoretical* materials, very few attempted to historicise their chosen authors and texts in any way, as if historical and literary-historical circumstances somehow 'go without saying' for everything written in the past seventy years (and this was true even of some otherwise excellent dissertations). The stronger work was driven by a critically worthwhile and interesting thesis; the less compelling work proceeded either as a list of 'points', as a rehearsal of familiar ideas, or as an argument that hadn't really been thought through carefully enough at the outset.

Rather than addressing themselves to the formal qualities of the writing under scrutiny, a number of essays tended to flatten literary experience into various moral or political themes. Some candidates seem to think that the sole criterion of literary merit is a text's conformity to accepted liberal standards on matters such as gender, race and sexuality, and could have been bolder in attempting to address the formal and stylistic virtues of their chosen texts, particularly of those which they find ideologically uncongenial. A number of candidates seemed inadequately aware of the literary critical debates surrounding the writing of this period, and had rather a weak grasp of concepts such as post-modernism.

On balance the essays that dealt with poetry rather than prose were stronger, while several essays on drama were particularly weak, as few paid attention to the performance contexts and instead treated the plays as texts designed to be read. The general level of presentation was sufficiently weak for the really meticulous dissertations to stand out more than they should. There were dismayingly rudimentary problems with the mechanics of citation, and almost all essays included minor errors and inconsistencies.

American Literature

There were 27 candidates in this strand. The papers submitted produced a reasonable range of marks, though it would have been good to see a few more at the upper end of the spectrum. There were some very good papers: those that stood out were informed by characteristics such as the careful pairing of theoretical-philosophical material with an appropriate choice of texts or insightful attempts to link American literature with transatlantic intellectual history. These stronger essays offered good close readings and were also able to place the authors and texts being considered in a longer and broader literary, intellectual and aesthetic historical context. In general, essays tended to be weighted toward post-1945 writers and materials, with a few exceptions.

The weaker essays tended to be hermetic: they either closed in on the internal manifestations of a single author's oeuvre (without attending to the author's debts to longer and broader traditions), or they collated a literary text with some overly specific or overly general historical context, or they read a literary text as a manifestation of a vague identitarianism (American identity, African American identity, transatlantic identity). In other words, the nuance that would make any and all of these foci acceptable and potentially very interesting was lacking.

In general, students would be advised to break the habit of thinking of American literature either as *sui generis* or as fully reducible to British models. The Faculty's emphasis on detailed analysis, responsible historical contextualisation, and the importance of a full sense of the long arc of literary and cultural history is as applicable to American literature as to British; students should try to pick up on what is *specific* about texts written in the New World and the United States, without reproducing the unfortunate Americanist tradition of arguing that there is something *exceptional* about the US and its literature.

Critical Theory

There were 2 candidates in this strand.

Theory of Text

There were 2 candidates in this strand.

Postcolonial

There were six Paper 7 dissertations on postcolonial, colonial and related topics, and four extended essays under the old regulations (Paper 8). There was a good range of material covered across all ten essays. Those produced under the old regulations tended to expand on a given theme or topic in a consecutive way, often adopting a predictable two-author or two/three books comparison model, while, in contrast, the dissertations were framed more clearly in terms of their argument and intervention in the existing scholarly debate, with varying degrees of success (Haggard, Conrad and scientific discourse; Caribbean exilic writing and existentialism; Forster and India; Naipaul and life-writing). On the whole the dissertations were better served by the clear sense of scholarly argument and intervention: this emerged as a strength both in terms of topic and research as well as the style and organisation of the essays. At their best they produced original, sophisticated work. The more fragmentary frameworks of the extended essays also meant that these candidates seemed less in control of their materials, both primary and theoretical. As in the Paper 6 postcolonial essays, there was often the assumption, in both the Paper 7 dissertations, and in Paper 8 long essays, that postcolonial critical concepts developed in one region or nation, could be imported into another without significant adaptation or justification.

Film

There were 4 candidates in this strand.

Children's Literature

6 candidates were identified as having produced dissertations in this strand. Topics ranged from picture books to YA, and from war fiction to reworkings of the classics. All essays had been well-researched and were correctly presented. Some were better structured internally than others and showed both clear argument and pace. Others struggled at times to avoid listing examples. This problem occurred when the proposed theme was too broad but also when sheer enthusiasm for the subject meant that a candidate found it hard to cut back on materials.

Language

There were 3 candidates in this strand.

COURSE II

Paper 1 650-1100

17 candidates took this paper. The standard of work was generally good, although there were few truly exceptional answers. All of the questions were attempted except for three: Q. 14, Q. 18, and Q. 19. By far the most popular question was Q. 10 (on inherited knowledge and/or the Anglo-Saxon sense of the world). More than half of the candidates chose to write on this question, and whilst there was some predictability in the texts discussed (*The Old English Orosius*, *The Letter of Alexander*, *The Wonders of the East* all featured several times), it nevertheless elicited some particularly strong work. Other topics that received particular attention were biblical verse (Q. 11) and translation (Q. 5, Q. 20).

Overall, the range of material covered (both prose and verse) was impressive. Although several texts recurred with some regularity (*Andreas*, *Genesis B*, *Apollonius of Tyre*), the combinations and juxtapositions tended to differ considerably between different scripts. Several candidates chose to write about 'Alfredian' literature, particularly in relation to ideas of 'Davidic' kingship. This produced some impressive work, including welcome attention to less frequently studied texts such as the *Domboc* or the *Prose Psalms*. Nevertheless, not all of the work on this topic did full justice to the complexities of the construction of Alfredian authority in this corpus of texts and some of the conclusions offered were rather simplistic.

Precise engagement with the question was a recurring weakness, with candidates frequently twisting the question almost beyond recognition in order to be able to reproduce a prepared essay (often when the material would, in fact, have fitted more comfortably under a different question on the paper). The best scripts were marked by a sound awareness of the literary, historical and cultural contexts of the works discussed, as well as their precise engagement with the language of these texts. There were some impressive examples of close-reading of quotations accurately cited in Old English (and, occasionally, Anglo-Latin). At the other end of the scale, however, some candidates were unable to produce the textual detail necessary to support their arguments about the texts. In extreme cases, the scripts as a whole included only a few isolated words of Old English.

Paper 2 Medieval English and Related Literatures 1066-1550

17 candidates took this paper. The first year of this paper produced some genuinely wonderful individual performances, and the overall standard was high. Excellent work was done with the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, and the Tristan legend; some scripts made good use of comparisons with Welsh and Norse literature, and several compared French antecedents with their later English redactions. In these contexts candidates were able to bring fresh insights to bear on later canonical texts, with Malory and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* making several worthwhile appearances. The strongest essays displayed precise attention to the terms of the question, a wide range of reference backed up by pertinent example and quotation, keen close analysis, and a structured argument. Weaker responses occasionally slipped into plot summary.

Candidates showed differing sensitivities to the question of genre, and in some cases attempts to draw comparisons between texts were vitiated by errors of dating. In general a higher level of theorization would be welcome – of what it might mean to compare an insular French romance with an Icelandic saga, or a prose pseudo-history with a Breton lay. The question on intertextuality/authorial self-consciousness drew a number of responses, the best of which were alert to precisely these matters.

While many candidates clearly revelled in the opportunity to write longer essays, some showed signs of lacking structure to support the argument, and others employed a kitchen sink approach, trying to include every potentially relevant reference. Candidates are reminded that structured argument remains essential – indeed perhaps even more so – in the slightly longer format, and that length alone is not the point.

It was sad to see some unceremonious dumping of pre-prepared essays onto questions regardless of relevance – especially when, as in some cases, those essays were actually very good, implying that the candidate could easily have turned the strength of their analysis into a real answer. Credit cannot fully be given to any essay which ignores the terms of the question chosen.

Paper 3 [see CI paper 2]

Paper 4 History of the English Language to c. 1800 (Year 2 Portfolio)

17 candidates took this paper. The best essays displayed a sound grasp of the linguistic changes that characterise the periods covered by this paper, backed up with detailed exemplification, and an appropriate use of technical terminology. Stronger candidates also showed a willingness to question the appropriateness of labels such as 'Standard English' as applied to particular periods. An engagement with material factors, such as the differing conditions pertaining to print and manuscript, was also apparent, as was an interest in variation and evidence of changes in progress. It was cheering to see some excellent work on the language of women, on corpora, and on writing from different social perspectives e.g. servants. Weaker candidates tended to rely on reproducing material (including specific linguistic examples) taken from lectures, or to try and encompass too much (whether thematically or chronologically) and consequently failed to include sufficient linguistic detail. In general, commentaries showed a sound knowledge of linguistic details, some interesting and original choices of text, and effective use of the *OED*.

Paper 5

5a The Material Text Portfolio

7 candidates took this paper. They were required on the one hand to analyse a passage from one of two manuscripts (Auchinleck for Middle English and the Exeter Book for Old English), when compared with modern editions, and on the other to answer questions on a comparatively wide range of topics. In general, it might be said that most candidates did better on the first part of the paper, when considering in detail various aspects of the manuscripts and modern editions, with almost all ranging widely and confidently across several of the six aspects specified (layout; scribal practice; glossing and/or annotation; copying, compilation and readership; textual transmission; and editorial practice), even though the rubric specifies a focus on just 'one or more' of these features. That said, it was clear that many of the candidates had effectively already prepared certain aspects of their answers as being broadly applicable to whichever of the manuscripts they were considering: by far the most successful responses were those where the candidates were able to link those general observations to the specific passages and manuscript pages at issue. It was notable in this respect that five of the seven candidates chose to focus on the Exeter Book, since the large number of texts of greatly varying length within that manuscript made it perhaps more challenging when considering the individual texts, and here therefore the candidates were evenly split between those who made quite vague assessments that might have been relevant to almost any page of the Exeter Book, and those whose analysis was far more penetrating and precise; naturally, the latter prospered.

