



UNIVERSITY OF  
**OXFORD**

**FACULTY OF ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017**

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# 1 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

## PART I: Overview

### A. Statistics

This year there were 233 candidates for the Preliminary Examination in English Language and Literature. 6 candidates had withdrawn during the course of the year. 2 candidates secured Partial Passes in the Trinity Term examination and were required to resit the Early Medieval Literature paper during the Long Vacation: both passed. A further 2 candidates secured Partial Passes but, following representations made to the Medical and Special Cases Committee, were not required to re-sit any papers.

7 candidates were granted permission by the Proctors to submit their Paper 1 portfolios after the deadline. 4 candidates who submitted their portfolios late without permission, or without submitting a form documenting any Factors Affecting Performance (FAP), were penalised accordingly.

Altogether 17 candidates submitted FAP forms (the total last year was 12) – this is discussed further on p. 3 below.

#### Numbers and percentages in each category:

2016-17	Total no candidates: 233	100 %
Distinction	55	23.6
Pass	174	74.7
Partial Pass	4	1.7
Incomplete	0	0.0

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

Paper	2015-16	%
1 Introduction to English Language and Literature: Combined	47	19.74
Section A	54	23.18
Section B	65	27.90
2 Literature in English 650-1350	51	21.89
3 Literature in English 1830-1910	52	22.32
4 Literature in English 1910 – Present	53	23.77

## PAST STATISTICS

i) English Prelims (from 2013-14) and Moderations (until 2012-13) numbers and percentages in each category:

Category					%	%
	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2015-16	2014-15
Dist.	57	57	59	46	25.3	25.0
Pass	163	171	175	186	74.7	75.00
Fail/PartPass	4	0	0	2	1.8	0
Inc.	0	0	1	1	0	0

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

Paper	2016	2015	2014
1	22.4	20.1	20.9
2	25.6	17.9	19.2
3	22.9	24.5	19.6
4	23.8	24.1	23.9
Overall	23.7	23.7	24.2

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

Paper 2: 2 EML and 3 HENG

Paper 3: 8 EML and 5 HENG

Paper 4: 5 EML and 2 HENG.

**B. General remarks**

Following last year's implementation of a new Faculty policy whereby all postholders who are not on leave can expect to do some exam marking each year, with Assessors for the Preliminary Examination normally being postholders, this year's Board comprised five permanent postholders and one departmental lecturer, while the Assessors likewise comprised five permanent postholders and one departmental lecturer. Each paper was marked by two Board members (30% of the run each) and two Assessors (25% each). As Prelims remains a single-marker system, moderation of the marks for each paper is an important part of the process; accordingly, the markers for each paper met at least once after the delivery of examination scripts to discuss standards and compare marks for sample scripts, while members of the Board also checked any discrepant marks and in some cases the affected script was remarked. Largely as a result of this process of internal moderation there was no need for any scaling of particular markers' profiles. The Chair asked all markers to inform him of any examples of short work or rubric infringements encountered during the marking process, and ensured that penalties were applied appropriately and consistently across all papers before the first marks meeting.

Candidates on the Pass/Distinction and Pass/Partial Pass borderlines had all four of their examination papers read by the Chair; any papers requiring a second expert opinion were read additionally by other members of the Board. It was agreed that this provided a more consistent way of identifying patterns of excellence and/or relative weakness in the work of

particular candidates, and it is recommended that this procedure should be retained in future years.

The arrangements for taking account of specific learning difficulties, factors affecting performance and permission for handing in assignments late worked reasonably well this year, although the various mechanisms for informing the Chair of particular decisions remain somewhat cumbersome. An increase in the number of FAP applications was to be expected, in line with similar developments at other universities, although it remains unclear why such applications are accepted by the Proctors so close to the final meeting of the Examination Board, and potentially (as happened last year) after the meeting of the Medical and Special Cases Committee. Officially an FAP application may be made by any candidate at any point before noon on the day before the final classification of results, even if the circumstances relate solely to the Paper 1 portfolio, submitted more than 6 weeks previously. Inevitably this adds another layer of uncertainty and complexity to a process that is already extremely time-consuming. The Faculty Board may wish to pursue this question further through the appropriate channels.

Although the Examiners saw some very impressive work at the top of the range this year, and all candidates gave some evidence of being alert to the rich possibilities offered by the course, there was general agreement that many candidates seemed reluctant to explore literature in English beyond a fairly narrow set of canonical texts. The reports for individual papers that follow give more detail on this matter. Set against this, it was also noticeable that a growing number of candidates are now willing to discuss American and Anglophone World Literature, which suggests that the broadening out of the course from 'English Literature' to 'Literature in English' is starting to have an effect on how undergraduates are taught and what they are willing to study.

One feature of how the later period papers were approached that is worth flagging up here is some continuing uncertainty over date boundaries. The undergraduate handbook currently states in relation to 'Literature in English, 1830-1910', for example, that "This paper examines literature in English from roughly 1830 to 1910, though you are permitted to look at material earlier and later than these boundaries in order to make sense of any particular writer's development." This is principally so that candidates may write about authors such as Hardy or Yeats, whose careers cross the neat lines of Oxford's period papers. However, this year a number of candidates were penalized for writing whole essays on (e.g.) *Heart of Darkness* (1898) for the 1910-Present paper without any attempt to show how this work fitted into the development of Conrad's career as a whole. (This is discussed further on p. 11 below.) While the wording of the handbook is not ambiguous, it might be helpful if it were to be articulated even more explicitly that choosing to write exclusively on material published outside the boundaries of a particular period paper is likely to place candidates at a severe disadvantage. This is something that the Undergraduate Studies Committee may wish to discuss further.

The stipulation about not writing "more than one answer substantially on the same author", which appears in the instructions at the front of each examination paper, might also usefully be added to the undergraduate handbook. Currently the handbook states "Do not repeat material", but this year the Chair had to answer several queries from candidates – and in

some cases their tutors – as to the exact meaning of this phrase: e.g. what constituted repetition, and whether it included writing on the same author in Paper 1 in addition to one of the period papers. The latter question proved especially troubling for some students. On p.12 of the Prelims Handbook it clearly states that: “You must avoid duplicating material used in this paper when answering other papers, i.e. if writing on a text or extract from a text under this paper, you may not write on the same text under any other Prelims paper.” However, it was suggested that this could be inconsistent with the instruction on the question paper that “you should not reuse material submitted as part of the portfolio in any of the timed examination papers”, on the grounds that it might be possible to write on the same text in different ways. These are matters that the Undergraduate Studies Committee may wish to consider, in particular whether the standard instructions printed at the front of each paper should be amended or clarified.

Finally, one curious thing that happened this year was that several candidates contacted the Faculty to check that they could – as they assumed – exceed the 2,000-word limit for Paper 1 essays by up to 10%, i.e. 200 words. It is not clear where this particular academic urban legend comes from; perhaps someone confused word limits with speed limits. In fact the wording in Information for Candidates is unambiguous: “Candidates are not permitted to exceed the word limit set down in the regulations. Portfolio essays should be between 1,500 and 2,000 words inclusive of notes but excluding the bibliography.” It would be helpful if tutors could draw the attention of their students to this stipulation.

### **C. 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.

## **PART II: Administration and Analysis**

### **A. Administration**

Once again the Mark-It database was used for the processing of marks, and E-vision for the recording of class lists and related data. (The Chair experienced specific difficulties in accessing FAP data, which were resolved only after the conclusion of the examination process; assurances have been received that they will not be repeated.) 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, this was the fourth year in which candidates were required to send an electronic version of their portfolio to an email address accessible by the Examinations Secretary, inserting their candidate numbers in the subject-line. It was the first year in which marks were recorded separately for Section A and Section B of Paper 1, to be automatically communicated to candidates, and although altering the database was by no

means straightforward, it was achieved in time for the new practice to be introduced this year.

Angie Johnson, the Examinations Secretary, was tenacious and good-humoured in dealing with the many queries that came her way – some of them intricately time-consuming, and others that came close to being time-wasting – and the complicated business of dealing with the many FAP applications was undertaken with great efficiency by Andy Davice, the Faculty’s Academic Administrator. The Board wishes to record its thanks to both.

Several exam scripts were misdelivered by the Exam Schools, which led to some testy email exchanges, and it was noticeable how many candidates turned up for the first written exam in Ewert House without knowing their candidate numbers. This is something that tutors may wish to remind their students about next year. The Chair also had to answer a large number of minor queries – about referencing, or formatting, or photocopying, or whether the phrase ‘word count’ was itself part of the word count – emailed by candidates who were anxious about the work they were planning to submit for their Paper 1 portfolio. In almost all cases these questions could have been answered by the candidate’s own tutor without breaking any rules. Next year it may be worth reminding candidates that they are not forbidden from *talking to* their tutors during the 10-day writing period, so long as substantive matters relating to the content or style of their work are not discussed.

## B. Breakdown of the Results by Gender

Candidates	2016	%
All Genders	233	100
Female	169	67
Male	64	33
<b>Distinctions</b>		
<b>All</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>23.6%</b>
Female	34	14.6% (20.1% of female students)
Male	21	9% (32.8% of male students)

## PAST STATISTICS: Prelims

Candidates	2016	%	2015	%	2014	%
All Genders	224	100	228	100	234	100
Female	151	67	151	66	160	68.37
Male	73	33	77	34	74	31.62
<b>Distinctions</b>			<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>%</b>
All	57		57		59	



Female	33	58 (22% of female students)	40	70 (27% of female students)	35	59 (22% of female students)
Male	24	42 (33% of male students)	17	30 (22% of male students)	24	41 (32% of male students)

This year, 169 female and 64 male students sat the examination. Approximately 22% of female students attained Distinctions, and 33% of male students, which is identical to last year's figures. (As there are proportionately fewer male students, the percentage attaining Distinctions has varied more widely in recent years, between 20% and 33%, as against variation between 19% and 27% for female students). More detailed comparative figures are supplied in the table above. It is probably worth repeating the view expressed in last year's Examiners' Report that "In the absence of any information about the relevant contextual factors (e.g. performance at school and at admissions) it is impossible [...] to offer any grounded interpretation of the figures recorded." However, whereas last year there was no significant disparity between the performance of male and female students in Paper 1, this year male students achieved higher marks in three of the four elements, including the Paper 1 portfolio (and in both sections). The exception was Paper 2, a timed exam, where female students were awarded a slightly higher percentage of Distinction-level marks. The comparative figures for Distinction-level marks in all four papers are:

Paper 1 Combined: F 16.0%; M 29.7%  
 Section A: F 20.1%; M 31.3%  
 Section B: F 22.5%; M 42.2%  
 Paper 2: F 22.5%; M 20.3%  
 Paper 3: F 22.5%; M 39.1%  
 Paper 4: F 19.5%; M 29.7%

### **PART III: Reports on Individual Papers**

#### **Paper 1: An Introduction to English Language and Literature**

[See also the General Remarks above on pp. 4-5]

##### Section A

All questions were attempted, with the most popular topics proving to be language and identity, standard/non-standard Englishes, metaphor, gender, and language and truth. The best commentaries combined a judicious selection of texts with an impressive command of technical terminology appropriate to linguistic analysis. Some scripts also demonstrated a pleasingly deep level of engagement with a wide range of relevant secondary materials and made intelligent use of online resources such as digital corpora. Weaker candidates, by contrast, tended to ignore the terms of the question (often reflected in the selection of texts) or to produce a literary appraisal of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the

chosen texts rather than a dispassionate linguistic analysis. Weaker candidates forgot that Paper 1A is a commentary exercise, involving technical analysis of language, not an essay. Some candidates created difficulties for themselves by choosing a pair of texts that made a large, bold contrast, rather than a pair in which the contrast might have emerged through subtle analysis. Some weaker candidates used the digital tools without any critical awareness of their limitations.

On the whole the level of formatting and scholarly apparatus was very inconsistent—only a small number were presented in anything like a satisfactory manner. Inconsistencies in referencing, bibliography and footnoting, as well as poor punctuation, grammar, spelling and syntax, often resulted in students achieving lower marks than if they had adhered to a standard system of referencing throughout. For example, in footnotes commas were regularly placed before opening brackets, pp. was used as an abbreviation for single page references and spacing was often arbitrary, especially in bibliographies. Detailed information about referencing and formatting is available in the Prelims Handbook that is easily accessible on weblearn.

Many candidates provided unacceptably short bibliographies—it is reasonable to expect a substantial level of research for a piece of work written over a two-week period. A large number of candidates failed to provide the question number at the beginning of the commentary. Stronger candidates introduced their chosen extracts at the start of a commentary, explaining the reasons why these texts were chosen and situating them in terms of genre, medium etc. as appropriate. A number of extracts were poorly presented in appendices, sometimes to the point of illegibility (especially in cases where images were scanned). Some candidates lost marks for failing to provide their own transcripts where scanned copies of texts were difficult to read. A small number of candidates failed to include copies of their chosen extracts, which inevitably had a significant impact on marks awarded, as candidates are solely responsible for the correct submission of all material.

Despite these issues, it is pleasing to see candidates tackling an impressively wide range of texts and media for this paper, reflecting the geographical and chronological sweep of the English language.

## Section B

All questions were attempted, and overall the standard of work on this section was high. There were some especially thoughtful essays on narratology and reader-response, while essays on gender and drama tended to be weaker; too many essays on drama, in particular, lacked a strong foundation in the theory and/or history of theatre and performance, and instead tended to offer wobbly generalisations about plot and character, which in some cases included a quick-fire summary of the history of theatre from the Greeks to the present. Although excellent work was produced in many different ways, it was noticeable that candidates who produced sensitive close readings of literary texts were far more likely to discuss theory with equal attention to nuance. Weaker candidates tended to describe theory rather than analyze its workings, or wrote essays that would have been more suited to Papers 3 and 4.

In general the best essays appeared to have taken heed of last year's examiners' report. A number of essays did not respond to the question in any detail, and instead used it as a springboard to offload an essay that had clearly been prepared for a rather different kind of question. These essays did not score highly. (Candidates who took the James

quotation as an opportunity simply to say what they wanted to say about realism [as opposed to considering also the idea of a 'strange irregular rhythm', for example], or those who took the Churchill quotation as an opportunity to write about dramatic form without also considering 'music', or 'reappearance', or 'pace', and so on, were less likely to write distinctively.) Among the strongest essays were those that delivered an independent argument arising from the question, rather than a predictable summary of well-worn critical material. Here the death of the author once again proved to be stubbornly alive and kicking, although in almost every case Barthes's claims were treated as a set of freestanding critical truths rather than considered within a larger historical context. A number of essays asserted their claim with little consideration of alternative perspectives; for example, arguing flatly that authorial intention is irretrievable. The best work sought to complicate its propositions.

Although this year produced some lively close readings of literary texts as seen through the lenses of different literary theories (the best of these were the critical equivalent of an optician's test: is it better with or without Derrida? with or without Nussbaum?), it remains disappointing how few candidates are willing to read criticism with the same kind of sustained close attention to its rhetorical strategies, presuppositions, argumentative blind-spots, and so on. While many essays tried to show how a piece of literature could be reshaped by the pressures applied to it by a piece of criticism, almost nobody paused to consider whether the same might be true the other way round; that is, whether (e.g.) Shakespeare might help us to read (e.g.) Harold Bloom as much as Harold Bloom might help us to read Shakespeare.

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

The standard of much of the work for this paper was very high. All of the essay questions were attempted, with issues of heroism, monstrosity and the Other, violence and mortality, gender and genre proving particularly popular. Candidates sometimes struggled with knowing how to frame an essay with a clear structure and argument in response to quotations on the exam paper, and there were the usual attempts by some to shoehorn material into an answer that did not fit the question, but the best scripts showed a real engagement with the issues raised by the quotations and questions. Many candidates showed a pleasing willingness to venture beyond the core group of recommended texts, demonstrating a healthy curiosity about the literatures and cultures of this long period. Some strong candidates, however, focused on a smaller selection of primary material (though by definition none of the strongest work came close to violating the rubric requiring candidates to demonstrate substantial knowledge of at least three texts across the two essays). Essays written by such candidates were marked by an impressive clarity of argument and some insightful and remarkably sophisticated close readings and engagement with texts in their original language (i.e. Old and/or early Middle English).

