



UNIVERSITY OF  
**OXFORD**

**FACULTY OF ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2022**

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## PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

### Part I

#### A. STATISTICS

This year there were 236 candidates for the Preliminary Examination in English Language and Literature.

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

- Paper 1: EML 32; HENG 11; CLENG 15
- Paper 2: EML 0; HENG 0
- Paper 3: EML 14; HENG 4
- Paper 4: EML 15; HENG 7

#### Numbers and percentages in each category

Category	Number			Percentage (%)		
	2021-22	2020-21	2019/20	2021-22	2020-21	2019/20
Distinction	56	(52)	NA*	23.72%	(22.41%)	NA*
Pass	179	(176)	NA*	75.84%	(77.16%)	NA*
Fail	0	(0)	NA*	0.42%	(0%)	NA*

*\*Prelims were cancelled in 2019/20*

#### Marking of scripts

All scripts are singled-marked for Prelims.

As in previous years, meetings were arranged by setters of each paper with all markers to ensure fair and robust marking during the marking window.

Scaling was not deemed necessary.

#### B. NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This year saw a return to 3-hour, in-person invigilated exams after 8-hour OBOW were used in 2020–21. Examiners agreed that the examination methods and procedures were robust and effective. (see below)

After shifting to OBOW mode of assessment in 2020–21, this year saw a return to the traditional 3-hour in-person invigilated and hand-written exam. The process went smoothly with no problems reported from Examination Schools. There were some issues with delivery of scripts, with lengthy and unscheduled delays disrupting markers' plans.

## Part II

### A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

Despite the shift from OBOW to in-person, results were broadly in accord with previous years.

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

- Detailed numbers on candidates' performance in each part of the examination

<b>Scripts awarded marks of 70+ for each paper:</b>					
<b>Paper</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>
1. Introduction to English Language and Literature: Combined	40 (16.9%)	33 (14%)	n/a	37 (16.6%)	38 (17.0%)
Section A Language	48 (20.3%)	32 (14%)	n/a	47 (21.1%)	49 (22.0%)
Section B Literature	46 (19.5%)	29 (13%)	n/a	47 (21.1%)	47 (21.1%)
2. Literature in English 650-1350	46 (20.8%)	41 (18%)	n/a	45 (20.2%)	40 (18.0%)
3. Literature in English 1830-1910	38 (16.1%)	34 (15%)	n/a	54 (24.2%)	36 (16.1%)
4. Literature in English 1910-Present	52 (22.0%)	28 (12%)	n/a	48 (21.5%)	46 (20.7%)

## C. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

### *Paper 1A: Introduction to English Language & Literature – Approaches to Language*

All questions in Section A of Paper 1 were attempted this year. By far the most popular was question 1 (language and power). Also popular were: question 2 (gender embedded in language); question 3 (Creole languages); and question 8 (metaphor).

There were many excellent submissions this year, and candidates are to be commended on their hard and thoughtful work. A large number of students engaged in strong Critical Discourse Analysis. At the top of the mark range, there was exceptional writing, showing incisive and sophisticated reflection, depth and breadth of research, and imaginative analysis.

Candidates are reminded to focus on language; they should not submit purely literary analyses. For example, whilst some responses to the question on Creole languages (question 3) were excellent, others took a more general, essay-like approach that did not focus sufficiently on the language of the passages chosen.

Candidates should remember that Section A is a commentary: it requires close, focused analysis of the chosen passages, with precise terminology employed. The response should not be an essay, and should not simply describe the contents of the passages. Precision in the analysis is important, and responses that do not provide detailed analysis of passages will not score highly. The commentary also needs to probe the effects of the linguistic features, rather than simply parsing the passages. For example, candidates should not merely note nouns and verbs without doing interpretative and analytical work.

In choosing the passages, candidates are advised not to select overly short passages; passages need to be of sufficient length to allow for rich and varied analysis. The examiners also advise candidates to choose texts that offer effective contrasts. Many of the scripts this year were let down by texts that were too similar. This meant that candidates would only have interesting points to make on the first passage, and were then forced to simply repeat themselves when discussing the second passage.

As with all papers, it is vital that candidates read the questions carefully, and respond to the specific terms and statement(s) of the question. There were a number of responses this year which showed little relevance to the given question, which meant that the candidates could not provide incisive or compelling work. Candidates are strongly discouraged from simply re-purposing a pre-written piece of work.

The examiners also noted that a significant number of responses showed little research, with very limited bibliographies. Some bibliographies had only one item, and others had nothing except for a list of entries from the Oxford English Dictionary. It is very important that candidates read widely. Work that does not show sufficient awareness of relevant critical and/or linguistic methods will not do well. It is important that candidates provide a clear critical/theoretical framework, and use relevant critical vocabulary.

There were responses that made excellent use of corpora and tables, using these tools and forms of apparatus productively in service of their argument and analysis. However, there were other responses with tables simply 'dropped in' without contributing to the argument or analysis. Candidates are reminded that if they choose to use corpora and tables, these need to serve a purpose.

Candidates should also remember to put time aside for polishing their referencing and presentation. The passages given must have line numbers and full details of their sources. Candidates should choose one referencing system and maintain it throughout—referencing needs to be consistent. There was also a large portion of submissions that contained too many typos.

From a data privacy standpoint, candidates are reminded that when citing from digital media, names must be redacted. There should not be any identifying features of individuals.

It is important that students make the most of the support offered during the year. Attending the core lectures and using the Faculty reading lists are two crucial ways that candidates can ensure they are aware of and responsive to the requirements of this section of the paper.

*Paper 1B: Introduction to English Language & Literature – Approaches to Literature*

All 12 questions were attempted. Certain traditions of thought dominated, as is usual, especially narratology (Propp, Génette, Brooks, Porter Abbott), poststructuralism (Barthes, Derrida, Cixous, Foucault), and reader response theory (Fish, Iser). It was, however, encouraging to see other areas in the history of theory and criticism appear, for example psychoanalysis, contemporary poetics, and the post-war strand of Anglo-American philosophy represented most prominently by Stanley Cavell. There was a relative dearth of engagement with theoretical materials from the twenty-first century.

A wide and interesting range of primary texts were marshalled in discussion of themes and theory: from Shakespeare, to Milton, to nineteenth-century poetry and novels, to modern and postmodern literature. The best answers engaged with such texts in a way which made their thematic or theoretical interest very clear, and did not produce something that looked too much like an essay for prelims paper 3 or paper 4 – or indeed a Wikipedia-style summary of a critical genealogy.

Some less successful answers tried to demonstrate too wide a range of theoretical knowledge, creating a patchwork of often weakly-understood, or theoretically incompatible materials from a variety of sources. In weaker scripts, this commitment to contiguity came at the expense of any argument at all. Stronger answers were able to balance argument with engagement. Examiners are cognizant of the fact that a 1500-2000-word essay is a short essay. The majority of responses in the first-class range demonstrated the fact that it is better to do one thing very well than to do many things averagely.

As in previous years, a number of candidates showed little sense of citation norms in academic work. The worst instances in this line proved to be test cases for the importance of good scholarly presentation, obscuring their sentence-level expression and their broader arguments through confused, inconsistent, opaque, or even non-existent practices of referencing, quotation, and bibliography.

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

There were some excellent exam scripts this year, with candidates demonstrating deep engagement with Old and/or Early Middle English language and literature, as well as sensitivity to relevant literary, historical and cultural contexts. In the commentary section, as in previous years the vast majority wrote on the Old English set texts, with *The Dream of the Rood* overwhelmingly the favourite. Clearly many students have read the set texts attentively and know them well.

A recurrent weakness in the commentary section was a failure to analyse the style of the passage in a systematic way. Weaker commentaries this year were often lacking in detail, making only vague or imprecise statements about poetic style and demonstrating poor comprehension of Old or Early Middle English language. Candidates are reminded that they should unpack their commentary passages in depth, thinking about a range of stylistic choices in the given extract.

In the essay section, it was heartening to read work that engaged with a range of texts—including lesser-known Old English ones, various Early Middle English texts (such as *Havelok* and *Ancrene Wisse*), and even Anglo-Latin texts. This has been very good to see. Candidates are warmly encouraged to be adventurous in their reading, particularly when it comes to essays (where they can explore any texts of their choice, as long as these texts fall within the period and as long as no more than a third of the paper is on non-English material). As in previous years, it was concerning that some candidates engaged very minimally with the original language(s). Whilst candidates can discuss texts in translation if the texts are in Latin or Anglo-Norman (or another language other than English), this should not take up more than a third of the whole exam script. It is vital that candidates engage closely with the Old English or Early Middle English texts in their original, with sufficient quotation. Old English and Early Middle English quotations must always be given in the original language. Candidates can additionally offer a translation if they wish, but they absolutely must not quote from Old English and Early Middle English texts solely in translation.

Across both the commentary and essay components, many candidates did not meet the criterion for ‘sophistication’ in argument and engagement. In particular, many scripts showed a lack of research into medieval literature and a lack of engagement with scholarship. To ensure they are producing work that is sufficiently ‘sophisticated’, candidates are advised to read a wide range of secondary material and to engage actively with it (for example, reflecting on whether they agree or disagree with different scholars’ arguments).

Questions 15 and 4 were most popular, with 3, 5, 8 and 14 also getting lots of attention. There were a disappointingly large number of rubric violations and essays which failed to display 'substantial' knowledge of enough texts. Problems included the usual not answering the question specifically or thinking about the implications of the quotation and/or question. The best scripts showed wide knowledge beyond the set texts, and engaged with Old or Early Middle English language and literature in detail, but there were many that were disappointing lacking in ambition. The 'elegies' were popular as always. As in previous years, there were only a handful of essays on Early Middle English, with the vast majority of students concentrating solely on Old English.

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

This was an unusual year in some respects: not only a return to timed examinations in Oxford, but for many candidates their first experience of producing handwritten essays in large exam halls. The results for this paper were mixed. Candidates at the upper end of the scale submitted work that was remarkable for its range, originality, clarity and polish. Other candidates were less ambitious and correspondingly less successful. (It was noticeable how many essays offered a simple comparison of two texts, although without any explanation as to why they had been juxtaposed in this way; often the result was as awkward as watching two people who have nothing in common being forced on a date.) Fewer scripts than in some previous years were awarded Distinctions, largely because although many candidates had clearly read some important literature from the period, they proved to have insufficient skill – or insufficient practice – in articulating and developing a critical argument.

One problem that returned alongside timed exams was irrelevance. A number of candidates dumped essays that were only vaguely related to the set question: ironically, the Arnold question about seeing 'the object as in itself it really is' particularly attracted these. It would benefit next year's cohort to be reminded that the prompt is designed to help them create an argument with added edge and direction: it is, therefore, an essential part of the question being asked, and it has to be addressed in order for the answer to be successful. Several candidates did not appear to understand the clear marking criteria for the paper, and a few boldly attempted exercises in creative writing rather than critical analysis. Generally these did not fare well. While recognising the pressures of timed exams, it was still a little dispiriting to see that their reintroduction also saw the return of legendary figures such as The Lady of Shallott [sic], and candidates are urged to check that they can spell the names of the works they have chosen to write about.

In terms of the specific authors and literary works tackled, Dickens's *Bleak House* was often paired fruitfully with *David Copperfield* or *Great Expectations*, while there was much excellent work on *Middlemarch*, that novel often sustaining a whole essay, including meticulous studies of its presentation of intellectual disciplines and disputes, political alignments and class issues. Other George Eliot novels were written about much more rarely, with *Silas Marner* probably most frequently encountered. Writing on Hardy was largely confined to *Tess* and *Jude*, although there was some excellent use of his Victorian and Edwardian poetry. Writing on Conrad was surefooted, though mostly on *Heart of Darkness* and *The Secret Agent*. Work on the 'woman question' was more predictable, with the gentle mock heroic of Patmore's *The Angel in the House* often cited but rarely explored.



Some candidates fell back on A-Level style accounts of New Women in Stoker's *Dracula*. *The Yellow Wallpaper* and its contexts were managed well, although there was little on Kate Chopin and nothing on George Egerton. Charlotte Brontë was a stalwart on less ambitious essays, though candidates found it difficult to manage the pre-Victorian inspirations and settings of *Wuthering Heights*.

On the whole, work on American contexts, including those of slavery, was good, with Poe proving to be an especially popular choice of author. Work on slave narratives was generally disappointing, with insufficient sense of the nature and provenance of the texts or their literary quality, though Douglass tended to draw out better writing, and there was good scholarly use of *The Bondwoman's Narrative*.

Essays on poetry included a number of studies not really suited to closed book examinations. Two pre-packed Victorian poems were often compared and contrasted (e.g. 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'Mariana'). This often resulted in practical criticism by default, seriously limiting the scope and even the relevance of an answer to the question. Only the very best answers were able to give a proper survey of the work of a lyric poet with appropriate illustration. Some of the writing on Hopkins, and to a lesser extent Dickinson, achieved this. Work on Tennyson was also promising, though often lacking in range, and Browning's dramatic monologues provided admirable service, with 'Andrea del Sarto' a favourite this year. Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* First Series produced good work on transgressive or aesthetic themes, though the range of these essays was often narrow; 'Ave Atque Vale' and 'Anactoria' were the favourite poems. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was more confidently handled than Christina Rossetti, where the theological background sometimes proved troubling. There was very little attention to drama, with Wilde the only regularly chosen dramatist, followed (perhaps a little surprisingly) by Ibsen. However, the questions also stimulated a number of more unusual literary choices, and it was refreshing to see how widely many candidates had read in the period.

