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OXFORD

**FACULTY OF
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**EXAMINERS' REPORTS
2016**

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1 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

1.1 PART I

1.1.1 Statistics

This year there were 224 candidates for the Preliminary Examination in English Language and Literature. 6 candidates had withdrawn during the course of the year. 4 candidates secured only Partial Passes in the Trinity Term examination and were required to resit papers during the Long Vacation, when all passed.

10 candidates were granted permission by the Proctors to submit their Paper 1 portfolios after the deadline. 4 candidates submitted their portfolios late without permission and were penalised accordingly. The Proctors permitted alternative arrangements for 22 candidates in the timed exams. 12 candidates submitted forms documenting Factors Affecting Performance (FAPs).

1.1.1.1 1. English Prelims: numbers and percentages in each category

2015-16	Total no candidates:	100 %
	224	
Distinction	57	25.3
Pass	163	72.7
Partial Pass	4	1.8
Incomplete	0	0

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

Paper	2015-16	%
1 Introduction to English Lang and Lit	50	22.42
2 650-1350	57	25.56
3 1830-1910	51	22.87
4 1910 to Present	53	23.77

1.1.1.3 3. Past Statistics

i) English Prelims (from 2013-14) and Moderations (until 2011-12): numbers and percentages in each category

Category					%	%
	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12	2014-15	2013-14
Dist.	57	59	46	51	25.0	25.2
Pass	171	175	186	167	75.0	74.78
Fail/Part. Pass	0	0	2	2	0	0
Inc.	0	1	1	0	0	0.4

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

Prelims

Paper	2015	2014	2013
1	20.1	20.9	20.5
2	17.9	19.2	23.1
3	24.5	19.6	10.7
4	24.1	23.9	25.5
Overall	23.7	25.2	19.6

Moderations

Paper	2012	2011
1	27.7	22.8
2a/4a	21.9	13.3
2b/4b	19.9	24.7
3a	23.4	27.5
3b	27.2 [11]	30.8 [13]

	scripts]	scripts]
Overall	24.0	23.8

Joint school candidates took optional English papers in the following numbers: Paper Two – 2 EML and 3 HEng; Paper Three – 10 EML and 1 HEng; Paper 4 – 11 EML and 4 HEng.

1.1.2 General remarks

This year saw the implementation of a new Faculty policy whereby all postholders can expect to do some exam marking each year, with Assessors for the Preliminary Examination normally being postholders. The Board of six Examiners was therefore afforded by six Assessors, of whom five were postholders (the other being a departmental lecturer). Each Section of Paper 1 was marked by three Examiners and one Assessor (25% of the run each). Each of Papers 2, 3 and 4 was marked by two Examiners (30% of the run each) and two Assessors (20% of the run each). Consistency was ensured by an extension of the practice of co-moderation which had become established over the previous two years. Groups of Examiners and Assessors for each Paper (or each Section of Paper 1) met during the marking process to calibrate their borderlines and discuss any problems or uncertainties. As a result, no individual marker profile required scaling. It seems likely that this practice may also have contributed to the harmony between the numbers of Distinction-level marks awarded in each Paper this year.

The process of co-moderation meant that much re-reading and re-consideration of scripts occurred during the marking process and before the first Examiners' Meeting. After that Meeting, more re-reading took place: of 19 scripts in borderline profiles; of 5 failed scripts; of 5 where queries had arisen; and of 10 where the script had been flagged as Short Weight. The reason for this re-reading in connection with Short Weight was to make sure that the criteria for the imposition of penalties had been applied consistently. If a script is lacking a whole answer then the imposition of a Short-Weight penalty is straightforward. But if it merely has one answer that is shorter than the others then the distinction between 'Short Weight' and merely 'short' can be hard to be certain about, especially as some candidates routinely write more than others. It may be helpful for the Faculty to consider whether the definition of Short Weight can be sharpened for the benefit of future Examiners. Nevertheless it is worth noting that, however detailed the definition of Short Weight in the marking criteria, there are always likely to be borderline cases where re-reading will be advisable.

The arrangements for taking account of specific learning difficulties, factors affecting performance and permission for handing in assignments late did work this year; but they were complicated, and demanded a great deal of time and careful attention from the Examiners and Examinations Secretary. As in past years, candidates with specific learning difficulties recorded them on pink forms which they attached to the front of their scripts. When candidates handed in their Paper 1 Portfolios late (with or

without Proctoral permission) the Chair and Examinations Secretary received emails from the Proctors adjudicating as to whether or not a penalty should be applied. Proctoral permission for alternative arrangements for sitting the examinations was communicated in the same way. Finally, as last year, candidates were able to submit Factors Affecting Performance forms to document anything that had, or might have had, an adverse effect upon them. The Chair and Examinations secretary were alerted to each such submission by email; but the forms themselves, and supporting documentation, were stored in an electronic database. There were, therefore, three separate routes, in different media, for communicating related information.

Each of these channels is subject to glitches, and the lack of connection between them compounds the potential for error. It is the responsibility of candidates to request paper Specific Learning Difficulty Forms in the examination hall. The invigilators and other staff bagging and transporting the scripts then need to be careful that the SpLD forms do not fall off; and markers have to take care to note the presence of such forms on their comment sheets, and to transfer that information to the marks sheets. Proctoral permissions and penalties come by email and need to be recorded by the Chair and Examinations Secretary: there is always the possibility that they may go astray or arrive late (two emails communicating Proctoral penalties for late submission of Paper 1 came through on the evening before the Final Marks Meeting, four days after the Medical and Special Cases Committee at which they ought to have been considered, and six weeks after the penalised latenesses occurred). Factors affecting performance are documented in a database where each form and each piece of supporting material has to be clicked on separately in order to be read or printed. Proctoral permissions and penalties, and Factors Affecting Performance Forms are organised by student number; Specific Learning Difficulty Forms are organised by candidate number (which is different). It is left to the Examiners to find out whether a candidate submitting a FAP Form has also been given a Proctoral permission or penalty and/or completed a SpLD Form. The Examiners feel confident that all these complications did not cause error this year; but it may be worth considering whether the system might be simplified and better integrated for the future.

During the examination period for Paper 1, access to one of the databases routinely used by candidates for Section A (the Brigham Young interface for the British National Corpus) was interrupted for a short time because Brigham Young had redesigned their website. Candidates were advised about the difficulty by email and the Examiners took account of it during the marking process.

As the healthy number of Distinctions indicates, the Examiners were, overall, impressed by the quality of work produced by candidates this year. The reports on individual Papers which follow give evidence of welcome trends. Candidates engaged in much attentive close reading; and they discussed a wide range of texts, both more and less canonical, including much American and Anglophone World Literature, and some texts in other languages and translation. The commentary and concept-oriented questions in Paper 1 were handled with confidence, and there were signs that the skills inculcated by that Paper had spread into work done for the rest of the Examination.

1.1.3 Conventions and Classification Criteria

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

1.2 PART II

1.2.1 Administration

The Mark-It database was used for the processing of marks, and E-vision for the recording of class lists and related data. Paper 1 was posted on Weblearn as a downloadable file at noon on Monday of week 4 of Trinity Term and the link was sent to candidates by email. Candidates were also given the option of collecting a hard copy from the Examinations Secretary on the same day if they were unable to access the paper electronically. In addition to submitting paper copies of their completed portfolios to the examination schools, candidates sent an electronic version of their portfolio to an email address accessible by the Examinations Secretary, inserting their candidate numbers in the subject-line. This method of electronic submission has now run smoothly for three years.

The Board records its heartfelt thanks to Angie Johnson, the Examinations Secretary, who exhibited her usual patient mastery of the electronic databases, knowledge of the intricacies of the examinations process, and tact in the handling of queries from candidates and communications with other faculties, the UAS Taught Degrees team and the Examination Schools. This was an especially arduous year as Ms Johnson was working without an assistant; the Board would like to record its gratitude to Andy Davice, the Faculty's Academic Administrator, for deputising in this role.

The Board comprised five permanent postholders and one departmental lecturer. The Assessors likewise comprised five permanent postholders and one departmental lecturer. One Assessor originally appointed had to withdraw from marking as she had been summoned to do jury service; a substitute kindly stepped in, with permission from the Proctors. One Examiner was unable to complete a full load of marking for personal reasons: the scripts were shared out among other members of the Board.

1.2.2 Breakdown of the Results by Gender

Candidates	2016	%
All Genders	224	100

Women	151	67
Men	73	33
Distinctions		
All	57	
Women	33	58 (22% of women)
Men	24	42 (33% of men)

PAST STATISTICS: Prelims

Candidates	2015	%	2014	%	2013	%
All Genders	228	100	234	100	235	100
Women	151	66	160	68.37	146	62.1
Men	77	34	74	31.62	89	37.9
Distinctions	Number	%	number	%	number	%
All	57	25	59	100	46	100
Women	40	70 (27% of women)	35	59 (22% of women)	28	61 (19% of women)
Men	17	30 (22% of men)	24	41 (32% of men)	18	39 (20% of men)

PAST STATISTICS: Moderations

		2012	2011
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Total no.	Women	135 (61%)	140 (63%)
Total no.	Men	85 (39%)	84 (38%)
Distinctions	Both genders	51 (23%)	48 (21%)
Of which:	Women	28 (21%)	27 (19%)
	Men	23 (27%)	21 (25%)

This year, 151 women and 73 men sat the examination. 58% of Distinctions were secured by women, and 42% by men; in other words, 22% of women attained Distinctions, and 33% of men. The percentages of each gender attaining Distinctions in recent years have been: women 27% / men 22% (2015); women 22% / men 32% (2014); women 19% / men 20% (2013). It is to be expected that, with our comparatively small numbers, percentages will vary quite widely from year to year: for instance, a variation of 10% in the percentage of men attaining distinctions is a matter of seven individuals rising above or dropping below the borderline. The group of men is much smaller than the group of women; correspondingly, the percentage of men attaining Distinctions has varied more widely (between 20% and 33% in recent years, as against variation between 19% and 27% for women).

In the absence of any information about the relevant contextual factors (eg. performance at school and at admissions) it is impossible, in this Examiners' Report, to offer any grounded interpretation of the figures recorded. One fact worth noting, however, is that, just like last year, there was no significant disparity between the differential performance of men and women in Paper 1, which is examined by portfolio, and the ensemble of the other Papers, which are traditional timed exams. The figures for distinction-level marks are: Paper 1 – women 20% / men 28%; Paper 2 – women 25% / men 26%; Paper 3 – women 22% / men 25%; Paper 4 – women 21% / men 31%.

1.3 PART III

1.3.1 Paper 1: Introduction to Language and Literature

1.3.1.1 Section A

All the questions attracted a fair number of takers and the standard overall was impressive, with a lot of well informed and sharply perceptive commentary being done. Texts from a wide range of language-use were chosen for analysis, and good work was produced across the spectrum. Shortcomings, where they appeared, were along the same lines as in previous years. Some commentaries seemed pre-prepared and did not sufficiently respond to the question. Some were more like essays and referred only glancingly to their chosen texts. Some did not command the meta-language needed for accurate linguistic analysis. But the large majority of answers did rise to the challenge of the particular discipline of language commentary, offering focused and detailed analysis that responded to the prompt of the question and/or quotation.

Corpora and other electronic resources were used adeptly by many candidates, though sometimes material from databases was offered as a substitute for analysis rather than as evidence to build on; occasionally it was simply irrelevant. Candidates were not always alert to the historical moment of the resources they are using: for instance, the British National Corpus does not provide linguistic context for texts from the eighteenth century. Some work on metaphor lapsed into exposition of conceptual metaphor theory, to the detriment of the commentary; some work on dialects focused on frequently-analysed texts about which it was hard to say anything fresh. The choice of texts is a crucial element of the commentary exercise: a surprising and illuminating pairing is already part of the way to a successful answer; conversely, it is hard for a commentary to shine when the texts chosen are obvious or already much discussed.

Overall, much careful and enterprising work was done. The best answers were able to bring their analysis into dialogue with theoretical frames so as to offer incisive, even exhilarating responses to the questions.

1.3.1.2 Section B

All answers on section B were attempted at least once this year, and the overall standard was good. The best answers were sophisticated, enterprising, and creative, but even the middling and less successful essays often showed a good sense of the critical debate(s) within which the student was working. In comparison with the average mark for section A (65.59), answers for section B averaged at 66.33. The overall numbers for marks of 70 or above for each section were almost identical (64 and 63 respectively).

Given the wide range of approaches that might be taken for section B, it is perhaps helpful to reiterate (and to extend) comments from a previous examiners' report. Approaches to this section included:

- using the question as a prompt for a critical discussion of the work of one or more theorists.
- offering a wide-ranging theoretical discussion augmented by literary examples.
- using literary text(s) as a way of interrogating theoretical positions and stances, and/or proposing literature as theory (exploring the text(s) in their own conceptualising terms).
- outlining and developing the literary 'in' theory (i.e. reading theory with the interpretative frameworks usually reserved for literary texts, and examining relatable principles of structure, composition, and hermeneutics).

All approaches were treated equally by the examiners and all approaches found some candidates reaching distinction level. Having said this, the best answers did tend to engage with specific details of literary style and form in order to ground and to develop their conceptual arguments. On occasion, the literary examples were too scattershot (and/or too wide ranging) to allow the student to advance a properly focused and coherent argument within the limits of a 2000-word essay.

Another quality that tended to distinguish distinction-level work from other answers was a student's willingness to formulate *their own* argument in relation to the material. Many answers ably set out and described a range of theoretical/critical perspectives on a topic, but often these answers felt more like a survey or a tour of the area, rather than a sustained critical engagement with it. Students who simply presented other theorists' viewpoints fared less well than those who showed how their own arguments and readings met and parted company with the theory. It was also notable that a number of candidates seemed wary of venturing beyond a small selection of canonical theoretical essays such as 'The Death of the Author' and 'The Laugh of the Medusa'.

A common problem in several of the weaker answers was a loose (sometimes even barely existent) relationship between the question and the essay. On occasion, what appeared to be a practice tutorial essay on a quite different topic seemed to have been levered into this assignment with (at the very most) pro-forma introductory gestures towards relevance. While examiners were willing to allow students some latitude in regard to how they chose to interpret questions, they did expect students to provide a rationale for their approach, and to provide an explanation of how his/her angle could be seen as a legitimate one in the light of the question. Students were unlikely to score high marks where their argument was clearly straining against the topic. On some occasions, students made no reference at all to the terms of the question; some answers to question 9 (which asked specifically about 'literary texts') did not examine any literary texts; some answers to question 7 (which asked for consideration of the novel and/or any narrative form) avoided any discussion of narrative.

A final observation relevant to both sections of the Paper: examiners noted the lack of care with referencing and with standards of scholarly presentation on a number of scripts. In several cases, forms of referencing were not consistent and presentation was slapdash.

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

The standard of scripts for this paper was generally very good, with a higher percentage of candidates achieving marks over 70 than last year. The best work demonstrated a deep and sustained engagement with a range of texts including but not limited to the set commentary texts, as well as sensitivity towards wider literary, cultural, historical and social concerns. Weaker scripts were limited in range, with some violating the rubric which clearly states that candidates must engage substantially with *at least three texts across the two essays*, and displayed only superficial awareness of critical issues.

The most popular of the commentary texts by far was *The Dream of the Rood*, though a substantial number of students also wrote on the *Beowulf* extract. There were no commentaries on the Early Middle English set texts. While most candidates were able to identify the extracts and place them within their relevant literary context, many commentaries also showed a welcome ambition to engage with form and Old English poetic style, as well as content. There was some loose handling of terms including kenning, envelope-pattern and hypermetric lines. The last in particular was often used to describe any line with many syllables, irrespective of number of stresses. Also, quite a few candidates seemed not to be aware that all vowels alliterate with one another. Disappointingly few students were able to discuss with any confidence the metre of the Old English commentary texts (e.g. Sievers' 5-types) or to say anything substantial about apposition or variation.

The essays covered an impressive range of texts, from across the whole 650-1350 period. It was pleasing to see students willing to engage with a very wide range of texts in the essays, including saints' lives (both prose and verse), biblical poetry, wisdom poetry, romances, chronicles and battle poems, as well as the ever popular Exeter Book elegies and the set texts. The majority of essays focused on pre-Conquest material and the most popular questions were on transience, heroism and death, monsters and gender; few students wrote on (or demonstrated sensitivity to) manuscript or historical context. This paper covers a much longer period than any other on the English syllabus and it is therefore especially important to place texts in their appropriate historical and literary context whenever it is known: weaker scripts tended to conflate early and late Anglo-Saxon texts, despite the period spanning some four centuries, or to treat pre- and post-conquest materials indiscriminately as if they were the products of the same, unchanging literary culture. But despite the dominance of Anglo-Saxon material, a significant number of candidates also wrote well on Early Middle English texts, in particular romances and *Ancrene Wisse*, though there were very few essays on *The Owl and the Nightingale* or *Sir Orfeo* and hardly any on Layamon or *Havelock*.

Some candidates failed to engage directly with the question, producing pre-prepared essays rather than considered responses. The worst scripts failed to engage with early medieval texts in the original language, and used only modern translation.. In cases where it was clear that students had no understanding of either Old or Early Middle English language scripts were failed.

1.3.3 Paper 3: Literature in English 1830-1910

There was a good deal of evidence that candidates taking this paper had read broadly, thought carefully, and were able to write critically about the period's literature in responsive and discriminating ways. The best answers tended to stake out a critical position in the opening of each essay, before going on to pursue it with some close analysis of textual evidence. The most impressive work also showed a fine command of its material – and the period as a whole – by drawing on a wide range of non-canonical writings, both literary and non-literary. Theoretical approaches were applied in sensitive and encouraging ways on the rare occasions they were used.

Competent but not excellent essays often provided too much commentary and summary – especially of the plots of novels, or moral judgments of characters – which then obscured a developing argument. There was also a good deal of generalization along the lines of 'Victorian culture' or what 'the Victorians believed', which was often inaccurate or impossible to back up with appropriate evidence. Weaker answers made no reference to the title quotation, or did so in bizarre and obviously strained ways (the Carroll quotation of Q 4 was the one most often stretched in this way). They also made no reference to the fact they might be writing across genres, and so why texts as diverse as (for example) Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* might take the form respectively of a play, an essay, and a novel – or why such distinctions might matter.

All the questions were attempted, although not always in a way that made it clear the candidate had thought about the full implications of the quotation: sometimes it was used, with greater or lesser degrees of ingenuity, as a peg to hang a rather different essay on. In many cases it was disappointing to see the same narrow range of literary authors being wheeled out (particularly George Eliot, Wilde, and the Brontës), or an even narrower range of literary texts (Conrad was again represented almost exclusively by *Heart of Darkness*, as James was by *The Turn of the Screw*). A number of candidates infringed, or were perilously close to infringing, the rubric restriction against writing 'more than one essay substantially on the same author': it is worth emphasising that this rubric does indeed apply to authors (e.g. Dickens) and not just specific works (e.g. *Great Expectations*). Lack of range was also a specific problem in the case of those candidates who chose to write essays that referred only to a very small number of examples, but without reading them closely enough to justify this level of focus. A number of answers focused on an author's major 'themes', particularly when discussing prose fiction, and these tended to do less well than answers that avoided such generalizations or put them to the test by closely examining matters of literary style, genre, etc. Such essays allowed the candidates to show that they were at once aware of well-thumbed critical books (e.g. *The Madwoman in the Attic*) and willing to offer a more original alternative. Where candidates included dates these were far too often approximate; several great Victorian works were apparently written after the end of WWII.