The same issues with regard to what might be described as the dumping of pre-prepared material without specific reference to the terms of the question being asked was even more apparent in the second section of the paper, where it was also somewhat disappointing that four of the seven candidates chose to answer on the same question (a quotation by Fred Robinson on the extent to which mediaeval manuscripts often constituted composite artefacts, and the challenges raised by extracting individual texts from their original environment). Many of those who responded to this question focused more firmly on the first part of the quotation, and indeed essentially based their answers on the single word 'composite'; greater success was had by those who attempted to cover the whole range of implications of the quotation in question.

Paper 6

6c Archaeology of Anglo Saxon England

1 candidate took this paper.

6c Old Norse

5 candidates took this paper. The standard on this paper was generally high, with all candidates achieving either a first class or a good second class mark. All of the essay questions had at least one taker, except for the final linguistic commentary/language topic question; but this remains a potentially valuable alternative for students with a particular interest in the language itself.

Most popular were the essay questions on *Hrafnkels saga* and on eddic verse, and there was some outstanding work, showing critical sophistication (and the knowledge and ability to take issue with some of the secondary literature), an impressive ability to quote in the original, and

good knowledge of Old Norse literature outside the set texts. Translations invariably attracted slightly lower marks than the essays, and a couple of candidates struggled with the niceties of the syntax of *Hrafnkels saga*. But overall, all candidates showed a clear command of Old Norse language and real engagement with literary texts.

6c Old and Early Middle Irish Texts

1 candidate took this paper.

6c Medieval Welsh I

2 candidates took this paper.

Old Regulations

Paper 1 The English Language Portfolio

21 candidates took this paper in year 2. See the report published in 2014.

Paper 2 Shakespeare

21 candidates took this paper. With the exception of q.18 (on music) all questions were answered. Though there were few outstanding scripts there was a good proportion of first class work, and the majority of scripts were of a good upper second quality. Some answers and a few whole scripts downloaded what was clearly pre-prepared material which became more peripheral to the question attempted as the essay progressed before coming to an abrupt halt. A tiny number fell foul of the rubric that requires at least two of the three answers to show knowledge of at least two works by Shakespeare.

Overall, however, responses were well-informed, cogent, and relevant to the quotations/questions. While a handful of scripts relied only on rather dated critical materials, the majority of answers showed very good knowledge of a range of secondary criticism and awareness of early modern cultural environments, especially politics, religion, rhetoric and poetic modes. There was good attention to performance traditions and practices from the early modern to the most recent (including non-English productions), and for the most part, this knowledge was handled critically and with flexibility. Engagement with the primary texts was consistently close, and there was some very fine work on language and textual apparatus.

Amongst the plays, *Titus* was a popular choice, especially but not only in response to q.8. And it was often well-situated with the non-dramatic poetry in a discussion of classical sources and analogues. Elsewhere there was even coverage of the Shakespeare canon, with no significant exceptions or preferences towards any grouping of plays. *Cymbeline* and *Henry VIII* made some notable appearances, often alongside works of Shakespeare's contemporaries, especially Middleton, Fletcher, and Rowley. For whatever reason, no-one wrote on *Richard III*.

Paper 3a (1100-1509)

21 candidates took this paper. The best scripts covered a range of texts from across the period and responded with precision and engagement to the specific questions. There were many answers on Chaucer's dream poetry (for questions 6 and 16), the Gawain-poet, and Malory (for questions 7 and 15); there was also some very good work on visionary and devotional writing. Candidates who engaged with recent scholarship and key theoretical arguments and ideas did so, for the most part, successfully. There was relatively little on early fifteenth-century poetry, on alliterative poetry (other than *Gawain*) and on Langland and Gower, although essays on Gower tended to be impressive.

An uncomfortable number of candidates continue to download material that has been previously prepared, with little or no relevance to the question or quotation chosen. This happened most often in response to stand-alone quotations: questions 5, 13 and 14 were used variously as prompts to write on just about anything within the period, and 'place' in question 2 was interpreted very loosely by most. Likewise, virtually nobody wrote on verse form in response to question 9, which was taken as a general point about the value of fiction rather than – as specified – 'drasty rymng'. Mistranslation affected some of the essays, especially answers to question 18 ('our rude langage'), which resulted in essays being penalized for irrelevance. The questions demanding more precise and focused responses were among the least popular on the paper, but those who answered them did so noticeably well.

Paper 3b (1100-1509)

21 candidates took this paper. Of the two passages from *Troilus and Criseyde*, passage (a) proved the more popular choice. The passage from *Pearl* (passage (e)) was the most popular choice for the second commentary (more than half of the candidates chose this option). The passages from Langland, Malory and Henryson were all attempted, but no candidates chose to write about passage (c) from *Ancrene Wisse*. The best work engaged compellingly with the passage in question, bringing together analysis of language, style, and form to produce a detailed and comprehensive close-reading. Overall, however, the quality of the work was somewhat disappointing, with many of the scripts displaying only a basic level of competence. One particularly common problem was the failure to engage directly with the precise language of the passage. As a result, several scripts struggled to get beyond simply summarizing the content of the passages, and a surprising number displayed a lack of basic comprehension, both at the level of individual words and at the wider level of understanding what the passage was about (or who was speaking to whom). Appropriate use of contextual information was also problematic. On the one hand, several candidates were unable to provide accurate information about the place of the passage in the wider text where this was directly relevant to issues under discussion (when such information was offered, it was frequently incorrect). On the other hand, there was also a tendency for some candidates to digress at length on contextual information that was *not* pertinent to their analysis of the passage, including clearly prepared paragraphs on general matters of authorship, date, provenance, and manuscript context.

Paper 4 (1509-1642)

21 candidates took this paper; see the report for new regulations Paper 3.

Paper 5 (1642-1740)

21 candidates took this paper. For the questions in common with new regulations Paper 4, the same remarks apply here from the report for that paper. Questions unique to the different date-range of this paper produced interesting work on mid-seventeenth century writers including Cowley, Lovelace, Herrick, and Browne; all were particularly well contextualised, and were addressed with a fine alertness to subtleties of literary form. There was also a noticeably large and particularly strong showing on heroic drama and Restoration tragedy.

Paper 6 (1740-1832)

21 candidates took this paper. They generally produced very strong work, with some excellent essays in particular on the eighteenth-century novel, notably Richardson's epistolary fiction. There was also some interesting and engaging work on the less familiar eighteenth-century poets, including poetry by women such as Smith, Hemans and Barbauld. The best essays showed range, depth and serious engagement with the precise terms of the question.

Paper 7 Special Authors

7c (i) Spenser

1 candidate took this paper.

7c (ii) Milton

2 candidates took this paper.

7c (iii) Jonson

1 candidate took this paper.

7d (i) Marvell

2 candidates took this paper.

7d (iii) Haywood

1 candidate took this paper.

7e (i) Wordsworth

1 candidate took this paper.

7e (ii) Austen

2 candidates took this paper.

7f (ii) Dickens

1 candidate took this paper.

7g (i) Conrad

2 candidates took this paper.

7g (ii) Yeats

3 candidates took this paper.

7g (iii) Woolf

2 candidates took this paper.

7i (i) Walcott

2 candidates took this paper.

7i (ii) Roth

1 candidate took this paper.

7i (iii) Faulkner

1 candidate took this paper.

Paper 8

8 (a) An Extended Essay

20 candidates took this paper; see comments under the relevant strand for the new regulations Dissertation.

8 (c) Centrally taught topics

8c (iv) Postcolonial

1 candidate took this paper.

REPORTS OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINERS FOR THE HONOUR SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

FHS English Language & Literature;

Examiner: Dr Eddie Jones, University of Exeter

Title of Examination:		FHS English & FHS History and English
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	Eddie Jones
	Position:	Associate Professor in Medieval English
	Home Institution:	University of Exeter

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A
A1	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	X		
A2	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	X		
A3	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].	X		
A4	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	X		
A5	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	X		
A6	Have issues raised in your previous reports been responded to and/or addressed to your satisfaction?	X		

This was my second year as external examiner for the FHS English and the Joint School of History & English. Again I was impressed by the quality (and quantity!) of work done by undergraduates in Oxford English.

I was struck, on returning for this year's meetings in the English Faculty, that, whilst many members of the Board were familiar faces from last year, the chair, her deputy and my two fellow externals had all changed. In my report last year I registered a degree of surprise that the incoming chair had not been present at our meetings to 'shadow' the role. As it happens, the conduct of the board this year was exemplary, but I do think there is a structural question for the Faculty about how it ensures consistency in policy and approach from year to year. I have noted before that (in contrast to practice elsewhere) Oxford's examination meetings are not minuted, so you are more than usually reliant on individual board members to preserve the 'institutional memory'. My sense of the board as a somewhat ephemeral 'happening' is reinforced by the lack of historical perspective in the statistical data we looked at. Such data can be extremely useful (and in particular I welcome the introduction of statistical analysis of marks by paper), but it would be enhanced by the addition of data for (say) the past two years for comparative purposes. Thus, for instance, while I was able, as external, to confirm that the percentage of firsts awarded this year (just over 27%) is not out of line with comparable UK institutions, the board was not able to consider whether this figure was in line with previous years at Oxford, or part of a trend up or down. Especially in the first year of a new and significantly revised syllabus, such diachronic data would have been interesting to have.