As in previous years, the majority of candidates wrote essays on Old English material without any reference to post-Conquest literature. The elegies, *Beowulf*, *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Battle of Maldon* proved as popular as ever but there was also some thoughtful work on texts including *Judith*, *Juliana*, *Andreas*, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, the riddles and the Physiologus poems as well as on some prose homilies and hagiographies. A small number of candidates did comparative work on pre- and post-Conquest literature (the saints' lives were quite popular) and while the best of these essays demonstrated a pleasing sensitivity to changing cultural and literary contexts, the weakest approached Old and Early

Middle English texts as though they were produced in a monolithic continuum. Very few wrote on Middle English alone, although those who did often wrote sensitively about texts and genres including romance, lyric and devotional writing. If this indicates that students are rarely working on the period 1066–1350, it is unfortunate.

This year, a significant number of candidates either violated, or came close to violating, the rubric requiring that they demonstrate substantial knowledge of three texts across the two essays. A brief reference to a text in one paragraph of an essay does not constitute showing substantial knowledge. While it is permissible to write an essay on a text on which they have already written a commentary, the repetition of material must be scrupulously avoided. Several candidates also violated the rubric requiring that candidates demonstrate an understanding of texts in English, in their original language; quoting solely or primarily from modern translations is not acceptable.

Of the two Old English commentary texts, *The Wanderer* was the most popular, though a significant minority wrote on the *Beowulf* passage. The quality of close reading was very varied. The strongest candidates paid careful attention to aspects of both style and content and managed to combine succinct reference to a range of poetic techniques and lexical choices characteristic of early English verse (such as formulaic diction, compound diction, kennings, variation, apposition, parallelism, litotes, alliteration, rhyme) with knowledge of broader thematic questions. The weaker work tended to be descriptive rather than analytical, simply summarising content and themes rather than commenting critically on the style as well as the content of the passage in hand. While there was some notably sensitive work on the *Beowulf* passage, disappointingly few candidates engaged with the fruitful question of voice(s) in the *Wanderer* passage. No candidate wrote on the *Ancrene Wisse* extract, and only a very small handful on *Havelok*.

### **Paper 3: Literature in English, 1830-1910**

All of the questions were attempted, with some of the most popular being those on faith (Q2), gender (Q4), multiplex and mutable personality (Q15, although this was often treated as an invitation to write more generally about literary character), literature and science (Q6), the novel (Q9), and issues around class raised by the *Punch* cartoon (Q22). However, not all of the questions were actually *answered*. (The quotations in several questions were not addressed at all.) The tactics adopted by some candidates appeared to be to slice out a few words (e.g. from Q9: responsibility, limits, experiments) and write an essay that had very little to do with the question as a whole. These essays did not do well. Similarly, several candidates had clearly decided in advance that they were going to write an essay on the industrial problem novel (usually a rather tired comparison of *Hard Times* and *North and South*), and exercised much ingenuity in finding a suitable peg to hang it on.

The best essays managed to range widely and penetrate deeply into their chosen material – indeed, although the most impressive candidates adopted several different approaches to Victorian literature, one feature they all shared was a willingness to read it closely and be surprised by what they found. Rather than assuming that inherited platitudes about the period were true, they succeeded – sometimes brilliantly – in challenging cultural and critical orthodoxies with freshness and insight. However, it was noticeable this year how few candidates were prepared to stray far from a well-beaten path. *Middlemarch*, *In Memoriam*, *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *The Picture of Dorian*

*Gray* were among the most popular texts. While the best essays tended to root these works in their contemporary literary and critical context, weaker candidates stuck doggedly to the familiar A-level territory of themes, character study, and long quotations that were reproduced with greater or lesser accuracy but rarely subjected to any critical scrutiny. Some of these essays were narrowly focused to the extent that the script as a whole suggested a very limited range of reading and revision. Essays on Browning that only considered 'My Last Duchess' and 'Porphyria's Lover', on Tennyson that focused on 'Mariana' and a sample of *In Memoriam*, or essays that recycled the most familiar critical comments on texts without evidence of independent reading, rarely showed either the range or depth of understanding required to achieve high marks.

A number of candidates wrote on Hopkins, although these essays tended to revolve around a small number of canonical poems ('The Windhover', 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire', 'Wreck of the Deutschland', 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire...'). Dickens's novels, particularly *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *Great Expectations*, and *Oliver Twist*, were popular, although again it was disappointing how narrow the range of examples was; there was scarcely a single reference to Dickens's journalism, travel-writing, letters, speeches, or any other aspect of his career. However, there were some good essays on American literature (Melville, Hawthorne, and others), and Emily Dickinson's poetry proved especially popular, particularly in relation to the questions on gender and faith/doubt. Some of the weakest answers were on Victorian science, which was either treated as a single cultural force or restricted to *The Origin of Species*, although very few candidates who chose to write about evolution gave any evidence that they had read anything *by* Darwin rather than *about* him. There was an increase in the number of political readings of Victorian texts - for example, on imperial guilt in Conrad. A significant number of these essays tended to impose a desirable reading onto the texts without letting them speak for themselves, meaning that careful textual engagement was too often minimal.

Also noticeable was how many candidates revealed a wider knowledge of the period that was at best hazy and at worst non-existent. Too many essays opened with breezy generalizations about what 'the Victorians believed' about God, or women, or industrialization, as if eighty years of fierce cultural debate could be boiled down to a single critical sound bite. The possibility that the Victorians – like us – believed many different things, often simultaneously, was rarely considered. This was especially obvious when critics were invoked: although some interesting recent literary criticism was discussed, as well as some old favourites who are wheeled out every year (e.g. Gilbert & Gubar), almost no candidates considered an author's critical reception by their contemporaries. Often it was as if they had floated free from the period altogether. By contrast, candidates who could demonstrate that they had done some original research – e.g. into print journalism, or material culture, or anything else not to be found within the covers of a Penguin Classics edition – tended to achieve high marks.

#### **Paper 4: Literature in English, 1910-Present**

All questions were attempted. The most successful responses were well-informed and imaginative, delivering bold, independent arguments that addressed the question with sensitive reference to the terms of the quotation. The strongest engaged with a range of primary texts and their literary contexts, illustrating a good knowledge of the period. Theory

was used sparingly, but a few of the highest performing answers incorporated theory skilfully. Distinctive answers sustained a striking conceptual framework, finely tuned close readings of the primary texts, and ambitious comparisons.

However, there were noticeable weaknesses across the range. Relevance was often an issue – candidates were often wrong-footed by the absence of a direct question on gender and often tried to co-opt other questions into pre-prepared material. Some of the nuances of questions were missed and there was a lack of engagement in the use of basic terms: the ambiguity of ideas such as public and private were seldom addressed or were complacently exploited. Many candidates interpreted the idea of the ‘public event’ very loosely, or even inaccurately. While some very successful answers challenged the binary between public and private, or questioned what an ‘event’ actually was, some simply used the rubric as a reason to write a prepared essay without addressing the precise terms of the question. Many tackling ‘self-presentation’ steered away from answering on ideas of autobiography or life-writing that were also implied by the term. Philosophical theories of the self were in the main avoided (though there were a few allusions to Sartre and Nietzsche), and the question on sexuality attracted a few references to Freud.

General narrowness of reference was a problem in many cases. While an answer on a single, notoriously long or difficult text (such as *The Waste Land*) is acceptable, candidates did not always offer searching interpretations. More surprisingly, answers tended to be very thin on historical context and ‘background’, and on knowledge of literary criticism. Context was often invoked in a very gestural way. Students tackling the ‘modernity’ question often conflated it with modernism, and had little sense of the intellectual history of the term. There was not often a sense that “experimentalism” might usually mean formal experimentalism. A few rubric violations implied that some people did not know that the course begins in 1910. For example, Conrad texts published after, and including *Under Western Eyes* (1911) fall under the rubric of this paper. *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent* may be referenced in support of an argument about other texts within the period range, but they should not be used substantially (or exclusively) to form the central topic of the essay.

A variety of approaches were taken - single author, multi-author, thematic overview, some lively discussions of American and twenty-first-century authors - but there was less attention to film and other technologies than might have been expected. Those candidates who chose to write an essay about two or three texts by different authors did best when they offered some logic for the comparison and occasionally the connection appeared purely superficial. In the weaker multi-text cases, little consideration was given to potential questions of progression, a theoretical line, a deeper connection in their approach, a similarity in their time of publication, which might have made the combination of authors seem less arbitrary. Many candidates might have performed better if they had shown greater range. A number of essays, for example, analysed three poems, or two short stories or one novel. On some occasions answers on Joyce were devoted mainly to one or two stories from *Dubliners*.

Woolf was by far the most popular author, followed by Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Beckett. Others tackled included Yeats, Conrad, Lawrence, Forster, Mansfield, Auden, Angus Wilson, Jean Rhys, W. H. Auden, H.D., Mina Loy, Henry Green, Evelyn Waugh, Larkin, Heaney, Ted Hughes, Plath, Osborne, Pinter, Wesker, Delaney, Joan Littlewood, Orwell, Elizabeth Bishop, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, Thomas Pynchon, James Baldwin, Philip Roth, Muriel Spark, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, Alan Hollinghurst, Ian Loy, Paul Muldoon, Geoffrey Hill,

Bret Easton Ellis, Ian McEwan, Anne Carson, Ciaran Carson, Tony Kushner, Caryl Churchill, Jez Butterworth, JM Coetzee, Naipaul, Achebe, Rushdie, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Ralph Ellison, Morrison, Jean Toomer, Walcott, Moshid Hamid, Cressida Cowell, Nabokov, and Zadie Smith.

## 2 FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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

First, I should like to offer my sincere thanks to the FHS Board, the Deputy Chair, Professor David Womersley, and the three externals for their help, insight, and professionalism; warm thanks also to colleagues not on the Board and those from other faculties who acted as assessors and setters of papers, as well as to my predecessor, Helen Moore, for great generosity with her time and advice. Angie Johnson once again deserves fulsome thanks from the Board and Faculty as well as from the Chair for the care she brings to a complex job and for her calmness and good humour under pressure, while Andy Davice was a great help in several of the vital final stages of the examination process. My thanks also to the staff of the Examination Schools and the Proctors' Office for what they did to facilitate that 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. As last year, it was good to see that some of the very strongest work was said to be at or near Master's level.

This year there were only a small number of penalties due to the late submission of papers examined by submitted work; where these were applied, however, the effect on the marks received by the candidates concerned, and on their overall ranking, was often significant. (The Humanities divisional framework for penalties for late submission is laid out in the Circular to Tutors and candidates each year.)

Due to concerns expressed by a majority of the Board that the system of using quotation themes for timed examination papers was encouraging candidates to reproduce pre-prepared essays, rather than paying close attention in their answers to the precise terms of the themes (as instructed by the paper rubrics), the papers this year included more rubrics than those in recent years. The format of the papers remained otherwise unchanged, consisting of themes rather than direct questions, and rubrics were not intended to be restrictive, but to help candidates focus their answers. The Chair alerted tutors to this slight change prior to the revision period.

#### 2.1 Statistics

There were 228 candidates, 11 of whom took Course II.

The breakdown of results is as follows:

Outcome	1 <sup>st</sup>	2:1	2:2	3	Pass
Numbers	71	154	3	0	0
2017	31.1%	67.5%	1.3%	0%	0%
2016	31.2%	67.5%	1.3%	0%	0%
2015	27.8%	71%	0.8%	0%	0%
2014	26%	72%	1%	0%	0.5%



2013	33.9%	65.2%	0.9%	0%	0%
2012	31%	66.1%	2.9%	0%	0%

67 standard route Firsts and 4 alternative route Firsts were awarded this year.

The number of Firsts awarded was almost identical to last year (2016: 72 Firsts from a cohort of 231).

## 2.2 Examiners and assessors

As ever, a large number of people (eighty this year) marked FHS scripts and submissions. Last year's report noted that the increase in the number of markers recruited for the Shakespeare portfolio in 2014-2016 had been rolled out for the large Course I period papers. The same system, with six rather than four markers per paper and a 'semi-circular' marking system to blur the boundaries between marking pairs was again used successfully. 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 22 scripts from 13 candidates were marked a further time. Externals read the entire runs of 11 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 third 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

Total number: 155 (100%)

I: 37 (23.9%)

II:1: 117 (75.5%)

II:2: 1 (0.6%)

## MALE

Total number: 73 (100%)

I: 34 (46.6%)

II:1: 37 (50.7%)

II:2: 2 (2.7%)

## COMBINED

Total number: 228 (100%)

I: 71 (31.1%)

II:1: 154 (67.5%)

II:2: 3 (1.3%)

The Board noted that a greater percentage of male candidates than female candidates was awarded a first. The percentages were comparable to those of last year (2016: female (24.1%), male (46.6%). The actual numbers also remain almost the same (2016: female (38); male (34), of a cohort of 231).

## 2.5 Training

The Chair held a training session in Michaelmas 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: Claire Devine, Wadham College
- Best overall performance in Course II of the Honour School: Miles Chandler, LMH
- Best performance in a three hour timed examination, and Distinguished Performance: Conor Wilcox-Mahon, St John's College
- Best extended essay, Paper 6: Daniel Cunniffe, St Peter's College
- Best dissertation and Distinguished Performance: Hannah Foxton, St Hugh's College
- Distinguished Performances: Francesca Forristal, Wadham; Christopher Archibald, Christ Church; Stanley Carrodus, Hertford College

Other prizes:

- Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize: Peter Kerr-Davis, Brasenose College
- Passmore Edwards Award, Classics and English: Molly Janz, Magdalen College

## 2.7 Reports on individual papers

[Examiners Reports are not required for Papers with 3 candidates or fewer].

### Paper 1 Shakespeare Portfolio

223 candidates took this paper. The portfolios as a whole showed an impressive range of subject-matter, many of them very inventively and individually conceived, with the dominant method being to choose something other than the bare Shakespeare text – such as a film, an adaptation, a material phenomenon, a source or an analogue – and use it to frame and direct the questions being explored. Many students had clearly been encouraged to identify three essays that were, on the surface at least, methodologically distinct, displaying an agile competence in each method. The majority of portfolios succeeded in this aim. The overwhelming sense was of very interested, committed, dexterously employed intelligences. There were very few poor submissions, although many of the weaker essays offered strong premises but failed really to develop them, circling around a single conceit, or becoming peremptory or cursory in analyzing specifics. As ever the best essays, however theoretically or historically sophisticated, however carefully plotted and layered, were grounded in close analytical attention to the plays/poems – not necessarily only the written or spoken words, but the whole array of languages and instruments at Shakespeare’s disposal.

