



UNIVERSITY OF  
**OXFORD**

**FACULTY OF ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2021**

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# PRELIMS EXAMINERS' REPORTS

## Chair's Report

### Statistics

This year there were 232 candidates for the Preliminary Examination in English Language and Literature.

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

- Paper 1: EML 29; HENG 13; CLENG 12
- Paper 2: EML 2; HENG 1
- Paper 3: EML 11; HENG 6
- Paper 4: EML 16; HENG 6

Numbers and Percentages in each category:

2020-21	Total no. candidates:	%
Distinction	52	22.41%
Pass	176	77.16%
Partial Pass	0	0.00%
Incomplete	1	0.43%
Fail	0	0.00%

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

Paper	2020-21	%
1 Introduction to English Language and Literature: Combined	33	14%
1 Section A	32	14%
1 Section B	29	13%
2 Literature in English 650-1350	41	18%
3 Literature in English 1830-1910	34	15%
4 Literature in English 1910-Present	28	12%

## PERCENTAGES INCLUDING RECENT YEARS

### i) English Prelims

	2020-21	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16
Dist.	22.4	22	19.3	23.6	25.4
Pass	77.2	74.4	79.4	74.7	72.8
Fail/Part Pass	0.0	1.8	0.4	1.7	1.8
Inc.	0.4	1.8	0.9	0	0

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

Paper	2021	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
1	14	16.6	17	19.7	22.4	20.1
2	18	20.2	18	21.9	25.6	17.9
3	15	24.2	16.1	22.3	22.9	24.5
4	28	21.5	20.6	23.8	23.8	24.1
Overall	22.4	20.6	17.9	22	23.7	23.7

## General remarks

After the cancellation of Preliminary examinations in 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the decision was made to shift to an online format: Open Book Open Web (OBOW). It was agreed that an eight-hour window would be preferable to the four-hour window used in FHS 2019, giving students more time to take breaks, and reducing anxiety. The faculty used INSPIRA software for the submission of written work, while Paper 1 portfolios were uploaded using Weblearn as in previous years. For written exams (Papers 2, 3 and 4) minimal referencing was required but no bibliography. A word limit of 2000 per response was imposed. Turnitin technology was used to detect cases of plagiarism.

The Prelims Board comprised seven postholders (two medieval/language, two Victorian, two Modern, one Classics & English). Each paper was marked by a team of four, comprising two Board members who acted as setters and two additional markers. In total there were ten markers, four of whom were postholders, two Departmental Lecturers, two permanent college staff and two postdoctoral researchers. Due to unforeseen circumstances, two further markers (one a DL, the other postdoctoral researcher) were called in at short notice to help share the marking load. All Board meetings and moderation meetings were held online via Microsoft Teams.

As in previous years, the setters for each paper took on the responsibility of arranging moderation meetings, at which markers compared a range of scripts (highest and lowest marks, borderline marks, rubric infringements, short weight etc). The Board ensured that penalties were applied consistently and appropriately across all four papers.

20 candidates on the Pass/Distinction and Pass/Fail borderline had their scripts re-read by the Chair and Deputy.

Unsurprisingly given the impact of the pandemic, there was a very large number of Mitigating Circumstances notices to Examiners (MCEs) this year (69 in total). These were assessed by the Chair and Deputy at a Special Cases meeting. A number of candidates' marks were moderated accordingly. A small number of candidates failed to submit their Paper 1 portfolio and therefore resat the paper in September. There were a small number of withdrawals.

The Board records its thanks to Lis Allen for her excellent work throughout the year under very challenging circumstances.

**Dr Francis Leneghan**  
**Chair of Preliminary Examinations 2020–21**

### **Prizes**

Gibbs Prizes were awarded to:

Lochie Springett	(St John's)
Jennifer Zhou	(Magdalen)
Tosun Stone Bora	(Magdalen)
Elena Vermeer	(St Hilda's)
Natasha Gargan	(St Peter's)
Millicent Wolter	(Pembroke)
James Newbery	(St Edmund Hall)
Anna Stephen	(Merton)

The Mrs Claude Beddington prize was awarded to Lochie Springett (St John's)

The Passmore Edwards prize was awarded to James Green (Exeter)

## Reports on Individual Papers

### Paper 1: Introduction to Language (Section A)

There was a good deal of excellent, nuanced and incisive work for the language section of Paper 1, demonstrating that students are learning foundational skills that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their degree. As in previous years, the paper produced a remarkably diverse range of work, reflecting the many varieties in English, from aboriginal Australian to Jamaican creole, as well as topics such as queer/non-binary identities, gender, race and politics. In addition to literary works, it was impressive to see many candidates tackle non-literary language drawn from text messaging, journalism, advertising, pamphlets, twitter and a range of other sources.