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

All questions were answered, with the most popular being those on history, formal experimentation, identity, culture and nationhood (Questions 12, 4, 2 and 6). The most popular authors were Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, Katherine Mansfield, James Baldwin, and Jean Rhys, with a significant number of candidates writing on Ezra Pound, Toni Morrison, Claudia Rankine, Langston Hughes, Kamau Brathwaite, Zadie Smith, Sarah Kane, James Joyce, Samuel Selvon, Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, Harold Pinter, and J. M. Coetzee. Other writers addressed by several candidates included Thomas Pynchon, Jean Toomer, Hope Mirrlees, Harold Pinter, W. H. Auden, Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, Mina Loy, George Orwell, Margaret Atwood, Rebecca West, Wallace Stevens, Muriel Spark, Flannery O'Connor, and Vladimir Nabokov.

Candidates took a pleasingly wide and diverse range of approaches to the questions and there was a refreshing sense that the hold of standard narratives and critical clichés had been loosened. So, for example, Question 12 – a quotation from C. L. R. James on delving into one's own history – was used as a prompt for exploring the ways in which a wide range

of authors including W. B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney, Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Derek Walcott and Claude McKay challenged and revised national, racial and literary traditions, forms and structures of thought. The most popular approach to Question 21 on the dialogue between art forms and the 'dialogue with the people' was to discuss the influence of jazz on the poetry and prose of the Harlem Renaissance, and discussions of literary representations of the city drew almost as frequently on the poetry of Frank O'Hara as on the prose of Joyce or Woolf.

As always, the strongest essays engaged thoughtfully and precisely with the issues raised in the title quotes, constructing robust and informed arguments, rooted in dexterous and insightful analysis of relevant texts. Weaker responses tended to select a single word or approximate theme and then offer a cluster of loosely related observations, linked by association rather than by a clear line of argument.

There were marked differences in the depth and breadth of reference and knowledge demonstrated by candidates. Many answers limited their engagement to just two poems, short stories or one-act plays – extreme examples of such limited scope included essays on Imagism devoting entire paragraphs to Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro'. Knowledge and range varied radically across different writers – it was a rare candidate who ventured beyond 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and *The Waste Land* when discussing Eliot, whereas Woolf enjoyed recognition of a fuller range of her writings, including *Three Guineas*, *Orlando*, *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*. Too often candidates addressed individual poems or short stories with no sense of context, whether within an individual writer's career and trajectory, or in dialogue with historical, political, geographical or literary particularities. However thoughtful or deft a close reading of such limited material may be, it is hard to demonstrate ambition of thought or depth of knowledge in an essay that contains nothing more. The strongest candidates showed remarkable command of wide and detailed reading, engaging thoughtfully and intelligently in critical debates, and constructing sinuous and sophisticated arguments, supported by insightful and attentive textual analysis. Range and substance took many forms, whether locating chosen texts and writers within contemporary critical and theoretical debates, considering the development of single writers across a number of works, or revealing the intertextual dialogue between chronologically distanced – but linked – writers and texts. As in previous years, a recurring weakness was the tendency to bring together two disparate texts or authors without a coherent rationale for their selection, and then comparing and contrasting them to little critical effect. Too often candidates deemed a notional thematic similarity between two disparate texts, or a single biographical feature held in common between two authors otherwise utterly removed from one another as reason enough to mount a comparison. These responses were always limited, and failed to gain any significant critical traction, or to draw significant or revealing conclusions of any sort. An effective exam essay must offer substantive and clearly-explained intellectual, literary, critical, or historical grounds for any comparison it makes. Such practices indicate, perhaps, a retreat to school-level habits under the pressure of exam conditions – as did some reductively descriptive essays on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Notably, careful thought and a well-structured argument repeatedly garnered higher marks than many longer scripts written in haste. Indeed, some candidates were too concerned to

cover sides at speed at the cost of coherence and legibility. Misinterpretation and over-interpretation of the title-quote was a recurrent trend. Howard Brenton's hope (Question 4) that developing new forms would produce new truths, for example, was repeatedly translated into an assertion that new truths could *only* be delivered via new forms – a misreading with which candidates then took issue. Many candidates were hampered by a lack of technical knowledge about literary forms, modes, and language, evident most obviously in the unreflective use most candidates made of the phrase 'stream of consciousness.' This despite Question 11, citing Dorothy Richardson who rightly called the phrase 'muddle-headed.' Drama was approached by many candidates as prose in dialogue form with no acknowledgement of the dynamics, possibilities or history of performance. A number of weaker essays offered confidently conclusive statements about the despair and meaninglessness inherent in Beckett's plays, for example, with no supporting evidence beyond bland assumptions or isolated quotations. Collectively scripts offered a wealth of considered, thoughtful and pleasingly alert discussions of texts drawn from the full scope of the 112 years covered by this paper, and the quality of the top scripts was hugely impressive, demonstrating an extraordinary breadth of knowledge and precision of thought, expressed with elegance and verve, and confounding any notions of the constraints imposed by the format of a three-hour exam.

**E. NAMES OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS**

Professor Francis Leneghan (CHAIR)

Dr Ayoush Lazikani

Professor Robert Douglas-Fairhurst (Deputy)

Dr David Russell

Professor Sos Eltis

Dr Adam Guy

## FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

### CHAIR'S REPORT

#### Part I

#### A. Statistics

212 candidates completed their degree, of whom 15 took Course II.

Class	Number					Percentage (%)				
	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
I	79	94	93	79	87	37.26%	42.2%	41.7%	33.9%	39.91%
II.I	128	128	127	154	129	60.38%	57.4%	57.0%	66.1%	59.17%
II.II	2	1	2	0	2	0.94%	0.4%	0.9%	0	0.92%
III	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pass	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.4%	0	0
Fail	3	0	0	0	0	1.42%	0	0	0	0

Of the Firsts, two were achieved via the so-called 'alternative' route (requiring 4 marks of 70 or above and an average of 67.5 or above).

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

Examiners' and assessors' marking profiles were scrutinised, and the median marks for larger papers were compared with those in 2018, 2019 and 2021. It was determined that no scaling of marks was necessary.

#### B. New examining methods and procedures

Following a decision taken by the Faculty in the summer of 2021, 8-hour OBOW ('open-book, open-web') exams were again used for Course I, Papers 2-5 and Course II, Papers 1, 2, 3 and 6(a), but with the word limit for each answer reduced to 1,500 words (or 2,250 in the case of Course II, Paper 2). The following guidance was provided in the Course I Circular to Tutors and Candidates: 'Individual answers should each be between 900 and 1500 words. There will be no penalties for under or over-length scripts, but examiners will not read essays beyond 1500 words, and it should be noted that essays of under 900 words are unlikely to be able to display at the highest level the qualities assessed by the marking criteria. Please note that the upper limit is a maximum, not a target: a typical length for an essay is around 1200 words, and it is perfectly possible for the assessed qualities to be fully displayed in an essay that is at the lower end of the range of permitted word-lengths' (the Course II guidance was identical, but with appropriate adjustment for Paper 2). As noted in the reports on individual papers below, the reduction in the word limit seems, with some reservations, to have had a beneficial effect in encouraging students to engage with the questions set and produce relevant answers.

The length of every script and coursework submission was checked by Faculty administrative staff. In the case of OBOW scripts, material beyond the 1,500-word (or 2,250-word) limit was highlighted so that markers could see where to stop reading. In the case of coursework submissions, information on word-length was provided to markers and the Exam Board to assist with the accurate application of penalties for over-length work.

Except for the very few handwritten papers, all assessments were run through Turnitin. Suspicious scores triggered an initial investigation by Faculty administrative staff, with problematic work being referred to the Chair, who determined whether further investigation should be undertaken by the Board. Evidence of plagiarism was referred to the Proctors, and penalties for poor academic practice were imposed by the Board.

Faculty administrative staff constructed a new database for handling the marks, to replace the old Markit programme. It took a lot of work to set up, but resulted in a more stable and efficient system, with less manual inputting of data, and clearer presentation of information to the Exam Board.

**C. Any changes in examining methods, procedures and examination conventions which the examiners would wish the faculty/department and the divisional board to consider.**

We suggest that third-marking be required whenever the first marks vary by 10 or more (rather than by 15 or more as at present). In practice, these cases are almost always also ones where the two markers fail to agree, and it would seem appropriate to standardise this aspect of the marking process, thereby bringing it in line with what is now the Divisional norm.

The examination conventions currently state that ‘candidates who have failed a paper, or fail to attend an examination without permission, are not permitted to resit that paper.’ However, the Examinations and Assessments Framework, which details the University’s policy on examinations, states that ‘Students are normally entitled to one resit of any failed assessment unit of a University Examination’ (an ‘assessment unit’ in our terms means a paper). This apparent discrepancy between our conventions and the EAF is problematic and we suggest that the Faculty give it some attention.

**D. How candidates are made aware of the examination conventions**

The examination conventions are provided in the Course Handbook. They are also included, along with other guidance, in the Circulars to Tutors and Candidates. In addition, the Faculty produced an online Frequently Asked Questions page, and directed students to the University’s guidance about Inspira.

## Part II

### A. General comments on the examination

The standard of performance was, as ever, high. Candidates this year are especially to be commended given the disruption they experienced during the first half of their course.

It is notable that the proportion of Firsts (37.26% of candidates) has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

I would like to express my gratitude to Faculty administrative staff for the exemplary support they provided throughout the examining process, and to my fellow Examiners, both internal and external, for their collaborative wisdom and unstinting work.

### B. Detailed numbers on candidates' performance in each part of the examination

In Course I, all the papers are compulsory, though Paper 6 includes 21 options, which were taken by between 8 and 15 students each, and Paper 7 is the dissertation.

In Course II, taken by 15 students, Papers 1-4, 6 and 7 are compulsory, with Papers 6 & 7 being the same as in Course I, and Paper 3 being the same as Course I, Paper 2. Course II, Paper 5 offers a choice between 'The Material Text' (taken by 9 students this year) and 'Shakespeare' (taken by 6 students) which is the same as Course I, Paper 1.

In the following tables, Course II students are included in the data for the Course I Papers that are shared with Course II. Numbers for the other Course II Papers are too small to be presented as statistics, and the same is true of the individual options in Course I, Paper 6. However, it is evident from the comments on individual papers under 'D' below that a wide range of material is being addressed in these smaller papers and options, and that the standard of work in them is high.

<b>Paper 1 Shakespeare (Course II Paper 5)</b>		
Marks	Candidates	%
70+	68	33.66%
60-69	125	61.88%
50-59	7	3.47%
40-49	1	0.50%
<40	1	0.50%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>202</b>	

<b>Paper 2 1350-1550 (Course II Paper 3)</b>		
Marks	Candidates	%
70+	53	25.12%
60-69	136	64.45%
50-59	20	9.48%
40-49	1	0.47%
<40	1	0.47%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>211</b>	

**Paper 3 1550-1660 (Course II Paper 6)**

**Paper 4 1660-1760**

Marks	Candidates	%
70+	58	29.44%
60-69	117	59.39%
50-59	20	10.15%
40-49	1	0.51%
<40	1	0.51%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>197</b>	

Marks	Candidates	%
70+	45	22.84%
60-69	141	71.57%
50-59	10	5.08%
40-49	0	0.00%
<40	1	0.51%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>197</b>	

Paper 5 1760-1830		
Marks	Candidates	%
70+	48	24.62%
60-69	142	72.82%
50-59	4	2.05%
40-49	0	0.00%
<40	1	0.51%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>195</b>	

Paper 6 Special Options (Submission)		
Marks	Candidates	%
70+	80	39.80%
60-69	111	55.22%
50-59	9	4.48%
40-49	1	0.50%
<40	0	0.00%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>201</b>	

Paper 7 Dissertation		
Marks	Candidates	%
70+	78	37.14%
60-69	126	60.00%
50-59	6	2.86%
40-49	0	0.00%
<40	0	0.00%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>210</b>	

As the tables show, more marks of 70+ are achieved in the 'coursework' papers (1, 6 and 7) than in the timed examinations. This continues the pattern of past years, with OBOW papers being no different from 3-hour handwritten exams in this regard.

### C. Comments on papers and individual questions

See 'FHS 2022 Examiners' Reports'

### D. Names of members of the board of examiners

#### Chair:

Professor Matthew Reynolds

#### Internal Examiners:



- Professor Bart van Es (Deputy Chair)
- Dr Amy Lidster
- Dr Erin Lafford
- Dr Julian Thompson
- Dr Kantik Ghosh
- Professor Matthew Bevis
- Professor Michael Whitworth
- Dr Mishtooni Bose
- Professor Peter McCullough
- Dr Phillip West
- Dr Ruth Scobie
- Dr Siân Grønlie
- Professor Sophie Ratcliffe
- Professor Simon Palfrey

**External Examiners:**

- Dr Anke Bernau (University of Manchester)
- Professor Alison Shell (University College London)
- Professor Peter Boxall (University of Sussex)

## FHS EXAMINERS' REPORTS

### *FHS Paper 1: Shakespeare Portfolio (Course II Paper 5)*

199 candidates took this paper. There were some exceptionally high-quality portfolios. The best work developed its arguments or explored its questions through sustained, detailed analysis of the chosen texts or modes; this was not limited to close reading of Shakespeare's language and dialogue (though this was done superbly well in some essays) but included in-depth attention to whatever medium or materials were at issue, whether in the early modern playhouse (scripting, staging, costume, props, actors etc) or in later adaptations and iterations (cuts, translation, camera angles, scenic choices etc). Examiners were always grateful for work which showed independent thinking, a sense of adventure underpinned by thorough reading and alertness to particularities. The most impressive essays developed their approaches not in isolation from critical history but in dialogue with it, generating confidence from an assurance about critical or historical contexts, including work of recent vintage. We preferred risk-taking to canned reproductions. The better portfolios didn't rely exclusively on a single critical approach or methodological frame (this doesn't however mean variety for variety's sake; range should provide depth, not just a thin spread; there is no compulsion to produce three essays of entirely distinct modes and habits).