Turning to the business of the Board, I will start with updates on matters that I raised last year. The handling of plagiarism (or suspected plagiarism) had been an issue then, but I understand that no cases were reported this year. In the work I read last year, I had found some uncertainty among candidates in their practice around referencing. I welcome the efforts made by the Faculty to address this, and note that, at least in the work I read, referencing seemed to be done well. Candidates' failure to answer the question (instead, as it is often put, 'downloading' a pre-prepared essay) remains a concern for markers, though there is considerable variation in how harshly that is penalised; such variation is, however, usually ironed out during the agreement of marks. The new system of pairing markers, to facilitate cross-referencing between pairs, is more complex for markers, logistically, but the complications are worth it. There was no repeat of the concerns that surfaced last year, and led to a last-minute debate over scaling the marks of one pair. There was some question over the marking of one paper, on which one of the markers had tended to mark low, and may have exercised a downward pull on overall marks. But the new system meant that the question had already been identified ahead of the Board, and could be addressed in a measured way.

There was a new system this year for the handling of Factors Affecting Performance, in which responsibility for considering medical cases and the like was devolved to individual Schools. There is always a balance to be struck between allowing decisions to be taken as close as possible to those whom they affect, and ensuring consistency across the institution. In this case, the Board was provided with surprisingly little guidance from the centre. It devised a system for dealing with applications that seemed to me to be thoroughly sensible and humane, but the Faculty needs to be sure that similar students are treated similarly from year to year (see my comments above on consistency and succession planning); and the centre needs to be satisfied

that similar students are being treated similarly across the institution. (Candidates in Joint Schools are only the most obvious case in point.) I have known systems in which the consideration of medical and special cases is done 'marks-blind', but I favour the practice adopted in the Board this year, in which FAP applications were considered (by a subgroup of the full Board) alongside the candidate's marks profile. This made it absolutely clear that we were considering the impact of the factors on a student's marks, rather than attempting to make medical or philosophical judgements about the comparative severity of those factors. I would in future years expect the FAP forms to be anonymised.

I was impressed by the detail of marker's comments on individual essays and scripts. I did find it odd, however, that nowhere on the comment sheets was there a place for markers to enter their agreed marks (and thereby to register their agreement). A simple box would suffice, though a space for a few further comments might in one or two cases have been helpful (eg when a wide discrepancy between raw marks is agreed significantly closer to one mark than the other). A brief Faculty discussion of marks of 69 (or 59, etc) would be beneficial. Such marks inevitably raise questions in the Board, and a clear understanding by all markers that a mark of 69 represents a firm decision that a script lies at the top of the 2.1 range and no higher, rather than uncertainty about its proper class, would make matters clearer for the Board.

I will close by echoing the sentiments of the Board as a whole in expressing our thanks and admiration for the unflustered and professional way in which the Board was run by its chair Helen Moore and her deputy Siân Gronlie, supported as ever by Angie Johnson. That in this year of concurrent old and new syllabi, FAPs, and the rest, nothing went astray, or even got temporarily muddled, is testimony to their diligent efforts.

FHS History and English

Examiner: Dr Eddie Jones, University of Exeter

FHS English Language & Literature;

Examiner: Professor Raphael Lyne, Cambridge University

Title of Examination:		FHS English
External Examiner Details	Title:	Dr
	Name:	Raphael Lyne
	Position:	Reader in Renaissance Literature
	Home Institution:	University of Cambridge

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A
A1	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	X		
A2	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	X		
A3	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].	X		
A4	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	X		
A5	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	X		
A6	Have issues raised in your previous reports been responded to and/or addressed to your satisfaction?	X		
<p>* If you answer “No” to any question, please provide further comments in Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer “Yes” or “N/A”.</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?***

Oxford FHS English students achieve at a very high level. The proportion of Firsts and 2.1s is high, and so it should be: the standards applied by examiners are comparable with those of the other institutions of which I have experience. I read candidates at both key borderlines and was fully in agreement with the assessment of the internal examiners.

- 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).***

There is some variation in performance and/or assessment between papers, but not in a way that is either (i) above the tolerance level in a subject like English, or (ii) worryingly consistent from one year to the next.

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 was conducted with admirable rigour and fairness. The Chair and Assistant Chair, ably assisted by the alertness of the other Board members and the efficiency of Angie Johnson, ensured equitable treatment for all. A large number of markers contribute to FHS English, and in my reading I witnessed consistently excellent and expert marking. The guidelines ensure that the Board is very attentive around class borderlines, and decisions about re-reading are made carefully.

B3. Issues

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

The most complex issues that take up a lot of time, and demand resourceful thinking, are familiar from my own institution and from the last time I served as external examiner in Oxford. Dealing with short work, for example, always proves tricky at some point. Such issues were handled well; some are listed under B4.

One thing that seemed worth raising at another stage is whether there could be a clearer steer about what constitutes a relevant answer when the question is posed in the form of a quotation with no rubric. I should be clear that wherever I saw any uncertainty, or a difference between examiners, on this issue, it was either (i) properly and inevitably a matter of examiner judgment, or (ii) thoughtfully dealt with in the agreement process. Nevertheless it was discussed at the meeting, and seemed significant. In my institution, at least, quotation-without-rubric questions have more or less disappeared in recent years, and the particular issue, how much candidates should engage with the quotation, seems to arise less often.

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 course has changed since I last examined. The new Shakespeare portfolio, the structure of Paper 6 options, and new period boundaries, have resulted in something that retains the key qualities of the Oxford course, but with what seems to me like a more varied and dynamic range of options. This means that this year, and perhaps for one or two more years, some candidates were taking New Regulations papers, and some Old Regulations. This could have been an administrative nightmare, I think, but it was handled very well.

The Medical and Special Cases subcommittee undertakes tasks that, in my institution, are not handled at Faculty level. After seeing it in action this year, I have come round more to the view that this is the right way to do things. While it exposes Board members to a set of complex issues for which they often have few precedents, it does enable nuanced decisions that, when handled well, promise equitable treatment all round. Some issues that arise are large ones, e.g. how to interpret cases where the college or GP is explicitly supportive, versus ones where they are more matter-of-fact; or, how to deal with a candidate with a long-term condition who has bravely refused concessions that might have helped them, but then feels disadvantaged by the condition when the exams take place. However, as I say, the whole process was handled judiciously and humanely.

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 returned for one year as a late replacement, and would just like to reiterate my admiration for the efforts of the Chair and Assistant Chair, the Board in general, and Angie Johnson.

FHS Classics and English;

Title of Examination:		FHS Classics and English
External Examiner Details	Title:	Dr
	Name:	Raphael Lyne
	Position:	Reader in Renaissance Literature
	Home Institution:	University of Cambridge

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A
A1	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	X		
A2	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	X		
A3	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].	X		
A4	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	X		
A5	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	X		
A6	Have issues raised in your previous reports been responded to and/or addressed to your satisfaction?	X		
<p>* If you answer “No” to any question, please provide further comments in Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer “Yes” or “N/A”.</p>				

Part B

This proviso applies to all headings below. This year there were only seven candidates for Classics and English, and there were no borderline cases requiring adjudication by an external examiner. Accordingly any statements about the degree and the 2015 process would have limited statistical basis. Of course I have seen more material for single-honours English, and my fellow external has seen more for single-honours Classics.

B1. Academic standards

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

The students achieve at a high level, but I am confident that they are assessed in a way comparable to other institutions. Indeed, I think they receive exacting scrutiny.

- d. ***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 my proviso above says, numbers are small, to the extent that observations about relative performance in English and Classics papers would be relying on evidence from one or very few candidates. However, I trust that those involved in teaching and advising students keep relative performance under close scrutiny.

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.

Every aspect of the process that I saw was handled with both rigour and fairness. The examination was run very well, and it seemed to me that the Classics and English members of the Board worked well together.

B3. Issues

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

I doubt this is really a matter for an external examiner's report, but the small number of candidates this year is regrettable given the quality of this course. The link papers are an

excellent way of giving a coherent core to a joint-schools programme, and the combinations of papers offered by candidates were varied, substantial – enviable, in fact.

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.

Since I last acted as external examiner it has become compulsory for candidates to offer a dissertation. These, I gather, were mostly on comparative topics. This seems like a good educational opportunity for the candidates, and it is pleasing that they are opting for topics that reflect the mixed nature of their course.

B5. Any other comments

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

None.

FHS English Language & Literature;

FHS English and Modern Languages

Examiner: Dr. David Attwell

Title of Examination:		Full Honours Programme - English
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	David Attwell
	Position:	Head of Department
	Home Institution:	University of York

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A

Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A
A1	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓		
A2	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	✓		
A3	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].	✓		
A4	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	✓		
A5	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓		
A6	Have issues raised in your previous reports been responded to and/or addressed to your satisfaction?	✓		
<p>* If you answer “No” to any question, please provide further comments in Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer “Yes” or “N/A”.</p>				

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- e. ***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 in the Faculty of English are appropriately at the highest level achieved by students in other institutions. I would recommend, however, that the very best students be given marks that reflect their standing nationally. Markers are unduly cautious at the high end, with the result that the top student achieves a mark of 74%, possibly as much as 10 percentage points lower than comparable achievements elsewhere.