Studies of performance history and adaptations featured very strongly. Some students tried to think hard about specific directorial or writerly choices, but a lot of the work that engaged with stage or film productions – and there was a massive amount, covering a wide range of times and places and languages - did so too descriptively, and didn’t do enough to show how such approaches newly reveal the plays at issue. That said, the best essays in this mode were able to use the specifics of performance history to help reformulate understandings of, for example, narrative potential or characterological bivalency. There was welcome engagement with the materiality of the stage (props, parts, audiences, actors, costumes, cues, etc) but quite a lot of this work was predictable and obedient, a bit static, insufficiently aware of the mixed aesthetic economy of the stage, or of Shakespeare’s deft exploitation of its limitations. The best work here engaged with the fact that all such materials are also expressive instruments or modes of language (and conversely, that language on the stage is another locus of materiality). A number of students engaged in textual studies or book history; some did it well, others less so, either making glaring errors (accuracy in these matters is paramount) or not showing why such questions might actually matter. There was good work on things such as reported action, gaps/disjunctions in time, the distribution of scenes, importance of inference, and rhetoric. There were some powerfully trenchant pieces, often anti-sentimental/subjectivist or feminist, bringing into question foundational issues of identity and character - although at times strong arguments were marred by tendentiousness. There was some interesting work bringing in contemporary politics (e.g. Brexit). Recurring themes included the body politic (especially in the histories), reading as perversity, exchanges of wounds, the carnivalesque; there was

some refreshingly inventive work on gender, masculinity, trans-Shakespeare (and not only in relation to *Twelfth Night*); there was ambitious writing on the fierce negative energy in some of Shakespeare's more difficult works, sometimes placing this very suggestively in or against classical traditions. Inevitably some topics recurred frequently: in particular rape and ocular rape in *Titus*, *Cymbeline* and *Lucrece*, and Shakespeare in prisons. Some of the very best work used theory/philosophy with real intelligence; but there were also some less well-thought-through essays where theory was reduced to a soundbite that did no more than work in approximate parallel to an idea already articulated. Some work leant too heavily upon surface sophistication, with apparently clever terminology masking very familiar hermeneutic models.

Most essays were produced to a high formal standard – footnotes, references, punctuation, and so on were generally accurate – but there were still too many examples of careless spelling and grammar. Many essays were sharp and succinct, some were written with brio, some even with imaginative daring, though the authors of others should have borne in mind that 'clarity, fluency, and elegance of prose' remains an important criterion for assessment. As for coverage, the sonnets were perhaps less written about than in previous years, but all in all students treated the full range of Shakespeare's plays and poems, with as much (perhaps more) attention given to nominally less popular works as to the famous plays.

### **Paper 2 (CII Paper 3) 1350- 1550**

228 candidates took this paper, including 11 Course II candidates. All questions were attempted, although some (especially 9, 15 and 17) were conspicuously less popular than others.

In the commentary, most candidates showed a workmanlike knowledge of the text and made a good attempt at analyzing the passage. Some were let down by their misunderstanding of individual words; a relatively large number assumed that 'guerdonynge' meant 'gardening', and several others misinterpreted 'daunger'. Commentaries that took a stanza-by-stanza approach were generally less successful than those that grouped thematic and stylistic elements, as they didn't sufficiently convey a sense of the passage as a whole. Candidates had evidently been instructed to concentrate on detail, which most did, but quite often this too was at the expense of showing some general understanding of the passage; in several cases comments on syntax, etc, appeared to be made for their own sake instead of being directed towards explicating the passage. However, there were also some excellent commentaries where the balance of the elements (syntax, style, content, reading of the passage as a whole, and knowledge of sources) was very well achieved.

The range of material covered in the questions was wide; it was particularly pleasing to see that the new syllabus is resulting in coverage of the paper's entire 200 year period, with a good amount of work on later authors such as Skelton, Wyatt, and More. The most popular authors, texts and topics included Chaucer (especially the dream visions, though (selections from) the *Canterbury Tales* were noticeably more popular than in previous years); *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (often in combination with either Malory or other works of the Pearl poet); Margery Kempe (often in combination with either Julian of Norwich or Hoccleve); Henryson (often in combination with Chaucer or the *Kingis Quair*). Mandeville

(often plus romance, e.g. *Emare*), Wyatt and Surrey also featured regularly, while *Piers Plowman* got a pleasing, 'laudable minority' amount of coverage, as did Rolle, Love, *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the wider mystical tradition. Lyric and drama were relatively rarely addressed, but lyric, in particular, was nonetheless more popular than in previous years, and much of the work on both genres was excellent. There was a minority, but growing, interest in material texts and manuscript culture, and up to a point also in historiography.

Some candidates answered (especially on Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, but on other texts, too) with quotations taken from translations into modern English, without apparently any sense that this might be considered inappropriate; like the misinterpretation of some Middle English terms in the commentary, this suggests an alarming failure to get to grips with the language of the period. The other disappointing feature of many scripts, as in previous years, was the very evident use of 'downloaded' answers, where candidates had clearly come into the exam with their answers planned in detail before they had seen the questions. This resulted in some conspicuous 'twisting' of the quotations; for example, the A. C. Spearing quotation in Question 3 was routinely taken as a prompt to write about narrators in very general terms, while a reference to the soul in a quotation from *Mankind* was variously used to discuss the heart, the mind, and the inner life. On the other hand, the strongest essays displayed an impressive ability to respond to the quotations, drawing on an excellent range of material and ordering it very effectively indeed; many of the best scripts suggested not just that candidates had read widely and enjoyed their reading, but that some of them seemed even to be enjoying the examination.

### **Paper 3 1550-1660**

233 candidates took this paper. All 20 questions were attempted.

This paper continues to suffer from thirty-year margins, with only limited attention shown to literature before Spenser's *The Shepherds' Calendar* (1579) or after Herbert's *The Temple* (1633). Candidates who were able to venture into the overlooked parts of the period gained the advantage of more flexible question selection, and often flourished as a result. It is worth emphasizing one more time that writers who straddle period boundaries (e.g. Milton, Marvell, Traherne) are perfectly legitimate options so long as material is not duplicated on another paper. Mid seventeenth-century authors who received good, if limited, attention included Herrick, Philips, and Marvell. However, the Civil War was largely absent, as was literature of the Stuart courts, especially the masque. Neither Milton's poetry nor prose put in much of an appearance.

The most popular topics were Elizabethan epic (long and short), sonnets, revenge tragedy, the city, cony-catching pamphlets, defences of poetry, devotional poetry, and travel writing. The most popular authors were Spenser, Marlowe, Sidney, Nashe, Webster, Herbert, Donne, and Jonson (the major comedies). Less familiar writers whose work was often compared profitably with more major figures included Wroth (as both poet and prose writer), Philips, Locke, and the Marprelate Tracts. Other minority interests eliciting good work included satires and libels, early scientific and utopian writing, and the *Essays* of Bacon. Answers on allegory were often impressive, mainly because they struck up an analytical relationship with the form.

The best work engaged with the questions at a number of levels, deploying deep and flexible knowledge of authors, genres, texts and contexts to construct engaged, elegant, and well-directed arguments. Attention to language and style was often a feature of the most impressive essays. By contrast, the overall deployment of close reading within scripts was generally insecure; descriptive paraphrases were more the norm. There was illuminating work on material aspects of texts, particularly manuscript and print circulation, and on paratexts; such approaches were at their best when closely integrated with critical reading of texts.

The general level of knowledge on display was impressive, with the significant exceptions that many answers on religion were very short on relevant knowledge, and understanding of rhetoric tended to be superficial. At the other extreme, answers on London at times became overly detailed excursions into social history, rather than considerations of the modes of representation.

A surprising number of answers presented a very narrow range of texts, and/or focused on very familiar poems (Donne's 'The Flea', the first sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, Herbert's 'Love III'); while focusing on familiar is not a problem in itself, the standard of analysis in these answers often suggested that the choice of texts reflected inadequate preparation. A lack of engagement with the questions was also a problem in a significant number of scripts. Answers that set off in promising directions often gave up the reins of argument after the first paragraph, switching back to a prepared topic rather than continuing to explore more relevant ideas. Quantities of contextual information, however substantial and impressive, did not successfully substitute for argument.

#### **Paper 4 1660-1760**

217 candidates took this paper. All questions were attempted, questions 2, 15, and 17 being overwhelmingly the most popular. Most popular authors were Milton and Pope by a long distance; but there was also much attention devoted to Dryden, Defoe, Behn, Fielding, Swift, Richardson, and Rochester. Some attention was also bestowed on a comparatively narrow pool of drama by Wycherley, Etherege, and Congreve. Writers who were tackled infrequently included Marvell, Bunyan, and Cavendish.

There were some very good answers indeed, surveying a very wide range of canonical and non-canonical texts. The best scripts tended to engage with complex, difficult material and indicated extensive reading in the period, even if focusing on one author or one substantial work. They moved fluidly between text and context, demonstrating a knowledge of how a particular work fits into a larger literary tradition, social milieu, or political debate. What often distinguished the very best scripts was a willingness to engage thoughtfully with a particular critical or theoretical approach, close attention to details in literary texts – not just showing close reading skills but also demonstrating an understanding of form and genre – and a planned and coherent argument (as well as fluent writing). These outstanding candidates didn't necessarily write about non-canonical authors and texts (although there was quite a lot of that) but could bring something fresh and independent to the interpretation of the canon. There was a lot of solid work from candidates who knew and understood the texts they were writing about, and who used criticism and contextual

knowledge intelligently. Overall, the message about the importance of including criticism appears to have been heeded.

There was good range of work on women's writing (Behn overwhelmingly the most popular, followed by Haywood, Montagu, and Leapor). Some answers on gender (not necessarily on female authors) showed a reductive sense of what gender criticism can achieve, especially on question 17. Weaker essays launched flattening polemics about how (un-) empowering early-modern literature is; stronger ones developed more searching critical explorations of how gender roles are constructed/evaluated through literary texts.

There were a small group of upper second candidates possessed of superb information and knowledge, but apparently unable to think on their feet quickly enough to apply this knowledge fully to an exam question. Strong candidates were able to use literary, historical, and biographical context to strengthen and enrich their work; weaker ones tended to make generalisations or factual errors when attempting to deploy this kind of material, thus failing to make the contextual information they provided *accurate* and *relevant*. Knowledge of all religious matters leaves a very great deal to be desired.

The greatest problem with the paper as a whole was the fair number of students who disregarded the clear instructions given and failed entirely to engage with the question. A surprising number attempted to shoehorn prepared essays into inappropriate questions, either by cherry-picking a single term, or by tacking on some perfunctory 'close-reading' of the question at the outset. Conversely, a small number of candidates were *too* distracted by the question, only focusing on how their material 'fitted', and neglecting to develop an argument any further. The best answers engaged with the substantial implications of the question, thought carefully about how these related to their material, and pursued their own argument while keeping this relevance in view.

Weaker scripts did not move beyond superficial analysis (whether formal or historical). Many candidates seemed to struggle with formal aspects of writing (especially poetry) in this period: e.g. making anachronistic assumptions about rhyme (as unnatural or mechanical), or building highly reified arguments on comparatively accidental features. The strongest work on form was informed by criticism written in the period, and developed careful and substantial scrutiny of verse-form, syntax, and the subtle interactions between them. However, too often attempts at close-reading were poor, as were knowledge of rhetoric and descriptive grammar.

### **Paper 5 1760-1830**

217 candidates took this paper. All questions were answered, with 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, and 18 proving a little more popular than the others.

The overall standard of responses was very good indeed. There were some excellent and sometimes dazzling scripts, which put on show absolute independence of mind, deep reading, the ability to shape nuanced and memorable arguments, and a beautiful and deft prose style. Depth of engagement with the question was always a discriminating factor. The strongest candidates moved beyond basic summary of the quotation ('Barbauld suggests

that...') by considering the special nature of its execution, often with attention to aspects of tone, syntax, and imagery, and then returned regularly to the quotation not simply out of a sense of obligation, but because the life and spark of their answers genuinely depended upon it. It was clear that some weaker answers conveniently seized upon a quotation from Author X (e.g. Burney) in order to download a pre-prepared essay on that author, without pondering the implications of the quotation at all. Other candidates thought 'engagement with the question' to be a simple matter of dropping into their essays at random intervals key words like 'nature' (from Burns) or 'despondency' (Wordsworth) or 'change' (Shelley). Answers which wilfully disregarded the terms of the question in order to offload prepared materials, or treated those terms too casually for the same purpose, were duly penalized. Candidates nonetheless might find it reassuring to be reminded that they are not expected to identify and contextualise the titular quotations beyond the information that is provided on the exam paper itself: for some candidates here, at least, the inability to do so seems to have provoked unnecessary anxiety. (That said, it was surprising to observe how often Frances Burney (Q 8) was spoken about as 'he'.)

Scripts addressed a remarkably diverse spread of authors: the 'big six' Romantic poets received responses of every standard as usual, but candidates attended to writers as various as Johnson, Equiano, Prince, Darwin, Cowper, Scott, Burns, Macpherson, Robinson, Southey, Hunt, Hogg, Hemans, Wheatley, Clare, and Beddoes, to name but a few. Even so, literature published between 1760 and 1780 remained relatively neglected overall. Poorer answers often took hold of a well-established theme or concept (imagination, nature, beauty, memory, revolution) and proceeded to do little more than force home in very general terms the prominence of that theme or concept within a canonical author's work. Accounts of well known novels were sometimes disappointingly descriptive. The weaker essays on Austen's works and *Frankenstein* especially offered Wikipedia-style overviews of stories and 'key themes' but not much else; and there were also some remarkably unsophisticated arguments presented about characters being good people (or not). The best answers on novels demonstrated nimbleness and attentiveness at once, usually by throwing into relief a particular trope or context, ranging across various texts, and giving at least some thought to the distinguishing characteristics of an author's style. Such answers made examiners feel as though they were being taken *into* these texts and not left to observe them from afar. Romantic essayists (Hazlitt, Lamb, and De Quincey, especially) proved very popular with candidates, and were often addressed in impressive responses. There were a number of answers on drama. Question 1 was often used as an opportunity to rehearse quite familiar debates about Goldsmith and Sheridan, but lesser known plays of the Georgian repertoire were also considered (Cumberland's *The West-Indian* and George Colman's *Polly Honeycombe*), and some of the finest answers addressed later, often overlooked, playwrights. Lack of range was an issue in weaker essays. A good number of answers referred to a single primary text and these answers felt very limited as a result. (Some examples: Burney was represented almost wholly by *Evelina*; Edgeworth nearly exclusively by *Belinda*; Sterne most often by *Tristram Shandy* alone; Burke by *Reflections*; Mary Shelley by *Frankenstein*; De Quincey by *Confessions*; and Hogg by his *Confessions*.) Other answers referred to two texts which did not sit together particularly well, and that was a problem when candidates failed to present an argument which discovered something valuable within the incongruity. Some accounts of Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Byron's *Don Juan* or *Childe Harold* looked only at one or two short extracts of verse, which made any broader



statements about these monumental poems seem quite unconvincing. Even when candidates attended to poems of a very manageable size (a sonnet by Smith, or an ode by Keats, let us say), only rarely did they manage to offer a strong sense of an individual poem's shape and workings as a whole.

The majority of candidates quoted regularly and extensively, though not always accurately. Examiners felt that too many essays offered quotations *in place of* analysis, and essays constructed in this way lacked evidence of close reading. While better work invariably paid careful attention to language, it was sometimes neat considerations of specific and revelatory contexts which brought the analysis to life (the influence of particular scientific discourses on texts, for instance, or the peculiar characteristics of literary allusion). Some responses took contextualisation too far, spending many words describing in very loose terms who Romantic poets were or what the French Revolution was. Generally work on politics and political literature tended to centre on 1790s debates surrounding the French Revolution – Paine, Wollstonecraft, Godwin – and there was little sense of the nature of political argument outside of this decade. Engagement with secondary criticism varied from none at all in weaker essays (or sometimes an extreme over-reliance upon the work of others) to arguments at the top end which situated work impressively within an ongoing critical conversation. Many candidates did not appear to have consulted any criticism written within the past thirty years.

Examiners were disappointed to observe surprising levels of carelessness: incorrect spellings of names of authors ('Percey Shelley'), characters (the now all-too-familiar 'Elizabeth Bennett'), titles of works ('Ode to a Grecian Urn'), and critics ('Nicholas Row'), and misremembered dates (sometimes as much as a whole century out).

## **Paper 6 Special Options**

### **The Long Fin de Siècle**

There were 7 candidates for this option (6 ELL). The best work brought new materials or, more interestingly, new juxtapositions across historical and geographical borders to bear on the European Fin de Siècle, opening up fresh ways of thinking about familiar authors or works and occasionally bringing new evidence into the debate. The weaker essays tended to be brought down either because they struggled to sustain a coherent argument convincingly or because they did not have the right critical tools or requisite sophistication to analyse the primary sources on which they chose to focus. In some cases the quality of proofreading left much to be desired.