There were some powerful essays that really took on the plays or poems, sometimes in relation to cross-cultural or -temporal versions, sometimes in relation to the conventions or possibilities of Shakespeare's period. There was a lively sense of engagement with theory of many kinds, including Romantic, post-structuralist, critical race theory, disability studies, performance studies, queer theory, sex and gender and trans studies. There was excellent work on book history (though perhaps limited engagement with textual variants/editing) and a few outstanding pieces on varieties of translation. There was some good use of visual and material culture, of music or cinematography in films, and revealing source work (eg on unusual contemporary or classical texts). There was perhaps less awareness of the play-texts as active prompts or records of performance than there might have been.

The weaker portfolios either reproduced conventional or fashionable approaches without much sign of re-thinking anything, or relied on little more than paraphrases of Faculty lectures or skimmed reading. Some students presented clever-sounding terms or a barrage of putative authorities as a screen to hide a basic absence of their own careful attention to detail, or an authentically possessed and developed throughline. Quotations were sometimes used opportunistically or with facile disregard for what the words actually said, or in what context. Some essays seemed to equate analytical thoroughness with frequency of citation; there were portfolios with bibliographies far more detailed than anything in the actual essays. Some examiners noted a deficient awareness of genre (not just the Folio's comedy/history/tragedy) as an active frame of reference.

Pretty much all of Shakespeare's works were written about, and no single play or sub-group dominated students' attentions. There were as many essays about, say, *Richard II* or *Merchant of Venice* as there were about *Hamlet* or *Lear*, perhaps more. Even the less-discussed works (eg *King John*, *Love's Labour's Lost*) attracted some incisive, singular analyses. The narrative poems were more discussed than Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. Some

examiners noted the difficulty of determining the desirable range of works to be studied, and of achieving the right balance between in-depth analysis and range across the Shakespeare corpus. The minimum number of texts is five, which many students restricted themselves to. When such essays engaged intensively with the chosen texts they could be impressive; but they were much less so when this limited range seemed a sign of limited reading. Some of the best work ranged widely and confidently across Shakespeare and his contemporaries. By the same token, there were some portfolios that namechecked dozens of plays without engaging deeply with anything. Students should be assured that there are many ways of showing range and depth and thoroughness, and we would not wish to prescribe or quantify beyond what has already been done.

*FHS Paper 2: Literature in English 1350-1550 (Course II Paper 3)*

216 students sat this paper, of whom 15 were following Course II and 3 Joint Schools. This was the second year of examinations in the 8-hour OBOW format, and the reduced word-limit this year meant that essays were more focused on addressing the question, and there were correspondingly fewer instances of downloaded irrelevant material. There were some excellent essays on a wide variety of texts, and speaking from a range of critical vantage points, the best of them communicating genuine engagement with the period and its literature as well as with current critical and scholarly approaches. Some candidates produced truly impressive pieces of critical argumentation under exam conditions, closely relevant to the question, reflective, coherent and controlled, with some shrewd, attentive close reading. The commonest weakness in middling-to-good scripts was a tendency for textual quotation and assemblage of material from critics to swamp critical argument. Essays that engaged thoughtfully with a specific critical approach were stronger than those whose content seemed to be driven by an eclectic mix of brief quotations from numerous critics. In extreme cases essays blurred the line between overreliance and poor academic practice. In some cases, more sustained discussion of fewer examples would have improved the essay, while others would have benefited from more textual range – essays on a restricted amount of primary material (and there were, disappointingly, quite a few essays focussing on only one smallish text) tended to be weak in other respects too. Weaker responses were generally relevant but did not engage closely with the wording of the question. Q14, a quotation from Alan of Lille, was handled especially loosely, with candidates picking out individual phrases such as ‘book’, ‘picture’ or ‘mirror’ but not addressing the quotation’s overall point. When a quotation is accompanied by a question, candidates need to pay attention to the tag-question as well as to the meaning of the quotation itself. (For example, with Q2, a few candidates disregarded the restriction to allegorical texts, or stretched the definition of ‘allegory’ beyond breaking point.) A few essays appeared to be downloaded from tutorial work on other topics with some inadequate gestures towards relevance in the introduction and conclusion: these were penalised accordingly. The range of texts and authors covered was creditable, though not impressive. Chaucerian dream vision, Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, Hoccleve’s *Complaint*, verse-romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl* retained their status as perennial favourites. There were quite a few essays on the lyric, drama (moralities and cycle-plays), Malory, Henryson, Tudor texts (especially More’s *Utopia*), and *The Canterbury*

*Tales*. There were relatively few essays on Gower, Langland, Lydgate (other than *Dance of Death*), *Cleanness / Patience*, Scots poets other than Henryson, Skelton, Wycliffite or Chaucerian prose. All questions were answered.

The best commentaries combined a clear, nuanced understanding of the passage as a whole with multiple dimensions of stylistic and formal analysis, and offered well-sustained, interesting readings. Some impressed with their level of technicality, others with critical nuance and sophistication. It was clear that many candidates knew the poem well, could offer thoughtful, relevant cross-referencing, and were able to integrate exposition on e.g. the handling of sources into a critical reading. Some candidates took advantage of the OBOW format by making good use of *MED* evidence. In weaker commentaries, there was a reliance on narrative summary or exposition for its own sake, a tendency to give primacy to context over close reading, or to rely on compilation of material from secondary sources (generally editorial notes from the standard scholarly editions). Bland paraphrase was more common than skewed reading (forcing detail to fit a pre-set view of the poem as a whole or Chaucer as an author). Some good accounts were compromised by excessively selective discussion of the passage. At the weak end, there were genuine misunderstandings of what the passage said. Surprisingly for an OBOW exam, misunderstandings of the content / meaning were quite common, more often the result of losing the syntactic thread than misunderstanding individual words, or taking individual lines and phrases out of their immediate context; some idioms were misread because of confusion with a modern expression that sounds a little similar. The inference would be that candidates are spending insufficient time working on the text in the original Middle English as opposed to translations, and that Middle English comprehension is therefore in many cases poor. There were difficulties with discussion of versification. Candidates are to be commended for attempting to analyse versification in the service of critical commentary. However, the results were mixed, with laboured comments on rhyme and sometimes rhythm, and unsuccessful attempts at scansion where Chaucer was being heard in modern English. There was some loose application of terminology (e.g. asyndeton).

*FHS Paper 3: Literature in English 1550-1660 (Course II Paper 6)*

There was a wide range of texts discussed, from canonical authors like Philip Sidney (primarily verse), Bacon, Herbert, Donne, and Spenser, to more unusual material, including prose pamphlets, Martha Moulsworth's *Memorandum*, Catholic verse, the Marprelate tracts, Godwin's *Man in the Moone*, and scientific writing. Female writers were well-represented: not only those who are familiar within the scope of women's writing (Wroth, Mary Sidney, Isabella Whitney, Ann Lock), but also less familiar authors of manuscript material (particularly Hester Pulter). There was strong work on empire, race, and travel, but an unfortunate tendency to draw on the same set of texts in the same ways. The fact that many different candidates discussing less canonical texts and topics did so in very similar ways suggests that many students treat classes and lectures as ends in themselves, with very minimal digestion or further independent application of what is offered in them.

Although a lack of independence was most characteristic of weaker scripts, irrelevance to the question was a substantial problem even among those that were otherwise highly accomplished, and such irrelevance was firmly penalised. The best essays were subtly, and in some cases combatively, responsive to the question and engaged directly with its terms and implications. But very many answers read as if highly prepared in advance, minimally adapted from pre-existing material, and hence only in loose or oblique ways relevant to the titles and questions, which seemed to be treated as excuses for existing arguments, rather than as generating new ones. Strikingly few candidates who wrote on question 5, for example, actually addressed 'dramatic *form*'; or actually made a 'case for prose', as required by question 8, rather than just writing about prose works. Question 1 (on the genre of romance) was frequently answered with material on sonnet sequences, and its header quotation from Wroth often ignored. There were similar problems with 'satire' in question 7, where the concept was frequently too elastically understood. And question 16 (on 'racial thinking') was often used to discuss 'otherness' more vaguely.

The new limit of 1500 words produced many competent but not many strikingly good answers; many essays felt like attempts at something more like a 2,000-word tutorial or portfolio essay, with the 8-hour open-book format used to gather large amounts of information (whether contextual material, secondary criticism, or lengthy quotation of primary texts) rather than to produce exciting or innovative analysis and argument.

#### *FHS Paper 4: Literature in English 1660-1760*

Most examiners were impressed by the overall quality of work on this Paper, especially given the disruptions to this cohort's time at university. Every question was attempted at least once, and there were excellent answers on a rich variety of texts and topics.

This year's shorter format seems to have worked well. Only a handful of candidates exceeded the word limit, and then not usually to the detriment of their essays' structure. Irrelevance was generally less prevalent than last year, perhaps helped by the reduction in word limit. However, a significant minority still either wrote only about a small part of the question, or attempted to wrest it to a different topic during their introductions, and then proceeded to write about something different, with varying degrees of relevance. Candidates should be reminded that it speaks to their knowledge of the period being examined that they are able to read, understand, and respond to the question as a whole. The best answers did just this, engaging the questions completely and in depth, and providing detailed reflections on the quotations and rubrics. They offered careful analysis of key terms, and maintained impressive structural control over the shape, pace, and development of their arguments.

There were many fine introductions to essays, but also a notable tendency to introductory bloat (and thus loss of focus and clarity). Others were brief to the point where it was not possible to ascertain what argument or approach was being proposed. In terms of structuring, correct paragraphing remains a problem, with many essays suffering from weak arrangement of material and inconsistent pacing in argument. Perhaps relatedly, a notable

proportion of answers adopted an extremely linear (Author/Text 1, then 2, then 3...) structure, reducing greatly their opportunities for detailed cross-thinking and development of argumentative points. Certain answers – especially, but not limited to, essays on science, life-writing, and the development of fiction and the novel – featured long sections of miscellaneous (though thematically related) information dumped in without integration into an argument. This tended to undermine the essays' ability to provide a flexible response to the particulars of the question (and, sometimes, to fit their material into the word limit).

As last year, the most popular texts were by Aphra Behn, Margaret Cavendish, Eliza Haywood, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and John Milton. Interest in religious writing was pleasingly higher than in previous years, with Thomas Traherne, John Bunyan and Lucy Hutchinson joining Milton as subjects of interest. Less was written, though, on such mid-century poets as Thomas Gray, William Collins, and Thomas Warton. Restoration poetry was generally represented by the Earl of Rochester (and to a lesser extent John Dryden). Restoration comedies by Behn, George Etherege and William Wycherley dominated answers on the theatre, although there were also some fine forays into less well known drama, including plays by Mary Pix, Susanna Centlivre, George Farquhar, and Dryden. There was, though, very little on heroic drama, opera, or pageantry. Candidates are also encouraged to think more about plays as events – that is, to reflect on how drama was actually performed and received in the theatre – rather than treating them as texts to be read.

A perhaps unprecedented number of essays on Richardson included discussion of *Clarissa* and even *Sir Charles Grandison* as well as *Pamela*, sometimes to great effect. On the other hand, many answers on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu were limited to the greatest hits of her letters from Turkey, and essays on *Oroonoko* frequently lacked any acknowledgement of Behn's other work. This all demonstrates with particular clarity that, although it is important for candidates to show that they have read widely, deep familiarity with a single author's wider body of work can more effectively equip them to demonstrate 'range' in an essay than scattered or arbitrary comparisons between multiple writers.

More answers than ever discussed the literature of the period in the light of contemporary colonialism and changing ideas of race. The difference between the strongest and weakest of these was very often the precision with which they outlined cultural and historical contexts: while too many depended on a vague, unhistoricised sense of the existence of slavery and empire, the best showed rigorous reading of history and theory, and generated brilliantly original and incisive readings.

#### *FHS Paper 5: Literature in English 1760-1830*

228 candidates sat the exam this year and all questions on the paper were attempted. Poetry and the novel were the primary forms of focus, although there were some notably ambitious answers on theatrical 'experiment' in the period, as well as some highly intelligent answers on confessional narratives and the literary essay (particularly on Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey), and on the rhetorical strategies and generic instability of both

abolitionist writing and first-person accounts of slavery (Mary Prince and Olaudah Equiano were key figures for the latter). Canonical choices were popular (especially Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Clare, Austen, Sterne) but there was also some pleasing incorporation of work by under-discussed writers. Those who considered Irish fiction in particular often revealed unusual choices of primary material and admirable alertness to context. Women's poetry was a popular topic, especially in response to question 3. Charlotte Smith, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Landon were prominent here, but answers were surprisingly repetitive on this topic. Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* also drew plenty of attention in response to questions 1 and 3; again, there was much repetition across answers here. Austen was an overwhelming presence in response to question 2, question 3, and question 5, but answers varied heavily in quality; the weakest had a narrow textual range, were descriptive rather than analytical, and tended to flatten the nuances in her thinking. Answers to the prompt on sensibility frequently evaded defining the term, or handling it with enough care. Responses based on labouring-class writing in general were scant, apart from some detailed work on Burns in response to question 21 on national identity. Responses to question 25 on the relationship between text and image focussed overwhelmingly on Blake, with a frequently disappointing lack of detail when it came to comparing his poetry to his prints and illustrations. Responses to question 16, a prompt which invited candidates to think about the relationship between literature and science in the period, were also frequently vague when it came to defining what 'science' meant in the argument, or lacked meaningful reference to specific treatises flagged as contextually important. Quite a few of the essays on the sublime didn't seek to define the concept, with the result that the connection of the texts discussed to that concept often remained unclear.