- f. ***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).***

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 English Board of Examiners is rigorous and consistent in its assessment process.

B3. Issues

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

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 release of (especially internal) Examiners' Reports (with comments about individuals redacted) to students has long been established practice at Oxford, but it is rarely done elsewhere and is a model of good practice.

B5. Any other comments

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

This is my second year of examining and I was again most impressed with the thoughtfulness, rigour and thoroughness of the examining procedures in the Faculty of English. Each year brings a few surprises, but this year involved particular challenges: the introduction of new procedures relating to Factors Affecting Performance (FAPs) for the Medical and Special Cases Committee, and the managing of students on new and old regulations simultaneously, following the introduction of the new syllabus. The Board of Examiners (thanks to the foresight and professionalism of the Chair, Helen Moore, and the administrative support provided by Angie Johnson) managed these challenges without any difficulties.

FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF CLASSICS AND ENGLISH. EXAMINERS' REPORT 2015

There were seven candidates for the degree. Six were awarded a 2.1, and one candidate a First Class. The size of the cohort was too small to allow further analysis of performance.

Reports for the Link Papers set by this examining board follow. Note that no candidate chose to sit Paper 6(b) *Comedy*.

Link Paper 1 (Paper 5) Epic

There were seven candidates; one answered the Greek commentary option, six the Latin.

The comparative commentary answers showed candidates engaging with the English poets' expansions, contractions and changes of phrases, sentences and verse rhythm as well as the connotations of particular words. There was a notable tendency to see Dryden's royalist position in every mention (or non-mention) of royalty, as indeed there was to see Milton's republican one in every reference to God's kingship in the *Paradise Lost* passage.

The Milton commentary was in general well done. The best responses paid close attention to Milton's poetic techniques and rhetorical devices, including irony; the weaker answers summarised the passage in descriptive rather than analytical terms. Most candidates were able to identify the context for the passage.

The essays were often impressively full and wide-ranging, drawing on both classical and English epics even in Section A where this was not obligatory; candidates also avoided the questions (4 and 5) which more explicitly invited a diachronic approach. Discussions of female identity, mortality, and father-son relationships provoked some thoughtful and often polemical responses. The best essays evidenced serious and incisive thinking about epic's generic legacy; weaker essays catalogued individual works and linked them in more superficial ways.

Link Paper 2 (6(a)) *Tragedy*

There were five candidates; none opted for the Greek or Latin commentary (Question 1.).

Although some candidates took advantage of Section A's permission to limit answers to a single author, or to only English or only classical tragedy, a majority of answers in this section addressed both classical and English texts. Candidates on the whole showed a good knowledge of a wide range of texts, though occasional inaccuracies crept in. Discussion of performance practice (both historical and modern) was a strength in many answers, as was the degree of engagement (often combative) with critics and larger critical debates. The best answers were able to use close readings of individual texts to make convincing general points. Weaker answers tended to be descriptive (often relying on unnecessary plot summary) rather than pursuing a strong argument, or did not address the question as set, and therefore lost marks.

Prof Peter E McCullough

Lincoln College

FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF ENGLISH AND MODERN LANGUAGES EXAMINERS' REPORT 2015

C. M. MacRobert, Chairman of Examiners

1. Statistics

There were 18 candidates (12 women, 6 men) in the Joint School, of whom 10 were awarded first class degrees. The Dolores Oria Merino Prize for the best performance in Spanish Prose was awarded to Matthew Hillborn (The Queen's College). Oral Distinctions were awarded to 11 candidates (5 French, 2 German, 1 Italian, 3 Spanish).

1.1 Numbers of candidates, by Modern Language

	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
French	10	13	12	16	16
German	4	4	5	5	5
Italian	1	2	1	-	-
Spanish	3	1	3	1	6
Portuguese	-	-	1	-	-
Russian	-	1	1	-	-
Czech	-	1	-	-	-
Total entries	18	22	23	22	27

1.2 Classes awarded (previous two years' figures in brackets where applicable)

	I	II.1	II.2
French	4 (5, 6)	6 (8, 6)	0 (0, 0)
German	2 (2, 2)	1 (2, 3)	1 (0, 0)
Italian	1 (1, 1)	0 (1, 0)	0 (0, 0)
Spanish	3 (0, 2)	0 (1, 1)	0 (0, 0)
Portuguese	- (-, 1)	- (-, 0)	- (-, 0)
Russian	- (0, 0)	- (1, 1)	- (0, 0)
Czech	- (0, -)	- (1, -)	- (0, -)
Total	10 (8, 12)	7 (14, 11)	1 (0, 0)
Total %	55.5% (36.4%, 52.2%)	38.9% (63.6%, 47.8%)	5.5% (0%, 0%)

1.3 Classes awarded by gender (% of class for previous two years in brackets)

	I	II.1	II.2

Female = 12	5 = 50% (100%, 58.3%)	6 = 85.7% (92.9%, 81.8%)	1 = 100% (0%, 100%)
Male = 6	5 = 50% (0%, 41.7%)	1 = 14.3% (7.1%, 18.2%)	none 0% (0%, 0%)

1.4 Percentage of each gender in each class (previous two years in brackets)

	I	II.1	II.2
Female = 12	41.6% (38.1%, 43.75%)	50% (61.9%, 56.25%)	8.3% (0%, 0%)
Male = 6	83.3% (0%, 71.4%)	16.6% (100%, 28.6%)	0 % (0%, 0%)

2. Examiners

English: Dr Michèle Mendelssohn (co-ordinator), Dr James McBain, Dr Kate McLoughlin, Professor David Attwell (external)

Modern Languages: Dr Mary MacRobert (Chairman), Dr Ian MacLachlan (French), Dr Ben Morgan (German), Dr Emanuella Tandello (Italian), Dr Xon de Ros (Spanish), Professor Nicholas Saul (external)

3. Conduct of the Examination and Final Meeting

This was the last year in which the examination was taken under old regulations for English, with Comparative Literature available only as a Paper XII option on the Modern Languages side of the course. Candidates were advised of this restriction. Because the Examination Regulations for 2014 contained only the new specifications for English, its version of the regulations for English and Modern Languages was intelligible only by inconvenient cross-reference to the old specifications for English in the 2013 volume. Those responsible for updating the Examination Regulations need to bear in mind that the Honours course in EML, like other courses involving Modern Languages, is taken over three years, whereas the Honours course in English lasts only two years, and that consequently changes in syllabus for these two courses are liable to come into effect in different years.

As usual, the examinations were held together with those in the main Schools of English and Medieval and Modern Languages. For the first time this year the marks for the English papers were entered on electronic marksheets, thus facilitating upload to the in-house mark processing system used by Modern Languages. A global rescaling of 2 points was applied to the marks for Spanish paper II, which was taken by the relevant candidates in EML (see the report for Medieval and Modern Languages).

The Proctors received complaints about noise from building works at University College during four English papers: English Literature 1509-1642, 1642-1740, 1740-1832 and the Shakespeare paper. A complaint was also lodged about the range of questions in the Latin American section of Spanish paper VIII, which was taken by the relevant candidates in EML; this was considered by the examiners in Modern Languages and found not to be substantiated by the mark range (see the report for Medieval and Modern Languages).

The Chairman and Coordinator had a pre-marks meeting to deal with three matters:

1. re-readings were agreed for one candidate at a class borderline;
2. the marks for English Literature 1509-1642, 1642-1740, 1740-1832 and the Shakespeare paper were reviewed in the light of complaints about noise during these

papers, and it was concluded that, as in the main School of English, there was no case for change;

3. three submissions about factors affecting performance were considered, and it was concluded that there was no case for adjusting marks (the forms recording these conclusions will be deposited with the candidates' scripts).

The final meeting was attended by all examiners except Dr Morgan, who was absent because of illness but subsequently signed a form approving the class list. The outcomes of re-reading were announced, but did not result in changes to classification. The conclusions under 2 and 3 above and the outcome of the complaint about Spanish VIII were reported and approved, and the external examiners expressed themselves satisfied with these procedures.

The Chairman wishes to record her thanks to the Examination Officers in English and Modern Languages, Angie Johnson and Catherine Pillionel, for their patient and efficient support.

C. M. MacRobert
Chairman of Examiners
12.07.15

FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF HISTORY AND ENGLISH EXAMINERS' REPORT 2015

Part I

A. Statistics

All candidates

Class	No						%					
	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
I	4	4	2	0	5	2	36.4	33.3	22.2	0	62.5	22.2
II.1	7	8	7	4	3	7	63.6	66.7	77.8	100	37.5	77.8
II.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
III	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

All candidates, divided by male and female

Class	Number										Percentage (%) of gender									
	2015		2014		2013		2012		2011		2014		2014		2013		2012		2011	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
I	2	2	3	1	0	2	0	0	3	2	40	33.3	100	11.1	0	33.3	0	0	100	40
II.1	3	4	0	8	3	4	1	3	0	3	60	66.7	0	88.9	100	66.7	100	100	0	60
II.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
III	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

A. The main innovation this year was the introduction of the interdisciplinary dissertation. The range and quality of this work suggested that it had been successful, and that candidates had taken full advantage of the intellectual opportunities presented by this course requirement. In addition, most of the candidates sat papers under the new English curriculum.

B. Candidates receive a circular from the History Faculty in April detailing examination procedures (this goes to all History and History joint schools candidates).

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

Eleven candidates (5M, 6F) took the examination, three of them under Old Regulations. The overall marks profile was very similar to last year, with 4 firsts, 7 upper seconds and no classification below 2.1.