### **Styles of Political Criticism since 2000**

There were 9 candidates for this option (7 ELL). It was good to see final-year work engaged with contemporary theory. The range covered was respectable— though affect theory attracted a higher proportion of candidates than might have been expected—and the quality was generally high. The best candidates tended to go beyond accurate exposition to a close critical reading of the theoretical materials, applying as much care to them as they would to any literary works. The highest marks went to those who attempted to do new politically-engaged archival work on the basis of that critical engagement—defining subjects

or problems not already articulated in the theoretical materials. It would have been good to see a more even application of scepticism, rather than the intermittent effort to be critical that characterised the less successful pieces. Several essays suffered from poor proof-reading.

### **Texts in Motion**

8 candidates took this paper (7 ELL). The standard of the work was very high indeed. Almost all candidates showed an impressive ability to position their original research in a context informed by a wide range of reading. The subjects were well chosen, and the essays were fluently written and cogently argued, showing a striking depth of understanding and often providing genuinely new insights. Even the slightly less successful essays were of a good standard, exhibiting evidence of either good original research or of comprehensive background reading, but not seamlessly combining the two. All essays suggested that the candidates had engaged with their work seriously and with enjoyment.

### **Children's Literature**

12 candidates took this option. The most successful essays argued strongly and consistently for well researched positions; a very few struggled to respond creatively to material that does not in itself demand an intellectual approach.

### **Literature and Science**

9 candidates took this option. Generally speaking they 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**

There were 14 candidates for this option (13 ELL). The quality of the work was generally high. The best essays made the most of the opportunity to do independent research and to think creatively across periods, territories, languages, media, and/or disciplines. They engaged with the ways in which literary works pose their own questions of identity in part by making demands on how we read, with some even developing wholly new contexts in which to understand how postcolonial literature works as literature. The weaker essays tended to rehearse familiar issues of identity politics and familiar approaches to reading literary works in the light of such issues.

### **Post-War British Drama**

15 candidates took this option (13 ELL). All the papers demonstrated a thoughtful and original response to the plays under discussion. Across the board, candidates engaged with the dynamics of performance, variously drawing on theatrical reviews, details of scene design, costume, rehearsal techniques, venue, casting, marketing, and the economic constraints of the theatre. Conversely, some astute work was done on the particularities of the printed play text and the visual staging of plays in print. The strongest work offered theoretically sophisticated analyses, informed by a confident command of a wide range of material, and a finely attuned sensitivity to the nuances of dialogue, gesture and theatrical convention. Astute, finely attuned close readings of dramatic moments were used effectively to open out into larger arguments, engaging with a wide range of issues including censorship and sexuality, the staging of altered states of mind, political resistance, race and cultural capital. Sensitivity to the ambiguities and nuances of performance and a precise grasp of political and social debates marked out the strongest essays, while some ambitious essays were weakened by crudely broad-brush generalisations about political and cultural contexts, or emphatic assertions about symbolic significance without supporting evidence.

### **The Literary Essay**

There were 15 candidates for this option (14 ELL). The essays ranged in chronological focus from the eighteenth century to the present day, with discussions of works by Fielding, Addison, Pope, Woolf, Adorno, Hazlitt, Lawrence, Carlos Williams, and Orwell, although the majority centred on writing of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Topics included music, the digital essay, childhood, environment and time. Many of the essays on these subjects would have benefitted from some wider reading in a parallel discipline such as musicology, psychogeography, or history of childhood. There were some fine submissions which succeeded in balancing close reading of individual passages of prose with a broader argument about form or theme. Weaker pieces bolted on passages of close reading without integrating it into a more general argument, or they made unsubstantiated large claims about the nature of the literary essay which did not reflect a sense of its evolution over time. It was hard in some cases to get a clear sense of engagement with the relevant critical or historical debates within which the essay sat. Some pieces compared a series of writers – this was most successful when the candidate was able to make productive links and comparisons between them, rather than simply sectioning their submission according to author.

### **Tragedy**

12 candidates took the Tragedy option. The standard was generally excellent, with a high proportion of first class marks. This paper encourages comparative work across a great variety of periods and genres, from ancient to contemporary, and the best essays used this freedom to construct commanding arguments which moved with high sophistication between texts. Greek tragedy was fruitfully compared with modern novels and drama, often with surprising and impressive success even when the comparison initially seemed arbitrary, an achievement made possible by a firm theoretical basis combined with intelligent close reading. Weaker essays limited themselves to comparisons between two or three texts without a wider sense of intertextuality, generic expectations, or influence, which left the argument ungrounded. Candidates made good use of the freedom to discuss texts of their own choosing beyond the seminar reading list; of the set texts, some thoroughly brilliant

work was done on *Antigone*, Thomas's *Tristan*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Madame Bovary*, *Housekeeping*, and *Angels in America*.

### **Literature and the Mind**

14 candidates took this option. The essays included some ambitious work from a range of methodological perspectives, from Freudian psychoanalysis and contemporary trauma theory to cognitive studies. Around two-thirds of candidates worked with primary texts not discussed in seminars, and all convincingly fulfilled the rubric for the assignment. The best work typically showed literary, historical, and biographical sensitivity as well as strong theoretical understanding, treating primary texts as more than mere exemplification of a theoretical paradigm. The less successful work tended to be diffuse and unclear in its argumentative objectives, and although all essays showed a measure of conceptual ambition and diligent research, some essays were so fragmentary and weakly organised as to suggest extreme haste. Citation mechanics were sometimes a problem even in very good work.

### **Writing Feminisms**

There were 10 candidates for this paper. The best work moved effectively between creative and critical materials testing and exploring debates about a feminist aesthetics at the level of both form and content. As in previous years, we saw strong interest in the representation and articulation of trans identities in fiction and poetry. This year also saw some good work on contemporary writing for the stage and feminist performance. Feminist remediation and intertextual reworking of classical and canonical works was a popular focus and produced some fine close reading. Stronger work showed confidence and curiosity in its engagement with the works of 'theory' students were introduced to in the course of this option. Weaker work was inclined to lay a (recent) feminist theoretical insight alongside a limited range of writing by women which did not seem to be otherwise related except in so far as they shared a theme of interest in feminist debate. Candidates were clearly more confident interpreting literary works, especially fictional texts by women, than bringing that same interpretive subtlety to bear on works they saw as 'secondary' or 'philosophical' or 'political'. Where the intentions of authors of literary texts were habitually tested or questioned in execution, works of feminist theory are too often taken to be straightforward expressions of intention rather than performative or artistic utterances. Essays were often rather limited in their range of reference. Essays on a single author could achieve resonance and depth but sometimes they discussed only a single work and seemed to lack the ambition and range needed to amplify the larger questions and histories encountered in this option. Most essays were well-written and well-structured, although trying to emulate the style of the theoretical writing occasionally meant that sophistication tipped over into obscurity. A number fell short in terms of sign-posting the argument and poor proof-reading sometimes meant that presentation and organisation did not match the intellectual sophistication of the content.

### **Hit and Myth**

There were 11 candidates for this paper, and as a group they ranged widely over an impressive range of medieval texts in Old English, Middle English, Old Norse, Medieval Welsh, Medieval Irish and Middle High German, and their adaptation into a variety of

modern media, including novels, poetry, film, television, graphic representation, comic books, and games. There were considerable differences in the competences demonstrated in the candidates' ability to cite material in the original medieval languages, and in general the focus was on the modern authors and adaptors, including Suzanna Clarke, Neil Gaiman, John Gardner, Seamus Heaney, David Jones, Paul Kingsnorth, Fritz Lang, George R. R. Martin, William Morris, and Alfred Tennyson. Candidates uniformly demonstrated considerable enthusiasm for their chosen topics; the differences lay with the extent to which modern and medieval material were treated together, rather than simply using the medieval background as a sometimes thin excuse to discuss particular pet topics. Overall, standards were high, though in some cases there were significant weaknesses of both presentation and argument, with insufficient attention paid to prose style and accurate referencing.

### **Post-War American Fiction**

14 candidates took this paper. The work produced was solid and a good range of topics, authors and texts was addressed. Candidates who chose to write about a single author perhaps disadvantaged themselves, as they made it harder for themselves to identify arresting angles. Impressively, many candidates were well informed, and had thought hard, about the literary, cultural and intellectual milieux of the authors and texts about which they wrote.

### **The Avant-Garde, 1908-1936**

13 candidates took this paper (12 ELL). Samuel Beckett, Wyndham Lewis and Filippo Marinetti were written on by a number of candidates, and the relationship between the body and the machine was a popular topic. But work ranged well beyond this, with candidates finding avant-garde properties in a variety of genres and media, making ingenious connections and illuminating neglected authors. If the less successful essays sometimes got stuck in not very well understood abstractions, the best work applied complex theoretical ideas with remarkable deftness and ingenuity. Candidates seemed both to have enjoyed and been inspired by the course.

### **The Ode from Wordsworth to Hopkins**

7 candidates took this option. The standard of work submitted for this paper was high. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, and Hopkins received frequent and often superb attention, but lesser-known poets including Charlotte Elliott, Walter Savage Landor, and Felicia Hemans made pleasing appearances too. A number of candidates approached essays by seizing upon specific formal or imaginative happenings: echoes; paradox; irony; turns; or pauses. Others built essays around historical or generic considerations: odes written about Wellington; the relationship between hymns and odes. But no approach ever felt too narrow or too expansive in its application. Almost every candidate demonstrated sensitivity to the workings of language and form, sound knowledge of the ode's origins and development, some depth of reading, and a good sense of the way that writers of odes influence other writers of odes. Close reading in the finest essays was striking and memorable, and was often delivered in clear, eloquent, and stylish prose. Given that this paper foregrounds formal concerns, it was also very pleasing to observe some impressive theorisation of arguments, which offered nice evidence that paying close attention to form need not (and should not) mean leaving theory and/or history behind. There were no weak essays, but there were weaknesses within essays, the most common of which was the habit

of looking at particular bits of odes while giving little sense of their development and shape as a whole. But that is a relatively minor complaint. The examiners found the essays submitted for this paper a delight to read.

### **Early Modern Criminality**

15 candidates took this option (14 ELL). Submitted essays were of a very high standard. Candidates wrote on a diverse range of themes and showed real enthusiasm for their topics. Some conducted closely focused case studies of wider themes, others attempted surveys over longer periods: both approaches had their successes and pitfalls. Essays were well-informed by a sense of social history, religion, urban dynamics, and popular print culture; some aspects of political and legal history (e.g. debates over *habeas corpus*) felt comparatively neglected. The best work—which was truly excellent—conducted substantial and imaginative original research (making confident use of *EEBO*), but married this with attentive and precise close reading, a cogent theoretical framework, and lucid argument. Some things the weaker essays could have improved on: balancing general context against the need for more specific analysis; drawing on a good range of primary and secondary sources to illustrate context; analysing the rhetorical strategies of cheap print more imaginatively and incisively; defining their theoretical and critical frameworks more carefully and reflectively. Essays were well-presented, and showed good understanding of how to cite and discuss non-canonical print materials.

### **Fairytales: Stories through time and place**

14 candidates took this option (13 ELL). The best essays offered sophisticated analyses of the permutations and combinations of texts, with due attention to reception. Less successful essays struggled to define the terms of what they were analysing, though even weaker essays were engaged and exceptionally wide-ranging.

### **Writers and the Cinema**

15 candidates took this option (13 ELL). The examiners were very pleased with students' engagement with the course, and with their enthusiasm for the topic. This was reflected in the strong essay-work. Candidates wrote on a wide range of topics, including German Expressionist cinema; modernist literature and film; sound and silence with reference to Hitchcock's *Blackmail*; intertitles in silent cinema; documentary film and Naturalist literature; the essay film; Soviet cinema; objects and speech in silent film and the works of Samuel Beckett. In general the examiners were very pleased with the originality, ambition and strength of the work produced, which is particularly impressive given that this was a new field for almost all the students.

### **Writing War**

15 candidates took this option. This year's essays were most striking for the adventurousness with which candidates approached the topic of war: the essays as a whole covered the full range of literary forms (poetry, fiction, drama, creative nonfiction) and many took an interdisciplinary approach, considering the writing of war alongside other forms of creative representation; there was also a less British flavour this year to the conflicts on which candidates chose to focus. Nonetheless, inventive and original work was also produced on more familiar topics such as the English poetry of the World Wars. Also very welcome this year was the sensitivity with which candidates attended to the nuances

of literary form in a paper where the power of the course theme perhaps presents some obvious pitfalls. It is always a matter of concern, however, to see weak mechanics (from paragraphing and punctuation to conventions of citation) in work at this level.

### **Paper 7 Dissertation**

#### **Pre 1500**

19 candidates submitted dissertations in the medieval period.

The examiners were impressed with the breadth and chronological range of topics and texts chosen within this long period; it was encouraging to see such ambition of research. Several candidates demonstrated advanced interdisciplinary work, and many showed sophisticated understanding of current theoretical debates. Equally impressive were some outstanding examples of straight-forward literary criticism, showing a good understanding of relevant critical and historical issues along with detailed textual knowledge and fine examples of close reading.

The essays which received the highest marks matched these foundations with well-structured and clearly-developed argument. Others were let down by corresponding lack of structure, often exposed by abrupt transitions between sections. Subheadings can be a useful way of clarifying the argument to the reader, but they cannot on their own compensate for lack of organization within the material. A related weakness was manifest in those essays which were effectively a survey of the topic, rather than a developed argument.

Attention to presentation and referencing was of a cheerily high standard this year, though the examiners did note that several essays were weakened by the apparent lack of a final proof-read.

#### **1500-1600**

There were 11 dissertations within this strand and, for the most part, the standard was high, including some particularly strong essays that took on creatively-formulated topics and challenging texts. Contemporary references were sometimes a way into engaging with this period, but did not overwhelm the contextual interpretations. Most candidates undertook significant critical reading that informed their thinking and several made impressive ventures into original archival research, particularly around the history of the book. There was also some excellent work on Spenser. The candidates that were less successful struggled with clarity and structure, had insufficient primary material with which to support their arguments, or had simply not left enough time to finish and polish their work.

#### **1600-1700**

There were 25 dissertations in this period, many of which were confidently voiced, showing real scholarly reach and the ability to construct and pursue a sinewy (strong and flexible) argument. These students often deftly balanced original research with awareness of editorial and critical traditions; their writing was authoritative and enterprising, written with concise precision and occasionally flair. Some of the best essays approached their subjects from unexpectedly creative angles, usually a sign of assured possession of the subject at hand and the questions being explored. There was impressive work linking literary form (e.g.

prosody, metaphor, genres) to mathematics, cosmologies old and new, legal and theological discourses, and so on. Some essays tried to look closely at rhetorical or lexical choices, but as though ticking off methodological boxes, without any compelling sense of purpose. There was some very good work on drama, with nuanced readings of performance and contexts (early modern and sometimes contemporary), alert to dramatic/theatrical form and to the difficulty of mapping simple models of performed gender or actor-audience relations onto plays. There were some excellent essays in book history (e.g. of satires, sermons, poem sequences), searching out unpublished manuscripts, reading widely, really thinking about variant texts or the relationship between bibliographical and thematic issues. Others with similar orientations, however, did little more than describe things they'd found, without developing any real argument about them. A few of the weaker dissertations made the mistake of thinking that an ostentatious demonstration of scholarly technique might serve instead of intellectual finesse. Good scholarly technique is of course welcome, but it is not an end in itself; it is designed to serve the interests of exposition and argument, and should not usurp more important and interesting virtues, ones that might bring to life what matters in the works at hand. By contrast, there were occasional disappointing essays that were far too broad: these relied heavily on a limited range of secondary reading, described rather than analysed, and failed to develop a persuasive through-line.