One item to note this year is the number of candidates who were prepared to tackle a selection of American authors, particularly Poe, Hawthorne, Dickinson, and Melville. These essays were often sophisticated and critically nuanced, and they

continue a welcome trend in the geographical expansion of the paper within the revised course.

1.3.4 Paper 4: Literature in English 1910 to the present day

All the questions were attempted. No. 3 was by some way the most popular; nos 1, 6, 7 and 12 were also frequently chosen. Each question was answered in a range of ways and with varying success. The best performances displayed thorough knowledge, intellectual sophistication and critical acuity, and the whole run of papers gave evidence of very wide ranging study of the period, and a good deal of readerly attentiveness.

One element that differentiated the stronger from the weaker essays was the level of engagement with the question. Writers of the less good essays seemed not to have stopped to try to understand the question and / or quotation – to probe and problematise it. In the worst cases, candidates took a single word and hung their material on that. On the other hand, there were many candidates who seemed to be thinking afresh in response to the prompts that had been given them.

Very many essays took the form of discussions of single authors. This tactic allowed the better candidates to bring an impressive level of detail onto the page while framing it in intellectual and / or historical contexts; but weaker essays taking this path tended to lapse into a chronological narrative summarising plots and themes. It sometimes seemed that essays that moved across authors found it easier to build arguments since they had to work to justify the connections they were making. On the other hand, this type of essay could turn out weak as well as strong: sometimes disparate texts were brought together for no apparent reason.

A lot of alert reading of literary texts was evident in this year's scripts. There were strong answers on poetry throughout the period – and these usually showed a sensitive close analysis of figurative language, voice, and tone. In contrast, it was disappointing how little writing on prose authors searchingly explored narrative method; and there was surprisingly little attention to theoretical or conceptual frameworks, and literary criticism and scholarship. Answers on the topic of war often had a good historical grounding, with some of the better students choosing to consider conflicts beyond World War 1 (e.g. the Spanish Civil War or the Vietnam War) or to approach the topic from an interesting angle (e.g. women's mixed experience of war). Elsewhere, responses were generally a bit thin on context, whether intellectual or socio-political.

There was less work than might have been expected on interactions between literature and other media. Woolf was by some distance the most popular author, followed by Eliot, Joyce, Yeats, and Beckett. Nevertheless, the range of authors treated overall was fairly diverse, both ethnically and geographically, with American and Anglophone world literatures being frequently discussed. Some candidates made the most of the permission to spend part of their scripts discussing translations and writing in foreign languages. At its best, the work showed an assured handling of the intellectual contexts and primary texts, authoritative arguments (backed up with evidence) and skilful close readings.

Authors discussed included the following: Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Yeats, Synge, O'Casey, Mansfield, Hardy, Lawrence, Joyce, Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Cummings, Forster, Ford, Loy, Auden, MacNeice, Frost, Glaspell, Bowen, Henry Green, Waugh, Orwell, Huxley, Plath, Ted Hughes, Wallace Stevens, Langston Hughes, Ginsberg, Edward Thomas, Dylan Thomas, Coetzee, Morrison, Lovelace, Carter, Duffy, McEwan, Ballard, O'Hara, Beckett, Pinter, Churchill, Kane, Miller, Williams, Wolfe, Thompson, Ellis, Roth, Ashbery, Nabokov, Kerouac, Rodker, Pynchon, Vonnegut, Rushdie, Atwood, Faulkner, Heaney, Brink, Gass, Lovecraft, Hansberry, Blixen, Banville, Selvon, Naipaul, Le Guin, Ishiguro, Updike, Fugard, Bishop, Brenton, Ravenhill, Churchill, Larkin, Morrison, Mirrlees, Lardner, R. F. Langley, Mary Borden, Walcott, Zadie Smith, Berryman, Grace Nichols, Edward Brathwaite, Linton Kwesi Johnson, BS Johnson, Adichie, Boland, Lydia Davis, Claire-Louise Bennett, Anne Carson, Martin Crimp, Hanif Kureishi, B. S. Johnson, Ann Quin, Claudia Rankine, Tracy K. Smith, James Agee, Joan Didion, Michael Robbins, Sarah Howe, Jean Toomer, Andrea Levy, James Kelman, Emily Berry, R. S. Thomas, Marilynne Robinson, Mina Loy, Radclyffe Hall, Mira Gonzalez.

1.4 PART IV – JOINT SCHOOLS

1.4.1 Classics & English Preliminary

There were seven candidates.

1.4.1.1 Paper I (Introduction to English Language and Literature)

See the report of the Examiners in English Prelims.

1.4.1.2 Paper II (Literature in English 1550–1660, excluding the plays of Shakespeare)

There were seven candidates for this paper. Almost all of the questions were attempted (with the exception of 8, 12, and 13); only one question (10) received more than two answers. The candidates addressed a surprisingly narrow range of topics: five candidates wrote on *Astrophil and Stella* (in response to a variety of questions), and other popular topics included Jonson's comedies, Marvell, Spenser, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and *The Spanish Tragedy*. Donne, Herbert, and Marlowe's 'Hero and Leander' also appeared in multiple answers, while Vaughan, Bacon, Montaigne, and Elizabeth I were rarer. Though originality is of course demonstrated through ideas and argument rather than content, candidates for this paper are welcome to explore the period's literature widely and consider less standard groupings of texts. Almost all answers demonstrated good knowledge of the works under consideration and were sound in the exposition of information; what distinguished the best scripts was a sense of literary, cultural, or critical context, an incisive and creative engagement with the question and its implications, and force of argument. Weaker answers tended to neglect the question, taking it as a thematic prompt rather than an issue for adjudication, and to describe rather than argue or make a case about the texts discussed. It was very pleasing to see almost all candidates fluently and confidently making apt and fruitful links between Classical and early modern literature, and benefitting from the comparative aspects of this course.

1.4.1.3 Paper III (Latin and Greek Unseen Translation)

70-84: —

40-69: 7 candidates.

39 and below: —

Two candidates attempted the Greek passages, the remaining five the Latin. The abstract arguments of the Euripides passage proved more testing than the Plato, once the latter had settled down into cosy story-telling mode. Nonetheless, careless inattention to what word went with what muddled the fact that *seismou* went with the previous genitive absolute and not with the infinitive *ῥαγῆναι* (subject *τι*), and succeeded in obfuscating the last clause ('they spoke about him as of one who was absent'). Two candidates came very near distinction standard in the Latin passages, with the narrative character of the Pliny passage once again producing a generally more robust response (despite the odd items of challenging vocabulary, such as *focilatus*) than the argumentative Lucretius. Very few candidates indeed divined that *domini* in the last clause was nominative plural not genitive singular.

1.4.1.4 Paper IV (Essays)

70-84: 2 candidates

40-69: 5 candidates.

39 and below: —

Nine out of the twelve questions on the paper were answered; the exceptions were 1 (on oral poetics), 5 (on oral literature and Herodotus) and 8 (on the characterisation of Petronius' Encolpius). The most popular question was 7, on the influence of genre on the portraits of women in the Latin authors on the syllabus, though it did not necessarily produce the strongest answers (candidates often fell into circularity: *x* is characteristic of elegy because it is in Catullus and Propertius, and therefore it is characteristic of elegy). Answers to no. 11 (on the interplay of genres) similarly suggested an insufficiently robust conception of genre (e.g. Herodotus reflects the influence of 'philosophy'), and in general candidates were only well-advised to answer questions which probed for abstract concepts if they understood the full implications of what was being asked (Homeric 'objectivity' is not about Homer's accuracy as a war reporter). The best answers displayed those two obvious components, knowledge (as in the commentary paper) and the ability to weld it into an argumentative structure (as opposed to copious miscellanea). In practice, this produced some excellent answers on, for example, the creative adaptation of myth, and weaker ones on the chorus of the *Bacchae* (where formal matters were almost entirely off the agenda except for a passing reference to Ionic).

1.4.1.5 Paper V (Translation and Commentary)

70-84: 2 candidates

40-69: 5 candidates.

39 and below: —

Two candidates confined themselves to Greek answers; another two answered a combination of Greek and Latin; the remainder confined themselves to Latin. All questions on the paper were answered by at least one candidate, except for 2b (Aristophanes); the most popular was 2c (Propertius).

In general there was insufficient evidence of vocabulary-learning, which would undoubtedly have helped with the prepared translation. This was particularly the case in Homer, and resulted in guesses at formulae that sounded vaguely plausible but were wrong, or were based on slippage from one word to another that sounded vaguely similar e.g. γλαφυρήσι (hollow, of ships) is not the same word as glaukōpis ('grey-eyed (Athena)'). A typical error across both languages was the garbling of proper names. Achilles' homeland should be transliterated 'Phthia' – not Pthia or Pythia; Aeacids should not be transmogrified into Achaeans; whereas working back from genitive Eurotae to Eurota (rather than the correct Eurotas) shows lack of knowledge of the geography of the Peloponnese.

It should be emphasised that the best translations were almost error-free. On the other hand, the weakest were prone to confuse one word with another that sounded similar (Bacch. 1122 ἄφρον is 'foam' not 'out of her mind', 1123 κόρας is 'eyelids' not 'girls') and paid no attention to endings (Il. 18.206 φλόγα παμφανώωσαν, 'flames' as if the noun were neuter plural; Bacch. 1114 ἱερέα φόνου is not 'holy murder'; 1131 βακχῶν is not a participle). Such errors could have been fixed, and consequently marks need not have been lost, with more effective vocabulary-learning.

The accuracy of a translation was usually a good indication of the adequacy of the commentary that followed. The best commentaries had lots to say about the contribution of the passage to the themes of the work as a whole, the poetical and rhetorical strategies of the author, the historical background, and other macroscopic matters, as well as close-focus comment on nuance and literary form. As ever, the weak answer commented mechanistically (the number of occurrences of a particular item within a passage) and compensated for lack of things to say by over-reading (an especial risk with Homeric formulae) and over-subtle but duff psychologisation. The strong answer, on the other hand — and these were in evidence on this paper — was not only sensitive as a piece of literary criticism, but also able to comment on formal matters (narratological considerations such as the difference between character and narrator text, narrative devices such as retardation; stylistic devices such as polysyndeton or the priamel) and able to explain mythographical, geographical, and other references.

J. L. Lightfoot (Chair)

1.4.2 English & Modern Languages Preliminary

1.4.2.1 Statistics

	2015/16		2014/15		2013/14	
Language	Distinction	Total	Distinction	Total	Distinction	Total
French	2	12	1	5	4	13
German	1	2	5	7	2	3
Italian	1	4				
Modern Greek		1	1	1		
Portuguese			1	1		
Russian		1		1		
Spanish		3		3		1
TOTAL	4	23	8	18	6	17

There were 23 candidates and 4 distinctions.

1.4.3 History & English Preliminary

Three of the eight candidates achieved a distinction.

1.4.3.1 History and English Prelims: paper 3b

All eight History and English candidates submitted the English Language and Literature Portfolio; three achieved a first class mark on this paper. Within the compulsory section 3b, where the questions are set to reflect the methodological concerns and interdisciplinary interests of the Joint School of History and English, questions 3, 4, 5 and 7 were attempted, with a wide range of textual and theoretical interests adduced. All candidates showed sound awareness of historiographical and interdisciplinary arguments and the best of the work was highly sophisticated and sharply acute.

2 FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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

This year saw the embedding of the Faculty's revised syllabus; there are now no candidates left on 'old' regulations going forward. Once again I record my profound thanks to the FHS Board, the Deputy Chair, Professor David Womersley, and our externals for their help, wisdom and generosity with their time and expertise. Angie Johnson, as ever, deserves the Chair's, Board's and the Faculty's heartfelt thanks for the care she brings to a complex job and her valuable eye for detail. My thanks also to the staff of the Examination Schools and the Proctors' Office for their calm and efficient help and facilitation of the examination process. The Board congratulates this year's FHS cohort on the successful completion of their course; the enthusiasm and knowledge brought to the task by candidates and their tutors were much in evidence. We note with particular pleasure the smattering of comments from examiners concerning the work at or near Master's level that was seen in some papers.

This year several markers reported reading work in timed scripts that seemed to be very closely based on lectures given in the Faculty. It seemed that some candidates were not exercising the same level of independent thought about material they receive in lectures as they would about information from other sources. The University's policy on the specific circumstances in which the recording of lectures is permitted should be adhered to at all times. Other candidates suffered significant penalties due to the late submission of papers examined by submitted work: the Humanities divisional framework for penalties for late submission is laid out in the Circular to Tutors and candidates each year.

While the Board felt that in general our current system of using quotation themes for timed examination papers was working well – drawing out in many cases work of sharp sophistication – several examiners' reports note that some candidates paid little attention in their answers to the precise terms of the themes (as instructed by the paper rubrics). Perhaps further guidance might be given by the Faculty on how to handle quotation themes, for example in the form of enhanced advice in the Undergraduate Handbooks for English.

2.1 Statistics

There were 231 candidates, 16 of whom took Course 2.

Outcome	1st	2.1	2.2	3	Pass
Numbers	72	156	3	0	0

Percentages including recent years:

	1 st	2.1	2.2	3	Pass
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%
2016	31.2%	67.5%	1.3%	0%	0%

67 standard route Firsts and 5 alternative route Firsts were awarded this year.

We were not surprised to see a small uplift in the number of Firsts awarded compared to last year, given the time that the revised syllabus has now had to establish itself; the total remains in line with the recent figures.

2.2 Examiners and assessors

As ever, a large number of people (85 this year) marked FHS scripts and submissions. Last year's report noted the increase in the number of markers recruited for the Shakespeare portfolio: the same number was used this year, and the system worked well. A similar increase in marker numbers was rolled out this year for the large Course I period papers, and this too helped to spread the workload more equitably. The 'semi-circular' system instituted last year to blur the boundaries between marking pairs was again used successfully, and is commended to future Boards. Our processes for double-blind and third marking worked very well and the statistical material provided at the first meeting on marker profiles and the distribution of marks across papers was carefully considered. Borderline and other cases were identified in advance of the first marks meeting and were individually scrutinised not only for their place in the rank order, but in comparison with others with similar marks profiles and averages. Between the first and second marks meetings six scripts/submissions were marked a further time. Externals read the entire runs of eight candidates, including the top 1sts in Course I and Course II, representative runs in each class, and those either side of the class boundaries. All candidates were given individual discussion in the first and second marks meetings, and the marks and classifications were confirmed by the Board before the class list was released.

2.3 Medical and Special cases

This was the second year of the University's Factors Affecting Performance (FAP) statements. A Medical and Special Cases sub-committee of the Board met in advance of the first marks meeting to consider the FAP applications and other cases; its role was to recommend to the Board what, if any, action should be taken. When considering the FAP applications the sub-committee also took into account any

Alternative Arrangements made for the relevant candidates and any communications from the Proctors' Office regarding submitted work or other matters.

2.4 Gender

Gender statistics were monitored as usual and were discussed in detail by the Board. Overall statistics are as follows:

FEMALE

	I	IIi	II.ii	III	Pass	Fail		Total
	38	118	2	0	0	0		158
%	24.1	74.7	1.3	0	0	0		100

MALE

	I	II.i	II.ii	III	Pass	Fail		Total
	34	38	1	0	0	0		73
%	46.6	52.1	1.4	0	0	0		100

COMBINED

	I	II.i	II.ii	III	Pass	Fail		Total
	72	156	3	0	0	0		231
%	31.2	67.5	1.3	0	0	0		100

The Board noted the increase in the percentage of male candidates awarded a first (2015: female (23.5%), male (34.3 %)). The actual numbers remain almost the same (2015: female (36); male (34), of a cohort of 252).

2.5 Training

The Chair held a training session in Trinity term, mainly for those new to Oxford marking, and provided individual advice throughout the year as needed.

2.6 Prizes

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

Best overall performance in Course I of the Honour School: Fergus Mcghee, Harris Manchester College

Best overall performance in Course II of the Honour School, and Best performance in a three hour timed examination: James Strawbridge, Lady Margaret Hall

Best extended essay, Paper 6, and Distinguished Performance: Ellen Ellis, Balliol College

Best dissertation, Paper 7: Violet Adams, St John's College

Distinguished Performances:

Frazer Hembrow, New College

Ryan Diamond, Balliol College

Joseph Hankinson, Balliol College

Mathis Clement, Trinity College

Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize: Frazer Hembrow, New College

Passmore Edwards Award, Classics and English: Jacob Warn, Oriel College

2.7 REPORTS ON INDIVIDUAL PAPERS

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

2.8 COURSE I

2.8.1 Paper 1 Shakespeare Portfolio

249 students took this paper – including 16 English and Modern Languages, 5 Classics and English and 5 History and English. As last year, a large number of candidates rose to the challenge of the portfolio format to produce original and thoughtful work, with the best performances reaching Master's standards. It was clear that the increase in word-limit had a definitely positive effect, allowing candidates to develop their arguments more fully; possibly for the same reason the work this year tended to be more varied and adventurous than last. The down side was that some candidates were overly ambitious, attempting to do more than could comfortably be accommodated in the essay format. The highest grades were awarded for a combination of originality and rigour of analysis, evident in the

candidates' choice of topic, assurance of treatment, articulacy of expression and ability to read texts closely.

While the majority of essays dealt with the drama, there were some exceptionally good pieces on the narrative and lyric poetry, displaying expert knowledge of form and style. Some almost publishable work was forthcoming on particular tropes, images, metaphors or examples of ekphrasis (particularly in *Titus* and *Lucrece*). Within the drama a wide range of plays and genres was attempted with many candidates demonstrating quite a detailed knowledge of the textual problems and the conditions of Early Modern performance. There were some particularly good studies of film adaptation and the literary and cultural reception of Shakespeare generally. Some of the best work was on such technical topics as music, song, dance, rhetoric, editorial practice, and stage-craft. However, some such essays showed a tendency to lose their focus on Shakespeare and become instead generalized studies of the topic with only tangential relevance to the poetry or drama. Some candidates failed to prioritize the primary texts.

There were some excellent submissions that thought hard about the distinctiveness and particularity of dramatic form, about theatre as a multi-instrumental event, and about how plays express, recover, or shape history. Some of the best candidates mobilised a range of criticism and/or critical theory – old, new, and sometimes unexpected – across their portfolios, not using such work as authority for their own, but helping them to define and contextualise what might be at stake. By contrast, while there was some trenchant, politically engaged work from a feminist perspective, essays on gender tended to be rather predictable and, in some cases, overly dependent on secondary reading. Generally speaking, and allowing for certain striking exceptions, knowledge of the historical and political background was often less secure than might be expected, and studies in genre and the use of source materials were relatively unsophisticated. Similarly, while many candidates supported their points with reference to recent productions, there was an unfortunate tendency to advance such productions as decisive evidence for an interpretation of the plays concerned.