The examination processes worked very smoothly, and both the English and History administrative staffs are to be thanked again, especially Angie Johnson and Andrea Hopkins.

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

The board were pleased to note that there was broad parity of performance as measured by gender, with the 4 firsts being equally shared by male and female candidates. Although this is a small school, it is good to see the imbalance of 2014 corrected.

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

There were no particular issues to report here, although it should be noted that the standard of the work for the interdisciplinary dissertation was not out of line with the strong performance of the field overall.

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

None.

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

In common with all the other examiners affected by the issue of noise in the vicinity of Examination Schools, the board would like to express its frustration at the way in which the matter was handled by college and university authorities. In line with the resolution of the History board, all history papers sat by History and English candidates were scrutinized by the board for signs of possible disruption, and two candidates received extra marks. English papers affected by noise were also checked to ensure that no candidate's classification would have changed through the application of History's procedure, but no attempt was made to add marks (in line with the resolution of the English board).

On a more positive note, the board was pleased to note the sheer range of topics covered by candidates on both sides of this joint-school.

F. Members of the Board of Examiners

P. Gauci (Chair)

J-G. Deutsch

O. Margolis

S. Byrne

R. McCabe

D. Thomas

A. Shepard (external)

E. Jones (external)

FHS History and English

Examiner: Dr Alexandra Shepard

Title of Examination:		FHS History; Joint Schools in History and English and History and Modern Languages
External Examiner Details	Title:	Dr
	Name:	Alexandra Shepard
	Position:	Reader in Early Modern History
	Home Institution:	University of Glasgow

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A
A1	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?		x*	
A2	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	x		
A3	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].	x		
A4	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	x		
A5	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	x		
A6	Have issues raised in your previous reports been responded to and/or addressed to your satisfaction?	x		

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

Part B

*My comments below are based on my having seen a very limited range of examined material. I have seen a small sample of extended essays and dissertations, augmented by additional cases of coursework which required adjudication. The only exam scripts that I saw were a small selection of ‘Disciplines of History’ requiring adjudication or a re-read. This was in no way related to any issues regarding the efficiency of the examining process and its administration, but was owing to insufficient time built in to the examining schedule to allow Externals to review samples of exam scripts. The work of the Exam Board was limited by time constraints this year, and also by the necessity of responding to the issue of student complaints regarding noise from building work that disrupted several exams. I make further recommendations below about how better use might be made of External Examiners in future years.

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 Oxford History students, as represented by the proportions classified within each band, are comparable with those at my own institution. The level of achievement at the top end of the scale is, however, outstanding, and on a par with top level postgraduate performance on the taught programmes that I have examined. There is also much less evidence at Oxford than elsewhere of weak work in which students display a poor grasp of what is expected of them.

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

Student performance at the high end of the scale is exceptional. I read a couple of dissertations that were of near publishable quality. The best dissertations were conceptually sophisticated, methodologically pioneering, and presented original arguments on the basis of an impressive level of research (in terms of its quality as well as its volume). At the top of the range students were able to synthesise and engage critically with a wide range of primary and secondary material with an impressive degree of precision and detail, and with the kind of theoretical engagement that is more characteristic of postgraduate work. That I saw almost no work of poor quality is

testament to the ability of Oxford students and the excellent quality of teaching that they receive.

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 no reason to doubt that the assessment process is conducted rigorously and fairly, although having seen very few exam scripts I am unable to comment on the extent to which marking criteria have been consistently or fairly applied beyond coursework. The extended essays and dissertations that I saw had been read thoroughly and marked in line with the assessment criteria. On the basis of the few 'Disciplines' scripts that I saw, it appears that there was less disagreement between markers over what constituted an appropriate comparison (and also that students had a clearer sense of how to prepare for and approach this paper this year).

The classification process was undertaken with exemplary rigour. The Board took due account of any special circumstances affecting student performance with commendable care, and also scrutinised tariff deductions to ensure their consistent application. Borderline candidates received thorough and fair scrutiny, with re-reads undertaken as appropriate. Due—and labour intensive—care was taken to ensure that no candidate had been disadvantaged by any discernible effect of noise near the exam halls on exam performance.

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 three issues I should like to raise:

a) The gender gap

The gender gap in performance between men and women was greater this year than it has been since 2009. Men outperformed women in every single category of paper, including the extended essay and the compulsory thesis (in which women have tended to outperform men in recent years). The gap was most pronounced in the History of the British Isles papers. I understand that this is a matter of ongoing concern for the Faculty that has been addressed in recent work on curriculum reform. It is clearly an ongoing issue that needs continued monitoring, and it would be useful to have comparable statistics from across the Division in order to have a sense of the extent to which it is a History-related problem.

b) Noise disruption during exams

Building work undertaken by a nearby college appears to have caused considerable disruption to exams held in the Schools. This affected a large number of History papers and although students were advised to bring earplugs to exams once the problem had become evident this was hardly a satisfactory solution. Exam Boards were instructed by the Proctors to deal with any detectable consequences for student performance as Boards resolved to be appropriate. It would have helped to have had a much clearer steer from the Proctors of what constituted an appropriate response, since different Boards adopted very different strategies for dealing with the issue leading to potentially inequitable treatment. The History Board undertook a very thorough assessment of the impact of noise on student performance, and raised a few marks as a result. This was a very time-consuming exercise and it was regrettable that precious time was devoted to the consequences of building work that was presumably avoidable during the brief exam period.

c) Provision for resits

The Oxford examining system is especially punitive for students who are incapacitated during the exam period, since the marks for over half the components of the degree depend entirely on exams taken at the end of the students' final year. Given such a high dependency on exams as a mode of assessment, concentrated within such a short time frame, it is regrettable that there is no provision for resits for candidates who for no fault of their own are unable to perform well or at all during exams.

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 thorough and considered response of the Exam Board to matters that had arisen last year was commendable, including a series of action points identified in tabulated form. The adjustments to marking criteria for Disciplines and Special Subject Gobbets have helped to clarify what is expected of students in these papers.

The ongoing work on curriculum reform, which will expand the coverage of the degree and which will introduce more varied modes of assessment, is to be commended and is likely to enrich the student learning experience at Oxford.

B5. Any other comments

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

In all three years as External Examiner I have been highly impressed by the extremely high level of student achievement, by the excellent teaching standards, and by the dedication of markers and Exam Board members in ensuring fair and rigorous assessment. The administrative efficiency with which the examining process is carried out is also exemplary, and heavily dependent on an enormous effort on the part of the administrative staff within a very tight time frame.

My final recommendation is that more use is made of External Examiners to scrutinise exam marking conventions. Although the examining and marking timescale means it is impossible to send sample scripts to Externals in advance of the Exam Board, it would be possible for Externals to spend the first day of the Board looking at samples of scripts from two or three papers if these samples could be prepared in advance, along with the marking profiles of different markers. This would be a good use of Externals' time, not only to enable them to comment confidently on exam marking conventions, but also to provide feedback as changes to the curriculum are bedding in.

M.St. and M.Phil. in English, Chair of Examiners' Report for 2014-15

A. Process

There were four new internal examiners this year (Fiona Stafford, Adam Smyth, Marina Mackay, Heather O'Donoghue) and three continuing from last (Sos Eltis, Giles Bergel, Peter McDonald). The external examiners remained the same as in 2013-14, with the exception of Jeremy Smith whose expertise was not required as there were no candidates for the MSt in Language. At the first meeting of the internal examiners in November, the timetable was approved and Michaelmas 'C' options were allocated to markers. Slight alterations to the wording of the marking criteria were agreed, in response to concerns expressed by the external examiners about the unduly negative tone of the descriptions in the lower bands. The issue of 'rounding up' was discussed at length in response to the recommendation by some external examiners that candidates whose average marks fell within 0.5% of a Distinction, and who met the other criteria, should be rounded up by 0.5% automatically. The Board agreed that some discretion in this regard should be retained, because of the possible effect on a candidate's average of an unusually high mark on a single component of the degree. Nevertheless it was agreed that any such case should be reviewed very carefully by the Final Examination Board.

The Chair wrote to all the external examiners to introduce herself and provide contact details, to address points raised in their reports from the previous year and explain any action already taken in response, and to welcome their participation in the examination. The Chair encouraged all the external examiners to raise any concerns or questions that might arise over the course of the examination, and to note the timetable and the dates for the Final Examination Board. The external examiners were also sent the minutes of the first and subsequent meetings. At the first meeting in Hilary, the Board confirmed the marks for the Michaelmas C essays and agreed on markers for the Hilary B and C essays. At the second meeting, markers were suggested for the dissertations, though in the event a number of changes were made depending on the availability of assessors. At the first meeting in Trinity, marks for the B and C essays were confirmed. This year a new system was introduced for candidates who wished to submit 'Factors Affecting Performance' to the attention of the Board. As the applications tended to arrive very late in the process and involved details of a confidential nature, it was necessary to convene a meeting of a small sub-section of the internal examiners at relatively short notice on the morning of the Final Examination Board. The Special Cases Sub Committee consisting of the Chair and three examiners, with the Graduate Officer in attendance to take notes, discussed each case and considered the evidence submitted, including the candidate's application, the College's support, and any medical reports, any reasonable adjustments that had already been made, such as extensions of time, and then agreed on what action, if any, should be recommended to the Board of examiners in the afternoon. After the Final Board, the Chair completed the relevant forms for each candidate, explaining what decisions had been taken by the Board and the reasons for these.