Candidates are reminded that they should not make their own transcriptions of spoken English texts as this invariably leads to issues with checking the accuracy of transcription. If transcriptions are used, they must be from a published source. As in previous years, relevance to the question *and* the prompt was a key issue. For example, in responding to the question on metaphor, which invited candidates to examine the work of metaphors in the given passage, a number of candidates simply listed the metaphors present.

Students are to be reminded that they need to provide their commentaries with detailed reference and analysis of the chosen texts. A commentary is not an essay, and not a description of the contents of the passage. Some candidates who wrote solely or primarily on literary texts effectively produced an essay or work of practical criticism rather than a linguistic commentary. Some candidates did not provide texts, or presented them poorly, with illegible line numbering or barely visible text, and were penalised accordingly. Some texts were too slight to afford the necessary depth and range for linguistic analysis. Others were too long, leading to lots of omission of key areas which could have been discussed.

Candidates should be strongly discouraged from simply repurposing a pre-written piece of work. There were a number of candidates with very interesting submissions which did not, however, address the question that was actually being asked beyond a perfunctory 'topping and tailing'. Commentary is not a parsing exercise — some candidates offered a kind of trainspotting exercise with reference to passing nouns or verb and articles, while failing to think about how language features can be used to illuminate meaning. In some cases, this led to a focus on simply listing formal features at the expense of interpretation and analysis. In contrast, there was some really excellent work on Critical Discourse Analysis, and the discursive approaches to meaning and identity. Candidates are reminded to focus on the *work* that language does, probing the effect of the linguistic features, rather than simply describing.

Bibliography could, in weaker candidates, be strikingly short, with some listing a single chapter or book alongside the references to those chosen passages. There is clear guidance on formatting and how to present a bibliography etc in the Prelims Handbook. The best responses made intelligent use of a wide range of secondary criticism, often engaging in a sophisticated manner with recent developments in scholarship; weaker candidates simply quoted secondary sources in an uncritical manner.

## **Paper 1: Introduction to Literature (Section B)**

All questions were attempted, with the most common being 2 (on the standard of taste/canon), 4 (on hanging together), 5 (historicity) and 6 (gender, performance, affect, the fictive). Question 10 (Strawson on the episodic self) was puzzling to all but the very best candidates; many answers rebuked Strawson for his ineptitude in being unable to construct a narrative of his own life, sometimes departing into lengthy discussions of autobiographical writers (e.g. Maggie Nelson) felt to do this more adequately. Question 6 was invariably answered with reference to Judith Butler, with some candidates tying themselves in knots around theatrical vs. non-theatrical performance.

Most answers took a genealogical approach to their material: that is, they offered a wealth of summary, for instance of specific contributions to reader response theory (e.g. Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish) or method debates (e.g. Eve Sedgwick, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus). In this way, many arguments proceeded from topic to topic in an iterative manner, and lacked a clear frame or focused inquiry. There were many exact repetitions of particular theorists and texts, in the same order, across the run of scripts as a whole. Examiners received the impression that candidates were often downloading answers from their tutorial and lecture notes, rather than offering fresh responses to question prompts. Where there was direct address to the prompt, candidates often took a quotation to task, or condemned it as a proposition (often without sufficient regard to context), rather than employing the quotation in opening up a theme for exploration. Such prosecution of the question prompt was common, but rarely produced a successful argument, because the answer's own foundations of criticism (often moralistic) were usually left uninterrogated. In some cases, candidates located the quotation within the larger work of which it was a part and then addressed their answer, often irrelevantly, to some other aspect of that work. This led, in some cases, to *ad hominem* arguments (e.g. against Hume's racism) which, although relevant in part, could not serve as full answers to the question. Work was largely well-presented but there was a noticeable tendency to rely heavily on non-committal passive or impersonal constructions. This tends to give the impression that candidates are shuffling around critical ideas rather than trying to set up an argument.