The best essays cogently defined their topics and approaches at the outset, maintained a clear focus throughout, and engaged with the critical literature in an intelligent and judicious manner, entering into genuine dialogue with the authorities they cited. At the other end of the scale candidates struggled to identify a theme or methodology, used critical quotation in lieu of argument, relied too heavily on lecture notes, and seemed to exercise little judgement in the choice of secondary literature, using what was to hand rather than attempting to construct a bibliography specific to their project. As a result, quite a few struggled to structure their essays coherently and, in trying to find middle ground between incompatible critical positions, created confusion rather than sensible compromise. The use of current, scholarly, up-to-date editions of Shakespeare, unless there was a clear reason not to do so (e.g. when the essay concerned historical editing) helped to secure quality answers. So too did an awareness when citing critical studies and commentaries of the historical contexts in which they were produced, and a clear discrimination between past and present modes of critical discourse. The overall level of formal presentation was high, but a number of candidates showed little consistency in footnoting and provided

surprisingly slight bibliographies. Such details deserve attention and are important requirements of the portfolio format.

2.8.2 Paper 2 (CII Paper 3) 1350-1550

235 candidates took this Paper – including 3 English and Modern Languages, 2 Classics and English and 1 History and English. As last year, the most popular commentary passage by far was the first, (1(a)), this year taken from Book 1. Many candidates noticed the importance of the direction of gaze in the passage, and the objectification of Criseyde, as well as Troilus's arrogance, features which pertain to the clear gendering of the characters, located as they are in a public setting. Criseyde's widow's weeds were commented on, though fewer noticed that she was 'under a cloud' on account of the disgrace brought upon her by her father's treachery. The most observant commentators noticed the contradictions presented by a character who is hanging back from the crowd, but whose manner is yet 'assured'. More could have been said about the religious, as well as amatory, significance of such words as 'devocioun,' 'observaunces' and 'penaunces' (though the ostentatiousness of the rhymes was much discussed). The likening of Criseyde to the first letter of the alphabet taxed the ingenuity of many. The second passage elicited much comment on Troilus's 'melodrama', and his construction of his own narrative for posterity; the best commentators noted the public as well as private nature of Troilus's bequests to the gods, and funeral arrangements. Few recognised the significance of the bequest to 'Pallas', or who she was. On the whole Chaucer's language was understood, with few egregious errors. Candidates have evidently taken to heart advice in the past not to neglect poetic technique; in a significant number of cases rhyme and scansion was discussed to the detriment of the content: a balance needs to be struck. It was pleasing to see the evident engagement with the characters (with much generous indignation on Criseyde's behalf) and enjoyment of the dynamics of the scenes. The comment made by last year's examiners stands: the best work was fluent and confident, showing familiarity with Chaucer's sources, as well as sophisticated and subtle appreciation of form and versification, combined with detailed, well informed comment on register and vocabulary (e.g. that the second passage contains the first recorded instance of that exotic vessel called an 'urne'). Weak answers were not sufficiently focused on the passage under discussion, and such candidates often spent too long describing the story so far, rather than getting down to business.

Taken all together, the chronological range and variety of texts discussed was impressive: from Rolle to More, taking in ballads, Hoccleve, Henryson and Dunbar, as well as the familiar fourteenth-century figures. There was some excellent work on the early sixteenth-century writers, amongst whom Wyatt was the most popular (in part thanks to the accessible biography by Susan Brigden, as well as the intrinsic appeal of his poems), but Skelton, Medwall, Surrey and More were also discussed. The early Tudor component of this paper is clearly no longer seen as an add-on to a 'medieval' paper. Weak answers on Wyatt failed to convey the range and extent of his writing: a discussion of 'They flee from me' and 'Whoso list to hunt' cannot be considered adequate. Close textual reading needs to be combined with well informed and relevant contextual awareness, and evidence needs to be given (not merely by name-dropping) of wide reading. Chaucer, the *Gawain*-poet, and Malory continue to be popular choices, though there was an evident reluctance to engage significantly with *The Canterbury Tales*. It may be that candidates feel that they will

not exhibit sufficient range of reading if they write on the *Tales* in addition to the *Troilus* commentary, if so, this was not the intention in devising the paper, and the effect is that a major text from the period is being neglected. Chaucer's dream poems, as well as *The Legend of Good Women* (tales, as well as Prologue), were far more popular. It was pleasing to see that, in support of this material, candidates had also studied a range of less well-known dream poems, such as Lydgate's 'Temple of Glas', *The Kyngis Quair*, and *The Floure and the Leafe*.

There were strong answers on Langland, showing an impressive familiarity with the poem and its intellectual and cultural context. Drama was popular: candidates showed that they had read a range of material from the big mystery cycles, though the same highlights from the York and Chester plays tended to be picked, especially the York Crucifixion Play, along with the N-Town *Mary Play*. *Mankind* and *Everyman*, along with other 'morality' plays were often discussed alongside the civic pageants, apparently in a determination to show how many plays had been read, though one would have thought that either the mystery or the morality plays on their own would have sufficed. The best answers to Question 7 showed willingness to entertain the possibility that the plays might be 'accessible' by means other than performance: Sheila Lindenbaum's comment was an observation about other critics, which she did not necessarily endorse herself. But even those candidates who rushed to agree showed an impressive knowledge of stage directions and how they might be interpreted. As last year, the visionary writers, Margery Kempe, and Julian of Norwich, along with Hilton, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, continue to be popular, either in response to Question 14, or Question 16, on 'otherness'. They elicited some highly sophisticated, theologically well-informed answers from the best candidates; weaker ones wrote stock answers on 'Jesus as Mother', related to the quotations with varying degrees of success.

Some candidates displayed a disappointing narrowness of range, especially when writing on collections of short poems. There was a tendency, as with answers on Wyatt, to limit discussion to a very few of such texts. Candidates wasted time and resources copying out short poems, or substantial portions of them, rather than engaging in their own discussion. In general, when answering these, or other questions, it must be said that copying out long quotations has little or no merit other than showing the candidates' capacity to memorise by rote. Quotations need to be made to work in supporting the overall argument. Conversely, some candidates failed to engage significantly with the texts offered in their answers, offering unsupported generalised opinions, without adequate close textual analysis.

There was a noticeable tendency for candidates to shift the argument abruptly mid-essay from a major text to bring in something else towards the end in a final paragraph or so. The intention was evidently a belated attempt to display range of reading; however, changing horses mid-stream is not a wise stratagem. Accordingly, when a candidate had been pursuing a carefully reasoned argument about a significant text or texts, it was disappointing to see a weak discussion about something else entirely tagged on to the end. Especially when a major text forms the main focus of the essay, there is no benefit in fragmenting the discussion by bringing in something else piecemeal. A balance needs to be struck between showing breadth and depth.

Some candidates are having significant problems in coming to terms in exam conditions with the form in which exam questions are now framed (20 or so quotations, without rubric, which may be applied, as appropriate, to any author, or authors, within the paper's chronological boundaries). Candidates should show willingness to engage with the issues raised in the questions when applying them to their chosen texts. Some just fastened on a few key words wrested from the quotations, which they adapted to their purposes. Others nodded at the question in a few sentences before launching into previously prepared answers. In such cases, the candidates tended to do better when writing their commentaries on *Troilus*: the nature of the commentary exercise was better understood, and gave fewer opportunities to digress. Sometimes the relevance of answers to the questions was very hard to assess. If there were no obvious opportunities to discuss the material elsewhere on the paper, examiners were inclined to make allowance, but not when candidates rushed to pick questions that were not well suited to their material and there were much more appropriate questions further on in the paper.

This said, the standard of work generally was good: the paper elicited engaged, lively writing on a wide range of texts, including a remarkable amount of work on less well known material as well as the canonical authors. The best work combined real critical sensitivity, with appropriate use of theory, and close attention to language with confident compositional style.

The intellectual sophistication of the work at the top of the School, and the capacity of the best candidates to adapt their material to construct thoughtful, insightful arguments, richly supported by textual evidence, based in wide reading and research, compelled admiration.

2.8.3 Paper 3 (CII Paper 6a) 1550-1660

225 candidates took this paper - including 6 English and Modern Languages, and 5 History and English. All of the 20 questions were attempted. Most of the writers and topics considered were from the period 1580 to 1620 and nothing much beyond—only one or two answers on poetry in the Civil War, and a few on Ford's *'Tis Pity*, combined with the Jacobean. The vast majority of answers were on the Elizabethan dramatists and Donne and Herbert. The interest in genre was largely confined to revenge tragedy (chiefly Webster), domestic tragedy, city comedy and in a few cases, satire in verse. The lyric and sonnet were left ill defined by most of the candidates who wrote about them (usually in answers on Sidney), and there was a disappointing lack of interest in the epic. A relatively small number of answers were devoted to Spenser and *The Faerie Queene*, though one or two candidates did very good work on the shorter poems, and on Spenser's handling of the pastoral, in genre and its roots in ancient writing. Most of the answers on prose concentrated on Nashe or Burton or Andrewes. *The Arcadia* was not widely covered but attracted one or two very good discussions. The interest in book history and manuscript culture continues to grow, and is welcome, although it was noticeable sometimes that the literary characteristics of texts were obscured by an over-reliance on this method, and description was substituted for argument. Literary criticism, especially of a nuanced and wide-ranging nature, is still very much welcomed in the study of this period and it sits well in combination with material criticism.

The best essays on this paper stood out by their ability to engage in a sophisticated and original way with the language of the question. However there still seemed to be a lot of room for improvement in encouraging candidates to engage fully and directly with the quotations, which should serve as prompts for thought. Too many candidates more or less ignored the quotations, or wrenched the meaning of single words in them so that they could write an entirely pre-prepared answer. The strongest work put canonical and less-canonical texts together, rather than swerving self-consciously towards an esoteric or arcane topic or writer. As always, the issue with weaker work was often irrelevance and a lack of basic knowledge about the period, its social and political history, and its foundations in classical writing. Much greater attention is needed to the history of Renaissance genres and rhetoric. When candidates achieved a high standard—and a good number did—it was because they had an argument or a case they wanted to present, for how we might better understand a particular writer or literary subject.

2.8.4 Paper 4 1660-1760

219 candidates took this paper - including 5 English and Modern Languages, and 1 History and English. All twenty questions on this paper were answered, though some proved more popular than others. Popular topics included libertinism and immorality on the late seventeenth-century stage (usually in response to question 5); virtue and hypocrisy in *Pamela*, frequently discussed alongside one or more of its parodies and continuations (often in response to question 12); mock epic and satire in the works of Pope, Swift, or both (often in response to question 14); Adam and Eve, Satan, and the Fall in *Paradise Lost*, often with reference to other works by Milton, particularly *Areopagitica* and *Paradise Regained* (usually in response to question 1 or 2). There were also several essays on spiritual autobiography, sometimes as an influence on *Robinson Crusoe* (usually in response to question 11); the writings of members of the Royal Society and literary responses to the new science, most notably *The Blazing World*. Among the less frequently discussed authors were Johnson (*Rasselas* and the dictionary), Sterne, Thomson, Gray, Smart (*Jubilate Agno*), and Jane Barker. Previous examiners have noted the absence of answers on Dryden: this year there was fairly frequent attention to 'Astraea Redux' and the 'Heroic Verses', the rest of his very extensive work in poetry, translation, drama, and criticism, was largely absent.

As in previous years, the exam paper took the form of a series of quotations that could be used to discuss any text or author in the period. A considerable number of answers appropriated single ideas or images from the quotations to serve as the basis for arguments, without offering any consideration of the quotations as a whole (this was a particular problem with questions 8, 13, and 15). A small number of answers were obliquely relevant to the quotations, but did not connect to them directly. The stronger answers this year were those which did address quotations directly and fully. Some candidates made their task harder by choosing quotations which were less suitable for their material than others on the paper, perhaps reflecting haste and the need to start writing. Some of the best answers offered rich readings (contextual or formal) of the titles themselves before branching out to other authors. Further evidence of this was the striking and pleasing way in which most titles did not become magnets for the same authors.

Weaker answers often took a thematic approach, identifying themes such as sex, female virtue, or radical politics, and discussing their treatment in works by one or more authors, paying little attention to literary form and style. Even some of the better answers missed opportunities to demonstrate an understanding of form and genre: there were answers on the narrative technique of *Pamela* that did not explicitly mention its epistolary form, and several answers on fashionable and libertine characters in Restoration drama did not use terms such as comedy or satire. The best answers did not always discuss more than one author, but they tended to combine high quality close analysis of literary language with arguments that demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the influence of historical events or the literary past on the texts and authors under discussion. It is worth noting that the criterion of 'information', fulfilled either through unusual or non-canonical material, or through sheer quantity, does not obviate the need for argumentative insight or analysis. In some essays, obscurity of sources or length of answer seemed to be presented as merits in their own right. A clear and persuasive argument in response to the quotation is the crucial framework for the essay, and not an optional adjunct.

The vast majority of answers deployed detailed knowledge of primary texts, and most made careful and precise use of critical material. Candidates in general were more willing to explore authors and texts close to the period boundaries without fear of violating the 'rules', although there is still a sense in which works close to the borderline are unnecessarily neglected. This year the work on Samuel Richardson extended beyond the *Pamela* controversy into a few fine and detailed considerations of *Clarissa*. In general there was very little on other substantial novels of the mid eighteenth century – Fielding, for example, hardly appearing outside of the *Pamela* controversy. There were few essays on drama other than either Aphra Behn, or a familiar triptych of Restoration comedies; Congreve only appeared fleetingly. The best drama essays showed sensitivity to change across the period, the importance of prologues and epilogues, and staging practices. Writing by women made a significant showing, with Haywood taking a leading role in essays on gender and the novel. It would have been good to see more work on descriptive or landscape poetry (very little on Thomson's *The Seasons*, for example). Rochester and Behn's verse attracted more nuanced work than in the past; the best attended carefully to complexities of textual history and circulation, attribution, and to party politics rather than sexual ones.

2.8.5 Paper 5 1760-1830

233 candidates took this paper - including 11 English and Modern Languages, 5 Classics and English and 3 History and English. Every question was answered, and although some proved more popular than others, most attracted a good number of answers. There were some outstanding essays, which demonstrated not only breadth and depth of reading and clarity of thought, but also a sophistication of treatment that showed real intellectual and critical maturity.

The range of writers and topics tackled across the School was remarkable and suggests that there is some very varied and adventurous teaching for this paper in Oxford. Canonical writers and genres – Sterne, the Gothic novel, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Keats, Austen – were not shunned, but inevitably they attracted

work of variable quality. There were very few essays on Johnson, and Burke was represented only by extremely selective readings of the *Reflections*. Historicising approaches to topics were not often well-executed. Although it was occasionally refreshing when a candidate took a new approach to a question, considering lesser known authors, or less well-trodden arguments, often it seemed as if an obscure author had been chosen in the hope that this would, by itself, suggest that the candidate possessed a profound and wide-ranging knowledge of the period. The examiners had little trouble in seeing through such naive gamesmanship. The best essays tended to be those that engaged with major authors in sophisticated and original ways, often placing them in fruitful dialogue with more obscure or lesser writers. These essays tended to show an advanced knowledge of the texts they discussed – manuscripts, revision, publication and reception history, biographical and other contextual knowledge, etc. – and this allowed them to move beyond the conventional postures of weaker work.

Relevance continues to be an issue with weaker students (that is to say, candidates in the lower half of the II.is and below). There were still a few candidates this year who have yet to understand the fundamental need to engage with the question. Irrelevance was penalized, no matter how strong the essay written may have been in its own terms, and examiners looked for engagement with the question to be sustained throughout an essay and not just gestured towards at the outset. Often an answer bore little relation to the question and too many candidates seemed to think that picking on an odd word or phrase from the question and using it as a peg on which to hang prepared material was the way to success. It was not.

Narrowness from time to time gave rise to concerns. Problems could emerge when arguments were based on such a limited knowledge of a writer's *oeuvre* that they were entirely unconvincing. Some examiners were struck by a lack of general knowledge of the period shown by some candidates, who seemed unable to recognise many of the well-known authors of the quotations used for the questions. Even if a candidate decides to apply quite different material to the question (which is often not a bad strategy), it is odd not to show a flicker of awareness of the author of the quotation, and of what he or she might have meant. Weaker scripts demonstrated very narrow range in terms of genre and text. A script that offers three questions each on one short piece of prose fiction is hardly adequate as a response to 'the "period" 1760-1830'. It is difficult to show range and depth, of course, and close reading was always welcome, but the best scripts - of which there were quite a number - revealed in their approach and argument and selection of material a really broad and deep understanding of their chosen texts, and a selection of the relevant contexts, whether literary or historical.

A final concern relates to essay technique. Some candidates apparently believed that the recipe for a Schools script runs as follows:

Select a quotation from the paper. Ignore it. Take one bald contention. Add *quant. suff.* of quotations deemed to support the contention. Half-bake. Repeat twice more.

Examiners rewarded critical essays which involved a degree of self-critical reflection, and where quotations were analysed, not brandished. Good essays moved forward

through analysis, not naked assertion. Essays which concluded by blandly restating their premises were weaker. Of course it is difficult to write in three pressurised hours three essays which demonstrate first-hand familiarity with a wide range of primary material, adroitness in adapting knowledge to the question posed, self-possession in the marshalling of evidence, nimbleness in the management of argument, and a willingness, just when the subject of the essay seemed to have been resolved, to enlarge the scope of inquiry so as to admit complicating and enriching considerations. And yet that is precisely what the best candidates this year managed to achieve.

2.8.6 Paper 6: Special Options

Children's Literature

14 candidates took this option - including 1 English and Modern Languages. All essays met a good standard, and all were coherently argued and well-presented. Four candidates received first class marks on this paper. Topics addressed this year ranged widely, e.g. a discussion of imperial contexts and consequences, an investigation of the challenges to behavioural normativity found in recent YA fiction, and an examination of ecocriticism themes within picture books. Themes of authority, education and reception were of recurrent interest, and submitted work also showed attention to gender issues. Print culture received scholarly attention, as did the (respective) concepts of space, memory, and time. Arguments were fresh and confident and candidates used theory appropriately and to advantage.

Comparative Literature

7 candidates took this option – including 4 English and Modern Languages. The standard of work was very high, with a majority of the candidates attaining marks in the first-class bracket. The essays explored a wide range of literary connections, involving translation (e.g. re Beckett), influence (e.g. Laforgue and Eliot, Defoe and Calvino, Joyce and Borges), comparable imaginings of bodies (Carter and Nothomb) and space (Rhys and Duras), and the transnational workings of a genre (holocaust literature). The best submissions combined breadth, close reading and conceptual sophistication; when essays were weaker it was often at least partly because they didn't really justify themselves as comparative projects. Overall, an impressive body of work.