At the Final Examination Board, the examiners confirmed the marks awarded to dissertations, agreed the imposition of penalties for work submitted late, discussed and then agreed to accept the recommendations made by the Chair on behalf of the Special Cases Committee, and then classified the candidates. With very few exceptions, the candidates could be classified without difficulty and very careful consideration was given to the few who could not. There was some wider discussion of the weighting given to dissertations in the overall degree and whether or not this was desirable. The weighting is reflected in the criteria for the Distinction, and although consideration was given to the idea of classifying according to the overall average, there was

general support for retaining the importance of the Dissertation in a degree that is intended to provide a foundation for further research. The high number of extensions were discussed and their possible implications for the quality of the dissertations, given that extending the time for the Hilary B and C essays meant reducing the time available for the dissertation, if a candidate was to submit in time for marking and classification at the Final Board in July. There was no obvious pattern of underperformance in the dissertation, however. Some thought was given as to whether the deadlines for the B and C essays in Hilary might be reviewed, and whether anything might be done to reduce stress and anxiety among MSt students. The issue of work that was either under or over length was discussed and it was agreed that the matter should be considered at the first examiners meeting of next year. At present, although work is submitted in electronic form as well as in hard copy, there is no straightforward way of checking word counts, nor is it clear that all markers are equally concerned about word limits. The guidelines on late work were considered and as there was an ambiguity over the precise meaning of 'a day late', the Board agreed to impose the more lenient penalty where appropriate. This is another detail to be clarified at the first meeting of next year's Board. The external examiners made very helpful contributions to the discussion and were, throughout the process, exemplary in their responses to every request and in their scrutiny of the process. Comparison with practice at other institutions is often very illuminating.

The Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize was not awarded this year, because none of the qualifying dissertations was considered sufficiently outstanding to merit the prize.

Much of the marking for the B and C essays was undertaken by the internal examiners, with course tutors acting as first markers for the C essays. For the dissertations, the internal examiners took a large share, but many additional assessors had to be appointed. In cases where internal markers were unable to reach agreement, the essays were sent, along with the internal markers marks and comments, to the appropriate external examiner for third marking. 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 (60, 70, 80) to give a proper sense of the marking parameters and to ensure that internal marking was appropriate and consistent. The high number of extensions this year means that some students had not submitted their dissertations in time for the Final Board, so their work will have to be marked during the long vacation.

B. Administration

Administration for the examination was undertaken by Emily Richards and Sue Clark, who worked very hard and often under considerable pressure. Emily Richards's experience of administering the MSt proved invaluable. Since Sue Clark was entirely new to the Faculty and this extremely complicated examination, her contribution was outstanding. Pressure from candidates for the release of marks can put strains on a very small team, and so the willingness of markers to meet deadlines for returning work, fill in the grids on the comment sheets and compose feedback remarks of appropriate tone and length is especially appreciated – though there were a few instances where markers were unable to co-operate as fully or promptly as hoped. The timetable is such that any delays and omissions increase the pressure, but the administrative team coped very well nevertheless.

C. Criteria

The criteria for classification were the same as in 2012-13. The two routes to a Distinction were retained: a candidate must gain 70 or over on the dissertation and an average of 70 across all

four elements (three essays and a dissertation); or the candidate needs 68 or over on the dissertation and an average of 72.

D. External Examiners' Comments

The reports of the external examiners are attached. At the Final Board, the external examiners were encouraged to comment on any item on the agenda and to make general comments on the examination process overall. Their points are summarised below:

Professor Connolly reported that she had found the pace of the examination process this year worked well and that what she had been asked to do felt right. She was impressed by the quality of the work, especially at the top end, and felt that the engagement with the bibliographical part of the course was a real strength. She thought that the overall standard of the dissertations was higher this year and the archival content especially impressive. There was, however, some potential for confusion over the difference between the topic set out on the mark sheets and the title of the submitted dissertation. She recommended that this be reviewed, and commented that if the candidates had a clearer sense of their titles, the dissertations would almost certainly benefit from this stronger framing of the central argument. When reviewing the forms from internal assessors, she thought that the accounts of their decisions and divergences, together with the reasons why particular marks had been agreed might sometimes be clearer.

Dr Townend was very positive about the quality of the work he had seen over the year, including nine MSt dissertations, though none for the M.Phil. He remained concerned that 'rounding up' was not an automatic process, especially following the discussion last year, and questioned the weighting given to the dissertation. He also questioned the need for third marking when the internal examiners' marks were close, for example 70 and 68, and thought more effort should be made by the first and second markers to agree their marks. The markers' comments had been full and helpful and it was good to have a dialogue explaining how marks had been agreed. He had noted a breach of the word count regulations and recommended that a clearer policy and better means of checking word counts be established for next year. He also thought it would be helpful for external examiners to see the agreed feedback forms in order to assess the kinds of comment that were sent to students after the marking process, because the role of the external examiner is to assess teaching and learning as well as examining.

Professor Hanson reported that she had seen some excellent work, including that of candidates in the World Literatures strand and that the new course was working well. She felt that the feedback was a constructive part of the course and that it should be substantial. She noted that the proportion of students receiving distinctions decreased at the modern end of the course, and wondered why this should be. Overall, she felt that her experience of acting as external examiner for the MSt in Oxford had been very positive and enjoyable.

Professor Stoneley said that he had found it very helpful to receive details of the timetable for the whole examination at the start of the year and praised the efforts of the administrative team. He had found the schedule and the amount of work manageable and had enjoyed reading the work. He had seen about the right quantity to form a proper sense of the examination and standards, and confirmed that all the marks he had seen were in accord with his own judgment and with standards at the institutions with which he was familiar. There were fewer cases where agreement had not been found between internal examiners, and the reasons for marks and agreements were clearer. He thought it would be helpful to external examiners to be sent entire runs of selected candidates, so that they could form a better sense of how candidates

developed over the course of the year. He also questioned the classification criteria that meant a student with an average of 72.5 was not awarded a distinction because of the failure to achieve a mark of 68 or above for the dissertation. He also noted that the proportion of students receiving distinctions decreased in the later periods, though he had no wish to challenge the marking which all seemed fair and accurate. He recommended that the new Special Cases committee should in future include an external examiner.

Professor McDowell corroborated much of what had been said by the other external examiners and said that he felt the balance of what he had seen this year had been about right – enough to form a proper sense of the degree and the examining process, but not so much as to be unmanageable. He had especially enjoyed the B-course essays, and felt that they were an important part of what made the Oxford course distinctive and worthwhile. He also thought that the dissertations should show more evidence of the benefits of the B course, given the library resources in Oxford.

In general, the external examiners were positive about the degree and the examining process and had particular praise for the administrative team.

Fiona Stafford
Chair of M.St. Examiners
6th August, 2015

2014-15 MSt and MPhil (Medieval Studies) in English (including MSt in English and American Studies and MSt in Language)

Fiona Stafford, Chair

PART I

A. STATISTICS

(1) Numbers and percentages in each class/category

There were 108 candidates

Outcome	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Numbers	41	61	3*	3**

Percentages including recent years

	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
2011	37.3%	62.7%	0%	N/A
2012	34.5%	64.5%	1%	N/A
2013	50%	50%	0%	N/A
2014	30.6%	68.1%	1.3%	N/A
2015	37.9%	56.5%	2.8%	2.8%

* 3 students (2.8%) have yet to complete due to the need to resubmit 'failed' work; each piece of 'failed' work can be re-submitted once (by Monday of 0th week of Michaelmas term); should re-submitted work not pass (60 or above), this will convert to a 'Fail'.

** 3 students (2.8%) have yet to complete due to being granted extensions for the dissertation, which they will have submitted in the long vacation.

(2) Vivas

Vivas were not used.

(3) Marking of Scripts

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

B. EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

There were no changes to the criteria for awarding the degree, though minor adjustments were made to the descriptions in the marking guidelines, following recommendations from the external examiners in 12-13 that the lower bands should include more positive qualities. No changes were made to the design of the comment sheets. The double route to the Distinction was retained, with discretion to round up averages in the case of any candidate within 0.5% of

an overall Distinction. (In the first meeting of the internal examiners in November, the Board discussed the issue of whether 'rounding up' should be made automatic rather than discretionary at some length in the light of comments made by the external examiners last year and agreed that while retaining an element of discretion was preferable, all candidates whose profile placed them very close to the level required for a Distinction would have all their marks very carefully considered at the Final Board). The calendar for marking and meetings remained the same as in 2013-14 and caused no insurmountable difficulties to markers, though the increased numbers of extensions complicated matters administratively and reduced the time available for the External examiners. The Final Examination Board was set for the same time as last year - four weeks after the deadline for submission of the dissertations. This year written work for the MSt was submitted in electronic form as well as hard copy. Some penalties were imposed for late submission, but none for problems relating to word length. The new procedure for considering candidates who had submitted 'Factors Affecting Performance' required that, for the first time, a special meeting involving a small sub-section of the Board was convened to examine the evidence and the cases made by candidates and their Colleges. The Special Cases Sub-committee met on the morning of the Final Board and agreed on the recommendations to be made to the Board. After the Final Board, the Chair completed the necessary forms for each candidate with reports on the decisions taken in the light of the evidence relating to 'Factors Affecting Performance'.