The best answers this year showed informed and imaginative (but not laboured) engagement with both the prompt and the precise terms of the question. They were elegantly argued and managed to marry interpretation with contextual knowledge, demonstrating sharp understanding of critical debate and the stakes of their own argument, along with a deft combination of a wide range of reference from an author's work and sustained close analysis of their style. Strong answers were able to incorporate and respond to secondary criticism without relying excessively and unquestioningly on it or, alternatively, mindlessly berating the cited critics. The weakest answers either completely ignored the opportunity to work with the prompt or laboured over a few key words in an effort to force an irrelevant answer to fit the question. They also had a narrow textual range (either single-author answers that lacked depth of engagement *across* the author's works, or comparative answers that lacked flexibility and other informative references). Weaker essays also tended to juxtapose two texts without giving any rationale for the comparison or relating them to the terms of the quotation, or to be catalogue-like, trying to discuss a large number of works and consequently leaving themselves insufficient space to analyse the works in any detail. Quite a few candidates failed to make it clear at the outset which part(s) of multi-part questions they were answering (despite explicit instructions to do so on the cover sheet), and in some cases it never became obvious which part or parts they might have been intending to write about. Sometimes candidates used their introductory paragraphs unhelpfully, riffing on the topic quotations for too long rather than introducing and framing the essay itself. Some answers were extremely well-presented in terms of appropriate levels of referencing for this exam format; but, given the amount of time candidates had to edit

and proofread their answers, the number of orthographical, grammatical, syntactical, and factual errors in many scripts was concerning. There was sometimes a sense that candidates had not taken advantage of the open-book examination format when it came to providing sustained textual analysis of primary works and to attempting to locate their arguments as responses to relevant critical debate. These concerns notwithstanding, there was some highly astute, ambitious, and impressive work on display this year.

#### *FHS Paper 6: Special Options*

### **20th and 21st Century Theatre**

13 students took the course. The range of topics included contemporary transgender writer-performers; race in contemporary African-American plays; representation of mental disorder; encoded female landscape in Beckett; disorder in recent plays; extremeness and violence on stage; heterotopia in Pinter's drama; nationhood and scenography; monologic drama; voice in plays by Beckett and Carr; Kane and sexual violence; torture on stage; and trauma and the use of props on stage.

The strongest essays had a cogent overall argument grounded in deep understanding of the plays and performances under discussion, evidenced by careful, precise, and rigorous analysis, a good sense of relevant contexts, impressive grasp of the extant critical discourse on the chosen plays, playwrights, performances, and/or topics, and alertness to theatre as both text and performance. Their presentation was clean and accurate and the writing articulate and sophisticated in expression.

Weaker essays lacked a clear sense of argument, or made arguments that were not convincingly rooted in analysis of texts and/or performances. Their logic was difficult to follow and their written expression lacked sophistication or was ineffective. They showed inadequate research, and either too broad or too narrow a focus. Their presentation was marked by errors of style, spelling, and/or punctuation.

### ***Dream Literatures, Dream Cultures***

Eight students took this option. The essays produced were impressive in range, taking in both new material and rereading the works that had been read in class in expanded ways. The best essays produced new readings of dream texts based on theoretical and historical material that shed light on how writers explored the concept of dreaming. Some essays focused on one writer and others worked across authors--both approaches worked. Some of the essays occasionally lost focus, lacking a clear argumentative throughline or losing sight of whether their claim had to do with a particular concept related to dreaming or to an aspect of the text itself. The essays that made a clear attempt to read a text in light of a particular idea or dream theory were the most successful.



### ***Fairytales, Folklore, and Fantasy***

Fifteen candidates took this option. Candidates employed a wide range of primary texts and historical periods in this option, with some inter-period work on show. While many candidates concentrated on fairy tales and fantasy from Europe, some explored the Caribbean and African-American material on mermaids that was added to the Paper this year. Candidates who rose to the challenge of the paper did so through marrying detailed and contextualised close engagement with the specifics of their chosen material alongside a nuanced grasp of the critical or theoretical field (e.g. feminism, critical race theory, etc.). Weaker scripts were characterised by arguments that were not embedded in close reading, a superficial grasp of theory, and the summarisation of, rather than engagement with, other scholarship.

### ***Faith, Proof and Fantasy on the Early Modern Stage***

There were nine students on 'Faith, Proof and Fantasy' this year. The essays submitted very pleasingly varied in topic – they wrote on the fictional space of the prologue, on the credibility of widows; on verisimilitude in true crime pamphlets and plays; on blood as a stage effect; on the dead as witnesses; on resistance to the performance of femininity, on witch-plays staging interrogations of supernatural evidence. The essays were theoretically and historically informed and freshly interpretative of the play texts; the standard was uniformly high. Plays covered included *Every Man in his Humour*, *Ralph Roister Doister*, *Gammer Gurton's Needle*; *The Tragedy of Mariam*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Devil is an Ass*, *The Witch of Edmonton*, *Amends for Ladies*, *Tamburlaine*, *The Alchemist*, *Henry V*, *Henry VIII*, *Bartholomew Fair*, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, *Michaelmas Term*, *3 Henry VI*, *Arden of Faversham*, *A Warning for Fair Women*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Julius Caesar*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, *Women beware Women*.

### ***Good Poets, Bad Politics? Wordsworth and Eliot***

Eight candidates took this option. The best essays were outstandingly good and ranged across an impressively wide range of long and short poems by both poets, as well as the full range of their prose writings. In the case of Eliot, this involved discussion of some of the 'new' materials published in the Johns Hopkins *Complete Prose*. Most concentrated primarily on one of the two poets, but the best essays made use of concepts from both sets of criticism. Several explored the depiction and production of awkward affective states (despair, despondency, bathos, and immobility) and went on to consider their potential political implications. There was also some good work on the relationship between political thought and religion in both poets, including a teasing out of Eliot's claim to be an Anglo-Catholic royalist. In some cases, clever, creative work was let down slightly by lack of attention to presentation and difficulties with structuring a longer argument.

### ***Freedom, Anarchy, Strangeness and Decay: Oscar Wilde and Cultures of the Fin De Siècle***

There were twelve students on this option. The standard of essays was consistently high, with some impressive, thoroughly researched and original essays at the top end. Written work ranged across a wide spectrum of topics from periodical publication, nationalism and aestheticism, to theories of impressionism in poetry and painting, representations of dance and the gendered gaze, and fictional and theatrical responses to the idea of automata and the waxwork. All the essays engaged thoughtfully and precisely with their chosen primary texts and demonstrated an admirable readiness to challenge extant critical assumptions. The strongest work was theoretically sophisticated, deeply informed, and deftly argued, and there was evidence of energetic thought and vigorous personal engagement across the board.

### ***Language, Persuasion, People, Things***

Eight candidates took this paper. The standard of work was very good indeed, making commendable use of a range of approaches and methodologies, and exploring aspects of commodification in relation to gender, politics, ideology, and consumerism, in often innovative and richly detailed ways. The individual topics chosen were diverse, though as in previous years, gender ideologies proved a popular focus for exploration, as did cross-period comparisons, while both rhetoric and critical discourse analysis were used well for their potential in anatomising persuasion at work. There was some strong work on cultural prescriptivism, and on persuasive dissimulations, alongside some commendably rigorous collection (and analysis) of available data, in both verbal and visual forms. Weaker essays could struggle with presentation, and in developing the structure of the submitted work beyond a list of examples. The best work was, however, arresting in its range and depth, as well as in its intellectual ambition, and cogent critical engagement.

### ***Literature, Culture, and Politics in the 1930s***

Thirteen students took this option. Given the overarching theme of the course, the work tended strongly towards the historicist (although no methodology was ever precluded), and the essays offered some new takes on traditional 1930s topics (for example, the Depression, the Spanish Civil War, the interwar 'generation', the approach of the Second World War) or considered less textbook dimensions of the period (for example, representations of specific kinds of consumption such as fashion, cinema, travel, and alcohol culture). Successful work was produced both on individual authors and across a range of authors, and, with both types of project, candidates consistently did well to identify the appropriate scope for an essay of this length. The transition from tutorial essays to long-form work probably explains why candidates occasionally struggled to organise their material and make the trajectory of their argument clear. As always, the best work found a compelling literary payoff for what was often very wide-ranging cultural-historical research.

### ***Myth, Legend and Saga in Old Norse Literature***

There were eight takers for this option, and the work produced was strong across the board. A pleasing range of topics were covered, including poetry, sagas, and reception history. The best essays were sophisticated and original, combining excellent close readings with a clear argument. There was some impressive use of theory to throw new light on well-known Old Norse texts. In the weaker scripts, candidates struggled to formulate their argument and/or to ground their own critical views sufficiently within the texts themselves.

### ***Old and Middle Irish for Beginners***

Six candidates sat this paper. The standard was very high.

### ***Others and Coetzee***

There were 8 candidates for this option. All made the most of the opportunities it affords, crossing disciplines, media, languages, periods, and continents. While some prioritized Coetzee and others focussed on their 'other', all engaged thoughtfully with the logic of the 'and' underpinning their argument. The best made creative use of the comparison/contrast it opened up, testing the relationship between literary and philosophical writing, fiction and photography, etc., and thinking self-reflexively about the terms of the comparison/contrast they chose to address. Some also backed this up with genuinely original research. The less assured either treated the terms guiding their analysis uncritically or struggled to sustain a carefully sequenced argument appropriate to a 6000-word essay.

### ***Possibilities of Criticism***

Once again the work submitted for this paper was highly committed, inventive, and thoughtful. Some of the writing was of outstanding originality, both thematically and formally adventurous, discovering new perspectives upon the works and ideas engaged with (always the measure of the best essays); there were pieces submitted of surpassing wit, incisiveness, and stylistic audacity; even the less realised efforts were really possessed by the students, and suffered mainly from a lack of time to refine the approach or argument, remaining somewhat inchoate. Authors engaged with included Barthes, Behn, Benjamin, Calvino, Carson, Cusk, Deleuze, Derrida, Annie Ernaux, Euripides, Felski, Cormac McCarthy, Milton, Saadiya Hartman, Joyce, Kierkegaard, Klein, Nelson, Oswald, Proust, Saunders, Sebald, Shakespeare, Stepanova, Zadie Smith, Spinoza, Whitman.

### ***Postcolonial Literature***

Thirteen students took this paper. Topics covered included gender in Black British Literature; Francophone Caribbean Poetry in translation; Chronotopes in Ben Okri; Mourning in Sara Suleri; Latin in Derek Walcott's Poetry; Thresholds in Sarah Howe; Silence

in Patricia Grace and M. NourbeSe Philip; Laughter in Sam Selvon and Zadie Smith. The best essays presented original approaches that brought postcolonial studies together with other approaches, such as material text, environmental studies, or medical humanities, with a good sense of historical context. Particularly striking and valuable was the greater attention to questions of form/style/genre. Essays that were less successful tended to reiterate well-worn critical ideas without situating these models in relation to more recent work, to 'apply' theory to texts, or to overstate the political currency of literature.

### ***Seeing Through Texts***

Seven scripts were examined for this option. The material covered ranged widely over late-medieval literature and visual/material culture. One of the most encouraging aspects of the essays is the way that students felt confident to navigate genuinely interdisciplinary work. The best essays allied this to exploring a clear set of questions or problems, and were reflective about the critical materials and debates that those engaged. Some of the essays could have done this more, or had a stronger argumentative structure. On the whole the examiners enjoyed reading this impressive work.

### ***Texts in Motion: Literary and Material Forms, 1550-1800***

Written work for this paper was in general of an excellent standard, with a high proportion of first class marks. Nine students submitted work. The best work was outstanding in its sophistication, lucidity, critical self-awareness and ambition. Candidates consistently demonstrated the ability to reflect thoughtfully on their own methods, and on the methods of other scholars. The strongest work responded both meticulously and imaginatively to the archival emphasis of this paper, and combined research into print or manuscript texts (or in some cases objects) with theoretical reflection and/or literary sensitivity. There was particularly good and ambitious work on non-book textual objects, and on manuscript cultures: these essays showed considerable archival work, and showed real confidence in dealing with difficult texts that challenged or resisted conventional variables of literary critical analysis. Less strong work was still characterised by archival industry but was less engaged with the specifics of the texts under discussion, and was more inclined towards the descriptive, rather than the analytical. Presentation and writing was good, often excellent. In general, there was a clear sense of the candidates responding to the particular intellectual and methodological challenges and opportunities of this paper.

### ***The American Novel After 1945***

Fifteen students took this option, and the standard was good. The essays often focused on two novels (more rarely one or three). The best performances combined a clear and distinctive line of argument with detailed close reading and a cogent theoretical frame. Where essays were less successful, it tended to be because the use of theory muddled rather than sharpened the argument, or because the discussion of the novels was more of a paraphrase than an analysis.

### ***The Avant-Garde***

14 students took this paper. Essay topics included authors and texts discussed during the course, as well as other material deriving both from the historical avant-garde and its broader and longer legacy. Essays were submitted on figures such as Amiri Baraka, André Breton, Claude Cahun, Leonora Carrington, Jayne Cortez, Maya Deren, Marcel Duchamp, Leonor Fini, Yagi Kazuo, Wyndham Lewis, the Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven, Mina Loy, René Magritte, F. T. Marinetti, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Frank O'Hara, and Ishmael Reed. Essays were pleasingly interdisciplinary, looking at writing and its relation to ceramics, cinema, magazines, music, painting, sculpture, and semiotics. Questions of gender and race provided a particularly productive spur to discussions of the politics of the avant-garde. Each excellent submission made a precise and discrete intervention on a particular critical matter, backed up with well-directed research that was always marshalled in service of an argument, as well as powerful and relevant close reading. Less good work often indicated that candidates had spent insufficient time considering how to level an argument across 5-6000 words, reading more like drawn-out tutorial essays ordered simply by association or even mere contiguity of individual points. Where essays succeeded, candidates showed a sensitivity to the fact that an extended essay needs distinct phases in its analysis, and a conclusion that reveals the broader stakes of its argument.