Film Criticism

15 candidates took this option. The quality was high, with six marks of 70 or higher and most of the remaining marks being in the high 2:1 territory (with some first class qualities). Nearly all the papers provided expert and rigorous close analysis and focused discussion. Topics included unspoken understanding, identity and place, dialogue, colour, framing, domestic space, and aesthetic dissonance. It was pleasing to see a wide range of films being addressed.

Forming Literary Character

Fourteen candidates submitted extended essays for this option, including 2 English and Modern Languages. Submissions encompassed all periods of literature written in English and in a few cases engaged in sustained and rewarding ways with materials originally composed in other languages.

The best essays were widely researched, balanced and considered in their attitudes, and satisfyingly cumulative in their arguments; arguments which were built on the ability to amass relevant, closely-observed details on the one hand and on the other to stand back from such details and consider their wider implications. These accomplished pieces of research were clearly and sometimes arrestingly laid out, nicely observed and carefully wrought, with a bold and simple structure (not necessarily involving the subdivision of the work into sections, although such an approach sometimes proved helpful).

Sometimes ranging chronologically through a series of texts by a single author, sometimes proceeding thematically across a broader selection of literary works, in both cases the most successful essays noted points of comparison and contrast between the primary materials and secondary theories of character. Other essays achieved competence and clarity via the judicious selection of their examples—the judiciousness involving some account of why those texts had been put together—as well as incorporating lucid and consistent referencing, and a substantial bibliography.

Less convincing essays offered no clearly articulated account of why the texts and authors under discussion, as opposed to any others, had been selected. Others proved too heavily reliant on existing critical discussions, impeding the chance for an original argument to develop. A few essays neglected to say much about *character* as such, avowedly the remit of this piece of work, or they demonstrated insufficient evidence of the range or depth of research that is expected of an extended essay. These essays tended also to have brief and inadequate bibliographies.

Some candidates seemingly acted on the assumption that all literary critics are naïve or want to foist something on the reader, and further assumed that pre-twentieth-century writers expected their readers to be similarly one-sided or credulous. But modern literature does not have a monopoly on complex or unknowable characters, or on three-dimensional writing of any kind, and these unidentified opponents felt like straw men.

Extended essays such as these require a sustained and developing argument, leading to a conclusion that squarely addresses the questions raised in the rest of the essay. In the group of submissions for this paper, several essays offered no more than a shifting and uncertain sense of what is meant by character in relation to anything else, such that it proved impossible to sum things up at the beginning or end of the work. This uncertainty was not helped by oddities of vocabulary and phrasing. Some candidates approached their essays in terms of considering key moments or discrete episodes, resulting in three or four freestanding chunks of commentary rather than a fully articulated argument, giving the impression of a scattergun collection of examples. Some work amounted to a description of areas to be studied rather than to a thoroughgoing engagement with particular texts and characters.

Hit and Myth: Reinventing the Medieval for the Modern Age

There were 13 candidates for this option, and together they covered the full range of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic materials, with the best papers showing considerable signs of impressively original research, and deep familiarity with both

primary and secondary texts. 7 achieved first class marks. In general, candidates did a good job of focusing attention equally between the medieval source-texts and their various modern incarnations and interpretations, but in some of the weaker cases informed reference to the medieval text was vanishingly small, and tended to be addressed rather obliquely, so demonstrating a relative lack of confidence and control. Candidates were also divided over the facility with which they were able to quote from material in the original, an aspect that, while far from compulsory, was often an indicator of deeper than usual interest and engagement. Overall, standards were high, though in some cases there were significant weaknesses of both presentation and argument that proved ultimately deleterious; candidates should be encouraged to pay particular attention to such issues for a paper where the candidate has considerable control over opportunities to polish their final submission over time.

Literature and Revolution

15 candidates took this option - including 1 English and Modern Languages. There was some excellent and thought-provoking work at the top end of the paper, with 5 achieving first class marks. Essays were best when they contextualized the texts offered within broader political and historical currents, and less compelling when they plunged immediately into close readings of the texts without a wider frame of either literary or political reference. The strongest essays tended to engage with demanding primary texts and showed impressive familiarity with surrounding criticism. They also took advantage of the interdisciplinary scope encouraged by a course such as this, thinking in sophisticated ways about the relationship between literary, philosophical, and historical texts and recognising the difference in kind between them. The weakest essays failed to move beyond close reading of poems or plot description of novels. A number of essays were marred by easily avoidable errors in structure, presentation, and style, with apparently little thought given to the clear and persuasive development of an argument in readable prose. But, overall, the examiners were impressed by the imaginative, independent, and often scholarly work undertaken by a number of candidates.

Literature and Science

13 candidates took this option - including 1 English and Modern Languages. 5 achieved first class marks. Generally speaking the candidates had developed to an impressive extent the new skills and subject knowledge that the option required of them: things such as situating their ideas in relation to the history of science; undertaking original research on self-defined topics; and close reading scientific and/or popular science texts. While the majority of candidates produced work that offered a reading of a literary text or texts in the light of a body of scientific ideas or texts, a few offered readings of scientific texts or ideas from the point of view of literary genres or tropes. In the majority category, the strongest work was impressive in its assimilation of scientific ideas and in the original research undertaken. If there was an Achilles heel, it was that even very strong work sometimes failed to articulate the literary consequences of the scientific ideas: what difference, for example, they made to a particular genre, or how they related to the existing literary criticism on that body of work. The weaker essays didn't show sufficient self-reflexive scepticism about the validity of their claims, and built their essays around very broad generalisations. The very weakest failed to engage with the scientific ideas in their literary texts and had not pursued any investigation of the historical scientific context.

Postcolonial Literature

9 candidates took this option, with 5 achieving first class marks. The nine essays submitted captured the regional, theoretical, formal and thematic variety of the field, and on the whole demonstrated critical ambition and insight. Most essays took a comparative approach to more than one writer, sometimes focussed thematically rather than regionally, and organised around a theoretical and/or historical framework. Those who focused on the work of one writer captured something of that writer's oeuvre, and at the top end represented substantial and original interventions. It is clear that students are engaging seriously with the theoretical focus of the course, often re-interrogating the canon of postcolonial literature and theory within the paradigms of current critical debate. Six of the nine essays focused largely on primary texts from outside the core reading for the course. Overall, candidates' engagement with the broader debates was clear in the articulation of their research questions and their theoretical preoccupations.

Post-War British Drama

There were 15 essays in all, and they covered a good range of topics, playwrights, plays and performances. 6 achieved first class marks. The course generated some particularly thoughtful discussion of contemporary theatre's engagements with race, ethnicity, identity, and sexuality. Samuel Beckett and Sarah Kane proved the most popular subjects by far, with a large proportion of essays devoted to one or the other of these playwrights, and from interesting angles for the most part. Those devoted to Beckett did not always seem aware of the vast critical discourse that has now built up on his work, which a quick glance at the MLA International Bibliography would have revealed. Kane, on the other hand, has generated a more manageable bulk of criticism and this was well represented in the essays on her work. Generally, the most successful essays across the cohort had a well thought out and sustained argument, were articulate and sophisticated in their expression, and engaged with performance aspects as well as texts, for example mining theatre reviews for clues about past performances.

Postwar American Fiction

14 candidates took this option - including 1 History and English, of whom 3 achieved first class marks, the majority falling in the 2:1 range. Many of the essays showed both ambition and enthusiasm for the material. The strongest grappled with some recent and challenging literary and critical developments in the field, and/or demonstrated sustained focus and authority. Less strong papers were prone to generalisation, broadness or diffuseness; a stronger sense of literary history and context would have helped some of these. DeLillo remained popular, with other topics including Ben Lerner, Teju Cole, John Cheever, Thomas Pynchon, and Toni Morrison. Several papers ranged significantly beyond the set texts to good effect.

The Avant Garde

12 candidates took this option. The standard was solid - good in that there were no 2:2s - with a couple reaching first class, though none in the really high-flying bracket. There was, on the whole, an interesting range of topics. While the tendency was to pick texts that had been discussed in class on the course, rather than thinking more independently, those that did branch out from the week-by-week topics proved to be

most stimulating. A few suffered from being too rushed or were sloppy in presentation.

The Character of Comedy

13 candidates took this option, and the overall standard was good, with several submitted essays judged to be 1st-class standard. The range of primary texts/films chosen for discussion was encouragingly diverse: Shakespeare, Pepys, Sterne, Byron, Edward Lear, Chaplin, Anita Loos, Wilde, Geoffrey Hill, David Foster Wallace, and others. However, the use of secondary criticism and theory was a little limited in range, with the same names recurring (e.g. Bergson, Critchley, Bakhtin). The weaker answers tended to give "symptomatic" readings of these sources, looking simply to "apply" the theorists uncritically, whereas the best answers took on both the comic texts and the theorists and really tried to grapple with why comic writing exists, what it's for, and why it might even matter. The better answers were conceptually nuanced and committed to sustained close readings of the texts in question.

The Fin de Siècle

There were 15 candidates for this option. The authors covered in written work included Walter Pater, Vernon Lee, Thomas Hardy, "Michael Field", Virginia Woolf, Edith Cooper, Ibsen, Henry James, Amy Levy, John Addington Symonds, Arthur Symons, Huysmans, Machen, Wilde, Stevenson, Conrad, the Rhymers' Club, Yeats, Dixon, Andrew Lang, and Edith Wharton.

The marks achieved covered the entire range, from high 2:2 to high 1st class. The very best work was of a nearly publishable standard. Weaker work suffered from generalizations about key topics such as "degeneration", "naturalism", "the New Woman", etc. Better work would have demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of these important concepts. Less competent work tended either to jump around (and lacked an argument to justify its intellectual leaps) or, on the contrary, to have a big argumentative bark with little analytic bite to justify it.

Some of the research topics addressed in written work were highly original, while others stayed closer to what had been covered in seminars. Only a few dealt with poetry or drama. While it is to be expected that written work will be informed by seminar discussion, the examiners think it preferable that the discussion be used as a jumping off point, rather than a point that needs to be summarized. Some candidates' written work seemed in thrall to the work of certain scholars. It would have benefited from taking a more critical perspective on their arguments. On the whole, the essays were well-researched and a pleasure to read. The best work mustered impressive theoretical, historical, and interpretive perspectives to produce strongly-argued and original readings.

The Icelandic Saga

6 candidates took this option. Even given the self-selecting nature of this rather specialised topic, it was extremely gratifying to see so many high-quality answers, based on wide reading in both primary and secondary sources, as well as deep and specific engagement with a highly diverse range of material. The stronger candidates moved beyond narrow distinctions of genre that would focus only on the so-called Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*), and roamed widely between the various categories of sagas produced at different points throughout the period; particular favourites

were the so-called Legendary Sagas (*fornaldarsögur*), but the most ambitious answers also involved some fairly obscure texts, and even engagement with so-called Contemporary Sagas (*samtíðarsögur*). Among the recurring topics addressed were the roles of women, sexuality, and monstrosity. There was little direct engagement with the (mostly) skaldic verses (*lausavísur*) that often offer a more nuanced perspective than the prose alone provides. Overall, most candidates elected to quote extensively in Old Norse. In general this was a most effective tactic, and although occasionally the precise relevance of the passages cited seemed somewhat unclear, it was often very evident that a good deal of care had been put into selecting the most pertinent passages. This is very obviously a paper that routinely attracts highly enthusiastic and deeply committed candidates; the high marks mostly obtained are a fair reflection of that.

The Literary Essay

There were 14 candidates for this option. The essays submitted were of a high standard: almost all were either very good or excellent, and some essays were genuinely original, well-researched pieces of work with publishable qualities. The scope of the course and the potential for essay topics spanned the period between Montaigne and the present. Most of the essays focussed on topics either in contemporary or Victorian literature, with some on twentieth century authors. There was less work on earlier periods, and less material that worked comparatively across periods, than in the previous year; other than Montaigne, the Renaissance and earlier eighteenth century featured only very rarely.

There was no one combination of elements which characterized all the successful essays. Some were closely focused discussions of the essayistic writing of individual authors, while others compared multiple writers, sometimes across period, in the light of particular essayistic themes. There was considerable conceptual sophistication in sight in some of the best pieces, which applied complex conceptual frameworks. Weaker answers were descriptive, rather than analytical, or did not engage with the specifically essayistic qualities of the writing they considered, or addressed a very broad or general topic without sufficient focus and direction.

Almost all candidates had shown ingenuity in seeking out unusual, unanthologized, or obscure material, and correspondingly demonstrated originality. The general standard of presentation and academic strategies of quotation and citation was high.

The Ode from Wordsworth to Hopkins

7 candidates took this option. 2 achieved first class marks. The extended essays submitted for this paper featured some quite outstanding work: the Ode was considered intelligently in terms of genre, with evidence of knowledge across the board of its ancient origins, along with useful awareness of both the 18th-century prelude to, and 20th-century sequel to, the Ode's 19th-century life. Major figures like Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Hopkins received detailed and often very rewarding attention; and it was noteworthy that some figures often considered marginal, like Southey, tended to operate in central positions, with illuminating results. The candidates treated this as neither a 'Romantic' nor a 'Victorian' paper, and all of the essays were much the better for this. Additionally, the ability to produce properly generic criticism was often impressive, and occasionally stunningly so. Close reading, too, was much in evidence: at its best, this was original and revelatory,

without losing anything in historical awareness. Overall, the paper gave heartening evidence of a continuing interest in, and mastery of, specifically poetic matters in critical practice. The best work here was - truly, for once - at the 'cutting edge' of critical intelligence and attention.

Things, People and Texts

There were 10 candidates for this special option, and within this group there was some genuinely lively, engaged and interesting work. 5 achieved first class marks. The essays submitted spanned the historical period from late seventeenth century to early nineteenth. Topics included miniatures, dress, cosmetics, domestic music making, masquerade and theatrical reputation. Candidates drew on the resources of museum and gallery collections and had clearly spent time amassing their own bodies of evidence upon which the essays were based. Some candidates had considerable theoretical sophistication in their approach, and others a rich sense of the historical context. Both worked well. There was evidence of original research and critical thinking in many of the best essays, and the most successful pieces were able adeptly to link literary texts to material culture in ways that offered new perspectives on potentially familiar works. The stronger essays had a strong and clear argument which was well supported by both visual and verbal material. A number were truly interdisciplinary in employing methodologies appropriate to art history and the material artefact and textual analysis. Less good work contained perfunctory references to objects, was scantily referenced, or had no discernible argument.

Writing Feminisms

There were 9 candidates for this option. 5 achieved first class marks. Essays demonstrated a sound command of some difficult theory and some adventurous combinations of material across genres and periods. This often produced exciting and innovative discussion and usually essays showed a healthy attention to stylistic and formal practice to explore the relationship between a feminist politics and aesthetics. Weaker essays inclined to mine texts for political content which was described through a simple intentionalist lens. Such essays often confined themselves to discussion of only two or three short texts, sometimes when ostensibly addressing very prolific writers with long and varied careers. There was some impressive archival work (looking at manuscript and print variants, or exploring publication contexts) brought into dialogue with feminist debate about women's experience as writers in literary markets. We also saw strong work informed by new directions in (feminist) criticism concerned with life-writing and trans identity. Work was fluent, well-structured and carefully signposted in the main although most candidates could still do with carefully copy-editing their essays, especially in the last few pages where there were signs that work had finished abruptly/in haste.

Writing War

9 candidates took this option. The submitted essays were of an impressive standard, with no candidate achieving below the mid-2.1 range. Candidates chose both to write on authors covered in the classes and to go beyond them; some excellent work was done on single authors. Genres treated ranged from novels to poetry to non-fiction and life-writing. The best candidates combined perceptive close readings with deft handling of theoretical issues and brought insights gained from across their degree course to illuminate their points, scoring highly against all the

criteria. What marked out the very best candidates was the originality of their arguments.

Written Discourse

Ten candidates followed this option - including 1 English and Modern Languages and 1 Classics and English, and it was clear that a great deal of work had gone into almost all of the extended essays they produced. 3 achieved first class marks. The great majority of candidates chose to undertake empirical analysis, in many cases drawing their data from digital media; on the whole their analyses were systematic, well-structured and clearly presented, and in some cases they showed real originality. The best essays went beyond purely descriptive analysis, linking the data candidates had chosen to examine to broader theoretical issues or current debates, and showing evidence of extensive secondary reading. Among those whose work was less good, some had not exploited their data fully, offering analyses which were partial or linguistically superficial, while others had not defined their question in a sufficiently focused way. Overall, though, the standard of the work was high, especially considering that the task of carrying out and then writing up an empirical linguistic analysis was new to most candidates.

2.8.7 Paper 7: Dissertation

247 candidates took this option – including 17 English and Modern Languages. 112 candidates achieved first class marks (including 10 in EML).

Pre 1500

There were 16 dissertations in this strand – including 1 from English and Modern Languages. Topics covered the range from Old English to ca.1500; Chaucer and romances were popular choices, along with various aspects of the fourteenth-century religious writers, and more general topics. The examiners were impressed by the enthusiasm and the knowledge shown by most of the candidates, who had clearly invested much thought and care in the work. The best dissertations were outstanding, showing great critical sensitivity and engagement with the primary materials. Their authors were able to balance close literary analysis and attention to the language of the texts with appropriate use of theory, and their writing was clear and confident. Weaker dissertations showed a propensity to discuss theory to the detriment of the primary texts. Other weaknesses were a tendency to recapitulate plots, or merely to assert the merits of a specific critical position, rather than demonstrate it through close textual work. In other cases the dissertations, although based in wide reading of primary texts, showed insufficient familiarity with secondary reading. Some dissertations would have benefited from more attention to structure, planning of the argument and proofing. However, the best work was a pleasure to read, and showed real potential for graduate study.

1500-1600

There were 16 candidates in this strand – including 2 from English and Modern Languages. The quality of the submissions was relatively high, with much evidence of original, independent work and some publishable material at the top end of the range. Some of the best pieces showed a real sense of adventure, taking on the challenge of their chosen topics, and mixing attention to detail with technical and critical virtuosity. A wide diversity of themes and approaches was evident with

attention being paid to textual and bibliographical issues, reception history, intellectual and political background, and the formal implications of genre and style. As was the case last year, there were fewer studies of manuscript culture than might be expected given the resources of the Bodleian Library. Generally speaking, argumentation was well supported from analysis of the primary texts, and the standard of presentation was high. The best dissertations were marked by originality of approach, structural coherence, and acute attention to linguistic and generic detail. There were occasions, however, when candidates attempted to encompass too much within the word limit and consequently did less than justice to the complexity of the issues involved. The best essays were ambitious but also realistic, clearly demarcating and identifying their themes and approaches and maintaining a clear focus throughout. Those of the second rank tended to depend too closely on a limited range of secondary sources, and/or demonstrated a less competent grasp of the contexts in which their chosen authors were writing or publishing.

1600-1700

25 candidates wrote dissertations falling within this time period. Overall, the essays were of a high standard, often focusing on archival material, in the form of manuscripts or marginalia. There was strong work on Milton, science writing and intellectual history which drew on primary resources in inventive ways. There was also a noticeable interest in the Jacobean masque and other drama at the early end of the century. Having said this, most of the essays converged on the middle of the period – there was very little from the decades at either end of the century. Candidates tended to focus on the seventeenth century rather than attempt transhistorical comparison, and this made for a confident sense of context: where students had for example, combined a seventeenth-century text with a twentieth-century one, they struggled to do justice to both.