C. CHANGES FOR THE FACULTY TO CONSIDER

1. The timetable for submission of essays in Hilary Term appears to cause undue stress, with implications for the dissertation, which is written in Trinity Term. It may be worth considering a review of the timetable for submission and the overall balance of the degree.
2. The numbers of candidates and options means that the examination is an administrative challenge. There may be advantages to increasing the size of the internal examining Board, so that more marking of dissertations could be undertaken by the examiners. This year, the internal Board had one fewer examiner than in 2013-14, reverting to the number (7) serving in 2012-13.
3. The Special Cases sub-committee should be made an intrinsic part of the examining process, with a date agreed for the meeting (which can be cancelled if no candidates are affected by special circumstances) at the beginning of the year. One external examiner should be invited to attend, as suggested during discussion at this year's Final Examination Board.
4. Issues relating to word length and the difficulties of checking the accuracy of candidates' statements about word length arose this year. This matter should be addressed at the first meeting and a clear mechanism for checking word length of essays considered, together with a policy on penalizing essays that are in serious breach of the guidelines. The guidelines for imposing penalties for work submitted late should also be clarified further.
5. There was some confusion about whether there was a need to get the final title of the dissertation approved. Currently candidates submit topics in Hilary and if approved, do not have to submit the title until the dissertation is submitted. This leads to a numerous requests concerning minor tweaks and changes, and also to potential confusion when the comment sheet for markers is headed with a version of the original proposal rather than the final title. Some thought might be given to introducing a formal stage in Trinity term when the final title is submitted. This might have a number of advantages.

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

Grades by reference to gender:

2015

	All students	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Female	66	17	43	3	3
%		25.8%	65.2%	4.5%	4.5%
Male	42	24	18	0	0
%		57.1%	42.9%	0%	0%

2014

	All students	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete*
Female	44	14	28	1	1
%		31.8%	63.6%	2.3%	2.3%
Male	28	8	20	0	0
%		28.6%	71.4%	0%	0%

*Candidate suspended status retrospectively after the end of the academic year.

2013

	All students	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Female	56	23	33	0	0

%		41%	59%	0%	0%
Male	30	20	10	0	0
%		66.6%	33.3%	0%	0%

C. DETAILED NUMBERS

NA for MSt.

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

NA for MSt.

E. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUALS

This part is physically separate.

F. THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Professor Fiona Stafford (Chair)

Dr Giles Bergel

Professor Heather O'Donoghue

Dr Adam Smyth

Dr Peter McDonald

Dr Sos Eltis

Dr Marina Mackay

Professor Claire Connolly (UCC)

Professor Clare Hanson (Southampton)

Professor Nicholas McDowell (Exeter)

Professor Peter Stoneley (Reading)

Dr Matthew Townend (York)

Title of Examination:		MSt/MPhil in English (Medieval)
External Examiner Details	Title:	Dr
	Name:	Matthew Townend
	Position:	Reader in English
	Home Institution:	University of York

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A
A1	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓		
A2	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	✓		
A3	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].	✓		
A4	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	✓		
A5	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓		
A6	Have issues raised in your previous reports been responded to and/or addressed to your satisfaction?		✓	
<p>* If you answer “No” to any question, please provide further comments in Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer “Yes” or “N/A”.</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?***

Academic standards on the Oxford MSt/MPhil in English are very high, and compare well with those achieved by students at other institutions. This year I saw a great deal of high quality work (and, as last year, I saw no failing work). The range of texts and topics covered in the medieval MSt/MPhil at Oxford is very wide: I saw excellent work in Old English, Old Norse, Middle English (both early and late), and medieval Scots, and a good range of critical approaches. In particular, some of the dissertations I read were extremely impressive, in which students were able to pursue and develop their own particular interests. Typically, work on the MSt/MPhil is scholarly, incisive, enthusiastic, and well presented, and I greatly enjoyed reading it.

- 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).***

On the medieval MSt/MPhil, candidates performed equally well across both the coursework essays and the dissertations: there was no falling off in quality in the work produced (and the marks given) for the latter – indeed, quite the reverse, as noted above.

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.

On the whole, the assessment process worked very well, and was conducted with rigour, conscientiousness, and efficiency. The double marking of individual pieces of assessed work was both fair and scrupulous, and the markers' reports (and the record of dialogue between markers) enabled me to see clearly the grounds for the award of particular marks. At the Faculty level, the assessment process was conducted with clarity, efficiency, and courtesy by Mrs Emily Richards, the Graduate Studies Officer, and Professor Fiona Stafford, the Chair of the MSt/MPhil Examination Board, and I am very grateful to them.

I have, however, ticked 'No' under question A6 above for the following reason. In my 2014 report I expressed concern over the fact that the Examination Board exercised discretion as to whether or not to round up candidate averages at the Distinction borderline: my concern was that the Board was, effectively, devising or implementing unwritten classification criteria at the final Board meeting, so that two candidates with an identical average might not be treated the same. The internal examiners did discuss this issue at the start of the academic year, for which I am grateful, and the following statement was added to the classification guidelines for the final Board meeting this year: 'Candidates

whose final average falls within 0.5% of the average for a Distinction will have their overall performance carefully considered by the final Examination Board'. Nonetheless, I still think that this is not explicit enough, in that it does not state clearly what classification criteria will be considered for such borderline candidates. I would continue to advocate either (1) a blanket principle whereby all such candidates are rounded up, without the Board pondering supplementary (and unwritten) criteria; or (2) an explicit, written statement of the supplementary criteria to be considered in such cases. (At the Examination Board it became clear that internal examiners were anxious lest a single exceptionally high mark for an essay could skew a candidate's average, so that a candidate might receive a Distinction on the basis of only one Distinction mark out of the four units of assessment. One simple safeguard against this, for borderline candidates at least, would be the introduction of a supplementary criterion that states that candidates must achieve a Distinction mark in two or more units of assessment in order for their average to be rounded up.)

This gives rise to another set of issues, regarding the general classification criteria themselves. At present, there are two sets of criteria for gaining a Distinction:

- a candidate achieves a mark of 70 or above in the dissertation and an overall average of 70 across the four elements of the course; or
- a candidate achieves a mark of 68 or above in the dissertation and an overall average of 72 across the four elements of the course.

In other words, if a candidate achieves an average of 72 or above overall, but 67 or less on the dissertation, s/he will not gain a Distinction. The problem with this is that the MSt does not formally weight the dissertation more heavily than the three coursework essays in the calculation of the overall average (they are each worth 25%), so that an importance is placed on the dissertation in terms of classification criteria which is not recognized in terms of weighting. Moreover, the qualitative difference between essays and the dissertation is not great at all (indeed, much less than in other Masters programmes known to me elsewhere): essays are 7,000 words in length (longer than the average elsewhere) and dissertations are 11,000 words in length (shorter than the average elsewhere). So one might query how far the importance given to the dissertation in degree classification is justified; certainly, the present arrangement will continue to produce examples where students with high overall averages (on account of sustained excellence on the coursework essays) miss out on a Distinction on account of gaining a sub-68 mark for their dissertation.

Under this heading, of assessment processes, I have two further comments to make:

- (1) Penalties for over-length work. At present, as far as I am aware, no penalties for over-length work are being imposed, even though the English Faculty's MSt/MPhil Handbook states that 'Penalties may be imposed by the Board of Examiners should you exceed the maximum word limit'. This year I saw a number of examples of over-length work, including one essay that was more than 20% over-length but still received an unpenalized mark in the 80s. I would suggest that practices in this area could be tightened up considerably (as could the guidelines and practices for the submission of late work, which came up for discussion at the final Examinations Board).
- (2) Third marking. This year I was given a number of essays and dissertations for third marking, as the two internal markers could not agree a mark. While I appreciate that cases of disagreement will sometimes arise which do justify third marking, in that

splitting the difference may not always be the fairest outcome for a student, nonetheless there did seem to be an unusually large number of instances in which examiners could not agree (usually across the Distinction boundary, and including some in which the scale of disagreement was very modest). Such a frequency of disagreement does not seem to me to be best practice, suggesting as it does a certain intransigence among some markers, and a failure to recognize sufficiently that double marking is a process of negotiation and compromise, in which one marker may legitimately perceive virtues in a piece of assessed work that the other marker does not. (There is also an issue here as to whether external examiners are the most appropriate persons to be using as third markers, but that may be a University policy rather than a Faculty one.)

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?

See especially my comments under B2 above concerning the classification criteria for the MSt.

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 is very clear from the assessed written work (both coursework essays and dissertations) that students are benefiting from high quality teaching and supervision on the MSt/MPhil in English. However, at present it is difficult for external examiners to observe one facet of the teaching and learning experience in particular (and it is an important one), namely feedback. What external examiners see is the internal examiners' reports on assessed work (which do not go to the student), and not the digest of feedback which does subsequently go to the student (derived substantially, I assume, from the reports). It would be very useful to see this, in order to observe the quality of feedback that students are receiving. I especially raise this because a significant proportion of markers' reports are couched in strongly negative terms – listing what is wrong with the work submitted, rather than praising what is good – and I would like to see how such reports are subsequently re-packaged for students in a suitably constructive manner.

In terms of observing further the students' teaching and learning experience on the MSt/MPhil, it would also be useful if externals could see one or two candidate runs (rather than just individual essays), in order to see in detail how students are able to put together a programme of study that addresses their particular interests, and how they develop as researchers and writers in the course of the programme. At present, the role of external examiners on the MSt/MPhil is very much directed towards the scrutiny of assessment, rather than teaching and learning more broadly.

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.