### **1700-1800**

There were 21 dissertations in this period. They covered a range of topics and authors, ranging from Pope, Swift and print to Richardson's treatment of time, music and national identity, commonplacing, child actors, and Swift and topography. For the most part they demonstrated a lively engagement with a range of texts, authors and genres in the period, and some inventiveness in identifying a fruitful area of study. The introduction of more obscure authors into the discussion of a major canonical figure was sometimes brilliantly illuminating.

Some of the best work drew on original and little known source material, sometimes in manuscript. Within these essays, candidates were able to use their particular examples to illuminate broader literary debates of the period. At the weaker end, candidates described a non-canonical text in some detail but were unable to link it to a more general context or explain its significance within the field. We were struck by the number of essays which drew on quite detailed knowledge of publication history in discussion of particular texts.

These are welcome developments, but we also noticed in some essays a tendency to fetishize aspects of scholarly presentation (this trend was noticeable too in dissertations in the earlier period). In some essays it was clear that the candidate did not understand the function or purpose of the scholarly notation they were imitating. The conventions of scholarship - particularly editorial scholarship - are utilitarian, aspiring only to avoid ambiguity and to secure clarity. Examiners are unlikely to take the uncomprehending duplication of these conventions as a sign of intellectual or scholarly power.

Some candidates had difficulty in structuring an argument across the entire dissertation, and the essays in which candidates signposted the progression of their analysis through the whole piece tended to be more effective and convey a greater sense of intellectual coherence. Referencing was variable – in some essays it was inconsistent or incomplete and



did not enable the reader to piece together a sense of the wider reading from which the essay emerged.

### **1800-1900**

There were 46 candidates for the 1800-1900 strand.

The examiners felt that the dissertations in this strand were generally of a very high standard. It was particularly pleasing to see first class work with a range of approaches, ranging from affect theory to the history of the book, work which reflected a real excitement about the possibilities for new work in nineteenth-century studies. There was an impressive amount of original scholarship on display, some thoughtful close reading of texts, and some outstanding historical research. At the lower end, a few candidates found themselves offering essays which rehashed very familiar approaches to a given text, or which became rather too synthetic, patching together the critical discoveries and arguments of others; but there was very little truly poor work.

The examiners were also impressed with the range of authors and genres engaged with: as well as poetry (Hopkins proved particularly popular) and the novel, some important methodological questions were taken up (for example, questions of realism and historicism), and there was a pleasing attention to works of nonfiction prose. There was a significantly greater volume of work on the Victorian period than there was on romantic literature.

### **1900-1950**

There were 28 dissertations in this period. The quality was in line with previous years and with overall 1<sup>st</sup>/2:1 distribution. There were a small number of excellent dissertations, where students found genuinely distinctive topics and undertook a substantial amount of well-chosen research. The best work was outstanding, showing excellent knowledge of an oeuvre or a logically chosen group of texts, and of their context. It also engaged with critical writing rather than simply citing critical opinion. Some dissertations were well written and had passages of good local interpretation, but failed to embed these into a well-researched theoretical or historical frame (they were simply long tutorial essays). A few students tried to do too much and spread themselves across many works and authors, rather than digging deeply in fewer. Some of the more adventurous students, who chose less canonical topics, or crossed media, arts and disciplines, often did excellent research but ended up producing very familiar critical readings. As well as short bibliographies, bibliographies mainly made up of general books with few articles or studies that drilled down into the specificity of the topic, were immediate indicators of superficial work. In many cases, the proofreading was poor.

### **1950 to the Present**

The essays in this large category (48 scripts in total) engaged with a wide range of authors across the period, from W.H. Auden and Samuel Beckett to Jeremy Prynne and Alice Oswald. A number of different genres were addressed, from hip-hop lyrics to Holocaust fiction. Essays were also submitted on topics relating to film. Some candidates chose to explore the relationship between literature and non-literary discourses, such as psychoanalysis, political theory, and sociology. Others chose to develop extended critical

arguments about single authors, or major texts. Regardless of the topic or approach, the best essays appreciated that it is just as important to make well-researched arguments about works that are contemporary, as it is for writing from earlier periods. In doing so they displayed a strong understanding of context, both cultural and literary, and were able to locate their argument within a debate that matters. The weaker essays tended to be those that recycled familiar topics or ideas, in a way that did not question routine popular assumptions about the writing of this period. They also struggled to form a clear co-ordinating argument, to make a claim about the material that was non-obvious, and to engage with the relevant secondary material in their field. The same can be said about the work on topics relating to film, with one significant difference. At times essays in this group were inclined to read films as a relatively uncomplicated form of cultural evidence that could be applied to various ideas about the nature of contemporary experience. Contrastingly, the strongest work presented careful and sustained analysis of visual and aural features of the films in question.

### **American**

33 candidates wrote on American Literature for Paper 7. There was a pleasing, inventive and diverse range of themes, genres and authors, though concentrated in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The very best work was stunning, of publishable quality, in command of complex intellectual contexts, written with commendable élan, the argument well controlled, the close readings delightful. The weakest work was characterized by predictable arguments, woolly reasoning, unsubstantiated claims and a failure to question assumptions.

The examiners noted in particular that a number of essays which had begun with considerable promise failed to deliver on it—due, often, to incomplete arguments, a lack of clear structure, digressiveness or simply having taken on too much. It may be that working on detailed plans would minimize this effect. Too often, the same theorists made appearances—notably Foucault—so that work suffered from predictability. A number of essays also displayed an evaluative approach to the work of minority writers—i.e. expecting it to be socially and/or politically active—while not asking the same of other writers. The examiners thought this resulted in less creative work. Stronger essays showed awareness of literary contexts and, while not attempting to re-invent the wheel, were unafraid to challenge critical conventions.

### **Postcolonial**

There were 9 dissertations in this strand. A small number were extremely good, but the overall quality was underwhelming. The main problems across the more poorly scoring essays were a lack of argumentative direction and a tendency to rely on (and frequently reproduce) well-worn critical positions. The field of postcolonial/world/Anglophone studies has evolved since the 1990s, and more awareness of this would have led to more stimulating work. In some cases, particularly for those essays that focused on very contemporary materials and used interviews with living writers, there was a mismatch between the originality of the evidence and the subtlety of the critical readings which made them read more like exercises in literary journalism rather than rigorous academic studies. The best essays combined sensitive readings of primary texts with original archival research and a sophisticated grasp of theoretical materials.

**Children's Literature**  
**ONLY 4 CANDIDATES**

**Language**  
**ONLY 3 CANDIDATES**

**2.8 CII**

**Paper 1 650 – 1100**

There were 13 candidates for this paper. All of the questions were attempted at least once, apart from question 14. The most popular questions were Q3 (King Alfred on the decline of learning and the translation of *Pastoral Care*) and Q7 (Wulfstan on the approaching end of the world), each of which was answered five times. Also popular were Q10 (on the Germanic past), Q5 (on wondrous beasts), and Q12 (Satan's proud defiance).

The range of material covered overall was impressive and highlights the variety of work being done for this paper. As ever, the longer narrative poems proved popular. There was relatively little work on shorter lyrical or devotional poems or (unusually) on the Exeter Riddles, although several candidates wrote about the metrical charms. As in previous years, several candidates wrote on 'Alfredian' prose, and it was nice to see that work on these texts was not wholly focussed upon the question of King Alfred's involvement in the production of any or all of these texts. Hagiographical prose and verse was also popular. There was very little work on non-hagiographical homiletic literature. A number of essays focused on the manuscript context of Old English poetry. Whilst this is a welcome development, it was notable that the focus of this work was largely restricted to MS Junius 11 and tended to follow rather predictable lines.

Some of the work produced for this paper was of an impressively high standard. The strongest candidates presented original and interesting arguments, informed by wide-ranging engagement with recent critical trends and addressing the question directly and thoughtfully. Less strong candidates often seemed determined to reproduce prepared essays, twisting or ignoring the precise emphasis of the chosen question. Though the range of texts addressed across the scripts as a whole was impressive, some candidates seemed to be drawing upon rather limited resources. In some cases there was little or no direct engagement with the primary texts, particularly in terms of quotation in the original language.

**Paper 2 Medieval and Related Literatures 1066 – 1550**

11 Course II candidates took this paper. Only questions 6, 12 and 13 were not attempted; the most popular were questions 4 and 10, on the 'civilized order's encounters with the other', and the supernatural.

In general the standard was very high, and the examiners were favourably impressed by the range of knowledge and depth of analysis on show. The best work moved fluidly between texts and their material and historical contexts, deploying high levels of theoretical analysis with close attention to textual and conceptual detail. This paper does not require that non-

English language works be encountered in their original language (and there is no penalty for working only with translations), but nevertheless it was pleasing and impressive to see good use of brief quotations in French, Welsh, and Old Norse. These was some genuinely excellent focused work on the Tristan legend, the Mabinogion, *Sir Orfeo*, and Malory, while almost all candidates used the paper's comparative remit to make good arguments between texts. The danger of falling into plot summary did emerge intermittently, but candidates seem generally to have heeded earlier reports' warnings against this. The paper's requirement of only two, 90 minute essays occasionally produced meandering arguments, but the best candidates used this scope to produce compelling, wide-ranging, and occasionally thoroughly commanding responses to the questions.

#### **Paper 4 (Year 2) The History of the English Language to c. 1800**

There were 11 candidates for this paper, and they attempted a good range of the questions set. A wide range of approaches and material was covered, and the overall standard was very high. There was some particularly assured handling of phonology and orthography; the best candidates engaged with the questions with a level of theoretical sophistication (e.g. on standardization and on change from below), making excellent use of electronic resources. There was a good command of technical vocabulary and good use of examples. It was cheering to see so much promising analytical and discursive engagement with the issues at stake.

#### **Paper 5 The Material Text Portfolio**

There were 6 candidates for this paper, and it was notable that the responses to the commentary section of the paper were considerably skewed: 5 candidates answered with regard to the *Beowulf* manuscript, and only 1 with regard to the Auchinleck manuscript. The choice seems to have been made by candidates for purely pragmatic reasons, presumably related to the perceived amount of material worth commenting on in the respective folios. But there was a certain amount of compensation, since in almost every case the essay questions were answered with regard to the other period, allowing candidates to demonstrate both the breadth and depth of knowledge running across periods as well as within them. The essay questions likewise, demonstrated great variety with only one question (that on marginal material) being answered by more than one candidate, while the others chose to write about such varied topics as: illustrative material, punctuation, letterforms, and scribal errors and scribal interference. In the commentary section the main danger was a tendency in some candidates simply to dump what was clearly pre-prepared material into the commentary, rather than discussing and analysing the specific page and edition of the relevant text. In the case of the essay questions, there was also considerable disparity in the amount of material, both primary and secondary, that was brought to bear. It was very clear from the responses that the candidates had been well prepared and fully trained for both exercises, and were able to demonstrate considerable individual choice with regard to the materials covered; overall, the results were very good indeed, with a combination of close reading and analysis on the one hand and on the other broader knowledge being demonstrated in abundance. The apparent disparity in the way that the two sections were answered is not therefore a major cause for concern.



### 3 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

<b>External examiner name:</b>	<b>Professor Judith Hawley</b>	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON	
<b>Course examined:</b>	BA ENGLISH / HISTORY and ENGLISH	
<b>Level:</b> (please delete as appropriate)	Undergraduate	

**Please complete both Parts A and B.**

Part A					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	Yes	No	N/A / Other
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?		X		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		X		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?		X		
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?				X
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?		X		It would be useful to receive more information from English about the handling of FAP cases and the conduct

				of the board meetings
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?			N/A
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?			N/A
* <b><i>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”.</i></b>				

## 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?*

Almost all students graduate with a 2.1 or above. The quality of the work I saw was almost all excellent, especially in the range of knowledge the students demonstrate in examination and in the sharpness of critical thought employed. Usually externals encourage markers to use the full range at the higher end. Yet, despite my sense of the overwhelmingly high quality of student attainment, I don't think examiners are using the lower range enough. Some of the individual components I read would have received a mark in the 2.2 range in other institutions with which I am familiar. Moreover, the examiners comments indicated that they recognised 2.2 qualities in these scripts. There needs to be a closer correlation between comments and grades. The marks are usually more generous than the comments. In the case of the higher marks, it looked like a reluctance to praise really good work; in the lower marks it looked like a reluctance to penalise poor work. E.g.: 'There is little substantive argument here ... a very disjointed discussion of genre ... its readings are elliptical': 62. 'knowledgeable ... no real thrust of argument': 68. The marking criteria specifies that work in the 60-64 range 'must offer relevant, substantiated and clear arguments'. According to your own criteria, these essays should receive marks in the 50-59 range. They would do in other institutions with which I am familiar. The 'Guide for Examiners', p. 11 notes 'There have been diminishing numbers of 2:2 classifications in recent years: examiners are reminded of the descriptive criteria for this range.' I am not urging you to award more 2:2s – your intake and teaching are excellent – but rather that weaknesses in individual pieces of work are duly recognized.

A more striking mismatch between the marking criteria and comments occurred in one script which was sent for third marking. The first markers were split 55/23. The third marker awarded 36 and remarked 'I don't see how this can constitute an Oxford pass'. But 36 is within your pass range of 30-39. (Other institutions with which I am familiar consider marks below 40 as a fail.)

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

Student performance in SH English and JH English and History were very similar. About a third of students were classified first class in each programme. The Chair of the HENG board expressed some concern that students were not always presenting interdisciplinary work in the joint dissertation. This did not seem to be a major problem to me, and there was a very fruitful discussion of the issue at the Exam Board. I recommended that students could be asked to identify the interdisciplinary aspect of the dissertation on the form on which they register their topic for approval. There was widespread approval of the joint degree programme and of the inter-faculty contact it necessitated. It was also noted that HENG has been a useful factor in widening participation as it attracts a more diverse student body than the SH programmes.

## **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 meetings I attended, including the FAP meetings, were conducted with a strong sense of commitment to the needs of the students. A great deal of effort was devoted to making sure that students had an opportunity to make it over the borderlines where possible. All the marking I saw was performed with great diligence. Staff and students seem to me to be working very hard to maintain the highest standards.

There is, though, some room for tightening up the procedure in a few of respects with regards to the consideration of borderline candidates in the English Faculty. From what I have seen so far, colleagues on the History and English degree do things slightly differently.

This is my first year as external on this programme and I was taken aback by your practice of 'finding extra marks' from the raw marks to raise a candidate over the borderline. If one of the markers had originally awarded a mark in the higher class, this was taken as enough justification for raising the final mark for the work. Examiners' comments were not looked at nor were the scripts seen by internal or external examiners. I wonder whether this implicitly undermines the process of blind double-marking? It seems to me that in this process, marks are arrived at by a process of discussion and adjustment; the agreed mark is much more authoritative than either of the raw marks. If you select the higher of the two marks for scripts which seem to drag a candidate's marks down, you revert selectively to single-marking.

The History faculty, as far as I have seen so far, have a different practice. HENG examiners recorded their reasons for agreeing on a mark on a third coversheet. As External, I was asked to scrutinise borderline candidates in advance of the meeting. I looked at the comments made by the markers before and after adjustment and then I read the scripts. The cohort of HENG students is small and I do not know if the same process is observed for single honours History, but I wonder if this process might be adapted for English? If all examiners briefly recorded how they arrived at their final mark, these comments could be checked during the first meeting. If a decision is not reached by that process, internal and external examiners could look at the scripts before the second exam Meeting. This would be possible if all the boxes of scripts were in the room with the examiners (we used to do this at Royal Holloway).

## **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?***

Two issues complicated the smooth running of the consideration of FAP:



1. Proctors use student numbers whereas examiners use candidate numbers. Time is wasted translating between the two.
2. There seems to be no cut off date for the acceptance of FAP applications. We had to delay the start of the second examiners' meeting in order to consider a new application which had just come in.

There were two elements of the University Regulations which I did not see reflected in the English Faculty procedures:

1. External examiners are not invited to review exam papers at a draft stage.
2. The Chair of the Board stated that students could not appeal.