Many candidates had clearly been urged to focus on a single text or confined area of study as the subject for their dissertation, and while this proved good advice in terms of enabling a sense of specialization, they were not always able to situate their chosen material within a wider frame of reference and to make the connections outwards. Equally, not every essay was embedded within a sense of existing critical argument about the chosen area, always a risk in a self-defined area of special interest. Weaker essays were unable to co-ordinate a coherent argument over the whole dissertation, so that the dissertation was more of a collection of observations than a thesis. While the attention to marginalia and the material history of the book was welcome, finding an archival source and merely describing it was not in itself considered by examiners to be evidence of outstanding ability: such evidence needs to be used in the context of an analytical argument. Similarly, the selection of a particularly *recherché* topic is not a guarantee of a first class work: original material ought to be matched by original thinking. Overall, the work submitted in this selection of dissertations was impressive: particularly alert to matters of material culture and intellectual history, and often sophisticated in linking textual detail to conceptual argument.

1700-1800

There were 9 dissertations in this strand– including 1 from English and Modern Languages. There were relatively few dissertations within the period 1700-1800, and nearly all of these focused on prose writings, ranging from periodicals to novels

to educational tracts. Only one dissertation addressed poetry. The work overall was solidly researched and of a high standard, paying careful attention to literary and historical contexts, but there was little that was outstanding either in execution or originality. There is great scope within this period for more adventurous choice of dissertation topics and texts.

1800-1900

There were 36 dissertations in this strand – including 3 from English and Modern Languages. In general, the work this year for dissertations on topics in the period 1800-1900 was of good quality, which has been acknowledged by the award of marks in the high 2:1 to first-class range to a relatively high number. The best dissertations were both historically and theoretically informed, and showed evidence of enterprise in the choice of subject and in adventurous reading. Both poetry and prose fiction were well represented, as were single-author and genre- or multi-author-based studies. A number included interdisciplinary elements – in comparisons from the visual arts, philosophy, and other disciplines. Many candidates, however, had insights which could have been more richly and rewardingly developed – there was potential in many scripts for higher marks to be awarded. Sometimes the problem lay with weaknesses in the technique of literary argument, sometimes with an intellectual prudence which verged on timidity – a reluctance really to push and develop, and even to take their own ideas seriously. Other dissertations lacked a sense of cohesion and development in the argument, giving the impression of having been made up of tutorial essay drafts stitched together. In contrast, a number of dissertations combined originality, breadth of reading and analytical power, and a few incorporated archival research. In cases where students took a strong lead from a critic or theorist, higher marks went to those dissertations which made clear how and where they were adding to or putting pressure on the already established viewpoint; lower marks to those who simply reiterated or illustrated it via their choice of texts.

1900-1950

There were 42 dissertations in this strand – including 5 from English and Modern Languages. There was a very diverse range of topics in the period 1900 to 1950, including essays that related literature to other media and art forms, and essays in bibliography and periodical studies. Several essays had a transatlantic emphasis. A wide range of modes and genres were attempted, including fiction, poetry, travel-writing, and various idioms of life-writing. The weakest essays lacked one or more of: a clear co-ordinating argument; a claim about the material that was non-obvious; well-defined intellectual development in the argument; self-reflexive consideration of the limits of the chosen approach; awareness of relevant secondary material in their field, and/or of the relation of their ideas to that material. The strongest essays not only knew existing critical work, but established a clear critical relation to it, and demonstrated a clear sense of what was at stake in the essay; they drew on a wide range of primary material, even when the main focus was more limited in extent. Some essays made good use of archival work, using both online and library resources.

Contemporary and Postcolonial Literature

There were 45 dissertations in the Contemporary strand. There were 6 dissertations in the Postcolonial strand – including 1 from English and Modern Languages. The

best essays, of which there were quite a few, had a well-articulated, clear line of argument, displayed an impressive range of knowledge, and understood the need to adopt a coherent, critically sophisticated methodology. These combined close, close reading with a strong case for why what they were seeing was critically significant — often they had original research in them (either traditional archival work or a return to ephemeral sources like magazines, etc.) and treated it not as an end in itself but really made it pay off in an original claim about, for example, a micro-period or about a particular author's career. The examiners felt unanimously that the best of this year's dissertations were an absolute delight to read because they told us something we really didn't know already.

On that issue, we saw a number of dissertations that fell down on the 'who cares?' question — dissertations that were textually alert and nicely written but made no effort to explain why what they were identifying was especially interesting, and so they tended towards the descriptive rather than the argumentative. This tended to happen when students had started with a favourite author rather than an actual question/problem, and produced critically underpowered work.

The weaker essays were unfocused, essentially serendipitous and had little or no understanding of the history of critical or intellectual debate. Contextual 'thinness' was a problem this year (as last) in all but the best we saw. We wondered if it was a particular problem with modern literature (because superficially 'easier' to get a handle on) that students weren't necessarily seeing the need to (e.g.) historicise in the way they intuitively might in earlier fields.

It was great to see students trying to theorise their material, although at the weaker end there was a tendency simply to 'apply' particular theorists uncritically and not always very precisely. Generalisations tended to abound on "gender," "homosexuality," "postmodernism," "knowledge and power." It is very important to see theory as historically and culturally situated, and not a set of universal truths; theorists should be taken to task, in the same way as authors and critics. A rare few candidates this year displayed a sophisticated sense of what the literary texts add to the theory and not just what the theory adds to the text.

Transhistorical dissertations tended to be weaker than others: even those demonstrating ingenuity and lots of hard work left the examiners thinking 'this isn't comparing like with like'. But, for the most part, we think students must be getting very good guidance on the appropriate scope of a relatively short dissertation: we saw very few that we thought were either too flimsy or, alternatively, trying to do too much.

Presentation/mechanics were a problem even in some of the really good ones — not occasional slips and typos but messy, invented citation systems, and repeated basic mistakes about how to (e.g.) introduce a quotation.

American Literature

There were 37 candidates in this strand – including 3 from English and Modern Languages. American literature dissertations considered authors including Faulkner, Du Bois, Nabokov, Stevens, Dickinson, Emerson, Thoreau, Plath, Ginsberg, Franzen, and Markovits. Several dissertations also engaged with

transatlantic and transnational connections between writers and cultures. The work included sophisticated treatments of vernacular, film, Anglo-American literary relations, and literary theory. Unfortunately, dissertations on poetry rarely engaged with prosody or formal features.

A few of the dissertations were uncomfortably close to current critical work on the same topic. There was some material on contemporary writing, ranging from the wonderful to the familiar – with little secondary reading, in the latter cases, to support some often clichéd ideas. Some essays would have benefited from a wider acquaintance with the range of available material. However, this year showed a continued improvement in the depth and sophistication of dissertations at the higher end of the marking range.

Children's Literature

Six candidates produced dissertation work in this field; one first class mark was awarded. The work was mainly of a high standard and well-presented; weak citation of secondary materials and other presentational flaws were penalised. Arguments were well-proposed and well-sustained, and thematic interests as diverse as developmental psychology, angelology and mythology were employed. The primary materials employed ranged from the medieval period to the contemporary, and non-elite writing was well-represented.

Language

There were 6 candidates in this strand. The small number of language dissertations tackled an encouragingly various range of topics, periods and genres.

2.9 COURSE II

2.9.1 Paper 1 650-1100

There were 17 candidates for this paper - including 1 History and English - and overall, there were responses to 17 of the 20 questions set. Those that went unanswered were Q8 (a Wulfstan quotation on paganism), Q12 (a Byrthferth quotation on Classical influences), and Q19 (a comment about the difficulty of searching for heathen gods in the literature), perhaps suggesting an unwillingness to engage outside the core vernacular material. Q7 (on Old English hagiography) was the most popular, with 8 answers; there were also 6 responses to Q10 (on the marvellous in Old English literature), indicating that the supernatural (at least in Old English) remains in vogue.

In general, there was considerable consistency in the quality of the responses offered by individual candidates, but disappointingly there were few really superb answers, with several candidates clustering around the borderlines. Likewise, there was an impressive range of text referenced in the course of the answers, with a particular focus around the twin poles of *Beowulf* on the one hand and King Alfred on the other, with the latter in particular producing some impressive work. In perhaps too many cases there seemed little relevance between the material being presented

and the question it purported to address, and this was especially true with regard to sometimes extensive quotation in the original which too often had only a hazy connection to the points raised, as if pre-prepared material were simply being dumped in the fond hope that any Old English was better than none. Many of the better essays this year chose to embed a larger number of (relevant) short quotations within an answer rather than attempt to impress examiners by extensive quotation improperly applied.

2.9.2 Paper 2 Medieval English and Related Literatures 1066-1550

There were 16 candidates for this paper. Once again, the best candidates produced outstanding work, combining close attention to the texts they were discussing with a keen sense of the larger relationships between literary and material traditions of romance narrative. Many of the scripts were expertly comparative, both in the sense of reading material originally composed in different languages, but also in the sense of finding nuanced differences and relations between those linguistic or national traditions, including texts in different dialects of English and Scots, as well as French, Welsh, Latin, Norse, Irish, German, Spanish and Italian.

The examiners were on the whole impressed by the range of material covered; by candidates' discipline in attempting to engage directly with the questions and quotations; and by their strong sense of romance as a genre, and the complexities that generic categorization throws up. Additionally, the format of this paper – two essays in three hours – enables candidates to develop more finely textured arguments about groups of texts, engage with critical and theoretical traditions, and be more ambitious in their ideas.

The relatively few weaker scripts tended to fall back on narrative-based summary and basic comparison of texts, and sometimes were reluctant to engage closely with the linguistic detail of the material, even when it was originally written in English. While there is no requirement for candidates to have read non-English language material in the original, when scripts engage with English texts, an awareness of and attention to their linguistic structures and form is likely to make an argument stronger. Some candidates wrote rather little on English material, and while this did not affect the quality of the best work, for some it contributed to the sense that they were writing at a distance from the texts, both in English and other languages. It would be worth clarifying in the handbook and other guidance that this paper does not require students *mostly* to read texts in translation, or pre-1350 texts, but only that they 'demonstrate [...] knowledge' of this material. If candidates have made full use of the faculty classes, lectures and their tutorial provision, they should have a good range of material on which to draw. This also applies to candidates' awareness of historical contexts for romance traditions, which was well-employed by some, but could have been more widely evident.

It was pleasing to see that nearly all of the questions were attempted, with a wide range of evidence drawn into the discussion. This paper continues to broaden the horizons of students through its comparative scope and generic focus, while demonstrating the free movement and common currency of stories, languages, texts and people across Scandinavia, these isles, mainland Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries.

2.9.3 Paper 3 [see CI paper 2]

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

16 candidates took this paper. The general standard on this paper was extremely good, with almost a third of the candidates getting marks in the first class range. Most questions were attempted; lexicography was the most popular, though candidates took the opportunity to show knowledge of a good range of topics. There was particularly good work on the intersections between private and public discourse, on dialect variation, on lexical and semantic change, and on questions of periodization. The best commentary questions provided commendably detailed linguistic analysis across the range of levels of linguistic organisation. Weaker commentaries tended to lack the specificity, or to provide a merely descriptive account of the passages selected. In stronger answers, candidates had thought carefully about the precise terms of the question for both commentary and essay; an interesting choice of commentary passages was sometimes let down by an overly loose interpretation of the question.

2.9.5 Paper 5a The Material Text Portfolio

There were seven candidates for this paper, and the responses were evenly split throughout the medieval period, with four candidates electing to answer the commentary question on the Auchinleck Manuscript and three on the Exeter Book. There was also a good distribution of answers with respect to the follow-up essay question, with little duplication; overall, five separate questions were addressed, covering such disparate topics as: editorial criteria; genre; illustrations; scribal accuracy; and the manuscript contexts of specific texts. On the whole, the commentary questions were answered with more confidence and cogency, and most candidates were able to address a good range of the suggested topics for discussion. Occasionally, however, candidates seemed at a loss how best to organize the commentaries, with some flagging badly at the end of the answer; better planning would have obviated the unfortunate impression that inevitably ensued.

In general, the standard overall was superbly high, with clear signs of deep and well-informed engagement, as one might expect from a paper for which candidates have considerable opportunity and incentive to prepare a good deal of material ahead of time; several of the better responses showed real flashes of insight and originality. Yet while in the stronger candidates this possibility of forward planning led to extremely high quality answers, at times and in candidates who had only partly or half-heartedly availed themselves of this advantage, there were definite signs of pre-prepared material simply being inserted willy-nilly, without due regard for precise relevance to the terms of the question allegedly being addressed.

2.9.6 CII Paper 6 Options

6c French Literature 1100-1500 (Submission)

1 candidate took this paper.

6c Old Norse

1 candidate took this paper.

6c Old and Early Middle Irish Texts

3 candidates took this paper – including 1 from History and English.

2.10 JOINT SCHOOLS

2.10.1 *Classics and English FHS*

There were seven candidates for the degree. Two candidates were awarded a First Class, and the other five were graded 2.1.

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

Link Paper 1: Epic

There were six candidates; two answered the Greek commentary option, five the Latin; some candidates showed an inclination towards tendentious over-interpretation of specific verbal and linguistic elements of the texts. In the comparative commentary questions, candidates engaged with poetic devices such as tricolon, enjambment and alliteration, often rather mechanically and at the expense of broader points of literary comparison.

In the Milton commentary the best responses recognised the disjunction between Milton's Christian narrative and his pagan model; weaker answers summarised the passage in descriptive rather than analytical terms.

Answers to the essay questions drew on both classical and English epic, showing a desire to demonstrate knowledge of background, context, and narrative detail. In answering the question about authorial presence, most sought to find details in the text that supported an argument for such a phenomenon rather than recognising that this was something that epic convention may not allow.

Link Paper 2: Tragedy

There were four candidates; two opted for the Greek or Latin commentary (Question 1). Both showed good knowledge and made intelligent comparisons, but both suffered from a tendency to describe (and even quote from) the passage rather than analyse it. Candidates showed reasonable knowledge of a wide range of texts, both classical and modern, but sometimes lacked precision and accuracy; those who used Aristotle to support their claims in qq. 4 and 6 demonstrated a weak understanding of the philosopher's views. The main deficiencies arose from insufficient focus on, and analysis of, the question and its implications, and a tendency to rely on generalities; the better answers argued from an intelligent selection of examples and close readings towards their conclusions.

Classics and English Theses

Seven theses were submitted. Most showed good presentation, awareness of literary history, and intelligent engagement with primary texts. Stronger theses attempted sophisticated discussion and analysis of the interaction of poetry and historical contexts. Weaker submissions were less well written and suffered from a tendency to list rather than to integrate points into an incisive argument; and in some cases they were surprisingly poorly presented (containing spelling mistakes, for instance).

Dr Armand D'Angour (Associate Professor in Classics, Jesus College).

2.10.2 *English & Modern Languages FHS*

Numbers in each class

	2016	2015
I	9	10
II.I	8	7
II.II	0	1

Gender breakdown (last year's in brackets)

	F	M
I	9 (5)	0 (5)
II.I	8 (6)	0 (1)
II.II	0 (1)	0 (0)

FAP

A pre-meeting between English liaison (Simon Palfrey) and the Chair (Almut Suerbaum) to discuss borderline cases and FAPs meant that the final meeting could proceed swiftly and expeditiously. The examiners noted that definitions of borderlines in the Examining Conventions might need to be checked for consistency for next year.

Languages

The Modern Languages offered were French (11), German (3), Russian (1), and Spanish (2).

Reports

Reports on the papers taken by more than five candidates can be found in the Examiners' reports on the parent Schools.

Process

For the most part, the examination process went smoothly this year, and the support of the administrators (Angie Johnson in English, and Catherine Pillonel in ML) was, as ever, invaluable. One concern was the malfunctioning of the classification programme, which wrongly classified some Firsts as Upper Seconds. The examiners were grateful to Catherine Pillonel for her swift action in resolving the problem, which ensured that the final meeting had a corrected version of the classification report. This caused considerable extra work at a crucial stage of the process, and it highlights the risks which the university runs in relying on a classification system which is beyond its shelf-life and not well supported.

Examiners

Almut Suerbaum (Chair, German)
 Simon Palfrey (ELL coordinator)
 ELL: Ankhi Mukherjee
 Patrick Hayes
 David Atwell (external)
 ML: Jane Hiddleston (French)
 Oliver Noble Wood (Spanish)
 Andrew Kahn (Russian)
 Sebastian Coxon (external)

2.10.3 History & English FHS

Statistics

All candidates

Class	No						%					
	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
I	4	4	4	2	0	5	44.4	36.4	33.3	22.2	0	62.5
II.1	5	7	8	7	4	3	55.6	63.6	66.7	77.8	100	37.5
II.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
III	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

All candidates, divided by male and female

Class	Number										Percentage (%) of gender									
	2016		2015		2014		2013		2012		2016		2015		2014		2013		2012	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
I	1	3	2	2	3	1	0	2	0	0	50	42.9	40	33.3	100	11.1	0	33.3	0	0
II.1	1	4	3	4	0	8	3	4	1	3	50	57.1	60	66.7	0	88.9	100	66.7	100	100
II.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
III	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

New Examining Methods and Procedures

This year was the second year of the compulsory 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.

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

General Comments on the Examination

Nine candidates (2M, 7F) took the examination, all of them under the revised English syllabus. The overall marks profile was very similar to last year, with 4 firsts, 5 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.

Equality and Diversity Issues and Breakdown of the Results by Gender

More female than male candidates gained a first (3 to 1) and more a 2:1 (4 to 1) but there were only two male candidates, so in percentage terms 50% of male candidates gained a first and 50% a 2:1, whereas the percentage of the seven female candidates was 42.9 and 57.1.

Detailed Numbers on Candidates' Performance in Each Part of the Examination

There were no particular issues to report here, and on the whole this was a strong school. The board was also pleased to note the wide range of topics covered by candidates on both sides of this joint school.

Comments on Papers and Individual Questions

Some examiners noted that the work for the interdisciplinary dissertation was not in each case clearly interdisciplinary but rather tended to focus on one or other of the two schools.

Members of the Board of Examiners

Dr S. Byrne (Chair)
Mr P. Ghosh
Dr M. Kempshall
Professor R. McCabe
Dr H.L. Spencer
Professor S. Todd
Dr L. Scales (external examiner in History)
Dr E. Jones (external examiner in English)

2.11 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

2.11.1 FHS English Language and Literature

Title of Examination(s):		FHS English Language and Literature
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	Jennifer Richards
	Position:	Joseph Cowen Chair of English Literature
	Home Institution:	Newcastle University

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A / Other
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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(b) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	/			
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.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?	/			
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have	/			

	been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?			
<p>* If you answer “No” to any question, 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 / Other”.</p>				

Part B

B1. Academic standards

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

I confirm that the academic standards are comparable with those achieved by students at other HEIs. The best students take full advantage of the resources available to them at Oxford, producing essays that are both imaginative and extraordinarily well researched, attentive to the material text as well as literary style. Students achieving the highest grades in written examinations showed an ability to analyse the title quotation with great care and to muster considerable knowledge to structure a coherent and persuasive argument. All of this was recognised and appropriately rewarded by the markers. It was a pleasure to read these scripts.