### ***The Good Life: Literature, Philosophy, Film***

15 students took the option this year. Final essays were generally of a high or very high standard. The best work was attentive to formal, generic and media distinctions (eg. between genres within the novel, or between the novel and film), in order to generate questions about the ethical work, or ethical questions, that form is capable of doing or raising. Less distinguished work simply noted a theme and enumerated its manifestation across one or two texts. The most distinguished work was able to treat philosophical texts and literary and cinematic themes as equally self-conscious and provocative.

### ***Tragedy***

Fourteen candidates took this paper. The course encourages comparative work across a great variety of periods and genres, from ancient to contemporary, and real originality, literary sensitivity, and flair were on show in several essays that comparatively explored their chosen works with analytical and theoretical precision. Candidates who did less well had often failed to justify ambitious comparisons between very disparate texts, lacking a theoretical framework for their analysis, or had otherwise become embroiled in theory to the exclusion of close textual analysis. There was also excellent work on single novels, or single authors, showing that precise focus and close reading can produce work of equal ambition and power. Several candidates fruitfully considered transformations and appropriations of 'tragedy' under the pressures of shifting cultures, analysing postcolonial, queer, and Black literatures, and many candidates made effective use of their freedom to discuss texts of their own choosing beyond the seminar reading list.

## ***Writers and the Cinema***

Twelve candidates took this option. The standard of extended essays was very strong, with a high number of students receiving first-class marks. Students grasped the opportunity afforded by this Paper's interdisciplinary focus, alighting on ambitious and original topics which explored an array of connections between film and literature. Both the literary and cinematic texts covered by essays were impressively wide-ranging. Candidates wrote on diverse cinematic genres and traditions, including early actuality film, contemporary documentary, silent comedy, the horror film, classical Hollywood cinema and avant-garde filmmaking. Essays studied film's relationship to novels, poetry, short stories, and drama, with some of the authors written about including: Donald Barthelme, Samuel Beckett, Elizabeth Bishop, Elizabeth Bowen, Angela Carter, H. D., F. Scott Fitzgerald, Christopher Isherwood, George Orwell, and David Shields. The strongest essays understood that the essence of this particular option is the study of film *and* literature: they exuded a deep critical appreciation of both media and reflected thoughtfully on the relationship between them, demonstrating a strong grasp of scholarship in the two disciplinary fields and supporting their arguments with detailed close analysis of literary and cinematic texts. Some essays would have benefited from having a more tightly-defined topic and selection of texts: they attempted to cover too much ground for an essay of this length and accordingly did not have the space to develop their arguments and close readings as fully as their ideas merited.

## ***Writing Feminisms/ Feminist Writing***

There were eight essays submitted for this paper, covering a wide range of authors including Adrienne Rich, Toni Morrison, Carol Ann Duffy, Audre Lorde, Jeanette Winterson, Ali Smith, Alice Oswald, Sally Rooney, and Margaret Atwood. As these names suggest, the essays primarily focused on modern and contemporary women's writing, although it was notable that most of the strongest essays carefully established the precise social, political, and cultural contexts of their chosen authors. The highest-marked essays made sophisticated theory a starting point for original and incisive close analysis, with particular attention to intersectionality and intertextuality. Weaker essays tended to be limited to making observations around a theme or pointing out resemblances between two texts, without clearly establishing an argument. It was in some cases apparent that essays needed at least one further editing stage, both to improve presentation, and to refine their theses.

## ***Writing Lives***

There was much exciting work produced in response to the varieties and modes of life-writing examined during this course – and the submitted essays demonstrated imagination and rigour. Students took in a wide variety of approaches, including single-author and generic focuses, tackling aphorisms, anecdotes, poetry, novels, diaries, memoirs, manuscripts, and photographs, as well as less conventional modes of biographical/autobiographical inscription such as tattoos, recipes, and dress. Topics varied widely across periods, modes, and media; works studied included those by Auden, Adiche, Barbellion, Bishop, Cusk, Dillon, Gallop, Lear, Lorde, Myles, Lorde, Nelson, The Refugee Tales, Ali Smith, and Gertrude Stein.

This year's dissertations covered a broad range of topics from Old English runic inscriptions, to Asian American poetry, to media like Instagram and blogs. A range of genres and styles were addressed, including theatre, journalism and film, and there was some promising interdisciplinary work dealing with photography and the visual arts. Awareness of non-English literary traditions was effectively mobilised. Although there was some cross-period analysis, most candidates preferred to focus on a single period and often on a single author. As was the case last year, there was a considerable body of material on North American and world literature.

The best dissertations conveyed enthusiasm for their topics and the pleasure of reading and conducting original research. They showed genuine ambition and inventiveness backed up by painstaking research. Both single-author and multiple-author projects were dealt with well, when single-author projects showed a breadth of knowledge across the author's oeuvre and relevant critical and theoretical frameworks, and when multiple-author projects carefully clarified the justification for reading texts together. Candidates were able to engage critically with up-to-date scholarly methods and debates and use these to inform their close readings. Their work demonstrated both breadth and depth of reading, was elegant and incisive in its engagement with primary materials, and was written in articulate and fluent prose. Many candidates produced original and creative readings of familiar texts, and were able to articulate their contribution to a live field. The very strongest work combined an impressive command of a substantial body of material, a carefully organised and informed argument, meticulous close reading, and a clear sense of how the argument contributed to discussions in the wider field. Some candidates showed a great deal of enterprise in their research in terms of working out what kinds of context might be relevant, often considering work on other media or from other disciplines. Some also showed deep engagement with textual reading (e.g. manuscript readings and situating reading in material texts, but also other forms of close reading). It was also noted that candidates were willing to think through material literary infrastructures shaping the production, circulation and reception of texts. It was pleasing to see so many candidates doing original research and bringing a healthy self-reflexivity to their own critical and scholarly practice.

Scripts at the weaker end suggested that candidates were struggling to choose a topic that could be tackled successfully within the word limit, and either opted for something too narrow or attempted to cover too much. Some appeared to have a poor understanding of what a dissertation should look like and ended up with something more like a collage of tutorial essays than a sustained argument. A recurrent issue was structure, with many candidates failing to see an argument through to the end or to choose a leading focus from among their options. They deployed lots of information and material, but without marshalling it into a coherent and critical argument. In general, candidates who used structuring devices fared better, although section divisions in themselves do not amount to a structure unless they correspond to real steps within the argument. Another recurrent issue was the difficulty of identifying the critical payoff for what was often attentive and hardworking analysis – the 'so what' of the dissertation. Candidates struggled to articulate the critical interest and significance of their work, either making broad sweeping claims that

did not stand up to scrutiny or taking a descriptive rather than an analytical approach. Although students are commendably anxious to make 'original' critical interventions, weaker dissertations sometimes do this based on distortive interpretations of the primary and secondary sources, rather than by working with the texts towards more nuanced understanding. Some candidates gave lists of examples and long quotations that they barely utilised; others attempted to create an appearance of range through the strategic dumping of secondary material rather than really engaging in a focussed way with the field. Although presentation was generally good, some dissertations showed sloppy grammar and sentence use.

On the whole, examiners were impressed by the range and overall standard of the dissertations and by the candidates' enthusiasm for their topics. They commended the high level of ambition and enterprise on display, which resulted in some truly exceptional work.

#### *FHS Course II Paper 1: Literature in English 650-1100*

Sixteen students sat this paper and every question except nos 10 and 16 was answered. The most popular questions were 4 (on the presentation of 'others'), 6 (on 'borders and boundaries'), and 9 (on translations into Old English). There was impressive range across most of the papers, from essays that revisited first-year texts from a different angle, to Alfredian translations and Cynewulfian poetry, to studies of particular manuscripts. The best candidates were impressively learned and wide-ranging in their references, seeking out less well-known texts, advancing new interpretations, and bringing palaeographical and linguistic skills to bear on their reading of Old English literature. There was some excellent engagement with the multilingualism of early medieval culture, especially Anglo-Latin and to a lesser extent Old Norse. The weaker candidates sometimes recycled first-year material with little or no evidence of further reading and/or struggled to fit a prepared essay into on the of question on the paper. No one wrote on the reception of Old English literature (e.g. in modern translation) and there was very little on biblical translations. Overall, though, the standard was high and showed an impressive engagement with literature from across the whole period.

#### *FHS Course II Paper 2: English and Related Literatures: The Lyric*

A wide range of questions was answered. The most popular were questions (6) and (9), which offered possible dismissals of medieval lyric (e.g. as sounding like nursery rhyme, or as offering a narrowly male gaze), which candidates usually disputed, and (11) on poetic failure. Candidates engaged well with the polemical limitations of the questions, often evaluating them methodically through essays with a clear structure. The best essays used paragraphing well to consider different perspectives with several fresh ideas in turn. Other essays were less successful when they only nodded to a content-related word in the question (gender, religion, nature) and then rehearsed material grouped only loosely under that theme, and related only tenuously to the question's challenge. Many good answers commented in detail on formal aspects, such as voice, imagery, virtuosity and structure (features perceptible even when working in translation). A few analysed in depth metrical



features or diction, especially in English but also in French on several occasions. There was in the best scripts, too, a sophisticated and precise critical vocabulary for debating literary practice, and a refreshing metacritical reflection on method (e.g. the politics of studying Arabic lyric; the separation of musicology from literary criticism; editorial failings) in ways that studying comparative literature invites. Most candidates discussed lyrics in English, but over half discussed the Arabic and Spanish of Islamic Europe, often with considerable technical knowledge of form; over a third of candidates discussed French, whether of England or France; and Galician, Latin and Welsh appeared too. There was less coverage of Celtic languages and Norse than in previous years. But most individual essays focused on one language; only a few took the opportunity the paper offers to write comparatively about texts from more than one language.

*FHS Course II Paper 4: History of the English Language to c.1800*

Thirteen candidates took this paper. In general, performance was very strong with four first class papers, and a further six gaining marks of 65 or above. Performance on the commentaries was particularly pleasing this year, with a lot of assured and linguistically informed scrutiny of the chosen texts. Submitted papers covered a wide range of topics, though lexicography, language variation, contact and contact features, private writing, and text type theory generated a good set of theoretically informed answers in which candidates handled a pleasing range of approaches and material. Presentation was generally extremely good, and period covered was commendable with many candidates revealing an impressive command of diachronic analysis. Weaker answers were marked by a failure to address the demands of the question chosen, as well as by significant gaps within the language analysis attempted.

*FHS Course II Paper 5: The Material Text*

In Section A, an equal number of candidates tackled the 'Nowell codex' and the 'Vernon manuscript'. For the Nowell codex, there were good observations on the text and on editorial method; for the Vernon manuscript, on word and image and on the page design. Candidates are encouraged to continue these strengths while also considering both areas of interest in relation to both manuscripts. The best commentaries were also well shaped into essays, picking out overarching themes in their observations. For Section B, this was the first year in which there were no questions set, and all candidates devised their own topics for their essay in this Section. Popular topics included illustrated manuscripts, from Gospel books to herbals, and the history of reading, through annotations and layout, in each case using examples of diverse genre and date across the cohort—though many individual candidates took the opportunity to specialize, across both Section A and Section B, in pre-Conquest or post-Conquest materials. The topics were largely well chosen, usually managing to balance themes of large implication with examples of precise observation, connecting the two as far as possible within the limits of one essay. Some essays could be strengthened by being more selective among the details discussed, selecting with analytical rigour the evidence which serves a wider argument. But precise knowledge of material texts was evident across almost all essays, and the enthusiasm for this subject was even more universally evident.

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS: FHS**

Anke Bernau

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Anke Bernau	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University of Manchester	
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	FHS	
<b>Level:</b> (please delete as appropriate)	Undergraduate X	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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		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 7 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		
<b>* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b>					

## Part B

In your responses to these questions, please could you include comments on the effectiveness of any changes made to the course or processes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic where appropriate.

### B1. Academic standards

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

This is my third year as external examiner for FHS. It has been a pleasure to do this work each year, and I have been as impressed with the quality of the work this time as I was in previous years. The work is as good - often better - than work I have seen at Russell Group institutions. The writing - even in weaker work - is clear and often confident; there is a good sense of chronological and formal range and variety. Students often exhibit detailed knowledge of relevant scholarship, and the strongest work is truly impressive.

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

This year I was asked to look at the full range of scripts for 5 candidates (with final averages ranging from a solid 2:2, to the highest 2:2 and lowest 2:1; to a solid 2:1 and a solid first class). I was also asked to look at the 3 highest-ranking dissertations, which was a particular pleasure and privilege. I was asked to offer recommendations for the dissertation prize.

The dissertation work was fascinating to read, and while there were differences in quality between them, they were all stand-out pieces of research. The strongest could have easily done extremely well at MA level (at least in many Russell Group institutions), and all three pieces suggested that their authors were capable of postgraduate work.

The candidates whose work sat in the 2:2 and low 2:1 range were fairly marked and the marks reflected the ability on display across the run of scripts. It was heartening to see a clear pattern emerge that confirmed individual marks, and although it was a real shame to have someone miss out on a 2:1 by very little, there is always a borderline candidate and it seemed to me the right decision overall.