#### **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 compilation of statistics of performance by gender is to be applauded. I would be interested to hear what happens next.

The range of topics covered by Paper 6 offers excellent choice, enables staff to teach from their research, and should provide pathways through to more advanced study.

#### **B5. Any other comments**

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

It was perhaps unfortunate that all three externals and the Chair were new to the job. It would have been useful to have had some continuity of experience, but perhaps it has usefully allowed us to see things from a fresh perspective.

<b>Signed:</b>	Judith Hawley
<b>Date:</b>	6.vii.17

Please email your completed form to: [external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk), and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

<b>External examiner name:</b>	<b>Professor Simon J. James</b>	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	Durham	
<b>Course examined:</b>	English	
<b>Level:</b> (please delete as appropriate)	Undergraduate	

**Please complete both Parts A and B.**

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

## Part B

### B1. Academic standards

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

Academic standards are at least as high as the other institutions where I have experience as internal or external examiner: generally the quality is higher, especially at upper-second level. Every single final degree result seemed to me to have been correctly classified, and the scrutiny of marks was conducted immaculately. Student work meets or exceeds the requirements of the Subject Benchmark in English. I was especially struck by Oxford English students' abilities to:

- develop independent and imaginative interpretations of literary, critical, linguistic or creative material
- articulate a critical understanding of complex texts and ideas (and of their historical relations where appropriate)
- write clearly, accurately and effectively (3.2, Skills Specific to English)

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

Student answers showed detailed literary knowledge and appropriate awareness of socio-cultural context. I was especially struck with student achievement in editing and book history – this is a distinct strength of the programme – it is very impressive to see responses in this field of such quality at this level. The very best students have a lot to say, even in a timed exam, and are good at more than one kind of thing, answering with creativity and sensitivity in their reading, as well as depth of knowledge. As someone who marks predominantly on fiction in my own institution, I was struck by the rareness of the use of thematised plot summary as a way of answering a question: Oxford students not only read literary texts carefully and closely, they do so with examination papers as well, and answer the questions as asked with directness and focus. I enjoyed reading work on Shakespeare, where students clearly benefitted from the format of the assessment; I was pleased to see candidates taking the opportunity to engage with issues of afterlife, reception or performance history in the third answer.

Some examiners commented that student engagement with literary theory, on the other hand, seemed somewhat half-hearted. I did not see much evidence that theory was being directly taught: given the commitment of Oxford students to their studies, I do not think they are to blame for this comparative weakness. Literary theory is complex material that cannot be consumed osmotically by even the best students, and I would suggest the Faculty consider how students are expected to acquire this knowledge. (I am not yet sufficiently familiar with the programme to suggest what might make way for such an initiative).

### B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

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

Every single member of the Board of Examiners conducted their duties assiduously, with rigour, conscientiousness, high academic standards and, where appropriate, justice and mercy. The Chair of the Board, and all administrative staff, in particular Angie Johnson, are to be commended in executing the process flawlessly, with the very highest of procedural and intellectual standards. I am very impressed with the level of attention paid to very individual candidates who merit it, both in the cases of students suffering adverse circumstances beyond their control, and candidates who are on the borderline between classes.

### 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 was struck that there seemed to be remedial measures in place as if for the expectation that in a, to me, surprisingly, high number of cases, the internal examiners will be unable to agree a mutually satisfactory mark. I would urge all examiners to do their best apply their academic judgement to ensure that the marking criteria are applied as accurately and consistently as possible. To give an example: a number of borderline cases hinged on the undermarking of work in one paper (the dissertation) by one examiner, who penalized answers for lack of 'originality' – surely a criterion more appropriate for postgraduate study, rather than for the outcome of the three years of undergraduate work that follow school or college?

#### **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 was especially impressed with the range of the material read by students whose work I saw. Oxford students are unusual in such a large proportion of their final degree being comprised of compulsory, period-based (and largely early-period), unseen examinations, but within these constraints I saw a great deal of freedom, and independent learning choices. I read work on *Golagros and Gawain*, Eliza Hayward, Margaret Cavendish, Anne Finch, Anne Smith, Barbauld, the *New Atlantis*, *Mac Flecknoe*, on the critical history of literary texts, Blake's *Urizen*, Blake as a laboring poet, hunger strike poetry, literature of the molly houses, the Robben Island Shakespeare.... There can hardly be another cohort of English undergraduate students anywhere in the world whose range and depth matches this.

#### **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.*

Penalties for short weight were not applied with faultless consistency in the work of the lowest-ranked candidate I saw.

<b>Signed:</b>	Simon J. James
<b>Date:</b>	26.7.17

Please email your completed form to: [external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk), and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

<b>External examiner name:</b>	<b>Professor Ad Putter</b>	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University of Bristol	
<b>Course examined:</b>	English and Classics-English	
<b>Level:</b> (please delete as appropriate)	Undergraduate	

**Please complete both Parts A and B.**

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

Having seen some of the exam work, essays, and dissertations, I can see your students receive an excellent education. The best work I have seen in dissertations and essay portfolios was of publishable standard, and my only criticism of the way this has been marked is that such work deserves higher marks than the 74/75 that I have often seen given to it by the time the two internal markers have agreed. Your marks and your currency of marks are otherwise very much in line with the sector, though exam marks may be a little lower than those awarded to equivalent work in my own institutions and others where I have externalled. The performance of your students in sit-down exams is something that really impressed me (it reflects, I think, both the quality of the students you have but also the importance of exams in your assessment system).

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

Students' achievement was strong. The numbers achieving firsts and II.1 was very similar to that in my own institution. Students were challenged but also inspired by exam questions and essay topics, and were given every chance to excel, as many did.

### 2. 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 work that your colleagues in English put into assessment and marking was admirable. You operate, and that is very unusual now in the sector, a double-blind marking system. It is the Rolls Royce of marking systems. At my own University and all others I have externalled except Cambridge, exams and essay work is internally moderated, not double-blind marked. The disadvantage of the double-blind marking system is that is time-consuming; the great boon is that your students can have every confidence in the marks they have been awarded.

### 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?*

Two issues need attention. The Guide for Examiners either needs to be updated so that it reflects the processes that have developed – or it needs to be followed. Probably both are needed. Actual practice broke with written guidelines in a number of ways:

a). One rule for the classification of degrees had to be set aside for good reason. (2) d (p. 10): 'Candidates re-read for a First may not receive a higher final average mark than that of the candidate with the lowest average mark among those established with a First at the initial classification.' Since candidates can establish a first with four marks in the first-class zone and an average of 67.5 or high, such candidates will automatically prevent candidates with an average of 68.5 or higher with one first (and needing another first to achieve a first) from having their marks raised. NB the guidelines say 're-read' (see point 2 below).

A quick fix would be to add a rider ('except for firsts achieved by the alternative method'), and that is basically what the board did this year, but I have concerns about the rule that students can or cannot have the benefit of discretion depending on the results of the candidate that happens to be ahead of them on the basis of the provisional determination that comes before the marks meeting. I believe that the case should be judged on its own merits, and if a board of examiners has discretion to raise and lower marks, it should accept the corollary - that the ranking order, which is simply a reflection of the marks awarded, can shift along with the marks. In the various institutions I have worked and externalised I have never come across a 'leapfrogging clause', and I think for good reasons.

I am also unclear why this 'leapfrogging rule' should apply only to candidates 're-read for a First' (and not, say, for an Upper Second). Possibly it reflects the way postgraduate funding is/was awarded, but this should not tie the hands of an exam board.

b). The guidelines contain eggshells of previous practice, a practice where borderline cases were read before marks were changed. There is mention in the Guide to Examiners of 'reconsidering scripts' (NB scripts, things written by the student) and of 're-reading'. At the marks meeting, however, not all marks changed involved re-reading of scripts. This made me uneasy (all the more so since the benefit of such reconsideration was denied to students who had a candidate with an established first and a higher percentage ahead of them in the rankings). Sometimes this changing of marks involved idle speculation (e.g. 'the raw marks were 66 and 68, the mark awarded was 67, but the examiners probably just split the difference and called it 67, without knowing that a 68 would have given this student a first'. We will raise to 68'). Since we do not know how marks were agreed upon (and no record of that is kept), this is not a sound procedure. Most Universities operate a much more mechanical procedure. In my own Department there used to be discretion of the kind you have — but that did involve 're-reading'. The English Faculty at Cambridge also still operates discretion, but again they re-read: it means there is rather more

re-reading of complete runs, but by dividing this between internal and external examiners this is perfectly manageable. I have to say it is also what the guidelines imply when referring to 'candidates being 're-read' for a First (p.10), and when it is said that 'In order to monitor the procedures and practices of classifying borderline candidates, externals will read a selection of the whole runs of scripts which are re-read by internals' (p. 15). I did re-read one script in the case of a borderline candidate (a dissertation), but again I think the guidelines make no provision for an external doing this, as it clearly reads: 'the script or scripts should be reconsidered by the *Internal Examiners*'.

c). The Guide to Examiners sensibly advises examiners not to make adjustments to marks for candidates with learning disabilities (dyslexia, dyspraxia). However, the guidelines then go on to say that adjustments to marks is '*for the Medical Committee to decide upon at its meeting*'. The Medical Committee when it met did not deal with any cases of dyslexia/dyspraxia, and this is right: the University's explicit policy (as per instructions issued to examiners on green sheet that accompanies typed exam scripts): examiners are to set aside 'minor writing issues', spelling, grammar, etc, except where they are part of the marking criteria — which, in the case of the English degree, they are ('correctness of grammar, spelling and punctuation'). In other words, beyond the reasonable adjustments that are made -- extra time, use of computer with spellcheck, etc – no action should be taken. The Guide for Examiners again needs updating to reflect current practice.

The other issue that needs attention is that the external examiners (and I quote from your University's own regulations English) should have 'opportunity to comment on all examination papers in draft form [as required under *Examination Regulations*, 2014, [Part 8](#), cl.8.2, p. 20, ll. 28-30].

See <https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgexaminers/4externalexaminers>.

Externals expect to be sent or to be given access to drafts of exam papers in their area of competence, whether by secure post or by secure digital means. I was surprised that this did not happen and apparently has not happened in recent years. I recommend that the English Faculty follow standard practice in the sector and comes into line with University Examination Regulations 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.*

I would particularly commend your system for third-marking where markers cannot agree or where the difference between marks is very large. In sampling a range of



work I have seen that you operate third-marking very well. Your third markers are genuinely independent — and do not just save themselves time by splitting the difference.


I also commend the fact that you have available, at the final exam meetings, statistics, such as the average mark given by each examiner, that make it possible to identify potential anomalies.

I attended the medical and special cases committee meetings, and thought that cases were dealt with a great deal of care and individual attention. Recommendations made to and approved to the Examiners' Board were fair and robust.

### **B5. Any other comments**

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

The running of the marks meeting and the final exam board was very efficient and credit must be given here to Dr Jane Griffiths, the Chair of Examiners (and also Dr Laurie Macguire, Chair of English-Classics Exams) and the administrator Angie Johnson, who has worked tirelessly and with wonderful efficiency. Their preparation and the sensible recommendations by the Chairs of Examiners saved all the examiners a great deal of time.

<b>Signed:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	18 July 2017

Please email your completed form to: [external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk), and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

## 4 MST AND MPHIL (MEDIEVAL STUDIES) IN ENGLISH (INCLUDING MST IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES AND MST IN LANGUAGE)

Fiona Stafford, Chair

### Part I

#### A. STATISTICS

##### (1) Numbers and percentages in each class/category

There were 81 candidates

Outcome	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Numbers	35	37	5*	4**

##### Percentages including recent years

	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
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%
2017	43.2%	45.7%	6.2%	5%

\* 5 students (6.2%) 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 0<sup>th</sup> week of Michaelmas term); should re-submitted work not pass (60 or above), this will convert to a 'Fail'.

\*\* 4 students (5%) have yet to complete due to being granted extensions for the dissertation, which they will have submitted in the long vacation.

##### (2) Vivas

Vivas were not used.

##### (3) Marking of Scripts

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

#### B. EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

There were no changes to the criteria for awarding the degree. The double route to the Distinction was retained, unaltered. Discretion to round up averages in the case of any candidate within 0.5% of an overall Distinction was removed in the light of concerns expressed last year over the lack of clarity around this procedure, but with a view to reviewing the process for future examinations. No changes were made to the design of the comment sheets.

The calendar for marking and meetings remained largely the same as in 2015-2016, with the Final Board, and preceding Special Cases meeting, on 4<sup>th</sup> July, four weeks after the deadline for submission of the dissertations. All written work was submitted in electronic form as well as hard copy.

The penalties for late submission and word-length infringements were reviewed and revised, in the light of recommendations and comments from last year's Board.

The practice of blind double marking, with each marker submitting marks and comment sheets to the Graduate Studies Committee prior to discussion with the other marker, was retained. Much of the marking for the B and C essays was undertaken by the internal examiners, with course tutors acting as first markers for the C essays. In cases where

internal markers were unable to reach agreement, the essays were sent, along with the internal markers marks and comments, to the appropriate external examiner for third marking. In addition, samples of essays and dissertations with high and low marks were sent to the externals, along with any pieces of work for which the internal examiners' raw marks had fallen on either side of a border (60, 70, 80) and, in the final weeks, full runs of selected candidates from each strand, to give a proper sense of the marking parameters and to ensure that internal marking was appropriate and consistent.

### C. CHANGES FOR THE FACULTY TO CONSIDER

See Chair's Report below

### D. PUBLICATION OF EXAMINATION CONVENTIONS

The document, 'Marking and Distinction Criteria', was sent to all candidates early in Michaelmas term and circulated to all markers at appropriate points in the year. The Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee wrote to all MSt and M.Phil convenors in Michaelmas, drawing their attention to the Guidelines and asking them to impress on their students the seriousness of deadlines and word limits and the risk of incurring penalties. Another document covering the specific criteria for the MPhil was sent to MPhil candidates separately.

## Part II

### A. GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE EXAMINATION

See attached report.

### B. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ISSUES

Grades by reference to gender:

2017

	All students	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Female	50	20 (correct)	25	2	3
%		40%	50%	4%	6%
Male	31	15	12	3	1
%		48.4%	38.7%	9.7%	3.2%

2016

	All students	Distinction	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Female	66	20	39	4	3
%		30.3%	59.1%	6.1%	4.5%
Male	36	17	15	1	3

%		<b>47.2</b>	<b>41.7%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>8.3%</b>
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## 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%

### C. DETAILED NUMBERS

n/a for MSt.

### D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

n/a for MSt.

### E. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUALS

This part is physically separate.