The proportion of firsts awarded was high (just over 30%), but this is justifiable given the quality of the students and the teaching they receive. Borderline candidates were dealt with scrupulously by the board, and there was also careful scrutiny of marker profiles.

- 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).*

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 with rigour. I cannot commend Dr Helen Moore highly enough for the care she took at each stage of the process, from the review of FAPS to the award of degrees. She was an exemplary chair. I would especially commend the care she took over a mismatch in the marks awarded by two examiners. The use of a third internal marker in these cases is effective. I would also commend the introduction of initiatives like ‘semi-circular marking’. All of this ensures equity of treatment for students. In all the cases I reviewed for the Board, I thought the final mark agreed was the right one. I was also impressed by the level of scrutiny given to individual marker profiles, as well as to the review of statistics by gender (and other data made available at the exam board).

The process works extremely well. Great care is taken over marking. I would encourage the new chair to continue the good practice of reminding markers to explain the mark they have arrived at, and to pay attention to the criteria when they

do so to ensure that there is as much consistency as possible (but see below for my comments on the criteria).

B3. Issues

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

I have two issues to raise and one suggestion.

1. Proctors' penalties: late submission without good reason should be penalised out of fairness to those students who do meet the deadline, and it is good to see that the Humanities Division operates a sliding scale: 5 marks up to one day, thereafter 1 mark per day. But this scale seems very blunt. I am not suggesting that there needs to be variation for day 1. Rather, the anomaly is that additional days carry the penalty of -1. If one is going to be very late on day 1, why not take an extra 24 hours? I would encourage the Humanities Division to consider whether the sliding scale needs more nuance.
2. This is a bigger issue about the grading criteria for submitted essays. External examiners usually encourage faculty to use the full scale of marks in the first class band. That's good advice since we tend to be cautious markers and first-class marks often 'bunch' at the lower end of the scale (70, 71, 72) affecting degree class averages. But what do we mean by the 'full scale'? Is it ok to award marks of 90+, even 100?

Your essay criteria suggest that it is. Markers of the Shakespeare Portfolio, for example, are encouraged to award marks of 86+ to 'Work of a very high standard, excellent handling of scholarly apparatus, wide-ranging research, command of a wide range of primary and secondary material. Excellent'. If I were an internal marker and took account of this instruction, as indeed I should do, and if I recalled the advice of external examiners over many years, I would feel professionally obliged to award marks of 85+ to essays that I deemed 'excellent' or of a 'high standard'. And yet, no other department where I have examined would think this acceptable. In my experience marks of 85+ are very rare indeed, and this is usually reflected in the grading criteria: they are awarded to work that is *outstanding* and of 'publishable quality', not work that is 'excellent' and 'of a very high standard'.

Part of the problem, I think, relates to the fact that the award of high firsts for essays in English at Oxford depends on the number of criteria met. This is not true of exam scripts. A mark of 85+ is awarded (rarely) to a script with essays that are 'so outstanding that they could not be better within the framework of a three-hour exam. Work of marked originality and sophistication'. In contrast, a submitted essay needs only to be 'excellent' across all the criteria. If it is not excellent in one or two areas, but excellent in all others, then it might earn '80' plus, while an essay that is excellent in one area only but 'highly competent' in all of the others might achieve 75+. If all markers were to follow the criteria strictly, and make reference to them in their comments (as I advised above), then there would be many more marks of 85+. In fact, the majority of markers are distinguishing, very fairly and properly, between first-class essays that are outstanding and those that are excellent.

I think the marking in the English faculty is very fair indeed, but there are occasional discrepancies in the award of high marks which are resolved through a well-managed process of third marking to ensure that there is equity of treatment. But I would advise colleagues to look at the criteria to understand why there are discrepancies in the first place. (This is not an issue in the 2.1 or 2.2 categories.)

Finally, might I suggest that the Faculty share the documents electronically at the exam board, using the IT facilities available for overhead projection, reserving paper copies for external examiners. The process does generate an awful lot of paper.

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 new curriculum has clearly been a success. The Shakespeare Portfolio especially has introduced variety into a programme that has been exam-heavy, and the students rise to the challenge of researching their own topics, clearly well supported by tutors.

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.

2016 was my last year as external examiner. The examining process is quite demanding, requiring busy external examiners to make two trips to Oxford at the start of the summer/conference season. I don't think there is any way around this, but I do think it is important to give external examiners very early notice of dates.

It has been a pleasure working with two chairs, Professor Tiffany Stern and Dr Helen Moore, the Exams Officer, Angie Johnson and the English faculty in attendance at the Board. I would like to thank them all for their professionalism and hospitality.

2.11.2 FHS Joint School of Classics and English

Title of Examination(s):		FHS Classics & English
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	Jennifer Richards
	Position:	Joseph Cowen Chair of English Literature
	Home Institution:	Newcastle University

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A				
	<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A /

				Other
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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(b) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	/		
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.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?	/		
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?	/		
<p>* If you answer "No" to any question, 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 / Other".</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?*

There were very few students this year. I was not given a run of scripts to read, and so I cannot comment on the standards of the students. There were no first class awards.

- 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).*

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.

There was very little business to conduct. There was a new chair this year, and we were reliant on the support of Ms Angie Johnson. The board, though, was conducted fairly.

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 have no issues to raise. I was sorry to see so few students taking this degree programme, which has clearly been a success in the past.

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.

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.

No.

2.11.3 FHS English Language and Literature, and the Joint School of English and Modern Languages

Title of Examination:		English and English and Modern Languages, Final Honours School
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	David Attwell
	Position:	Head of Department of English and Related Literature
	Home Institution:	University of York

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A

		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>				
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 final year of the Final Honours degree in English at Oxford are remarkably high, indeed they set a benchmark for standards in the discipline across the entire sector. I had the good fortune to read the full run of scripts of the top performing student, and was immensely impressed with the candidate's range of answers across periods, genres and approaches, the consistency of the achievement, and the probity and stylistic flair of the writing. Across the whole cohort, however, even at the lower end of the range, there was a clear sense that students were rising to the challenge in a remarkably resourceful and rigorous intellectual climate.

- 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).*

I was again impressed (this being the final year of a three-year term as examiner) with the rigour and range of assessments, from long essay, to an innovative portfolio in the Shakespeare paper, to closed exams, showing that the Board is continually exploring new ways of testing and drawing commanding work from the students. The Shakespeare portfolio produced higher marks on average, but it was no less rigorous for that; indeed it clearly worked in facilitating original and scholarly work in a well-trodden field. I was also an examiner in the English and Modern Languages joint school Board, but was not been asked to adjudicate in difficult or borderline cases, which had been managed internally. The joint Board was managed with due rigour and consistency.

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.

At most universities in the sector, the role of external examiners has been reduced to oversight of systems and procedures. I would congratulate the University of Oxford for retaining a more traditional role for external examiners, by inviting them to participate in every stage of the process, from the consideration of medical and special cases, to FAPs, the first-pass meeting identifying difficult and borderline cases, and the final Board. The end-result of this time-consuming but valuable process is a degree of confidence unavailable elsewhere that the examination has been fair, rigorous and consistent. The rigour of the examination is apparent in the maintenance of double-marking, in third marking where necessary, in the second scrutiny of the range of marks for each candidate, ensuring that the final degree result is what the candidate has properly earned.

B3. Issues

None.

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.*

I would congratulate the Chair of Examiners, Helen Moore, on her efficient, compassionate, rigorous, and innovative management of the Board during my three-year term. As examples of good practice, I would commend the following:

- a. 'Semi-circular' marking. This refers to the practice of 'pairing' a marker with two other markers, rather than one, reducing the likelihood of a skewed result produced by a pair with a shared tendency.
- b. Publication to the Board of marker profiles. This was handled with extreme care, with an appropriate insistence on confidentiality. When an out-of-profile result for a candidate was found to correlate with an unusual marker profile, further

investigation was conducted (by third or fourth marking) to ensure that the mark was appropriate. NB, marker profiles were not used to re-scale across a batch of scripts, but were introduced as a factor in the adjudication of individual cases where necessary, and with appropriate caution.

- c. Grouping of borderline candidates. This approach was used on the first/upper second borderline, which normally involves a large number of candidates. It meant grouping different degrees of borderline status (three 70's short by one, two 70's short by two, etc.), a practice which produced greater efficiency AND consistency in the management of borderlines and the identification of scripts that required further reading.

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 have enjoyed the professionalism, the strong sense of accountability, and the collegiality of the Board of Examiners in the Faculty of English over the three years of my appointment, and I would congratulate the Chair, Helen Moore, on her highly successful term of office.

2.11.4 FHS English Language and Literature, and the Joint School of History and English

Title of Examination(s):		FHS English, English & History
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	Eddie Jones
	Position:	Associate professor in medieval English literature
	Home Institution:	University of Exeter

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A / Other
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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(b) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	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.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?	X		
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?	X		
* 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 / Other".				

Part B

B1. Academic standards

- g. *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 favourably. The excellent candidates would be excellent anywhere; the 'middling' candidates are probably better on average than the middling candidates elsewhere – certainly (as I have mentioned before) the standards of their writing and argumentation are very good, even in those cases where the content may be relatively undistinguished. There were a couple of poor performances this year; they too would have been poor elsewhere.

- h. *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 percentage of candidates achieving in the first class was raised by the chair for discussion: it felt high, though is not significantly out of line with historical values (statistics were usefully provided for comparison). Nor is it much out of line with the figures from comparable institutions, nor with what one might expect from an exceptionally high-calibre intake.

One might wonder whether, given such excellent students and the very stimulating essays that many of them write, the best students should regularly be getting overall averages beyond 75%. (In fact, such averages are rare.) I

think this is down to a demanding assessment process that makes it hard to maintain very high marks across the entire degree, rather than a reluctance among markers to award such high marks for individual papers where they are appropriate.

The Board noticed the particularly high marks awarded to candidates in the special options and dissertation submitted papers; these marks were routinely the highest achieved by an individual candidate. In some ways this is not a concern – it is not surprising that final-year candidates pursuing a strong personal interest accompanied by a tutor who shares that interest should excel – but the Board will want to continue to keep an eye on this, looking both for inflationary pressure on overall results (not at this stage in question), and also any areas of weakness that may emerge. One challenge as the Faculty goes forward with its new syllabus will be to maintain the sense of enthusiasm and excitement that is palpable in the teaching and assessment of these new papers.

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 happy with the assessment process. The FAP system introduced last year has now bedded in and is working smoothly. New processes introduced by the Faculty to monitor the marking practices of pairs of markers worked very well: the system identified a potential anomaly well in advance of the Board, so that the Board was able to consider and implement a remedy that ensured fairness to students. The Board was conducted in a very professional manner, for which the chair, Helen Moore, deserves credit, along with Angie Johnson, whose support of the Board was especially impressive given the less than ideal environment created by the building work currently under way at the English Faculty.

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?

A couple of points of inconsistency for possible discussion within the Faculty. Neither, I think, will be news. Reading across the complete profiles of several candidates, I noticed some inconsistency in markers' attitudes to the explicit use of criticism/secondary sources. In particular I read the complete run of one strong candidate who, whilst evidently immersed in the critical debates around his/her texts, rarely if ever cited or quoted specific critics associated with those positions. Some markers mentioned this in their feedback, and presumably penalised the candidate for it; others did not. Secondly, there was a brief discussion in the Board of the slippery notion of 'range'. Oxford candidates are not required, as those sitting exams elsewhere often are, to answer with reference to a specified number of texts or authors; instead there is an implicit assumption that they will show competence across a period,

including a satisfactory range of coverage. What that means remains undefined. (Should the 3 answers cover a range of dates? genres? genders? critical approaches? etc?) In both cases, the Board felt that the appropriate place for advice on such matters was the annual examiners' reports. Perhaps it is – the reports are invaluable documents – though I would suggest (1) that the reports are, by their nature, descriptive of the behaviour of the previous year's examiners rather than necessarily prescriptive in relation to those examiners whose preferences really matter to the candidate, and (2) that it may be very confusing to candidates if examiners on different papers put forward significantly different positions on these questions.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

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

Good practice: as noted above, the Board's decision to divide runs of students' work between pairs of examiners in such a way that any one examiner will always examine with at least two other examiners is an efficacious solution to the potential consequences for candidates of pairing two 'hard' markers on one side, and two 'generous' markers on the other, of a run of scripts.

I read, as part of the run of work of the top Course II candidate, the essay that received the prize for the highest essay mark. The paper, unusually for Oxford, asks candidates to write 2 essays, rather than 3, in 3 hours. I mentioned this in a previous year, so won't reiterate at length; but I do wonder whether this format doesn't allow candidates to develop better arguments (and better-considered answers to questions) than the more typical format, which includes an element of sheer physical challenge, and often (even in stronger candidates) results in at least one rushed answer, and some poor fits of question to essay. Any anxieties over range could be dealt with via the paper's rubric.

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 was my third and final year as an examiner. It has been a most enjoyable term of office, made the more so by two different but equally capable chairs (Tiffany Stern and Helen Moore), and expertly supported by the excellent Angie Johnson.

The period has seen the working through the system of a major restructuring of the Oxford English syllabus, and it has been good to see how well these changes have worked. There is considerable excitement and energy around

the English programme at the moment, which hasn't always been the effect of syllabus reform in other places I have known.

A number of changes have been made to the examining system across the University during these three years. These sometimes seem to have been introduced, or at least communicated from the centre to the faculties, a little clumsily or over-hastily, but the direction of the changes – towards a more consistent and professional system – is appropriate, and as they have become embedded they have resulted in a better process.

Oxford's English programme provides a lively environment in which high quality students are able to produce excellent work.

3 MST AND MPHIL (MEDIEVAL STUDIES) IN ENGLISH (including MSt in English and American Studies and MSt in Language)

3.1 STATISTICS

3.1.1 Numbers and percentages in each class/category

There were 102 candidates

Outcome	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete	Fail & Incomplete
Numbers	37	53	5*	6**	1***

Percentages including recent years

	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
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%	N/A
2016	36.3%	52%	4.9%	5.9%

* 5 students (4.9%) 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'.

** 6 students (5.9%) have yet to complete due to being granted extensions for the dissertation, which they will have submitted in the long vacation.

*** 1 student (0.98%) has yet to complete due to the need to resubmit 'failed' work and was granted an extension for the dissertation which they will have submitted in the long vacation

3.1.2 Vivas

Vivas were not used

3.1.3 Marking of Scripts

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

3.2 EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

See Chair's report

3.3 CHANGES FOR THE FACULTY TO CONSIDER

See Chair's report

3.4 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 separately to MPhil candidates.

3.5 GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE EXAMINATION

See attached report

3.6 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ISSUES

3.6.1 Grades by reference to gender:

2016

	All students	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete	Fail & Incomplete
Female	66	20	39	4	3	1
%		30.3%	59.1%	6.1%	4.5%	1.5%
Male	36	17	15	1	3	0
%		47.2%	41.7%	2.8%	8.3%	0%

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.

3.7 DETAILED NUMBERS

n/a for the MSt

3.8 COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

n/a for the MSt

3.9 COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUALS

This part is physically separate

3.10 THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Professor Heather O'Donoghue (Chair)

Ms Jeri Johnson

Professor Laura Marcus,

Professor Lynda Mugglestone

Professor Lloyd Pratt

Dr Adam Smyth

Professor Kathryn Sutherland

Dr Daniel Tyler

Dr Gavin Alexander (Cambridge)

Dr Paul Davis (UCL)
Dr Ruth Livesey (Royal Holloway)
Professor Adam Piette (Sheffield)
Professor Jeremy Smith (Glasgow)
Dr Matthew Townend (York)

3.11 MSt and MPhil in English, Chair of Examiners' Report for 2015-16

3.11.1 Process

There were six new internal examiners this year, with only two (Heather O'Donoghue and Adam Smyth) continuing from last year. Similarly, of the external examiners, only two continued from last year (Matthew Townend and Jeremy Smith, although Professor Smith was not called on last year since there were no candidates for the Language MSt).

At the first meeting of the examiners (20/11/2015) the timetable was approved and 'B' and 'C' Course options were allocated to markers. In response to last year's Examiners' Reports and Action Points, it was agreed that 'rounding up' of borderline candidates should remain at the discretion of the Board and not be stated explicitly; that a common approach to dissertation supervision should be set out in the convenor guidelines for all strands (in response to worries about poorer performances on dissertations than on essays); that externals should see examples of the feedback given to students, and should also see some full candidate runs towards the end of the examination period; and that the dissertation should continue not to receive extra weighting. It was also agreed to tighten up and impose penalties for over- and under-length work, and noted that the existing guidelines are somewhat ambiguous.

The Board noted the examination conventions, and determined that from next year the MPhil final classification will be calculated on the basis of an array of all eight marks gained across both years of the degree (rather than only the second year marks, as happened last year). Although the Board understands that the Faculty's intention was always to use all eight marks, after careful consultation with the relevant authorities it was deemed unfair to make the change this year, but the one student who will be in the second year of the MPhil in 2016-17 will receive the 2016/17 version of the examination conventions. The Board also agreed that candidates should submit a title as well as an outline for their dissertation, and this year the Chair urged all relevant internal examiners to check the feasibility of topics, rather than the Chair having responsibility to approve topics in all strands. Finally, arrangements were set up for a "Factors affecting Performance" committee to convene on the morning of the Final Examiners' meeting.

The Chair wrote to all the external examiners to introduce herself and provide contact details, to address the points raised in reports from the previous year, and to welcome their participation in the examination process. The Chair encouraged all the external examiners to raise any concerns or questions

which 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 all meetings. However, the main item on the Agenda for the HT is confirmation of MT 'C' Course essay marks, and the Board was informed that the external examiners would have to be present at the meeting if the marks were to be released to students (as is fundamental to the operation of the MSt and MPhil). The University Proctors insisted on this requirement even after representations from the Chair of Examiners, but conceded that a virtual meeting by video call would suffice. Thanks to the resourcefulness of the administrative staff, Emily, Jemma and Andy, the co-operation of the Law Faculty (due to building work in St Cross there was no available room in which to hold such a conference call) and not least, the laudable good-humour of all the externals (even though they had to clear free time in the middle of term for two hours on a weekday morning), the meeting was held successfully. All the externals, however, confirmed that these interim meetings had not in their experience been required at other institutions they had externalled in. If this requirement is continued in 2016-17, it will be essential to make this commitment of time clear to externals.

In the process of confirming 'C' course marks, the Board considered cases of over- and under-length work. Current Exam Conventions stipulate a penalty of one mark for "5% over word limit" – that is the "Percentage by which the maximum word count is exceeded". The Board noted that if strictly applied, this seems to mean that one word over the maximum, and thence up to 5%, would incur the penalty. It was agreed that steps should be taken to request revision of the wording of this guidance. There was also some uncertainty as to whether candidates are required to obtain permission from the Chair to include an appendix with submitted work. It was agreed to discuss this at the Final Meeting. At the second HT meeting, markers were suggested for 'B' Course essays and for dissertations.