The best answers, however, were able to provide incisive and engaged responses to the questions, offering arguments that developed elegantly and cumulatively within the word count. They explored approaches to literature by both reflecting on and performing such an approach: for instance, by testing the limits, but also the affordances, of a particular critical lens against judiciously chosen literary texts. The very best responses were able, not only to read literature through a particular critical or thematic approach, but to use an approach to understand particular works of literature as proposing theories or perspectives of their own. Such answers took intellectual risks, and provided detailed analysis of quotation as evidence for their arguments, rather than relying on sheer volume of quotation to carry the day. It was such risk-taking that produced the most distinguished scripts.

## **Paper 2: Early Medieval Literature 650–1350**

There was a good deal of high-quality work in this year's scripts, and students are to be commended on their hard and thoughtful work on medieval English during difficult



circumstances. While some candidates focused solely on the set texts for both parts of the exam (commentary and essays), a significant number of scripts showed impressively wide reading, tackling other heroic poems, laments, saints' lives, riddles, lyrics, wisdom poems, biblical verse, charms, romances, spiritual treatises and prose texts in the essay section. There was also some excellent and intelligent use of theoretical ideas in this paper. As in previous years, the majority of candidates focused on Old English texts for both parts of the exam, though there were a substantial number of essays on Early Middle English and/or Anglo-Norman texts. The best scripts carefully situated each text under discussion within appropriate literary, historical or cultural contexts while weaker responses tended to lump together texts from different genres, periods, backgrounds and languages indiscriminately. Candidates are to be reminded that this paper covers some seven centuries during which the English language and its literatures underwent radical changes. It is not advisable to treat any text produced in this timespan as simply 'medieval'.

The most popular passage for commentary was by far *The Wanderer* excerpt. Second in popularity was the *Beowulf* passage. Hardly any candidates wrote on the Early Middle English set texts for their commentary, but there were a very small number of commentaries on *The Owl and the Nightingale* passage. The strongest commentaries provided a precise and detailed analysis of the given Old English/Early Middle English extract that was informed by wider reading, linguistic competence and (it seems) attendance of lectures. The best work combined deep knowledge of content with sustained and focused analysis of the *language* and *style* of Old or Early Middle English writing. Weaker points in commentaries included lack of attention to style and lack of focus on the given passage. It was pleasing to see many students demonstrating deep engagement with language, metre, diction, variation, parallelism and other aspects of form as well as structure, themes, imagery and rhetoric. On the other hand, many candidates treated features such as alliteration as embellishments rather than as essential structural components of Old English verse. Though it was pleasing to see students engage with metre, there were a number of slips. Many candidates, for example, misidentified the 'ubi sunt' passage in *The Wanderer* as 'hypermetric'.

The most popular essay questions were 6 (on the heroic ethos), 19 (on monstrosity, margins, geography), 10 (on representations of the Cross or Judgement—most answers focused on the former subject), 14 (on sanctity and/or holiness), and 4 (on setting). A significant number of students also responded to question 2 (a quote from *Wulf and Eadwacer*), 8 (on the 'aphoristic mode'), 9 (on the didactic / homiletic modes), 11 (a quote from *Beowulf* involving Wealhtheow), 16 (on love, suffering, beauty, death), and 17 (on time and transience or aristocratic culture). Students wrote on a wide range of Old English texts (elegies, saints' lives, heroic verse, riddles, charms). Some students also wrote on Early Middle English (including *Ancrene Wisse*, saints' lives, and romances); some wrote on romance texts in French, Anglo-Norman and Early Middle English.

Students are reminded that they must quote from all English texts in their original language. It is not acceptable to quote from Old or Early Middle English texts solely in translation. There were some rubric infringements on this front and candidates were therefore penalised. Candidates are also reminded that, while it is acceptable to write on texts in translation (for example, Latin, Anglo-Norman or French texts produced in this period in translation) for up to a third of the exam, they must demonstrate substantial engagement with texts in Old and/or Early Middle English in both parts of the examination

(i.e. commentary and essays). Candidates who did not engage substantially with Old or Early Middle English in either essay were therefore penalised.

The strongest essays engaged with the questions clearly and creatively, drawing on an impressive range of early medieval texts. Weaker points in essays included lack of critical reading and limited clarity and fluency in style. A number of essays were clearly rehashed commentaries or tutorial essays which paid little attention to the terms of the question — these scripts were penalised. A significant number of responses to essay question 10, in particular, unadvisedly took the approach of writing a commentary on the depiction of the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood*. Stronger responses to this question tended to consider representations of the Cross in other texts too, such as *Elene*.

On the whole, there was a marked improvement in the quality of submissions for this paper, especially in the commentary section. There was also more imaginative work and variety on the essays than in previous years.