### F. THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Professor Fiona Stafford (Chair)

Professor Kathryn Sutherland (ex officio)

Professor Vincent Gillespie

Professor Laura Marcus

Professor Lloyd Pratt

Dr Hannah Sullivan (replaced by Dr Sos Eltis in Hilary)

Dr Philip West

#### External

Dr Gavin Alexander (Cambridge)

Dr Paul Davis (UCL)

Dr Ruth Livesey (Royal Holloway)

Professor Ian Johnson (St Andrews)

Professor Adam Piette (Sheffield)

## 4.1 M.St. and M.Phil. in English, Chair of Examiners' Report for 2016-17

### A. Process

There were four new internal examiners this year (Fiona Stafford, Vincent Gillespie, Hannah Sullivan and Philip West) and three continuing from last (Laura Marcus, Lloyd Pratt and Kathryn Sutherland). This was a smaller Board than in 2015-16, when there were 8 internal examiners. The external examiners remained the same as in 2015-16, with the exception of

Professor Ian Johnson, who was new to the process. At the first meeting of the internal examiners in November, the timetable was approved and Michaelmas 'C' options were allocated to markers. The Board discussed all the points raised in last year's reports and the recommendations of the Graduate Studies Committee and made consequent adjustments to the penalties for late submission, over- and under-length work. The minimum word length of 13, 000 for M.Phil dissertation was approved. Professor Sutherland was asked to revise the information on the B course and to include specific guidelines on Appendices. The Marking Criteria document was revised after the meeting accordingly. The word limit for the B and C essays was agreed at 5-6000 words, but this cannot be implemented until next year. The Chair also revised the Guidance to Examiners to place more emphasis on constructive feedback, in line with the recommendations from the External examiners. The issue of 'rounding up' was discussed in response to concerns expressed in the previous years' reports, and it was agreed that neither automatic nor discretionary rounding up would be allowed this year, though this should be reviewed in the light of the Final Board. After the first meeting, the Chair wrote to each of the external examiners to introduce herself and provide contact details, to address points raised in their reports from the previous year (where appropriate) and to welcome their participation in the examination. The external examiners were also sent the minutes of the first and subsequent meetings. The Chair encouraged all the external examiners to raise any concerns or questions that might arise over the course of the examination, and to note the timetable and the dates for the Final Examination Board. Since External Examiners, as well as all internal examiners, are required by the Proctors to attend the Marks meetings in Hilary and Trinity and the Final Board, it is essential that all members of the Board take heed of the timetable at the beginning of the process. Although the External Examiners are permitted to attend by telephone, these long meetings are a major commitment and require ample notice. Next year's Chair is strongly advised to alert External Examiners to the Proctors' requirement of their presence on the phone for the marks meetings and for requests for absence on exceptional grounds in advance of any meeting that they may, due to unforeseen circumstances, be prevented from attending. In practice, this requirement is very problematic and so the Faculty may wish to explore the possibility of reviewing the confirmation of Marks over the course of the year, in the light of practice in other Faculties and Universities. The dearth of rooms with suitable conference facilities for telephone Marks meetings aggravates what is already an undesirable situation.

In advance of each of the Marks meetings, the Special Cases committee comprising Professors Gillespie and Pratt, together with the Chair, considered the submission of Factors Affecting Performance relating to essays and made recommendations to the Examination Board, which met shortly afterwards, with the External Examiners in attendance by phone. Marks for the Michaelmas C essays were confirmed at the first meeting in Hilary and the external examiners were invited to make comments. At the second meeting of Hilary, the internal examiners agreed the allocation of markers for the Hilary B and C essays and for the Dissertations. At the first meeting in Trinity, marks for the B and C essays were confirmed. On the day of the Final Board, the Special Cases Committee met to consider any new submissions and to review earlier cases prior to the Board meeting. At the Final Examination Board, the examiners confirmed the marks awarded to dissertations, agreed the imposition of penalties for late, over- or under-length work, accepted the recommendations from the Special Cases Committee, and then classified the candidates. In accordance with the new guidelines agreed earlier in the year, no borderline candidates were automatically rounded up, nor considered under the discretion of the Board. The external examiners felt that their recommendation from last year had been misinterpreted, so it was agreed to revisit this aspect of the final classification process next year, in the light of their reports on this year's procedure. Although the penalties for over and under length

work had been clarified, there were still some difficulties relating to the status of epigraphs, translations and captions in the overall word count. This should be considered again by next year's Board. The Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize awarded to the candidate whose Dissertation on a relevant topic achieved the highest marks. The Marilyn Butler Prize was awarded to the candidate whose Dissertation achieved the highest mark overall.

The high number of extensions this year meant that some students had not submitted their dissertations in time for the Final Board, so their work has to be marked during the long vacation. The extensions did, however, mean that there were probably fewer Special Case submissions and that where an extension had been granted, the Special Cases committee took into account that an adjustment to the examining process had already been made. There was some discussion of the weighting given to dissertations in the overall degree and whether or not this was desirable. The weighting is reflected in the criteria for the Distinction, but not in the proportion of overall marks given for the degree. A suggestion was made that the B and C essays could be reduced in length, so that the dissertation was more obviously the most substantial piece of work. This might also alleviate stress in Hilary Term, when two important deadlines fall.

The issue of cautious marking by internals was raised. There was general support for encouraging internal markers to use higher grades, especially given the competition for Doctoral funding. If this suggestion is approved, it will be important to ensure that it is embraced by all markers, to avoid uneven practice, with serious consequences for candidates and their overall averages.

The format of the comment sheets was discussed at the Final Board. While there was general agreement that the tick boxes were not essential and sometimes quite unhelpful, there was also a view that if the box is removed from the form, the marking criteria should be explicitly addressed in the markers' comments.

The external examiners made very helpful contributions to the various discussions and were, throughout the process, exemplary in their responses to every request and in their scrutiny of the process. Comparison with practice at other institutions is often very illuminating.

Further thoughts on the overall examination:

For the dissertations, the internal examiners each marked several, but many additional assessors had to be appointed. This proved problematic, because the request to mark a Dissertation comes relatively late in the year, and, in cases where those asked initially have declined to act, such requests can come very late indeed. This is an undesirable situation. Since the internal Board had one less examiner than in 2015-16, the difficulties of finding sufficient markers were even greater than usual. It would be advantageous to increase the size of the internal examining Board, so that more marking of dissertations could be undertaken by the examiners, (especially if the External examiners' recommendation that third marking should fall to internal examiners is to be approved). If it proves impractical to increase the size of the Board, then it may be desirable to alert the entire Faculty at the start of the academic year to the probability of members being required to mark one or more Masters Dissertations, unless they have externally-funded research leave with a Departmental Lecturer in place. This is in line with University guidelines on Academic leave, though those already holding onerous positions such as Chair of FHS or Prelims should also be exempt. As it stands, the current practice of referring to the appointment of additional markers as an 'invitation' seems to make refusal to act rather easier than is helpful to the successful administration of the examination.

The numbers of candidates and options means that the entire examination is an administrative challenge (see below). When allocating dissertation markers, the examiners noted that some students had two supervisors, which made the difficulty of finding markers even greater. The task would be simpler if, next year, convenors could avoid securing more than one supervisor for each student. The examiners were also concerned by the extremely

specialised nature of some dissertation topics and, although reluctant to refuse any so late in the year, would urge convenors to consider the question of finding suitable markers when encouraging potential dissertation topics. One very late request from a student to change the topic of the dissertation after approval and the appointment of markers had to be refused.

The lack of continuity between successive Exam Boards means that there is a certain amount of revisiting ground that has already been well trodden. The return of examiners to the Board after an interval also has problematic potential, as practices can change considerably from year to year. It is, therefore, very important for all members of the internal Board to attend all the meetings, unless prevented by exceptional circumstances. It would be helpful for examiners to be appointed as early in the previous year as possible and to be sent the provisional timetable when appointed, to help mitigate against clashes.

## **B. Administration**

Administration for the examination was undertaken by Emily Richards, Rida Khan and latterly, Amaroa Wyatt, with Andy Davice providing crucial assistance at various points. Thanks are due to all those involved. At all stages, the process was reliant on Emily Richards's experience of administering the MSt over a number of years and the hard work of all involved. Since Rida Khan left the Graduate Studies Office in the first half of Trinity, Amaroa arrived in the midst of a very challenging term and is to be greatly commended for her efforts to get to grips with this complicated examination. The difficulty of recruiting appropriate markers for the Dissertations was again a problem, putting additional pressure on the administration of the examination. The numbers of markers and the need to send work to external examiners in time for them to read and comment before the various Marks meetings, as well as the process of providing feedback and queries from candidates can put strains on a very small team. This is further complicated by the apparently increasing numbers of extensions and associated correspondence with the Proctors' Office (which is not always as swift as would be desirable in dealing with urgent matters relating to the examination). The timetable for the examination is such that any delays and omissions increase the pressure, and although the administrative team generally coped extremely well in the circumstances, they were put under undue pressure at various stages in the year. The discrepancies that sometimes arose between marker's comments and the tick-boxes creates further work for the Chair and the Graduate Studies Office, so the Graduate Studies Committee's recent decision to abolish the grids should alleviate some of the burden in future years.

## **C. Criteria**

The criteria for classification were the same as in 2015-16. The two routes to a Distinction were retained: a candidate must gain 70 or over on the dissertation and an average of 70 across all four elements (three essays and a dissertation); or the candidate needs 68 or over on the dissertation and an average of 72.

## **D. External Examiners' Comments**

The reports of the external examiners are attached. At the two Marks meetings in Hilary and Trinity and at the Final Board, the external examiners were encouraged to comment orally on the examination process. Their points are summarised below, in order of period expertise:

Professor Johnson was very positive about the exceptionally high quality of the work he had seen over the year, especially in the B course and some of the dissertations. He was struck by the quality of the intake and the inspirational teaching that

encouraged these very able students to excel. He noted that there seemed to be no standard convention for scholarly presentation across the cohort. He was especially appreciative of the efforts of Emily and Amaroa in equipping him with the necessary guidelines and written work.

Dr Alexander was especially struck by some outstanding B course essays and felt that internal markers were somewhat inclined to caution and should use the 80+ range more readily. He also felt that when agreeing marks, there was sometimes a tendency to opt for a lower, or median mark, rather than confirming the higher mark. He thought that more explicit emphasis on standard presentation would be beneficial for candidates and markers and that the Handbook needed to be more consistent on this matter. He questioned the status of the Dissertation in relation to the other essays and suggested that it might be wise to shorten the B and C course essays in order to differentiate them more clearly from the more substantial dissertation.

Dr Davis also thought the B course was a great strength of the MSt and important for the overall coherence of the degree. He was struck by the variety of topics and approaches, though at times he had been a little unsure about the relevance of a particular essay to the course description (in the C courses). He was disappointed not to see more close reading, but confident nevertheless in the overall expertise and judgment of the course tutors. He found being sent full runs of work from individual students interesting, but was not clear what action was open to him in relation to these. He also expressed his thanks to the administrative staff.

Dr Livesey was very impressed by the quality of the work. She felt that the bibliographical work was so good that the marks could have been higher. The internal marking had nevertheless been scrupulous and clearly explained their judgments. She recommended that feedback should be addressed more directly and personally to students. She questioned the role of the external examiners and suggested that third marking should be done internally.

Professor Piette was very positive about the sophistication and scholarship demonstrated in much of the work he had read. He felt generally well informed about the process and found receiving whole runs from individual candidates helpful for seeing how they had developed over the course. He also suggested that if whole runs of borderline candidates were sent to the external examiners, they might then be able to advise on final classifications. The internal marking process was fair and seemed to be working well.

In general, the external examiners were positive about the degree, the examining process, the quality of the candidates and the teaching, and praised the hard work of the administrative team.

Fiona Stafford  
Chair of M.St. Examiners  
September 2017



## 5 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

<b>External examiner name:</b>	<b>Professor Ruth Livesey</b>	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	Royal Holloway, University of London	
<b>Course examined:</b>	MSt English Literature (1830-1914)	
<b>Level:</b> (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate

**Please complete both Parts A and B.**

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

## **Part B**

### **B1. Academic standards**

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

The quality of work I read on this programme reaffirms my sense that students on this programme are producing, in all passing essays, very good work. The high proportion of exceptionally strong work positions the MSt (1830-1914) as having one of the strongest cohorts of students nationally. The MSt marking criteria emphasise the need for originality and independence of analysis – which is very welcome – and solid or derivative work which would receive a higher grade elsewhere struggles around the pass mark at Oxford. I note for the second year running that 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. The structure of the MSt means that the dissertation possesses neither the research intensity, credit weighting, nor word length of 12 month MA programmes. However, the B course essays yet again demonstrated the appetite and capacity for independent research on the part of students.

I note again the anomaly of this programme having a 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 am very glad to hear this is under consideration by the Humanities Division alongside the new category of Merit. This year there were fewer fails and 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.

- 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).*

In this second year of my service, the performance of students across the year showed improvement on 2015-16. This was welcome, in particular in relation to the Dissertation, in which a dip in performance at the end was much less evident this year. Students also had a firm grasp of the requirements of the B course and were inspired and challenged to produce very good work on all course units. This year it was evident that students on all taught elements were being encouraged to engage with critical theory as well as showing mastery of their own materials.

### **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.*

Rigorous blind double-marking is practiced with consistency across the programme. I had a clear indication of how differences were resolved between markers and was passed several essays across the year to come up with a final mark in the case of 'ANF' assignments. I was pleased to see copies of the composite feedback returned to students. I attended the Factors Affecting Performance Pre-Meeting and was very pleased to see that the new system of extension management by the Proctors has resulted in a new degree of clarity and consistency in relation to deadlines and penalties for late work.

I have two suggestions for consideration by the Faculty in relation to assessment practice:

That examiners consider addressing feedback to the students. A more direct address, with reference to the criteria, might assist in improving student performance, in particular given that students do not receive annotated essays indicating areas of weakness.

That the Faculty consider the benefit of seeking internal 3<sup>rd</sup> examiners, where possible, for ANF essays, as opposed to using the external examiners. Internal discussion and resolution of such differences might be of greater use in creating a cohesive marking culture in the Faculty and identifying habitual areas of difference in academic judgement. Although willing and happy to read ANF work, internal resolution has a higher value in establishing consistency in assessment in the longer term.

### **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?***

This is my second year of noting the relatively low marks (70-75) awarded to outstanding work on this programme. One outcome of this continued reluctance to use the higher range means that students completing this MSt programme will be disadvantaged to a considerable degree when applying for doctoral funding via AHRC doctoral training partnership competitions. In the multi-institutional selection panels which are presently in force for most institutions, and which will be the future for Oxford, Cambridge and all consortia from 2019, multi-disciplinary panels make decisions about candidates from a range of PGT programmes. Distinction-level work of the quality such that I see in this MSt would, I am confident, be awarded marks in the 80s in other programmes. Although PGT results are only one element of the selection process, they form an important – apparently objective – means by which candidates can be ranked. This imminent change to PGR funding allocation should be a call to examiners to discuss and agree upon a shift in marking culture towards the 78-86 range where appropriate. The language of the current descriptors for such work certainly matches the ambition of work I see for this programme at each assessment point.

In my previous report I highlighted the problem of the lack of published criteria for promoting candidates within 0.5% of the higher class. I am pleased to see that the Board of Examiners responded to this. However the new criteria effectively remove the possibility of promotion or discussion of borderline candidates, stating a final average of 70+ (or 72+ if the dissertation is not awarded distinction) is what is required. The new criteria have effectively done away with a zone of consideration at the grade boundary, rather than supplying a clear framework within which such cases might be considered for promotion by the board.

The Examiners requested me to supply information about borderlines and awards in my own institution and within my direct experience to inform Faculty discussion. In my own institution there are two ways to achieve Distinction (these are College regulations); 1. To achieve a final average of 70 or above; 2. To achieve an overall final mark within 2% of the grade boundary and to have been awarded 70 or above for the dissertation. In every other PGT programme I have encountered, the dissertation is also given a higher credit weighting (my own institution double weights it at 60 credits in comparison to 30 for term essays). It is clear that the timeframe of the MSt would not make double-weighting fair or desirable, but strong performance in the dissertation might be considered as a means to licence promotion to the higher class ('exit velocity') in the absence of an actual higher credit weighting. Rewarding strong dissertation performance (so for instance, considering promoting candidates with an overall 69.5 and 72 in the dissertation), as opposed to penalising distinction level candidates who lag at the final submission, would be one way to return to using academic judgement and external advice at the final board as these dissertation marks have not yet been received and confirmed by the Board.

#### **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.***

Once again 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.

To reiterate from B2, examiners might consider addressing feedback to the students – something I suggested in my report last year. A more direct address, with reference to the criteria, might assist in improving student performance. This is a particular concern given that students do not receive annotated essays indicating areas of weakness. Although the structuring of essays was better this year, I am aware that students still don't receive annotated copies of their work as part of the feedback process. Written feedback produced this year tends to engage with content: more feedback of some sort on structure and style would enhance student learning opportunities.