At the first meeting of TT 2016, marks for HT 'B' and 'C' Course essays were confirmed, again by conference call, and with the good-humoured co-operation of the external examiners although two of them were simply not able to clear time for the meeting. Issues of late submission were discussed – for instance, an essay handed in at 7.57 am on the day after the deadline (or at least, logged by Exam Schools as having arrived by then) was properly leniently treated as having perhaps arrived late on the day of the deadline. Next year's examiners will need to look carefully at procedures for logging in submitted work; it was very helpfully suggested that consideration be given to submitting work electronically – as is the case in very many other institutions – which would have the advantage of ascertaining a definite submission time and date.

There was further discussion of the nature and status of appendices; GSC might wish to discuss giving more guidance and formulating clear guidelines with regard to appendices.

The Final meeting was held on July 5th 2016, and followed by dinner at Pembroke, thanks to Lynda Mugglestone (Linacre kitchens were being refurbished so the Chair could not host dinner). At this meeting, dissertation marks were confirmed, and penalties agreed for under and over length work, and late submissions. Report was made from a specially summoned meeting

of the newly constituted “Factors Affecting Performance Committee” which had met earlier in the day (thanks are due to the external examiner, Dr Livesey, and Professor Mugglestone, who generously volunteered to serve on the committee). As the Board understood it, action can only be taken with regard to candidates on a borderline, and since there was no-one in this position, no action was taken.

It was noted that the MPhil regulations do not specify a minimum number of words for the dissertation; this should be included in future.

Two candidates with distinction marks for the dissertation and an average of 69.75 were rounded up, with strong support from the whole Board. The issue of formal regulation of rounding up was raised again by externals, and it was suggested that there might be legal challenges made if there was no clear specification of criteria. The Chair asked the externals to put their concerns into their final reports; GSC may wish to consider their anxieties and suggestions. The Board awarded the Charles Oldham Shakespeare prize to one candidate, and the new Marilyn Butler prize for the best performance in the dissertation jointly to candidates who each got a mark of 80 for the dissertation.

The University Proctors granted a large number of extensions this year, and almost all stretched beyond the date of the Final Examiners’ meeting (and some, indeed, into October). It was decided that rather than gathering all the examiners several times – even virtually - to confirm marks and classify candidates, there might be one virtual meeting once all the submitted work had been received and marked. This has proved an extremely long process, given the frequent unavailability of markers, examiners, and administrative staff over the Long Vacation, and candidates with relative short extensions are having to wait for a long time before their degree is finalized. It is not clear to me how this might be addressed, but the situation does not seem wholly satisfactory as it stands [there are still outstanding cases now, at the beginning of MT2016] GSC may also wish to devise some guidelines regarding supervision of candidates with long extensions.

3.11.2 ADMINISTRATION

Administration for the examination was undertaken by Emily Richards and Jemma Stewart, who worked very hard and often under considerable pressure, in spite of the unflagging enthusiasm and co-operativeness of the external examiners. We all relied heavily on Emily’s experience, and on Jemma’s remarkably speedy mastery of many complex and sensitive processes, given that she was very new to the Faculty. Andy Davice was also a great help to us. It is, however, becoming increasingly difficult to recruit dissertation markers for the MSt, and not least because deadlines are so tight, and this put pressure on the administrative staff. The very substantial degree of turnover of examiners also made things a little more difficult. Directives from the “centre” have come to seem increasingly eccentric and ambiguous, and this too put pressure on our administrators (and indeed examiners).

Some externals noted informally that we may as a faculty find it difficult to recruit externals too in the future.

3.11.3 CRITERIA

The criteria for classification remained the same as last year. The two routes to a distinction were maintained: a candidate must gain 70 or over on the dissertation and an average across all four elements of 70; or 68 or over on the dissertation, and an average of 72 (but note previous mentions of rounding up in certain cases, and the change in prospect for classifying the MPhil across all eight marks).

3.11.4 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS

The reports of the external examiners are attached. At the Final meeting of the 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 summarized below:

Dr Townend reported that although the meetings he attended via conference telephone were unusual he had felt more involved in the process by taking part. The quantity of essays he received over the year was about right. There was terrific quality in all areas of medieval work. The students seemed to perform just as well in the dissertations as in the essays but the essays were particularly excellent. The assessors seemed very fair with their judgements and their reports were very full. It had been very useful to receive a full run of scripts for one or two candidates. However, feedback was often couched in very negative terms. Dr Townend remained concerned about the weighting of the different parts of the course. Either the dissertation should be properly weighted or the requirement for a distinction in the dissertation in order to gain a distinction overall should be removed from the criteria. There were a number of cases in which assessors could not agree on a mark. He thought having 60 as the pass mark is rather odd as it leads to a lot of work for the Faculty and seems to be of no benefit.

Dr Alexander said that the assessment for the MSt is rigorous and fair and there is a lot of good practice. He had a slight worry that the long essays favour quantity over quality. He questioned the fact there is such a large range for the word count on the essays (5-7000 words) but only a narrow range on the dissertation (10-11,000 words). He would have liked to have seen a few 'agreed mark not found' essays especially since the first and second marks for some of the essays he had seen were 11-12 marks apart so there was evidently some disagreement. The external examiners might be used to look at candidates whose average marks were close to the distinction borderline, as suggested by Dr Davis. He said he felt the tick boxes on the comments forms were confusing and he had noted cases where a student's referencing was not correct but the assessors had not seemed concerned. The handbook is ambiguous about referencing and appendices. The

conventions for over-length work seem light compared to the penalties imposed for late submissions.

Dr Davis said the work he had seen was of high quality and the range very impressive. Seeing a full run of scripts for one or two candidates had been very helpful. He had however struggled somewhat with learning about how the students are taught. He saw a lot of bad notation, sometimes in very good work. Some of the examiners had penalised this and some hadn't. He thought that 60-70 was a very narrow range for a pass mark leaving no space for applying penalties.

Dr Livesey had been impressed with the work she had seen and was pleased to see a full range. It is very clear that the students are working across different genres and periods. She would uphold the value of the B course for which she saw wonderful work. The sense of the architecture of a longer essay needs to be addressed in the feedback. It might be useful for students to receive annotated copies of their essays. There wasn't a sense that the dissertation was providing exit velocity and perhaps it might be better to call it an extended essay.

Professor Piette felt there is a good shape to the MSt. The A course seems to prepare students well for the B and C courses. In particular the 1900-present A course seems very useful. The content of the B course is not clear from the handbook and he would also have liked to have seen abstracts of the American strand's A course content in the handbook. The World Literature A course also needed more content. The C course offerings were inspirational. Professor Piette could not understand why there is no merit classification and thinks establishing a formal 'zone of discretion' for rounding-up is a good idea.

Professor Smith said he had seen some ambitious projects and very wide-ranging work. The marking criteria are well-established and he liked the dialogue between markers. He agreed with the establishment of a 'zone of discretion' when dealing with borderline marks.

Overall, the external examiners were very positive about the degree and about the quality of the work they saw. They too paid tribute to the efforts and professionalism of the administrative staff – as I do, as Chair.

Heather O'Donoghue
Chair of MSt and MPhil Examiners
September 2016

3.12 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

3.12.1 *MSt and MPhil in English (650-1550)*

Title of Examination(s):		MSt and MPhil in English (650-1550)
External	Title:	Dr

Examiner Details	Name:	Matthew Townend
	Position:	Reader in English
	Home Institution:	University of York

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		✓		
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

B1. Academic standards

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

I am very happy to confirm that academic standards on the Oxford MSt and MPhil in English compare well with those achieved by students on other Masters programmes I have experience of.

- 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).*

Levels of student performance and achievement are very impressive: I saw excellent work in the medieval period on both the MSt and the MPhil, and across a range of fields – Old English, Middle English, Old Norse, and medieval Scots. Some of the coursework essays, in particular, were especially good, being characterized by a very strong command of the primary sources (and the languages in which they are written) and a very conscientious engagement with the secondary scholarship. This year (I think for the first time during my stint as external) I did however see some failing work as well, but the fail marks seemed to be fully justified, and in accordance with the grade descriptors for the programme.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

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

As in previous years (this is my third and final year as an external), I was very impressed by the rigour and conduct of the assessment process. The process as a whole was very ably managed by the assessment team of Prof Heather O'Donoghue, Mrs Emily Richards, and Ms Jemma Stewart. Throughout the year, communication with the external examiners was exemplary, not only in terms of clarity and documentation, but also in terms of openness to external input. The amount of written work sent to externals to read was considerable, but not overwhelming, and it enabled me to gain a good sense of both students' work and assessors' practices. I have not experienced at any other institution the requirement to involve external examiners in 'tele-conferences' in the course of the year, but these were run in an efficient and friendly manner, and were helpful in developing a sense of issues arising. The final examiners' meeting in July was similarly conducted in an exemplary fashion.

There is, however, one issue concerning the examination process which I have commented on in both my previous reports as external examiner, and would wish to do so again (and this is my reason for ticking 'No' for A7 above). The classification criteria for the English MSt state that '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'. As I argued at length in my two previous reports, this seems to me to fall short of the necessary standards of explicitness and transparency regarding principles of degree classification. I will not re-state everything I have written in my two previous reports, but I do feel strongly that classification criteria should be full, explicit, and transparent, and that they should be known to students in advance. It is, I think, undesirable for examination boards to

wish to retain 'discretion' in borderline cases, as there is a danger that boards will end up devising classification criteria on the spot, to decide which borderline candidates go up and which do not. It is much better, I would suggest, for explicit borderline criteria to be stated in advance – for example, that a student needs to have achieved a Distinction mark on at least two of their four units of assessment in order to move up to an overall Distinction. There was, however, a general consensus at this year's board, both among internal and external examiners, that it would be desirable to frame some explicit criteria for future years; so I hope very much that this will be acted on.

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?

Please see B2 above and also B5 below

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, I have been impressed by the fullness of internal examiners' reports, and also the 'marker dialogue' that explains how agreed marks have been arrived at. I do, however, feel that some examiners write as if they are providing a critical review of a work (tabulating problems, and so on), rather than seeking to provide constructive feedback, which students will find helpful as they go on to write further pieces of assessed work. So a change of tone or approach might in some cases be appropriate.

There have been good steps taken this year to tighten up penalties on the late submission of work, and also (above all) on over-length and under-length work. It became clear in the course of the year that some of the regulations on these issues remain somewhat ambiguous, and so will require further tightening, but in most cases this is just a matter of clarifying the wording. I do wonder, though, if penalties for over-length work are not somewhat lenient, especially in comparison with penalties for late submission (which seem highly punitive).

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.

One item I would like to comment on is the placing of the passmark for the English MSt at 60, rather than 50 (which is the norm on other Masters programmes I am familiar with). Over my three years as external I have increasingly come to the conclusion that a passmark of 60 (as opposed to 50) is really of no benefit, and indeed is positively undesirable. Assessed work marked in the 50s currently has to

be re-written by students and re-assessed by staff, even though much of that work is by no means disastrously weak: this seems to me an unnecessary repetition of effort both for students and staff, at an unhelpful time of year. It is also the case that respectable work in the low 60s can be easily brought down to a Fail through the imposition of a penalty for being late or over-length: this isn't, of course, a problem in itself, but one would not want to have a system in which this occurs repeatedly. Above all, the narrow range of 60-69, between Fail and Distinction, leads to a good deal of bunching of marks: a Pass range of 50-69 would give examiners much more room to manoeuvre in terms of distinguishing between work (and of course at many institutions 50-59 is designated as Pass, and 60-69 as Merit).

Finally, as I sign off at the end of my last report, I would, of course, wish to end on a positive and appreciative note. I am very grateful for having had the opportunity to act as medieval external on the English MSt and MPhil over the past three years. I have read a very great deal of excellent student work, and worked with very impressive Faculty staff, both academic and administrative. Thank you!

3.12.2 MSt in English (1550-1700)

Title of Examination(s):		MSt in English (1550-1700)
External Examiner Details	Title:	Dr
	Name:	Gavin Alexander
	Position:	Reader in Renaissance Literature
	Home Institution:	Faculty of English, University of Cambridge

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		✓		
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

- 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?*
- 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).*

There was much really outstanding student work, in range and method, in focus of insight and originality; the least competent work still showed the benefit of an excellent course structure and excellent teaching support.

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.

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?

Word limits

The B- and C- course essays have word limits of 5,000-7,000, a wide range (maximum is 40% more than minimum). The dissertation has a word limit of 10,000-11,000, a very narrow range (maximum is 10% more than minimum). I don't understand the thinking here. If a 10% range of variation is appropriate to a dissertation, why not to an essay? The implications for the balance of a student's work ought to be clear, and seem to me undesirable. One student might submit 10,000 words of dissertation for assessment and 21,000 words of coursework; another 11,000 words of dissertation and 15,000 words of coursework. I think some mathematical logic ought to be introduced here to improve clarity of expectation for students and aid comparability in assessment. I also feel that the coursework essay lengths are a little excessive, meaning we get more quantity than quality of writing. There will be many views, but I do think the issue needs some thought.

Criteria for distinction

Borderline candidates (<0.5% short of required average for distinction) are considered by the Board, but there are no defined criteria to apply to such cases (such as 70+ marks on at least two elements). Criteria are needed, and consideration should also be given to involving externals in judging whether the candidate deserves a distinction or not.

Agreeing marks

Some sets of examiners were more likely to agree than others. One external read many dissertations, some with such small discrepancies between examiners' individual marks that failure to agree looked surprising. I was not asked to adjudicate any dissertations, although there were cases where the individual marks were 10 or 11 apart. I wonder if a clear set of conventions is needed (e.g. <5 apart should not normally be referred for third reading; >10 apart should always be referred).

Hard copy vs online submission

The externals lug back to Oxford heavy piles of essays and dissertations. Copying and sending these led to delays more than once. Beyond a certain point, late submissions cannot be considered at the scheduled final Board meeting. More use of electronic files would help, pending an online submission and marking system, which must surely be adopted before too much longer. Personally, I would prefer to receive essays I am adjudicating in hard copy, but would be happy to receive essays for standards checking in electronic form.

Sample feedback

I believe previous externals have requested samples of the feedback given to students (based on examiners notesheets, which we do see), and I hope that this will be included next year.

Referencing

Clarity is needed on whether or not the author-date system of referencing is allowed. The guidelines in the Faculty's MSt/MPhil Handbook (15-22) are ambiguous, seeming (p. 16) to allow any system but on p. 18 seeming to require a full referencing form. There are implications for word count, so it is an important question of fairness.

Penalties for over/underlength essays/dissertation

The current penalties need rethinking. Over/underlength essays are penalised at 1 mark per 5% up to a maximum of 10 marks. These rules are arguably too lenient, and were being too leniently applied (5% overlength was taken to mean more than 5% and less than 10% rather than up to 5%). The students seem to understand that they have <5% leeway; that should be stopped. And it is possible to be substantially overlength with only a minor penalty. Underlength essays are self-penalising, so it is not even clear that a penalty is needed there. The leniency only punishes the examiners and I do not understand it.

Other penalties

3.5 and 3.7 of 'Exam Conventions' refer to penalties for departure from rubric or from approved titles or subject-matter which are not given.

Marking criteria

In general the criteria and descriptors are excellent, but I think the criteria for failing work ('Exam Conventions', section 3.2) represent a hostage to fortune: work might fail by meeting some but not all of these criteria, but the implication is that failing work will demonstrate all, not some, of the shortcomings listed.

Sampling

The dissertations I was sent for sampling (distinction, high pass, low pass) happened to be ones where the examiners were close together in their initial marks. It would be good next year also to see work where the initial marks are further apart but discussion resulted in a mark at one of those three levels.

Appendices

The guidelines on appendices (especially in B-course essays, but also, potentially, in dissertations, need clarifying. It is not sufficiently clear that an appendix is material not included in the word count; that it cannot therefore be a part of what is assessed; and when permission for its inclusion must be sought. See 'Handbook', p. 16.

Charles Oldham prize

A process is needed to ensure that all candidates are identified well in advance of the meeting; the external might then be involved in adjudicating.

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 MSt/MPhil is an outstanding course. I was especially impressed by the up-front course documentation, enabling students to pick their own route through what is an enviably modular course. The depth and rigour of work required within the course structure (insofar as this can be judged from the paperwork) is very impressive indeed.

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.

3.12.3 **MSt in English (1550-1700) / MSt in English (1700-1830)**

Title of Examination(s):		MSt in English (1550-1700) / MSt in English (1700-1830)
External Examiner Details	Title:	Dr
	Name:	Paul Davis
	Position:	Reader in English
	Home Institution:	University College London

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		✓		
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?*

Academic standards achieved by the MSt in English students at Oxford generally compare very favourably with those achieved by students at other HE institutions at which I have served either as an internal examiner (i.e. my own department at University College London) or an external examiner (i.e. King's College London). I would single out two areas of particularly impressive achievement: the broad range of materials with which students on the course have the opportunity to engage, eliciting an answerable diversity in their own critical approaches; and the eloquence and expressiveness of their critical prose. Conversely, the one area where standards occasionally dipped below what one would expect of such high-achieving students in so prestigious an institution was that of scholarly presentation. Full guidance is provided in the course materials, and I would personally endorse the unwillingness of

teachers on the course to prescribe a single system of notation. But, of course, whichever system students decide to use when constructing bibliographies and styling footnotes must be consistently applied, and this was too often not the case, not just in the work of weaker students but also in some of the strongest essays and dissertations I saw this year.

- 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).*

On the evidence of the sample work I reviewed, student performance and achievement, in both the MSt (1550-1700) and the MSt (1700-1830), is pretty uniformly strong. That my experience is representative of the programmes as a whole is suggested by the statistics of final results, showing that in both programmes the average mark for most components was just below the level required for a Distinction. The one exception are the 'Hilary B or C' essays in the MSt (1700-1830) where the average mark was 64. The average for this component was also the lowest in this programme in the previous two years, albeit by a smaller margin. Perhaps this year's result is just a blip – and it should be noted that the difference was not observable at all in the MSt (1550-1700) – but it may be worth investigating whether the discrepancy is due in particular to performance in the essays for the 'B' course which test specific editorial and bibliographical skills. To be clear, I regard the 'B' course as one of the prime distinctions of the Oxford MSt programmes, and the work I evaluated for the course struck me as scrupulous and resourceful. But teachers might want to review the guidance and support concerning 'B' coursework offered to students in periods after the early-modern (to whom the value of addressing the 'material' aspects of texts may not be immediately self-evident), particularly bearing in mind that the course is to be made compulsory for MSt students in all periods from next year.