The work was in almost all cases engaged and often very engaging. Students really dug into topics, and were able to be articulate (or at least quite well-informed) across an impressive range of material. The stronger work (and I include 2:1 work here) exhibits intellectual ambition and liveliness - there is a notable presence of individual 'voice' and little sense of 'rote' repetition.

It was very helpful and interesting to see the full run of scripts from work in different class bands.

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

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

As I commented in previous years, the process is very rigorous and it is impressive to see how carefully and judiciously the board proceeds. Being asked to participate in the MCE meeting gives one a very rounded picture of the process, and also confirms that the Board acts scrupulously and fairly according to existing rules and regulations (even if there are cases where one might be tempted to act differently, due to a candidate's very difficult personal circumstances).

The marking process is mostly also very rigorous and careful. The work is double-marked and there are regular instances when a third marker is called in to adjudicate (rather than simply 'dividing the difference' between two marks). I have a few suggestions (see below), but these do not detract from my overall sense that students are served very well by the markers and the Board.

I noted a slightly greater willingness to award marks in the high first-class bands - this is really heartening. However, I would recommend further consideration of this, especially with dissertations. I agree that grade inflation is concerning, but there can be no question of that in the cases I've been asked to look at. These students might end up competing for funding for postgraduate work, and it would be a real disservice to disadvantage them by not making use of the full range of marks available.

## **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?*

We discussed the 8-hour exam format, especially in view of the fact that some students with disabilities felt that the new format did not sufficiently take into account their needs. While it seems that in the original planning process it was decided that 8 hours was sufficient to allow all students to work to the best of their abilities, I do see the objection that the 8 hours still allows students without special needs to re-read or edit work, while others might need the full 8 hours simply to complete the assessment. It would be worth considering how this might be addressed - or how it might be better communicated, if no change is made.

While in most cases marking and feedback were clear, there were instances in which the marks and the comments did not seem to match up. In some scripts, the comments suggested really strong work, while the mark given was less generous; in others, it was the other way round. I would recommend urging markers to bear the marking criteria in mind and to ensure that marks and comments are in line with one another. Some markers were

exemplary. The dissertation marksheet helpfully outlines areas that markers should be taking into consideration - it is therefore very easy to refer to those criteria in comments.

A third marker is automatically called in when the first and second marks diverge by 15 points. I saw one piece of work where the marks diverged by 14 - and this made me think that the threshold for this could be lowered, especially since the two initial marks will often lie in different class bands.

While I can see that there is often not much to say about how a final mark was reached when markers diverge by only 2 or 3 points, where there is greater divergence it is important to write more than 'mark agreed after discussion'.

Here, as in other institutions, there are concerns about plagiarism. It would be worth introducing more plagiarism training for students, especially when it comes to differentiating between 'poor academic practice' and 'plagiarism'. I am very happy to see it being taken so seriously by this Board and support that approach wholeheartedly. It does a disservice to academia - not to mention other students - to be too lenient in this regard.

#### **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.*


See my comments above.

I was very pleased to see one particularly creative course (P6 Option: Possibilities of Criticism) - which looked extremely challenging and stimulating in its remit. It was not surprising, perhaps, to see that the work produced divided markers, as the course allows for innovative forms and responses. It would be worth having (I did not see any) clear guidelines for what is being asked of students, and how more experimental and speculative work will be assessed (for students, as well as second markers and externals).

#### **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.*

My thanks to Andy Davice, Tara Hathaway and Matthew Reynolds for running the Board (online) despite all suffering from Covid at the time. I'm not sure this sets a good precedent - as colleagues should not be expected to work when ill - but it certainly demonstrated their commitment to students and the process.

<b>Signed:</b>	
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**Date:**

**20 July 2022**

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and 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.

Peter Boxall

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Peter Boxall	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University of Sussex	
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	English Literature	
<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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		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 7 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, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b></p>					

## Part B

In your responses to these questions, please could you include comments on the effectiveness of any changes made to the course or processes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic where appropriate.

### B1. Academic standards

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

The standard of the work produced by English literature undergraduates at Oxford is exceptionally high.

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

I read scripts at the high end of the first category, and then some work on either side of the first/2:1 boundary.

I was lucky enough to read the run of the highest awarded first class student, which was quite stunning in its lucidity, its originality, and its control. All of the work that I saw in these categories had first class potential, and all showed independence and seriousness of thought. What was most striking about the range of work that I read was that all students have a writerly control of voice and tone – a mark of the quality of the teaching at Oxford.

The standard of work at Oxford is exceptionally high in comparison with other comparable degree programmes in the UK. I noted that some of the most poorly performing students on the cohort had some first class marks in their array – a tribute to the quality of the cohort, and of the diligence and inclusiveness of the teaching.

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

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

There are not many English departments in the UK that still follow a blind double marking procedure across the board. That Oxford uses blind double marking in all cases makes this an exceptionally rigorous and scrupulously fair examination process. I could always see how both examiners came to their mark, and I could almost always see how agreed marks were arrived at (sometimes after a third examiner had been consulted).

The marking is highly consistent in its own terms, and is exemplary in its clarity and fairness.



The exam board itself was conducted impeccably. Every decision was made with care, and with consistency, and each student was given proper consideration.

The mitigating evidence process is thorough, and the proper consideration was given to ensuring that any adverse circumstances were taken into account in a way that was fair for all students.

### **B3. Issues**

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

It seemed to me that there was some variation in practice between joint boards and the English single honours board. I would recommend that rules are standardised for all joint exam boards with an English component, in line with those governing the single honours board, to avoid inconsistencies.

I note that the examining load for faculty seems to be unusually heavy at Oxford, in comparison with other universities in the UK. It may be that this is an effect of your examining practices, and so unavoidable. But it is worth mentioning, in case there are any planning procedures that might lighten the load on faculty.

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

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

I am struck by the fact that the exam board at Oxford still has autonomy (where boards in other UK universities are tending to become less autonomous). I was struck too by the care with which the board exercised its autonomy, and by its commitment to making fair, consistent and measured decisions in all cases.

The administrative support offered to the Board, and to myself as external examiner, was exemplary in every way.

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

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

Only to emphasise how impressed I have been this year by the quality of student work that the faculty produces, and by the clarity and rigour of the examination process. The English Literature exam board at Oxford provides a model for other universities to follow.

<b>Signed:</b>	<b>Peter Boxall</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>11<sup>th</sup> August 2022</b>

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and 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.

Alison Shell

<b>External examiner name:</b>	ALISON SHELL	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	UCL	
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	ENGLISH BA; ENGLISH AND CLASSICS BA	
<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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		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 7 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?		NA		
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?		NA		
* <b>If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b>					

## Part B

In your responses to these questions, please could you include comments on the effectiveness of any changes made to the course or processes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic where appropriate.

### 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 have several years' examining experience at BA level: at Durham, where I was chair of examiners for two years; at my current institution, UCL; and at Keele, where I was an external examiner for four years. This year -- my first as an external at Oxford -- I was, for the most part, asked to comment on high achievers: the second-top First, the winner of the Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize, two low Firsts and two scripts on the 1/2:1 borderline. All were comparable to those from Durham or UCL graded at similar levels; students at Keele, though often highly intelligent, tended to be less polished and well-informed.

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

Oxford gives a high number of Firsts -- but this is as one would expect from the standard of the intake, and judging from what I saw, they're entirely right to do so.

With regard to the English and Classics BA, it was pleasing to see that students tended to achieve academic parity across the two disciplines.

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

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

I was deeply impressed: by the papers, the marking, the meetings, and the emailed follow-ups. Matthew Reynolds was a courteous, scrupulous, tireless chair of examiners; committee members were invariably engaged and constructive; and the administrative backup, from Andy Davice and Tara Hathaway, was exemplary.

I was satisfied that students were given equity of treatment, most of all by my experience of attending the MCE committees. These were conducted under considerable time pressure, especially in relation to last-minute submissions -- but this didn't get in the way of justice, and difficult cases were paused on where appropriate. I was asked to re-read a run of scripts with an eye to whether a change in degree classification was appropriate, given the

candidate's exceptionally unfortunate circumstances over the assessment period; opening up this case proved to be productive, and I was glad to recommend the higher classification.

The Oxford system resoundingly vindicates double marking: time-consuming, and often in freefall elsewhere for that reason, but the best possible mode of assessment for essay-based disciplines. Occasional sharp disagreements are intrinsic to the process -- but, in what I saw, these were appropriately dealt with.

Finally, cases of poor academic practice and plagiarism -- an inevitable if thankless part of the examinations process -- were thoughtfully considered in relation to each other, and elicited some astute detective work from committee members.

### **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?*

Where agreed marks were adjusted upwards in line with inclusive marking guidelines, this was sometimes flagged up and sometimes not. Conversely, while standard penalties for over-length work were consistently applied as far as I could tell, some markers were better than others at spelling out what they'd done. I feel that showing one's workings should be routine, and brought this issue up at the final examiners' meeting for English; my understanding, though, is that it's already being reassessed within a wider fine-tuning of the Covid-related move to online assessment.

At the English and Classics MCE committee, it was pointed out that while administrators know whether an extension has been granted, they're not necessarily aware of whether one has been applied for and denied.

Finally, in hybrid meetings, it wasn't always easy for those participating online to intervene in discussions.

### **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.*

Examples of good practice abounded. If I can single out one student-led trend, it was refreshing to see how the move to online assessment had freed candidates to write on a wider range of texts and topics than tends to be practicable for traditional desk-based exams.

One small point: none of the scripts I saw deployed sectionalisation, though some would have benefited from it.

## 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 second English examiners' meeting was moved online at very short notice, when the chair of examiners and the administrators were all stricken with Covid. Some confusion, even postponement, would have been forgivable. Yet it went ahead, and was a seamless experience -- the university is so fortunate in having team members who kept going with undiminished professionalism under such difficult circumstances.

Thank you for having me -- I look forward to next year's stint!

<b>Signed:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>19 July 2022</b>

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and 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.

**MST AND MPHIL (MEDIEVAL STUDIES) IN ENGLISH  
(INCLUDING MST IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES)**

**A. Statistics**

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

There were 93 candidates

(89 MSt, 3 MPhil 1<sup>st</sup> year, 1 MPhil 2<sup>nd</sup> year)

Outcome	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Numbers	40	32	18	1	2

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

	Distinction	Pass (for 2019 onwards, Merit or Pass)	Fail	Incomplete
<b>2018</b>	35.2%	54%	5.4%	5.4%
<b>2019</b>	32.3%	57%*	2%	9%
<b>2020</b>	46%	48%*	1%	5%
<b>2021</b>	42.7%	49.6%*	1%	6.7%
<b>2022</b>	43%	53.8%*	1.1%	3.3%

**2022\*** 34.4% at Merit and 19.4% at Pass

**2021\*** 32% at Merit and 18% at Pass

**2020\*** 37% at Merit and 11% Pass

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

**(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**

For 2021-22, the traditional practice of releasing on-course marks was continued. We have not yet seen the end of Covid, and as last year, release of marks frequently led to retrospective submission of 'Mitigating Circumstances' appeals.

As in previous years, blind double marking was retained, with each marker submitting marks and comment sheets to the Graduate Studies Office prior to discussion with the other marker. Course tutors served as first markers for the B and C essays. In cases where internal markers were unable to reach agreement, the essays, marks and comments were sent to the appropriate External Examiner for adjudication. In addition, samples of essays and dissertations with high and low marks were sent

to the Externals, along with any pieces of work for which the internal examiners' raw marks had fallen on either side of a border, and any essays where the first two marks were ten or more points apart. While this year we did not send complete runs of essays for individual candidates of higher, medium, and lower achievement, to Externals, we may want to re-introduce this practice in the future.

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

### **C. Publication of examination conventions**

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

## **Part II**

### **A. GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE EXAMINATION**

See attached report.

### **B. DETAILED NUMBERS**

n/a for MSt.

### **C. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS**

n/a for MSt.

### **D. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUALS**

n/a

### **E. THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS**

#### **Internal**

Ms Jeri Johnson (Chair)  
Professor Andy Orchard  
Professor Emma Smith  
Professor Fiona Stafford  
Professor Dirk Van Hulle  
Dr Sandie Byrne  
Dr Penny Cartwright

#### **External**

Professor Raluca Radulescu (Bangor)  
Professor Fiona Green (Cambridge)  
Professor Javed Majeed (KCL)  
Professor Helen Smith (York)  
Professor Michael Rossington (Newcastle)  
Dr Rex Ferguson (Birmingham)



## **M.St. and M.Phil. in English, Chair of Examiners' Report for 2021-22**

### **CHAIR'S REPORT**

#### **A. Process**

Though the extraordinary conditions of the previous two years (the result of COVID-19) were avoided, we still experienced a higher number of Mitigating Circumstances submissions than historically. There was, again, no general 'safety net' policy put in place for this year. While last year we had an exceptionally high number of requests for extensions, this year there were thankfully fewer. Virtually all candidates were either considered at the first meeting in July, or in a second meeting in early September.

A very real problem arose, however, directly related to such requests and the inability of the Proctors to respond in a timely fashion. The extreme delay in the Proctors granting or refusing such requests led to serious consequences for some students: having (legitimately) sought extensions (most relevantly for dissertation submission), the candidates in numerous instances had no decisive response from the Proctors' Office by the time of the submission deadline. This meant candidates were faced with an unconscionable decision: they could wait to submit their work at risk of subsequent refusal of extension by the Proctors and so suffer a late penalty, or submit work before they felt it was ready due to the circumstances that led them to request an extension in the first place. For the first time in this examiner's memory, retrospective mitigating circumstances submissions relating to this set of circumstances were received, and after careful consideration of relevant cases, the Board determined that an adjustment of the final result was warranted.