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

All of the questions were attempted, with Q.10 (science) and Q.16 (visual art/sexuality) being especially popular, although questions that explicitly asked candidates to consider form (e.g. Q.1) were chosen far less often than those that asked them to reflect on broad cultural or thematic concerns. The lack of a question explicitly focused on industrialization did not prevent many candidates from writing the essay they had clearly prepared comparing *Hard Times* and *Mary Barton*, which they accomplished with varying degrees of ingenuity, usually by latching onto the fact that both novels were set in cities (the focus of Q. 8). The period's major novels (e.g. *Bleak House* and *Middlemarch*) were also written on by many candidates, although in a number of cases there was little evidence of wider reading in a chosen author or the period more generally. This was especially disappointing in the context of a 2,000-word limit for each essay under the OBOW format, and the number of online resources now available for the 1830-1910 period. The same was true of essays on poetry, where often Tennyson was represented only by *In Memoriam* or 'Mariana', and Browning's restless, rummaging imagination was restricted to 'My Last Duchess' and 'Porphyria's Lover'. In such essays the candidates struggled to make a convincing argument, largely because they had attempted to build it on such narrow foundations. Again there was surprisingly little attention paid to matters of form, as if the fact that these works had been written in verse was simply a puzzling fashion of the period, like crinolines or side whiskers. Most essays on the period's plays read them as sociological documents or coded authorial confessions; very few considered how successfully they worked as plays.

Without exception, the best essays considered the implications of the question, and established a sense of dialogue with it throughout. There were excellent essays on both single authors and multiple authors. The best comparative work made a clear, convincing case for the *importance* of the comparison to the overall argument, whereas those that considered each text in isolation (sometimes, paragraph-by-paragraph) were generally less successful. The best work on individual authors was able to show both depth and range, by considering examples from across a text and weaving in relevant material from more unexpected sources (e.g. diaries, letters, reviews, and non-literary materials including advertisements, paintings and photographs). There was much evidence of subtle, independent close reading; the very best essays not only demonstrated originality and

sophistication at the level of the word or line, but could make persuasive and fully-substantiated points about an author's use of genre, form, and tone. Less successful essays might identify a literary technique (e.g. different styles of narrative voice) but not do very much to explain how it worked or why it mattered. Most essays stayed very close to the primary materials, and cited secondary criticism without necessarily putting any pressure on it; future candidates would benefit from remembering that when they quote a piece of criticism they should try to put themselves in dialogue with it rather than simply hide behind it. Some of the most outstanding essays were able to incorporate theory with confidence and self-awareness, although elsewhere there was disappointingly little evidence of the work done in Paper 1 being applied to this paper.

As is often the case with the 1830–1910 paper, there were far too many generalisations about 'Victorian society' or 'the Victorians' that diluted the impact of any given argument. Indeed, future candidates who are tempted to generalize about what 'the Victorians' thought might pause to reflect how useful it would be to make similar generalizations about what 'people in the twentieth century' thought. However, the most successful essays engaged closely with historical details, and clearly demonstrated why this information illuminated the literature under discussion.

There were more typographical errors than might be expected in an eight-hour OBOW exam: 'Chesney World', 'The Lady of Shallot', and so on, demonstrating how a lack of close reading skills sometimes began with the most basic details of the texts. Finally, in a handful of cases we noticed repetitions across papers of the same claims, about the same texts, and made in the same way. Although individual scripts were not penalized for these patterns of repetition, such patterns provide evidence for the impression that candidates were downloading material drawn from tutorials or lectures, without using the extended format of the exam to elaborate their own thoughts and individual reading in response to question prompts.

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

255 candidates took the paper. The best answers engaged closely with both the question and the quotation motivating it; they made incisive but sparing use of textual quotation; used critics critically (to motivate an oppositional argument or summarize reception); were able to situate the texts under discussion within some broader cultural, literary, or historical context; and, above all, pursued a clear and linear argument from beginning to end. The very best scripts were impressively erudite and showed traces of original research. Weaker answers tended to be heavily reliant on quotations, often presenting large chunks of material from individual critics while showing relatively little sense of general cultural and historical context. It was heartening to see the increased range of work in this year's scripts — there were a number of excellent essays on the Harlem Renaissance, for example. But too often one or two texts seemed to have been read in isolation, with little attention to their literary historical context. Pat Barker's *Regeneration*, for example, was treated not as a historical novel but as a contemporary source. This relative lack of historicism was also visible, from another angle, in a kind of modern-day Leavisitism. Some candidates were surprisingly keen to berate the authors they had read — some writing more than a hundred years ago — for regressive attitudes towards diversity, race, sexuality, and gender.