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 rigorously and in a manner which generally ensured equity of treatment for students. As is often the case with Masters programmes, limited numbers of students and the practicalities of a personal tutoring system mean that full candidate anonymity can be something of a fiction for internal members of the Board. But teachers seemed properly aware of the need to avoid inappropriate reference to personal information when considering the profiles of candidates, and especially when deciding whether or not to 'round up' a borderline profile. In reaching such decisions, the Board rightly enjoys a measure of 'discretion', but without wishing to make these processes spuriously 'objective' (i.e. brutally bureaucratic) I would support the general feeling amongst the external examiners this year that some criteria to frame debate could usefully be stipulated. One possible procedural change the Board might want to contemplate is involving external examiners more fully in the assessment of borderline profiles – for example,

by asking them to read the entire 'runs' of borderline candidates' work, providing a synoptic view not available to internal markers.

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 referred above (under B1 (a)) to weaknesses in the scholarly apparatus of some of the work I reviewed this year. To judge from their reports, internal markers seem to differ widely in how they react to such weaknesses, some applying a specific deduction while others take a more impressionistic view. No doubt this is a matter discussed between first and second markers when settling the marks for individual essays, but a more general discussion among the Board might be in order to ensure that students are not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by uneven marking practice in this area. At present, students are told (Handbook, p. 15) that it is a 'requirement of your examiners' that work on the course should be 'presented in a scholarly manner', but not what the baseline for that requirement might be, or whether they will actually be penalised for failing to meet it.

That raises the matter of penalties more generally, a subject where again I share the concerns of my fellow external examiners. It is good to see that steps have been taken to clarify the nature and extent of penalties for infringements of the word count and delayed submission of essays. Unfortunately, the tables as presently formulated are seriously ambiguous. If exceeding the word limit by 10% attracts a penalty of 2 marks, and it is 3 marks for 15%, how much will be taken off for 11%? Similarly, if submitting an essay one day late leads to a 5 mark deduction, and a two-day delay costs 8 marks, how early on day two are the extra 3 marks forfeited? Several ways of addressing these problems were aired at the final Board meeting, and I do not myself have any particular preference, but plainly the internal members of the Board, in consultation with teachers on the courses, must settle on a solution and apply it consistently.

These various concerns surrounding penalties or quasi-penalties assume particular importance in the context of the aspect of the assessment process which most surprised me as an external examiner new to the MSt programmes this year – namely, the proportions of the marking scale. The pass mark, at 60, is ten marks higher than in the other comparable Masters programmes of which I have knowledge; and yet the Distinction threshold, at 70, is the same as in those other programmes. That leaves markers here very little room indeed to distinguish between work which meets the requirement for a bare pass, and work which clears that level with something to spare but without attaining the standard for a Distinction. It also means that even a comparatively minor penalty will often result in a candidate receiving a fail mark. The norm in other Masters programmes in English is to employ a three-tier assessment system, with a middle band of 'Merit' marks – usually, 60-69 – between bare pass and Distinction. Of course, standardization for the sake of it is invidious, and the Chair of the Board explained the historical rationale for Oxford's unusual practice in this area. However, in an increasingly competitive environment for doctoral places and funding, the Board surely needs to consider whether it is not disadvantaging students whose marks average in the high 60s under the present

scheme – students potentially capable of proceeding to doctoral research – by not recognizing their achievement in the terms of ‘Merit’ which are now in well nigh universal use across English literature departments in the UK.

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) Learning and Teaching

I have already commented above (under B1 (b)) on the distinctive calibre of the ‘B’ course, and welcomed its increased centrality within the MSt programme from next year. From one point of view, this course could be called ‘traditional’, but given the obsolescence of the traditions it preserves in other Masters programmes in English literature, it also ranks as ‘innovative’.

A similar observation might be made more generally about the syllabus for the two MSt programmes I oversaw, both of which strike something close to an ideal balance between the ‘traditional’ virtue of catholic coverage of the literature of their periods (especially in the ‘A’ course), and ‘innovative’ (research-led) options allowing students to pursue a wide range of local enthusiasms (in the ‘C’ courses).

(ii) Assessment

The double marking system employed in the MSt programme seems to me to represent ‘best practice’, in so far as it appears to be a double marking system in more than merely name – that is to say, that even where the first marker is the convenor for the course, it is not the custom, as increasingly happens in notionally ‘double marking’ systems in other institutions, for the second marker simply to ratify the first marker’s conclusions.

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.

No further comments, except to register formally my thanks for the courteous and prompt assistance I have received Ms Emily Richards and Ms Gemma Stewart, and also the Chair of the Board, Professor Heather O’Donoghue, in all aspects of the Examination process.

3.12.4 MSt English Literature, 1830-1914

Title of Examination(s):	MSt English Literature, 1830-1914
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External Examiner Details	Title:	Dr
	Name:	Ruth Livesey
	Position:	Reader in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Thought
	Home Institution:	Department of English, Royal Holloway, University of London

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓			
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

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

The academic standards achieved by students on the MSt 1830-1914 programme are very high indeed. The quality of writing across all levels of achievement is the best I have seen on similar taught postgraduate programmes across the UK. Although the structure of the MSt as it stands does not enable students to undertake the extensive research of a 12 month MA programme with a dissertation, students nevertheless strive to produce work of depth and originality at all programme levels. In the work I have seen this year I had the pleasure of reading at least two near-publishable pieces of work demonstrating research excellence and intellectual ambition. The MSt marking criteria emphasis the need for originality and independence of analysis – which is very welcome – and solid or derivative work which would receive a higher grade elsewhere falls rather lower here, which is a welcome indication of the intellectual expectations of the programme. Few examiners on this strand of the MSt used the 80-84 ‘very high distinction’ which might have been applied to some of the work I read, and certainly would have been awarded to work of this quality at other institutions. It was noticeable at the Board that examiners on other parts of the MSt are using this upper range on a more regular basis.

One anomaly of this programme is the fact that the pass mark is set at 60, unlike the 50 which is pretty universally the pass mark of taught MA programmes in the rest of the UK. I do not see the value of this: it leads to many capped second attempts by students in the course of a year with additional burden of pressure for students, administrative staff, and academics alike. A banding of pass, merit, distinction at 50+, 60+, and 70+ would do nothing, in my view, to dilute the quality and ambition of students on this programme.

- h. *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 the work of half the students on the programme and that of some taking courses from other strands of the MSt intake. It is clear that students engaged and responded with enthusiasm to some well-structured courses this year, in particular Bevis’s course on Victorian humour, which produced much excellent work. The teaching and research of Mendelssohn and Evangelista has also led to an overall student tendency to write on fin de siècle literature and culture, with surprising few essays on canonical mid-Victorian novelists and poets. Above all, however, I was impressed by the work that emerged from the Hilary B course on bibliographical research. The inclusion of such a strand in a more modern period course is highly unusual in the UK. But the training and resources available to students led – in most cases – to deep and innovative independent research discoveries of a very high level: in many ways these essays are the best indicator of research preparedness in a course in which the dissertation is relatively short in word-length and duration.

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 process of double blind marking is rigorous and consistent in all the material I have read this year. Markers make adequate reference to the published criteria in comments and use the tick sheet to confirm and justify the mark awarded. Cases where agreement was not found between examiners were fairly rare and in those instances I was happy to act as a final adjudicator. In most cases I was sent an

account of how disparities in marks were resolved, but a couple missed this out. Markers engage in depth with the content, analysis and argument of the work in question and this is clear in the reports.

I attended the 'factors affecting performance' sub-board meeting which was conducted with scrupulous attention to individual cases and evidence. I believe moving to online submission of assessed essays via turnitin or similar means would simplify much of the complication around late manual submissions to the Schools. Students seemed unaware or unconcerned about the fairly substantial deduction of marks for late work and the double system of extensions issued by Proctors and 'factors affecting performance' examiners' meetings around late penalties does risk jeopardizing equity of treatment through the nature of its complexity.

B3. Issues

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

It seems essential to ensure consistent practice that the Board develops a set of additional criteria for considering the promotion of candidates on a borderline for Distinction. At present the criteria state that 'candidates whose final average falls within 0.5% of the average for a Distinction will have their overall performance carefully reconsidered by the final Examination Board'. Developing published criteria that go beyond this seems essential for clarity and transparency for candidates and in line with University governance policy. These additional criteria could look to preponderance of distinction level marks, reconsider the dissertation, or call on external examiners' academic judgement of the whole run. Whatever the decision, and there are plenty of excellent examples of additional criteria around, further published guidance is necessary to ensure the best standards of academic practice.

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 would like to reiterate the value of the Hilary B course on bibliographical research and the high standard of teaching and supervision that must be in place to equip students to produce the fine work I read. The inclusion of such a strand in a more modern period course is highly unusual in the UK, but reading the work has made me realise how many more future research students would benefit from this sort of exercise and training.

Now that students receive marked work and feedback during the course of the programme I would like to suggest that students have opportunities to receive face-to-face feedback tutorials or annotated copies of essays. In several cases it was clear that very able students had not quite mastered the additional attention needed to the structure and signposting of longer essays. This sort of generic editorial feedback on clarity and essay architecture could have really helped students improve work for the final dissertation, which in many cases did not display the exit velocity and mark uplift one might expect.

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 the new system of returning feedback, I suggest examiners consider addressing the written comments to students in the final version.

3.12.5 MSt in English (1900-present)

Title of Examination(s):		MSt English Literature, 1900 - Present
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	Adam Piette
	Position:	Head of School of English
	Home Institution:	University of Sheffield

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓			
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

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

The standard was comparable to the work by Masters level students whom I have taught and examined and read as external examiner at Sheffield, York, Glasgow, Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin, UEA, Liverpool, Keele.

- j. *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 read was marked by its scrupulousness, scholarly rigour and dedication to learning. It is a feature of the Oxford system that students get some sense of the production and materiality of the book in their overall degree, as well as being encouraged to pursue their own way – with superb work at the high end from students experimenting with the challenges of World Literature, or experimental writing.

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 read work from across the board and was given samples from high to low range, more specifically from Fail to marks of 80. The module marking and dissertation marking was accurate, clearly worked out between markers, pedagogically useful to the students, and with a proper dedication to standards as set out by the discipline and University.

B3. Issues

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

No, none, The issues of possible lack of clarity with regard to word count and appendices for B-course work, length of dissertation, draconian late penalties, and constructive feedback problems have all been dealt with at the Board to my satisfaction. I should note general dissatisfaction with the proctors' decision to insist on telephone attendance by all externals at all Board meetings throughout the year – this is not convenient and Oxford is alone in insisting on this.

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.

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.

3.12.6 MSt in Women's Studies

Title of Examination(s):		MSt in Women's Studies
External Examiner Details	Title:	Dr
	Name:	Katherine Cecilia Harloe
	Position:	Associate Professor in Classics and Intellectual History
	Home Institution:	University of Reading

Part A				
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>		
		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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
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?	✓		

*** 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

B1. Academic standards

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

This is an outstanding course; it is wide-ranging and challenging in its interdisciplinary focus. The level of student achievement equals or exceeds that of Master's cohorts in other institutions of which I have experience.

- l. *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).*

This was yet again a successful year, even though a smaller proportion of students than last year achieved Distinctions. The work was consistently very good across the range of topics. Unlike last year, I did not detect any falling off of student grades in sociological/political options by comparison with literary/cultural ones. I understand that my suggestion of offering further guidance to students working on such topics for the first time was taken up by the option convenors, and am glad that this issue appears to have been addressed effectively.

In terms of the substance of the work, I was yet again impressed by the range of topics addressed and by the level of engagement with issues, theories and methods pertinent to Women's Studies. Students were clearly engaging with critical feminist theory and gender theory, with research approaches drawing on phenomenology, queers of colour, and discourse analysis proving particularly popular. Almost universally, students demonstrated their ability to grasp key theories and approaches, to apply them, *and* to criticise them – this final skill clearly differentiates postgraduate-from undergraduate-level work. I concluded from this that the Michaelmas term Theories and Approaches courses are working well, and that students are able to carry over understanding gained in these elements to their option essays. There was some particularly good work on early modern and contemporary literature and some very original studies grounded in empirical research.

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 reviewed all the Michaelmas Term option essays, two-thirds of the Hilary Term ones and around half of the (available) dissertations, including all borderline work or work where the candidate's overall grade was borderline. In general the markers are applying the criteria consistently and fairly, and all students got the marks their work merited. I saw no reason to change any of the marks agreed by internal markers.

I queried one case in which there was a significant discrepancy between the Examiner's and Assessor's recordings of their initial marks and discussion in order to reach an agreed mark. I believe that the Assessor did not record her marks properly in this case; however this was an isolated instance of one marker failing to follow the Conventions. I do not believe that there is a general problem here.

I was also called upon to adjudicate one case in which the Examiner and Assessor failed to agree a mark. In this case, the mark that I suggested was very close to the initial mark awarded by the Examiner.

In a very small number of cases, the Examiner had not completed a statement giving details of how she and the Assessor had arrived at their agreed mark. This information is very important for external moderation purposes, and Examiners should be reminded in future years to complete this part of the form.

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?

1. Use of the range of marks: Across all the work I examined the highest mark awarded was 83, the next highest 80, and the third highest 77. No work at all was awarded marks in the 'Highest Distinction' category (86-100). It would be good to give some thought to the question of what it would take for an essay to receive a mark of 90+; this is a question that is increasingly being addressed in other institutions, where redesign of marking criteria descriptors, the introduction of step marking in the First Class/Distinction range, and other measures are being taken to encourage markers to use the entire range of available marks. I believe that this is something you should consider, to ensure that Oxford graduates are not disadvantaged by comparison to students in other institutions where the full range of marks is being used.
2. There was a general tendency, which I detected across all elements of programme, for students to fall down on the marking criterion that regards structure (and, albeit to a lesser extent, that of expression), while scoring highly on other criteria. It would be worthwhile for the supervising committee to consider whether some additional instruction or support should be given in order to help students to improve their performance in this area. In one option this year students were asked to produce an abstract of their essay, just as they do for the dissertation. Since the composition of an abstract seems *prima facie* likely to prompt careful reflection on structure, I wonder whether this exercise could be built upon in order to encourage students to plan and structure their essays in a more satisfactory fashion.
3. I would like to record a serious concern about the manner in which extenuating circumstances ('factors affecting performance') and extension requests are processed by the University of Oxford, which seems to me to risk disadvantaging students unfairly.

In my own institution these two procedures have been merged, so that any student who is experiencing difficulties that she believes are likely to have a negative effect on her makes a declaration of extenuating circumstances. These are considered straight away by the Senior Tutor and/or Chair of Examiners, who can approve an immediate extension to a coursework deadlines as a strategy of mitigation. All such cases are then reviewed again at the end of the assessment period by a Sub-Committee of the Examining Board, which meets immediately

before the final Examiner's Meeting but after all the marks have been agreed. This Sub-Committee, which has access to the candidates' overall mark profile, is able to review declarations of extenuating circumstances against that profile and take further actions in mitigation if this appears to be justified. For example, it might decide to waive a late penalty for a particular piece of work, to offer the candidate an opportunity to resubmit it, or (if the mark achieved for a particular piece of work completed during the period of difficulties is very much out of line with the candidate's performance across the other assessed elements) to exclude a particular component mark when calculating the candidate's overall grade.

My understanding is that at Oxford these procedures are kept separate: this means that if a student applies for an extension because (for example) of a medical problem, but does not also make a separate declaration of 'factors affecting performance', no information is available to the Examining Board when it meets to confirm the final degree classifications. This system is highly problematic as it places the responsibility entirely on the individual student to assess how far her performance will be affected by a particular problem, at a time at which that problem may be only just developing. If a student miscalculates and requests only an extension as a result of a problem which results in significant longer-term stress or time pressure, but takes no further action because she is not fully aware of the impact it is having on her work, the student may in effect be penalised for having failed to anticipate the seriousness of the problem at the time it first developed. Moreover, because the University Proctors refuse to share information that relates to extension requests with the Examining Board, Examiners have no way of obtaining information that it might be relevant for them to take into account, even where they suspect or know through less formal channels that a student has, indeed, experienced a serious medical problem or other difficulties. I believe that students have been disadvantaged unfairly by this, and I hope that the University will consider revising its procedures.

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.*

1. At B3.2 above I commend the practice of requiring students to produce abstracts for option essays, and recommend its consideration as a means of developing students' skills in structuring essays.
2. One Examiner structured all her feedback in the format 'The best features of this essay were... What was missing was....' This helped me immensely in understanding of how she had arrived at her initial mark, and I believe that it also phrases feedback in the form that is most useful for the individual student.

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 a fantastic programme, and a very important one: it clearly offers students an opportunity to develop critical and reflective skills and to increase their understanding of the diversity of both contemporary and past global society. This is a large part of what university-level education is for, and Oxford should be proud of this MSt.

3.12.7 MSt in English Language

Title of Examination:		MSt in English Language
External Examiner Details	Title:	Professor
	Name:	Jeremy Smith
	Position:	Professor of English Philology
	Home Institution:	University of Glasgow

Please complete both Parts A and B.

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 3(c) of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓			
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?

Standards achieved by students are generally very high. Tasks set are appropriately stretching, and students characteristically demonstrate quite considerable ambition in addressing them, often with remarkable results. I do note that the programme, which only lasts 9 months, does require exceptional commitment from students, and my impression is that they can underperform on the dissertation element as a result of time-pressure, with a consequent effect on the overall grade awarded (including missing distinctions). I suggest that some work is carried out to establish whether this impression is a true one, and consider appropriate action.

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).

See above. I am concerned that word-counts for essays/dissertations seem to vary between cognate subjects within the institution, and suggest some homologation might be carried out in that regard, if only to justify the current situation more explicitly.

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.

Marking standards were scrupulous throughout, and I appreciated the full resume offered showing dialogue between the various markers involved. I have no doubts whatsoever as to the robustness of the grades awarded. I wondered whether it might be a good idea to flag the achievement of candidates with reference to an explicit set of Intended Learning Outcomes, in line with usual practice at other institutions.

B3. Issues

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

Some issues arose with regard to the weighting of individual units, and also to do with the operation of discretion at boundaries. Some explicit procedures here could be useful. The range of marks allotted to examiners, expressed in percentage terms, offered challenges, and again other institutions have addressed such problems through reviewing their mark-scale and aligning achievement of grades much more explicitly to published descriptors. I should be happy to supply examples if that would be welcome.

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 applaud the ambition of the programme, and the stretching demands made on students. Administrative support for the programme was absolutely exemplary, and the convener of the examination board was clearly in command of all aspects of her brief. The conference-call arrangements worked very well indeed, and I am glad that the Proctors agreed to them. Frankly, I – and I know that other external examiners shared my view – would simply not have been able to attend the range of Oxford meetings originally demanded; given that external examiners are senior academics who generally have significant responsibilities in their own HEIs, Oxford must be realistic about the demands it makes if it wishes – in my view rightly – to sustain the external examiner system as part of its quality assurance.

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 have much enjoyed my involvement with the programme, and hope my contribution has been useful. It is my understanding, however, that staffing issues mean that the programme will not be offered in future years. In my view this is a retrograde step, quite out of line with broader trends in English Studies both in the UK and overseas. It is a shame that Oxford, which has such a distinctive and established reputation in the linked fields of English linguistics and philology, will no longer be placing such activity at the heart of its English programme.