Students need to be reminded that extensions to submission dates will inevitably result in delay in the release of results. In the end, careful attention was paid to all such cases, and the examiners did their utmost to accommodate the very difficult circumstances students faced.

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

1. As last year, it was felt that the procedures for consideration of SPLD cases could be clarified, and the forms attached to submitted work provide clearer guidance to markers. Further, markers need to ensure that they not only note to themselves that a candidate has an SPLD, but that they make note of this on their submitted comments. They are not to adjust their mark, but that they have noted the case is important.
2. We agreed last year that when the raw marks for essays or dissertations exceeded ten marks or more that these ought to be sent automatically to External Examiners for scrutiny. This was done this year, and was in addition to the usual practice of sending work where the raw marks fall on either side of borderlines or an 'ANF' was submitted. We have not yet returned to a practice of sending externals complete runs of individual candidates' work from the upper, middle and lower ranges of achievement.
3. It is hard to know what might be done about the delay in Proctors' decisions for student extensions, as this is clearly outside the Faculty's remit. The detrimental consequences for candidates, however, do need to be communicated, if not directly to the Proctors, then through appropriate channels.
4. While it is for Examiners to determine their procedures (within the parameters of the University's 'Examinations and Assessments Framework'), consideration might be given, as one external suggests, to sending students not agreed (amalgamated) feedback, but the comment sheets from both examiners. This raises serious issues, and the Examiners should think very carefully before accepting it. Before this might happen, markers need to be reminded to ensure that their comments are robust, and that marking is done in accordance with the examination criteria and justified as such on the comment sheets. (And on a related

matter, first markers need to be reminded to ensure that the feedback to students is truly amalgamated into a coherent set of remarks, not sent as two possibly entirely contradictory chunks of comment.)

5. A final point for the Faculty to consider: a suggestion from Emma Smith was that we increase the number of prizes available for the course(s), with particularly a prize for the highest overall average (best performance). We have only the Charles Oldham and the Marilyn Butler prizes to award at the moment.

### **General outline of the year's meetings.**

There were three new internal examiners this year (Marina Mackay, Sandie Byrne and Penny Cartwright) with five continuing from last year (Jeri Johnson (Chair), Andy Orchard, Emma Smith, Fiona Stafford and Dirk Van Hulle). Of the Externals, two new people joined us this year (Michael Rossington and Rex Ferguson), while five continued from last year (Raluca Radulescu, Fiona Green, Javed Majeed, Helen Smith).

At the first meeting of the internal examiners, the timetable was approved, and markers were allocated for Michaelmas and Hilary C options, and for B-courses. The Board discussed all the points raised in last year's reports from the Chair and the External Examiners, and the recommendations of the Graduate Studies Committee.

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

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

Special Cases Committee (Jeri Johnson (Chair), Emma Smith, Fiona Stafford (later replaced by Marina Mackay)) met to consider Mitigating Circumstances and proposed responses to individual cases to be considered by the Final Examination Board. The Chair scrutinized comment forms to ensure that all SPLD cases had been considered by markers.

At the 'Final' Examination Board in July, examiners confirmed the marks awarded to dissertations; agreed the imposition of penalties for late, over- or under-length work; accepted the recommendations from the Special Cases Committee; and classified the candidates. Both the Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize (for the strongest essay on 'Shakespeare') and the Marilyn Butler prize (for the candidate with the highest Dissertation mark) were awarded. The External Examiners offered sustained and helpful contributions to the various discussions and were, throughout the process, exemplary in their responses to every request and in their scrutiny of the process.

A further Exam Board meeting was held, remotely, to complete the acceptance and ratification of marks for those candidates whose work had been submitted after July (with Proctoral permission for extension of submission date). The same procedures as above were followed.

### **B. Administration**

Administration for the examination was undertaken primarily by Holly Bickerton (who stepped into the post just as the academic year began, who suffered, therefore, a baptism of fire, and who performed every task with exemplary efficiency and good humour). Emily Richards and Andy Davice provided assistance at important points. Thanks are due to all those involved, particularly to Holly Bickerton, whose excellent work was crucial to the smooth running of the year.

### **C. Criteria**

n/a

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

The detailed written reports of the External Examiners are attached. Summaries of key points articulated by the External Examiners in the Final Exam Board meeting, and in their written reports,

follow below. All External Examiners graciously thanked the Chair, but especially Holly Bickerton for her efficiency and expedition in the administration of the exam process.

### **Helen Smith**

Helen explained that this was her final year as an examiner and thanked Jeri and Holly for their clear communication and for being well organised. She expressed her sympathy for examiners who had to quickly submit their marks for the late submissions. The marking was scrupulous and the way in which agreement was reached was fair and made sense.

It was interesting to be able to see the feedback that is sent to students. She wondered whether time could be saved by the first marker not writing two sets of comments.

Students pushed themselves and were adventurous. There was no decline in the marks received for the dissertation this year.

For essays that are deemed publishable by the markers, it would be useful for markers to note how they could be expanded and where they could be taken.

### **Raluca Radulescu**

Raluca thanked Jeri and Holly and praised the seamless administrative transition. She mentioned that the folders containing the essays were sometimes hard to navigate. She appreciated seeing the feedback sent to students.

Raluca said there were fuller comments on how the agreed mark was arrived at, but there was some unevenness between the agreed mark and the feedback. Some students had a high mark but negative feedback. (The Chair assured her that the markers had been told to align their comments with the marking criteria.) For some essays with a mark in the mid-60s, the wording of the feedback made it sound as if the student had barely passed.

### **Javed Majeed**

Javed thanked Jeri and Holly for their efficient and smooth work. He commented on the interesting range of work he had been sent.

It was worrying that in one C course in particular, there was a consistently wide divergence between the first and second marker.

One student had used a text with no translation provided. Again, guidance should be given to students on the use of non-English primary text – this was the third year this had happened. The Chair assured him that Graduate Studies had agreed that convenors were to be told to tell students to make sure to think of the implications of translation, and to provide English translations when non-English texts were under discussion.

It is important for the externals to receive both first and second markers' comment sheets at the same time as the essays for scrutiny.

### **Michael Rossington**

Michael also thanked Jeri and Holly for being helpful and efficient. This was his first year as an examiner and he said it was a privilege and a pleasure to read such outstanding work, with its sense of an argument and high standard of writing. He mentioned the originality and impressive bibliographies.

The B course essays were the stand-out in his strand: students had used resources in the Bodleian and other libraries and had produced really interesting work.

In the batch of essays he was sent, there was a falling-off in marks for the dissertation compared with the marks for the B and C course essays. He also didn't receive all the comment sheets (cf Javed Majeed, above).

There was excellent practice in the feedback for some essays, with students being encouraged to push themselves. The care and attention from tutors was outstanding. Some feedback was less full or not available.

### **Rex Ferguson**

Rex also thanked Jeri and Holly. This was his first year as an examiner and he said it was good to be told clearly what he needed to do and when.

Rex said he enjoyed reading the work he was sent, some of which was outstanding. He mentioned in particular the originality of the work.

The feedback and comments were detailed and showed a deep engagement with the topics. It was good that they also reflected on style.

Compared to master's courses at other universities, work marked in the mid-60s was still very good work and could be given higher marks.

### **Fiona Green**

In her fourth year, Fiona said it had been a pleasure and an inspiration to be an eternal examiner. She recognised the work put into the course by the tutors, Jeri and administrators. It was enjoyable and absorbing to read the course details for this flexible and demanding programme. The B course was a distinctive feature and the work done here filtered into the other essays in a distinctive way.

She noted the variety in the feedback given in terms of length and types of comment, but said that variety is preferable and that agreement was found in all cases. She questioned whether there was a need for markers to justify their agreed mark, given that this is something they are professionally equipped to do. As well as reducing the time spent compiling the feedback for students, she asked if it would be valuable for students to see the different comments from the two markers. They had a legal right to request it anyway if they submit a subject access request.

I am grateful to my colleagues for their help, professionalism, and cheerful efficiency in the running of this process during this last year. Thank you particularly, and hugely, to Holly Bickerton without whom this year would have been impossible.

It has become custom for the Chair to sign off with a wish for a future less fraught. I so wish it for this coming year's examiners.

Jeri Johnson  
Chair, MSt/MPhil Examiners  
October 2022

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS: PGT**
*Raluca Radulescu*

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Raluca Radulescu (Prof)	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	Bangor University	
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	MSt, MPhil	
<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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	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 7 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		
<b>* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b>				

## Part B

In your responses to these questions, please could you include comments on the effectiveness of any changes made to the course or processes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic where appropriate.

### B1. Academic standards

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

This academic year I feel confident that I have formed a good view of the submissions for the two degrees, both in terms of diversity of approach and coverage, with some really interesting choices of essay topics and dissertations, ranging across the period and a variety of literary genres and their manuscript contexts. Being able to attend the final board in person also helped clarify more aspects related to the system including the procedures related to choosing dissertation topics. Careful supervision is in evidence throughout, and good performances. New approaches and new theories have been nurtured in supervision, and rewarded, relative to the scope of the project(s) undertaken. This work is enjoyable to read and, in places, breakthroughs in scholarship were visible in a number of essays and dissertations (particularly two dissertations I sampled at the top end) – which is just what one wants to see at this level as preparation for doctoral research.

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

I am happy with the feedback I have encountered on assessments (both essays and dissertations) and the rigour and conduct of the assessment process. I have noticed even more consistency in the feedback and the way the discussion between the markers is recorded. In some cases, there might have been more need to justify a rather significant gap in the two marks (of 10 points), but the comments were, on the whole, clear and fair. Attention is clearly paid to the classification of marks, and overall consistent application of the same principles is observed. The assessment process continues to be robust and staff maintain the highest standards. I am satisfied with the arrangements put in place to mitigate post-COVID19 effects and on a par with those implemented at the institution I work at and those other institutions I am external examiner at.

There has been admirable continuity in the way administrative support was given, even though there was a change in administrator. The chairing of the final board was collegial and transparent, accommodating both in person and online attendance. I was made welcome, each external examiner's views were heard, and due process followed in terms of fairness to students.

## B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

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

## B3. Issues

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

As we had the opportunity to move back to in-person examiner meetings I learned a lot more about the system and its workings. Overall, fairness and transparency prevailed throughout the year in both written communication and the oral discussion at 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.*

The work I have been able to sample this year demonstrates the high calibre of the teaching and supervision on this programme. I am now able to better understand the development of the initial abstract for dissertation through to the final product, and wonder if the faculty might consider delaying the first proposal stage until candidates have some more experience of working at M level before they choose their topic.

## 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.*

My previous comments on last year's report have been answered and addressed, and I am pleased that I have learned a lot more about the system this year thanks to the opportunity to attend the board in person and ask a variety of questions.

<b>Signed:</b>	R. L. Radulescu
<b>Date:</b>	20 July 2022

**Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and 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.**



Helen Smith

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Helen Smith		
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University of York		
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	MSt in English (1550-1700)		
<b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )		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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
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 7 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?	✓		
<b>* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b>				

## Part B

In your responses to these questions, please could you include comments on the effectiveness of any changes made to the course or processes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic where appropriate.

### B1. Academic standards

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

The academic standards achieved by the students are of a comparable standard to those achieved by students on similar degree programmes at other HE institutions of which I have experience. Student work is strong across the degree, and shows considerable independence and originality, particularly at the top level.

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

I very much enjoyed reading a range of work and was able to view highest and lowest marks for each module, as well as all borderline dissertations and a representative sample of student work. The bibliographical work undertaken by the students is highly impressive and sets them up well for the dissertation as well as future doctoral research. Weaker students show a generally ambitious engagement with existing scholarship, a secure sense of the period and its literature and culture, and a commitment to scholarly conventions and good practice. At this level, students sometimes struggle to achieve focus in their topic and argument. At the top end, the work is highly impressive: original, fluent, extremely well researched, and insightful. Students working towards the higher end of the scale are impressively well prepared for doctoral study, and often already working at the level I would expect of a PhD candidate. This year in particular, I was struck by the ambitious and exciting work produced by a number of high-performing candidates.

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

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

The assessment process was conducted fairly and in accordance with the University's regulations and guidance. Student work is scrutinised closely, and marks were examined carefully both prior to and at the final examiners' meeting. Feedback was clear and thoughtful, and I was grateful for the opportunity to see the feedback which is returned to students which was, in general, well-pitched and encouraging. I was given access to an appropriate selection of material, which allowed me to gain a confident sense of the cohort

as a whole and the range of students' achievements. I read a significant number of essays and dissertations which had prompted a significant difference between markers (either a large gap, or a split across borderlines). It was helpful to see brief, clear statements of how disagreements had been resolved from most markers; these reflected careful discussion and consideration of the assessment criteria. There is an evident concern for equity of treatment for students, which is ensured through the application of a robust double marking process as well as through extensions and the mitigating circumstances procedure. As was the case last year and in 2019/20, mitigations relating to Covid were thorough and appropriate.

### **B3. Issues**

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

The process of double marking, in which both markers write and exchange comments before the first marker prepares a separate set of comments for the student, is unusual in my experience. It seems likely that it adds to the workload of colleagues in the English Faculty, and I would encourage colleagues to consider whether this process might be streamlined in a way that would benefit both staff and students.

Not all markers demonstrated how agreement had been reached. Given the relatively high number of disagreements, and the sometimes significant difference between marks, this was frustrating.

There is some lack of clarity around whether external examiners are allowed or encouraged to change marks, which I also noted last year.