As a whole, the scripts showcased the remarkable breadth of teaching at Oxford in this period. The most popular authors remained Eliot, Woolf and, to a lesser extent, Joyce

and Beckett. But, in the earlier part of the period, there was also excellent work on Dorothy Richardson, D. H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Mina Loy, and the Harlem Renaissance, and some sophisticated readings of this work within the context of modernist little magazines. Beckett's dramaticules were studied as frequently as his major plays, with good work on *Ohio Impromptu*. Candidates who wrote on E. M. Forster's early fiction (published just before 1910) were not penalized.

Popular writers from the middle of the century included Muriel Spark, Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath and Sam Selvon. Here, as in the work on modernism, the focus was largely, though not exclusively, on work produced in the British Isles. But candidates wrote about a wide and geographically diverse range of writers from c. 1960 onwards: Morrison (very popular, though limited mostly to *Beloved*) Philip Roth, Tony Kushner, Elizabeth Bishop, Chinua Achebe, J.M. Coetzee, Martin Amis, Kazuo Ishiguro, Thomas Pynchon, Claudia Rankine, Bernardine Evaristo, Kamau Brathwaite, and Eimear McBride, among many others. These answers tended to be stronger when nourished by some contextual, historical, or critical background; an answer on a single very recent novel, where book reviews remain the only form of criticism, is unlikely to showcase enough general knowledge of the period. There was some outstanding work on theatre. But, in general, the geographical breadth of writing wasn't matched by an equal diversity of formal and generic range; life-writing and biography were relatively neglected (though the subject of a small number of outstanding answers); fiction was far more frequently discussed than poetry, where many major authors and movements were ignored entirely (almost nothing on Pound, Auden, the Objectivists, the New York School, Language Poetry, to take a few examples); and very few scripts discussed graphic novels, film, or the short story as a self-standing form.

There were some excellent and even erudite answers on single authors, but most answers compared two texts by different writers. In some cases, candidates were clearly thinking hard during the exam and coupling texts from different parts of the period to answer a specific question. But they should remember that unlikely pairings do not themselves suggest wide knowledge of the period; when repeated across multiple scripts, these pairings also tend to indicate heavily prepared work, particularly when no justification for the combination is given.

Presentation was mixed. As much as 25% of some scripts came in the form of quotations, including excessively long quotations from primary texts and, particularly, sentences or even whole paragraphs from secondary criticism, presented as 'the case', without additional commentary or discussion. In general, weaker answers tended to skirt argument by providing a collage-like assembly of semi-relevant materials or facts. Although the best answers written in this longer exam format were superb, making full use of the extra time to think carefully and assemble accurate materials, the weakest compared unfavourably to scripts produced in a three-hour invigilated exam. In some cases, irrelevant turns or non-cohesive passages in an answer seemed to indicate clearly where reused material from different sources had been cobbled together. In the best scripts, critics tended to be summarized and paraphrased rather than quoted *verbatim*.

Some referred to critics only by name, without specifying the book or article in question; others went too far in the opposite direction and wasted word count with complete referencing, including JSTOR links. As ever, more care needs to be taken in distinguishing *whole books* from 'items within books'. Some mistakes common in three-hour

exams were repeated; the title of *The Waste Land* continued to appear in a range of forms, often within the same script.

All questions were attempted. Questions 4 (Boyer on books and disappointment), 6 (on the body), 7 (Auden on 'the words of a dead man'), and 16 (Munro on ordinariness) were particularly popular, perhaps because they were felt to offer the most capacious ambit for using prepared material. They did not, as a result, always generate the best work. Question 4, in particular, elicited a large number of somewhat vague responses about the way that modernist experiments with form 'disappointed' traditional conventions.

Answers to question 10 tended to launch straight into a discussion of the role of technology in the work of a particular writer without parsing the Orwell quotation at all. 'Simplicity' was invariably ignored.

Answers to question 18 (Thomas on writing as a young black woman) often ignored the question of gender entirely, writing instead on race and anger in texts by Sam Selvon, Wilson Harris, Kamau Brathwaite, Sterling A. Brown and others. This was not penalized, provided answers engaged with the quotation in some way.