Just to repeat, in conclusion, that I saw a great deal of excellent work this year, which I very much enjoyed reading. Levels of student achievement on the medieval MSt/MPhil are high: this year there were, I think, 13 students completing the medieval MSt, of which 9 gained Distinctions, and 5 completing the MPhil, of which 3 gained Distinctions – all thoroughly well deserved.

Title of Examination:		MSt. in English (1550-1700)
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	Nicholas McDowell
	Position:	Professor of English
	Home Institution:	University of Exeter

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A
A1	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	X		
A2	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	X		
A3	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].	X		
A4	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	X		
A5	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	X		
A6	Have issues raised in your previous reports been responded to and/or addressed to your satisfaction?	X		
<p>* If you answer "No" to any question, please provide further comments in Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A".</p>				

Part B

B1. Academic standards

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

On the balance of the work I have seen this year, and over the three years of my tenure, the Oxford English Faculty continues to produce and train MSt. students to world-leading standards of attainment in the subject, particularly in the area of early modern book history.

- d. *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 read a wide variety of scripts this year, from fails to work in the low 80s. There perhaps wasn't quite the truly outstanding work of previous years, reflected in the mark of 80 being the highest that I saw for a dissertation, but overall there were more distinctions this year than in the previous two years (50% as opposed to 38% in both previous years) and there were 20 students, a higher number than the previous year. Once more, the most innovative work that I saw was in the B-Course bibliography. Once again, the dissertations were slightly disappointing, given they are designed to lead directly into doctoral research, but the compacted period of time that Oxford students have to write their dissertation, compared to other institutions which continue until September, may in part explain this.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

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

I was fully satisfied with the procedures, which were handled with sensitivity and fairness. There was very fair discussion of one case, in which a failed essay, that I had third-marked, was considered in terms of certain personal issues that the student had faced, and I was happy with the outcome of this discussion. The only point that I made, as did another external, was that anonymity of students at the exam board should be preserved until the final marks have been fully agreed.

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?

While I support the idea that externals should be asked to adjudicate when first and second markers are very far apart and cannot agree (i.e. 80 and 65), marks that are very close (i.e. 70 and 67) should be settled internally, or if not, there needs to be a clear rationale for the continued disagreement. This is not, however, an issue that was at all wide-spread – I only noticed it once.

It might be worth giving some more thought within English as to why the dissertations do not always reflect the innovative nature of some of the essay work, particularly in relation to bibliography, but revert to more traditional and safe critical approaches.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

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

As in previous years, the great strength of the Oxford MSt. course, certainly in the period that I examine, is the exploitation of Oxford's unparalleled resources in book history and manuscripts, and the ways in which students are encouraged to use those resources and come up with genuinely original work. This, for me, is absolutely central to the distinctiveness of Oxford's postgraduate provision.

The comments that I made last year about not being given enough work to be able to judge the quality of the course as a whole were fully taken on board this year and I commend the Chief of Examiners and the internal Board for taking steps to ensure that this year the balance of work sent to externals was just about right – not too heavy a load, but also enough to enable a fair judgment of standards.

B5. Any other comments

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

In my first year as external, I was given a lot of third marking, and seemingly had the power to adjust internally agreed marks; this was rectified in the second year, but then I wasn't sent enough scripts to judge quality properly (although it was a smaller cohort). Nonetheless I was impressed in both years by the standard of student performance, and the exam boards were conducted with grace and professionalism. In this, my final year, the balance seemed exactly right, and externals were being used exactly as they should be – fundamentally to give an overview of the standards and quality of the course, and to adjudicate and offer advice in certain problem cases. So I hope that this year's experience will be the model for the future. Throughout the three years, I have been reassured that Oxford graduate work continues to be world-leading in its quality, and that the students are taught and assessed to very high standards. I have also been treated very well and with respect throughout the process, and commend the administrative staff.

Title of Examination:		MSt English
External Examiner Details	Title:	Prof
	Name:	Claire Connolly
	Position:	Head of School
	Home Institution:	University College Cork

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A
A1	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	x		
A2	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	x		
A3	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].	x		
A4	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	x		
A5	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	x		
A6	Have issues raised in your previous reports been responded to and/or addressed to your satisfaction?	x		
<p>* If you answer “No” to any question, please provide further comments in Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer “Yes” or “N/A”.</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?*

Standards compare very well to other Masters programmes, despite the shorter than normal delivery time of the course.

- 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 work I saw was almost uniformly solid and well-researched, with the better papers making truly excellent use of Oxford's rich library and archival holdings.

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 well. Examiners do not always record the reason that they could not arrive at an agreed mark: there is generally good practice in this regard but it is not uniform.

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?

MSt candidates write their dissertations within a relatively short time frame which can cause problems as students seek to frame larger and more ambitious topics of study. The main issue relates to the framing of the dissertation topic: almost all of the dissertations that I read would have benefitted from being able to articulate a clearer and more explicit argument.

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.

In general the standard of work on the B paper is excellent.

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.

The administration of the examination process was conducted with customary efficiency and courtesy. Instructions and expectations were made very clear at the start of the year and documentation sent out in good time.

Title of Examination:		MSt in English Studies
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	Clare Hanson
	Position:	Professor of Twentieth Century Literature
	Home Institution:	University of Southampton

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A
A1	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓		
A2	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	✓		
A3	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].	✓		
A4	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	✓		
A5	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓		
A6	Have issues raised in your previous reports been responded to and/or addressed to your satisfaction?	✓		
<p>* If you answer “No” to any question, please provide further comments in Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer “Yes” or “N/A”.</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 students' work is of an exceptionally high standard overall. The work I have seen demonstrates academic engagement, scholarly rigour and intellectual ambition, with some particularly strong work in World Literatures.

- 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 students perform exceptionally well across the board.

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 is thoughtful and judicious with evidence of careful debate between internal examiners. The external examiners were sent a greater number of essays to sample this year which was helpful for forming an overview of student performance.

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 in previous years I was asked to third-mark more than one essay where a disagreement between internal examiners turned on how far the work conformed to the criteria for the B-course. Given that students may on occasion fail to engage sufficiently with bibliographical, bibliographical or book-historical evidence I wonder if it might be appropriate to insert a sentence in the MSt/M.Phil Handbook which makes it clear that essays will be penalised if they do not conform to the criteria set out in 2.10 and in Appendix 2: B-course essay topics.

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.

N/A

5. **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 have very much enjoyed my external examining for the MSt and have been impressed by the consistently high quality of the work I have seen. The B-course in Research Skills is a particularly distinctive and valuable component of the course, engaging the students with the institution's unique resources and prompting some excellent, often innovative work in textual scholarship and book history. The work I have seen for the C-course is notable for its engagement with a range of novel and illuminating approaches to contemporary literature, directly reflecting the research interests of the English Faculty. In every respect, the Mst provides invaluable training for future researchers.

I am grateful for the courtesy and efficiency of the academic and administrative staff who have made examining for the MSt such a pleasant experience.

Title of Examination:		MSt in English Studies
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	Peter Stoneley
	Position:	Professor of English
	Home Institution:	University of Reading

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
Please (✓) as applicable*		Yes	No	N/A
A1	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	x		
A2	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	x		
A3	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].	x		
A4	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	x		
A5	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	x		
A6	Have issues raised in your previous reports been responded to and/or addressed to your satisfaction?		x	
<p>* If you answer "No" to any question, please provide further comments in Part B. Further comments may also be given in Part B, if desired, if you answer "Yes" or "N/A".</p>				

Part B

B1. Academic standards

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

The academic standards achieved compare very well with others; at its best, the work is exceptionally good.

- d. *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 very interesting work on the Part B essay, with some fascinating analysis of *Ulysses* and copyright libraries, and paratextual materials in children's literature publishing. I also confirmed a high mark for a very sophisticated dissertation on Delillo and McCarthy. At the lower level, the Merit work often had considerable strengths; there was a tendency in the Merit work to have too broad a frame for discussion, leading to a sense of survey rather than analysis.

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 was thorough, with full comments from both internals. Where there was initial disagreement between markers, they came to solutions that were, in my judgement, right. It was clear to me that the process was rigorous and fair, and in accordance with the University's regulations and guidance.

B3. Issues

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

I continue to be troubled by the weighting of the degree, which led this year to a student with an average of 72.25 being awarded a Merit, whereas a student with an average in the high 60s might get a Distinction. As in previous years, I am of the view that the weightings of the various elements should be changed to avoid this, or the criteria for the award of Distinction should be altered. I can understand wishing to emphasise the dissertation in the weightings, where the dissertation is much longer than the

coursework, and prepared over the whole summer. But such is not the case here. I accept that students are made aware of the weightings and the processes, so there is no injustice as such. But year after year the marks present the board with anomalies that might be avoided.

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 suggested at the final board that an external should be invited to the special cases board, and I understand that this is to be adopted.

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.

Professor Stafford conducted all the exams business in a scrupulous, genial, and fair way; she was very ably supported by the administrative staff from Faculty Office. This year, as in all previous years, I was very impressed by the levels of intellectual achievement demanded by the degree, and achieved by the stronger students. It would have been good to see a larger cohort taking the US papers, but I was pleased to see that the proportion of Distinctions improved with the cohort this year – up from 20% to 30%. This still leaves the performance significantly below that achieved on some of the other papers (100% Distinctions, no Merits, is not unknown). Perhaps this is grounds for discussion within the Faculty. But, in conclusion after three very interesting years, my abiding memory of the degree will be of the range and quality of the work, and the thoughtfulness and rigour of the internal assessors.