At the exam board, we had some brief discussion of mitigating circumstances, and noted that the application of the mitigating circumstances procedure had not changed the outcome for any students. The process of weighting mitigating circumstances on a scale of 1-3 is unusual in my experience.

### **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 last year, I would like to note that the B course ensures that students are supported in making excellent use of the resources available to them through the University's libraries, which gives them the best students an impressive confidence and understanding in their discussion of copy-specific details, bibliography and codicology.

### **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.*

Enormous thanks to Holly Bickerton and Jeri Johnston for their support in this final year of my tenure as external examiner. Communications have been exceptionally clear and timely, and Holly has been generous in helping with IT issues and questions when they have arisen. This is the second conclusion of my term of office, after a one-year extension. It has been a great pleasure to act as external examiner for this prestigious, challenging and engaging degree programme. Students benefit from excellent teaching, imaginative and well-crafted courses teaching and courses, and careful scrutiny of their work. They are effectively prepared for doctoral study at any HE institution, and are lucky to benefit from the guidance and extraordinary resources available to them in the Faculty of English.

<b>Signed:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	19 <sup>th</sup> July 2022

**Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and 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>	Professor Michael Rossington	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	Newcastle University	
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	M.St. in English	
<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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
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 7 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, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b></p>				

## Part B

In your responses to these questions, please could you include comments on the effectiveness of any changes made to the course or processes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic where appropriate.

### 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?*

From my experience this year, the standards achieved by students on the English MSt programme at Oxford are comparable with, and in several cases superior to those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which I have experience.

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

This is my first year as an examiner for the MSt in English, largely responsible for the 1700 to 1830 strand. It was a privilege and a pleasure to read much of the work by students. Some of the best essays were outstanding in every way. A high proportion showed a sophisticated sense of how to argue, a high standard of writing and an awareness that research at postgraduate level entails originality, serious application and a step up from undergraduate level in terms of presentation; some of the bibliographies appended to essays and dissertations were truly impressive. In many cases there was a sense that the next destination could be doctoral research and in a few, the work had the potential to be developed for publication.

### 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 confident of the rigour and sound conduct of the assessment process. It ensures the equity of treatment for students and was conducted fairly. I would like to single out the conduct of the Exam Board for praise. It was chaired most efficiently and the documentation (and reporting, e.g. of decisions made by the Mitigating Circumstances committee) necessary for a careful consideration of each student's profile was provided. The Chair and the Administrative staff had evidently done a tremendous amount of preparation to ensure the smooth running of proceedings.

### B3. Issues

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

No.

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

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

A stand-out for me was the B-Course in my strand on bibliography, book history and the nature of textual criticism. The students were encouraged to use the resources of the Bodleian, including the Weston Library and other research libraries (The Queen's College and St Bride). I also thought 'British Literature and Slavery: 1711-1833' C-Course was rigorously conceived and timely. However, I can honestly say that there was interest and a sense of appropriately stretching standards in the all the courses whose work I assessed. They reflected a sense of the energy of C18 and Romantic literary studies as they are now, which is exactly what a postgraduate degree needs to do. I thought the course outlines and bibliographies supplied to students were consistently of a very high standard. Perhaps the only part of the course where there was a slightly falling off, in that the levels of the B and C essays I read were not quite matched, was the sample of Dissertations I was sent. Looking at the marksheet at the Exam Board I must immediately acknowledge that this was down to the batch I was sent (I think the dissertation that was given the highest mark was submitted just before the Exam Board meeting) and the fact that there were a greater number of late submissions than usual this year (for understandable reasons).

Over the course of the year, in most cases I had access to all the first marker, second marker and combined sheets, but in some cases I didn't. It does make it easier to perform one's role as an external if all the documentation is available. The grading and comments, including the combined feedback sheets, were in a significant majority of cases the best of best practice. Detailed, generous, careful, and always pushing the students to think more rigorously, read more or consider a stronger execution of argument or an even higher standard of presentation. That was probably one of the highlights for me, a sense that the care and attention that the students are getting from tutors, as well as the resources at their disposal, outstanding. The detail and rigour of feedback is another reason in addition to the high standard of student work is why I can say honestly that it has been a pleasure to examine this year.

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

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

I think the programme is working very well. It took me a little while to get the hang of the structure and to understand the different kinds of assessment for the various parts of the course. (I'd like to know more about how A courses are assessed but this is out of curiosity; the 'M.St. & M.Phil. Course Details 2021-22' booklet explains that 'There is no formal assessment for the A-course, but written work and/or oral presentations may be required' (p. 6).) I must thank the Chair of the Exam Board and the Academic Administrator in the Faculty of English Language and Literature for their willingness to provide me with information and guidance throughout the year.

<b>Signed:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	22 July 2022

**Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and 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.**



Fiona Green

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Fiona Green		
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University of Cambridge		
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	MSt. English		
<b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )		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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
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 7 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?	✓		
* <b>If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b>				

## Part B

In your responses to these questions, please could you include comments on the effectiveness of any changes made to the course or processes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic where appropriate.

### 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 standard achieved by candidates for MSt are in line with those achieved at other high ranking UK institutions, and comparable especially with those achieved for the equivalent qualification at my own institution (Cambridge).

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

The range of achievement in the MSt courses I examined and moderated (post-1800, American) is wide, with work submitted at the upper end of the Distinction category that would be publishable in peer reviewed journals internationally, and at the lower end of the pass category recognisable as competent undergraduate work plus one year's further study. This is just the range of achievement one would expect of a course of this kind, which attracts a large number of candidates from a very wide range of undergraduate courses and institutions.

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

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

The Assessment process is rigorous, with double blind marking followed by discussion and agreement between internal examiners, and recourse to externals where necessary. Examiners write different kinds of report: some generic, and helpfully invoking the assessment criteria, some explicitly engaging with the arguments of the essays reviewed, some long, some short. This is to my mind preferable to a more uniform approach in that it attests to a variety of experts reading in a variety of ways but nonetheless reaching agreement about the quality of the submitted work.

Runs of marks for each candidate are scrutinised with exceptional care, and processes regarding deadline extensions and extenuating circumstances likewise.

### B3. Issues

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

There is some in clarity regarding the material sent to external examiners in advance of the final Exam Board meeting. This year I was sent dissertations at the lower, middle, and upper range of marks, and dissertations where the internal marks differed by 10+. In each case, the internal examiners had agreed a mark, and their individual and joint reports were included in the documentation. Externals were advised that they could alter any of these marks, within the range of the two original marks.

This part of the examining process is not, as far as I can see, specified in the Guidelines for Examiners. I would advise the faculty to review the role of externals at this point in the process, and in particular to consider whether and in which cases externals should be invited to change marks. My own view, which may be helpful as a starting position, is as follows:

- Sample dissertations at the lower, middle, and upper range should be sent for monitoring purposes only. *Marks for these sampled dissertations should not be changed.* If the marks seem questionable, then this should alert the Board to a potential problem with the whole cohort; changing individual marks at this stage is unfair to those candidates whose work doesn't happen to fall into the sampled categories.
- Dissertations where the internal marks differ by 10+ should be sent to externals *as a matter of course* and treated as 'ANF': internal examiners should not attempt to resolve disagreements of this kind. Their individual reports should be included with the documentation sent to the external, and the external be asked to decide and report on a mark for that dissertation.
- The above procedure regarding marks that differ by 10+ should apply also, in the course of the year, to all coursework: all disagreements of this kind should be treated automatically as ANF cases, with no attempt to reach agreement between internal examiners.

### B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

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


As in previous years, I spent an absorbing few hours looking through the MSt course details and admiring the rich, scholarly, and in many cases diverse offerings from which MSt students select their seminars. This is an enviably coherent, flexible, and very demanding course, I continue to think, with the bibliographical 'B' course as ever a distinctive feature,

and work done in that area also filtering into coursework and dissertations. Courses are regularly updated to keep pace with rapidly changing fields of scholarly enquiry. The work that comes out of the MSt is equally various, across a wide range of achievement. It's a course that discriminates, just as it should do, so that the outstanding achievements of the very best candidates are properly recognised.

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

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

This year I saw some student-facing feedback as well as the two internal examiners' reports, and I wondered again about time spent writing a document that combines the two already written, and which in some cases tends to iron out their differences. Perhaps time could be better spent than on this extra layer of feedback, especially on the dissertation, which is for most candidates summative rather than formative, and especially in view of students' legal right to see everything written about them, including individual reports, if they were to make a Subject Access Request (which is to say: the existence of a student-facing report doesn't protect the original reports from being accessed, if a student wanted to see them). This is my final year as an external examiner of the MSt in English. It's been a pleasure and an inspiration to serve as external examiner since 2018. Many congratulations, again, on this excellent Master's course.

<b>Signed:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>8 August 2022</b>

**Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and 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>	Rex Ferguson		
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University of Birmingham		
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	MSt in English Literature		
<b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )		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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
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 7 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?			✓
* <b>If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b>				

## Part B

In your responses to these questions, please could you include comments on the effectiveness of any changes made to the course or processes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic where appropriate.

### 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?*

In the course of my examination I read several essays from the Michaelmas and Hilary terms and a good selection of final dissertations. I found the standards achieved by students to be admirably high. The work graded high in the distinction category was truly outstanding and was, quite rightly, often commented upon by markers in relation to the potential for publication. In the part of the programme that I examined (1900-present) the amount of work graded in the low-to-mid distinction and high merit categories was considerable and there were very few examples of work that dropped below the 60-mark. This entirely accurate assessment of reflects an above average academic standard for postgraduate programmes in English Literature nationally.

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

I was highly impressed by student performance on this programme. The work that I read consistently reached a high standard in terms of presentation, articulation and scholarship. The basic mechanics of good essay-writing (the ability to take an idea and develop it over the course of several pages and via a range of interesting examples) was highly developed in virtually all the work I examined. What was most impressive, however, was the sheer originality of student work. The dissertations I read were highly individual in their topics and methods. So too were module essays that, while clearly having their genesis within the material of the modules themselves, branched into extremely interesting and unique areas. I would normally expect to see this level of original thinking at the higher level of the distinction category but it was present in virtually all the work that I examined.

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

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

There was clear evidence that all markers performed their duties with due care and diligence. Student work was read carefully and with an eye to rewarding quality rather than a focus on weaknesses. At the same time, the identification of areas where work could have

been improved was expertly done and these matters were communicated to students in clear feedback documents. The opportunity to see how markers had agreed upon marks when there were differences in the grades initially allotted was beneficial for me as external and indicated that a useful dialogue between markers was the norm. I did have to adjudicate in a few instances when markers could not agree on a final grade and wonder if the external, with their necessarily limited view of the material taught in modules, was quite the best person to do such a task. Having said that, this process was very interesting and I do feel confident that justifiable grades were achieved in the end. Overall, the consistency of marking struck me as exemplary.

### **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?*

During our board of examiners meeting the Chair reported on the meeting of the Mitigating Circumstances Committee that had met earlier in the day. We then went through the list of students that had mitigating circumstances with an eye to whether any substantive change could be made in relation to the overall degree classification awarded. While no details of the circumstances faced by individual students was divulged there was a rating of severity given (1-3). There were no cases in which this discussion resulted in a material change for the student in question – this being the case even when the severity was 3 and they were relatively close to a higher classification. Knowing the kinds of circumstances that students routinely face each year (and the further strains upon physical and mental health that have characterised recent times) I am concerned about whether truly equitable outcomes were achieved in these instances. I feel that either a loosening of the regulations, or a more generous interpretation of the regulations, about what the board can contemplate in terms of degree classifications should be considered.

### **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 have nothing to recommend here but just wanted to take the opportunity to note a few elements of good practice that are already in operation:

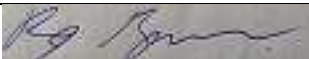
- The quality of the handbook was outstanding and must provide students with a great degree of confidence about both practical matters AND the intellectual scope of their modules and the programme overall.
- The use of double-marking functioned extremely well and, as noted above, it was excellent to see signs of dialogue between markers prior to a consensus being reached.
- Feedback was clear, sensitively phrased and useful in terms of future student work. I really valued the fact that writing style was pretty much routinely commented on

(especially as this refrained from enforcing a set, uniform, style and, instead, responded to the particular elements of an individual's writing).

**B5. Any other comments**

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

This is my first year acting as external – hence the N/A answers to questions A6 and A7 above.

<b>Signed:</b>	 <b>REX FERGUSON</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>27/7/22</b>

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and 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>	Prof Javed Majeed	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	King's College London	
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	M.St. in English Studies (primarily World Literatures in English)	
<b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )		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? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>	✓		
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 7 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?	✓		
* <b>If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b>				

## Part B

In your responses to these questions, please could you include comments on the effectiveness of any changes made to the course or processes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic where appropriate.

### B1. Academic standards

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

The academic standards achieved are in general equal to and often considerably higher than those achieved by students at other HEIs. However, the work at this level at other HEIs is generally more open to interdisciplinary approaches. The work I have seen at Oxford over the past 4 years tends to be less open to taking intellectual risks or interdisciplinary experimentation.

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

The standard of work is high, and the essays and dissertations address an interesting range of topics and material. The issues which one encounters in other HEIs when it comes to standards of writing amongst less able candidates are absent.

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

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

The assessment process is rigorous and fair. Markers' comments are constructive, clear, and well-balanced, and give a clear indication of how the agreed mark is arrived at. The marking criteria is carefully adhered to. Markers also used the whole range of marks when assessing candidates' work, and the office was quick to respond to queries about the conduct of the assessment process.

### B3. Issues

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

### 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>	J. Majeed
<b>Date:</b>	July 25 <sup>th</sup> 2022

**Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and 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.**