#### **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.***

<b>Signed:</b>	<b>Ruth Livesey</b>
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Date:	11 July 2017
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Please email your completed form to: [external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk), and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

<b>External examiner name:</b>	<b>Professor Adam Piette</b>	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD	
<b>Course examined:</b>	MSt English	
<b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )		Postgraduate

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

**Please complete both Parts A and B.**

## **Part B**

### **B1. Academic standards**

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

The standard 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.

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

The work I was asked to sample and to judge was uniformly of a high standard, with excellent and original research in most essays, scrupulous and compelling scholarly rigour displayed, especially with the B essays where their attention to the material context and production values of the texts. High marks go to those who work hardest to cover the ground with focussed, telling and concretely evidenced stories about publication history – very impressive rounded sense of the texts. The C essays clearly issue from good challenging courses, especially radio and poetry and postcolonial texts. Best work I read goes into really complex cultural history of the projects – with some publishable essays.

### **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?*

None, except for detail. Two markers working well to agree marks and external used fairly to adjudicate – at times split marks agreed and no information as to how they had come to this decision – I understand that this is because externals sometimes sent the agreed report which will be shown the student – it would still be good to have a clear indication, always, why split marks agreed as they are..

I understand the stress the administrative staff are under, especially with late marks and comments from academics, but at present it is difficult to collate comments and essays and be certain from which MA module they issue. Perhaps it might be good to gather the scans and comment sheets together as per module and not as unwieldy B- and C-essay blocks.

The Board in May revealed the need to have a clear protocol for waiving penalty if student work is only marginally over, eg if the excess word count is due to translations or epigraphs. For B-essays, it is not wise to have precise penalties for content issues; only appropriate for rubric violations.

I commend the general willingness in those teaching and administering the MSt to move to a system more in line with marking schemes elsewhere in the sector, that is, a full range for pass marks 50-69, and distinctions from 70 and above, with a merit award for work above 65.


I was in broad agreement with recommendations made at the Board by fellow examiners, that (a) Oxford consider recourse to 3<sup>rd</sup> markers within the teaching body rather than using externals for this function; (b) that examiners be aware that for exceptional work distinction marks should be hitting over 75, and that PhD funding in the current climate is going practically exclusively to students with a mean average above 75.

#### **B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities**

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

#### **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.***

<b>Signed:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	7 August 2017

Please email your completed form to: [external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk), and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.



**EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2017**

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Dr Paul Davis		
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University College London		
<b>Course examined:</b>	MSt in English (1550-1700) / MSt in English (1700-1830)		
<b>Level:</b> (please delete as appropriate)			Postgraduate

**Please complete both Parts A and B.**

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

## Part B

### B1. Academic standards

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

The academic standards achieved by students on the MSt in English at Oxford compare extremely well with those which obtain at my home institution (UCL) and also in the department where I previously served as external examiner on a postgraduate programme (MA in Comparative Literature, King's College London). In particular, this year's cohort of MSt students have shown themselves to be quite exceptionally resourceful and capable in the areas of archival or documentary research and historical contextualization. One area of surprisingly weak performance which I commented on last year and remains an exception to the rule of your students' impressive achievement is that of scholarly presentation. But I was also surprised this year to observe the comparatively poor standards of 'close reading' skills among the MSt in English (1700-1830) students. It was regularly the case that 'C' essays and dissertations in this strand which were meticulously researched and densely contextualised were let down badly by passages of close literary interpretation which were either reductive or manifestly implausible.

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

I have noted above some exceptions to the generally impressive standards of performance among the students on the 1700-1830 strand of the MSt, and whether for these reasons or not it is notable how low a percentage of these students were awarded a Distinction. In fact, the percentage was similarly low last year (22% in 2016, 20% in 2017). These figures contrast strikingly with the percentages of Distinctions in other strands: the next lowest this year is 33% in the 'English and American Studies' strand, with the average across the programme being around 45-50%, and the highest figure 67% in the 'World Literatures' strand. The most obvious reason for this discrepancy is that it is more difficult to attract high-achieving students in eighteenth-century studies, and I have some personal experience of this unfortunate vagary of academic fashion. I would also emphasise that I have seen no evidence this year or last year of any overly tough assessment practices by the internal examiners on the 1700-1830 strand; on the contrary, I have found the marking to be entirely reliable, and appropriately generous. Nevertheless, without wishing examiners to alter their procedures artificially, let alone inflate marks because of inconvenient statistics, I would recommend that those who teach and mark on this strand of the MSt set aside time for a formal collective discussion of the situation and ways it might be redressed. Teachers who occasionally mark on this strand but whose main involvement in the MSt is with other strands might also be invited to share their sense – if any – of relevant differences in students' approaches and attainment.

### 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 generally equitable manner. All procedures conformed to the University's regulations and guidance. However, I was concerned to note that, owing in part to a misunderstanding of remarks made by me and other external examiners last year, the Board's protocols for handling borderline Distinctions appear to have become less sensitive to the particularities of individual difficult cases. I (and my colleagues) noted the lack of any formal criteria for determining when and when not to 'round up' a borderline Distinction profile. In response, the Board, alas, gave up its discretionary powers to 'round up' altogether. Despite this, I am entirely clear that all borderline cases were fairly resolved this year;

still, I would urge the Board to reassume its discretionary powers in future years, having first formulated and stipulated a rational basis for the use of those powers. The simplest solution would be to have a presumption of rounding up to a Distinction candidates whose overall average comes in at 69.5 or 69.75 and who meet the other criteria for the award. But that might be felt to be a rather bald way of proceeding, in which case I would recommend combining it with an enhanced use of the external examiners in this area. Following another of our recommendations from last year, the practice has now been instituted of sending the whole run of borderline candidates' work to us for 'overview'; we might, instead, be invited to comment more formally on the candidate's overall level of achievement. If the external examiner reported, with the advantage of this unique panoramic view, that the candidate's overall performance was of Distinction quality, then the arithmetical presumption of 'rounding up' would be applied. But that presumption would not be activated in cases where the external examiner reported that the candidate's run of work was not of Distinction standard. Under such a method, the cadre of borderline candidates could be easily identified (by arithmetical average) and all such candidates would have the benefit of having all their work re-read by an external examiner 'in the round'. The Board's powers of discretion would not involve any kind of inappropriate discussion of individual cases where students' identities might potentially be known to some internal examiners. And there would be a general presumption towards generosity, but without the final decision being a blunt consequence of arithmetical calculation.

### **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 ticked 'other' under question A7 because one of the issues I raised for consideration in this category last year – namely, the highly anomalous practice of setting the pass mark for the MSt at 60 – apparently remains unresolved. I gather that discussion of this practice is ongoing at division level. Pending the results of that discussion, I would reiterate my view that the disadvantages of imposing so anomalously high a pass mark far outweigh any potential advantages. In particular, it means that candidates risk failing parts of the programme as a result of infringing the word-count in coursework essays and thereby incurring a two or three mark penalty. It also makes it difficult to adopt the three-tier assessment model – pretty much standard across the sector – under which students who achieve creditably but not to Distinction level can receive the formal recognition of a Merit. Such recognition can be vital for students wishing to pursue doctoral study. I would urge that this matter be speedily resolved, in the interests of your students.

### **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 I noted last year, the 'B' course within the MSt represents a central area of good practice in the programme: increasingly rare in other comparable programmes, courses teaching bibliography and other related forms of technical research skills for the study of literature are extremely difficult to deliver. But here that difficulty is manifestly being overcome: not only is the work produced in the 'B' coursework essays themselves frequently of superb quality; I saw particular evidence this year of 'B' ways of thinking (as it were) productively inflecting candidates' work in 'C' essays and dissertations.

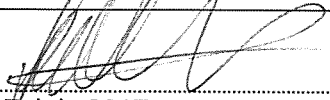
As to possible 'enhancement opportunities', I wonder if more might be done (following my answer under B1(a)) to help students hone their 'close reading' skills. Of course, the programme is already an extremely demanding one, and intensively taught; moreover, close reading is not a 'skill' in the narrow sense of the term, a competence which can be straightforwardly passed on. But it should be possible, at least, to encourage students to recognise that 'close reading' is (a) necessary in most kinds of literary inquiry, but also (b) not an entirely 'subjective' business. Protocols of 'probable proof', not to mention basic common sense, still apply, and discussion of some examples of good critical practice in this regard (as well as some salutary bad ones!) might

be built into existing teaching on the course, as a way of raising students' consciousness on the question.

**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 record my thanks to the Chair of the Board, Prof Fiona Stafford, and the programme administrator Ms Emily Richards for their courteous assistance with all aspects of the Examination process.

<b>Signed:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	7 July 2017

**Please email your completed form to: [external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk), and copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.**

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2017

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Ian Johnson	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University of St Andrews	
<b>Course examined:</b>	English	
<b>Level:</b> (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate

**Please complete both Parts A and B.**

<b>Part A</b>				
	<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A / Other</b>
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?	✓		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?	✓		
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?	✓		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?	✓		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?			✓
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?			✓
<p><b>* 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".</b></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 am responsible for the external examining of the medieval area. There was a tremendously high standard of work across all medieval courses, consistently better in scholarship, originality, articulation, presentation of apparatus and ambitiousness than I have seen in other universities in which I have examined.

- 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).*

Please see my previous comment. Many talented students are clearly being taught inspirationally and with great care. More than once I was taken aback by just how inventive and insightful the work could be. It was pleasing and reassuring to note an improvement in work from Michaelmas Term onwards. Methodological shakiness and misguided undergraduate habits, with some occasional exceptions and intermittent lapses, seemed in general to be getting left behind.

I also gained a sense, amidst clear evidence of sound and excellent generic training, of emerging and strengthening individual voices and academic personalities being nurtured and emerging independently. It was good too to see a rich and diverse variety of approaches, with no preferred corporate approach or style.

The B-essays were remarkably impressive, witnessing to an astonishingly speedy development, in a matter of weeks, of well-digested, reflective expertise in codicology and palaeography. Particularly commendable, however, was the routine integration of sophisticated textual analysis with manuscript skills, in which each fed the other critically, often with crackling interpretative energy and some stunning results in the submitted work. There is nothing else remotely as good as this nationally, I am sure. It would not be an exaggeration to say that some of your students put established manuscript scholars to shame (for instance, those who pore over letter forms but who fail to say enough about the workings of the text itself).

### **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 am certainly happy with the rigour and fairness of the assessment process. Markers are clearly working effectively together to common standards; they are transparently sensible both in finding agreement and in referring disagreed grades to the External Examiner. Marking is careful, consistent, and in line with your descriptors and guidelines; comments are fair, clear, illuminating, firm and constructive; and feedback is well considered and appropriate to the grades given. I would encourage you warmly, however, to make more use of the highest Distinction-level bands for work of exceptional excellence. As at other universities, there is, it would appear, a long-standing tendency not to elevate marks much above the lower levels of Distinction.

I was impressed by the great care taken at the examiners' meetings to be as just as possible to each student and to leave no stone unturned in the pursuit of fairness and consistency of treatment across the board. Meetings were also conducted impeccably in a collegial and receptive atmosphere, with constructive discussion and with each examiner being given appropriate opportunity to make his/her points.

### **B3. Issues**

*Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising*

*committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University?*

Although I answered question A5 positively, because I felt that I had in fact managed to discharge my role effectively, it should be noted that the turn-round time in the summer for scrutinizing a considerable quantity of student work was unacceptably short. Less than a week is not reasonable when one is contending with routine professional demands, in my case two conferences and a range of other duties.

#### **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.*

My comments above about the B essays are also comments on commendably good teaching practice in this part of the course.

More generally, even those students not achieving high marks produced materials and exercised thinking that could only be the result of an effective syllabus, well-considered teaching, and expert, committed personal attention to individual postgraduates.

#### **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.

<b>Signed:</b>	Ian Johnson
<b>Date:</b>	1 August 2017

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## EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2017

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Dr Gavin Alexander	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University of Cambridge	
<b>Course examined:</b>	MSt/MPhil in English Studies	
<b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )	Undergraduate	Postgraduate

**Please complete both Parts A and B.**

<b>Part A</b>					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A / Other</b>
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience?		✓		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		✓		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?		✓		
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?		✓		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?		✓		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?		✓		
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?				✓
<p><b>* 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".</b></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 are very high. This course has a large number of outstanding students, and yet I think more distinction marks might be given, and not fewer. An Oxford distinction is if anything harder to get than a distinction elsewhere.

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

I mostly read students working in the period 1550-1700. There was much outstanding work, but a few cases where the work was weaker and struggled to engage meaningfully with what is an intensive and demanding course. The large number of teaching hours and long coursework essays can result in dissertations that are a little disappointing in comparison to B- and C- course essays.

### **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.*

Assessment is rigorous and fair, within the usual margins of error and tolerance. Outcomes are equitable, though there are areas where improvements might nevertheless be made (see below). All aspects of the assessment process were conducted with appropriate scruple and fairness, and in accordance with University regulation 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?*

#### **BORDERLINE CANDIDATES**

The suggestion last year (from a number of externals, I believe) that externals be more involved in borderline cases seems instead to have issued in a hardening of the borderline, no longer considering students <0.5% short of the required average at the Board. This was felt by many at the final Board to be unsatisfactory. Given that average marks vary from module to module for reasons that have to do with course design and teaching but also, I believe, with marking practices, some careful scrutiny of borderline candidates to ensure fairness and consistency seems indicated. The externals could be involved in this (as happens at my own institution). Criteria would be needed to determine which candidates are on the borderline. I would suggest these notice individual examiners' initial marks as well as the candidate's overall average (e.g., if a candidate has an agreed dissertation mark of 68 resulting from initial marks of 67 and 68, one might conclude it is unlikely to deserve 70; if the initial marks are 68 and 71, it might be worth another look). The large number of distinction marks given does not mean that there are not still deserving candidates who miss out through small distortions and unfairnesses.

#### **REFERENCING AND PRESENTATION**

1. I commented last year on an ambiguity (critical for fair application of word limit regulations) over whether short forms of referencing (in particular author-date) are permitted. This has not been resolved and remains problematic in my view.
2. There is inconsistency from examiners on the attention given to presentation. I saw coursework essays in which referencing was minimal, with no comment from examiners. Some

examiners note negatively the failure to separate primary and secondary in the bibliography, and presumably they penalise this or at least factor it in to their mark. But one of the exemplary high-mark essays I read didn't separate primary and secondary, and this was not commented on. A box on the comment sheet on presentation and referencing can be a useful prompt and might ensure greater consistency in assessing this important aspect of the training you are giving the students.

### **OTHER PENALTIES**

(See my comment last year.) 3.5 and 3.7 of 'Exam Conventions' continue to refer to penalties for departure from rubric or from approved titles or subject-matter which are not given.

### **PASS, MERIT, DISTINCTION**

The case of a failed candidate on the 1550-1700 strand made clearer to me than it was last year the need for a pass band (50-59). You have a wide range of students and a narrow range of marks.

### **MARK RANGES**

1. Some runs of marks (particular cohorts, teams of examiners) are more stretched than others; some examiners are more generous than others. The descriptors are very good, but I can't say from the comments I read that examiners are always referring to them; when they do, it clearly helps, and I would recommend repeated reminders to refer to them.
2. Distinction borderline and high distinctions: during the year the externals, myself included, quite often mentioned runs of marks seeming compressed at the high end, though this varies quite widely from module to module. Marks in the higher range play an important role in averaging final marks. There is not much use of 80+. The difference between the descriptors at the various thresholds throughout the distinction range is pretty slight, so this feels more like a matter of habit than of absolute truth.

### **RELEVANCE**

Examiners' comments showed that the question of the relevance of a coursework essay to its course arose quite frequently, especially in B-course essays, but also sometimes in C-course essays. The students get copious guidance and support, and it is surprising that examiners should be unsure if an essay is allowable.

### **WORD COUNTS**


It was agreed at the meeting that there is a need for a consistent practice and guideline on the discounting (or not) of certain elements (titles, epigraphs, picture captions, etc.) from word counts.

## **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.*

Signed:	
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**Date:**

4 September 2017

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