Questions 19 and 21 proved difficult, with most candidates choosing to write not about the avant-garde or the temporal relationship between literary works, but, rather naively, about the way that literature represents time diegetically.

A couple of candidates misread question 19 by ignoring the initial 'what'; they then took the question as an invitation to write on experts' dissatisfaction with the present. There were a small number of very good answers to question 12, but most scripts entirely ignored the phrase 'the essay', writing instead on discontinuity in general. There were some excellent and very closely engaged answers to question 3 (Flint on modernist formal experiments) and 20 (Fuchs on the 3D world of theatre). Questions 13 (on illness), 15 (on religious belief) and 17 (on style) were unpopular but also elicited strong work.

## ENGLISH FHS EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2020-21

## FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE CHAIR'S REPORT

Part I

### A. STATISTICS

There were 225 candidates, of whom 12 took Course II.

Class	Number			Percentage (%)		
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
I	94	93	79	42.2%	41.7%	33.9%
II.I	128	127	154	57.4%	57.0%	66.1%
II.II	1	2	0	0.4%	0.9%	0
III	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pass	0	1	0	0	0.4%	0
Fail	0	0	0	0	0	0

Three 'alternative firsts' were awarded (requiring 4 of 7 marks of 70+ and an average of 67.5+).

All scripts in coursework, and all essays in the remote written papers, were double blind marked. In accordance with the Guide for Examiners, scripts/essays were third-marked wherever markers 1 and 2 could not reach agreement, and automatically third-marked in cases where the initial marks varied by 15 marks or two classes. In one case a mark was adjusted following an External Examiner's reading of a candidate's entire run of scripts. Comparison was made with 2017-19 median marks (larger papers only) and it was determined that no cohort-wide scaling of papers was necessary.

Comparison was made with 2017-19 classification outcomes, and it was decided that 2021 classification lay within the acceptable range. It was noted that provisional classification before consideration of MCEs resulted in 37.8% firsts; the notional 'cap' of 39.9% (set at the average of 2017-19 plus 5%) was only breached by changes in classification undertaken in response to MCEs describing circumstances of the greatest severity. The Board felt that in the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic, this was wholly acceptable.

No candidate made an application for DDH.

### B. Candidate awareness of exam conventions.

Candidates received the Examination Circulars; a Letter to Finalists giving extensive detail on the examination; a guide to Citing Sources in OBOW exams; and a Frequently Asked Questions document (all attached). They were also directed to all of the University's guidance on Inspira.

## Part II

### A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

This year's examination must be assessed and reflected upon in light of the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken to mitigate its effects. This year's candidates had their education, living circumstances, and access to resources disrupted for the majority of their FHS course; all assessments were submitted or undertaken in severely difficult circumstances, and candidates are hugely to be congratulated on their achievements. For the same reasons, as Chair I want to express great gratitude to the Board examiners, and all assessors and markers, for their work throughout this difficult period.

The proportion of Firsts awarded in 2021 is higher than in previous years, but remains within the acceptable range given current proportions of firsts awarded in other faculties of the Humanities Division, and in other Russell Group universities.

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

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

### C. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

See 'FHS 2021 Examiners' Reports' (attached).

### D. AWARD OF PRIZES

- The Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize is awarded jointly to Arthur James (Magdalen College) and Bruno Atkinson (Balliol College).
- The Gibbs Prize for the Best Dissertation is awarded jointly to Alexandra Gunn (St Edmund Hall) and Joseph Turner (St Anne's College).
- The Violet Vaughan Morgan Prize for the Best Dissertation is awarded jointly to Alexandra Gunn (St Edmund Hall) and Joseph Turner (St Anne's College).
- The Gibbs Prize for the Best Performance in Course I is awarded to Ella Johnson (St Peter's College).
- The Gibbs Prize for the Best Performance in Course II is awarded to Gabriella Bailey (New College).
- Gibbs Prizes for Distinguished Performance are awarded to the following candidates: Francesca Gardner (Magdalen College), Lily Smart (St Hilda's College), Arthur James (Magdalen College), Bruno Atkinson (Balliol College), Francesca Peacock (Lincoln College), Molly Johnson (St Catherine's College), Eleanor Cousins Brown (Brasenose College), and Jacqueline Brown (St Catherine's College).



E. NAMES OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Prof. Laura Ashe (Chair), Dr Anke Bernau (External), Prof. Peter Boxall (External), Dr Kantik Ghosh, Dr Sian Grönlie, Dr Adam Guy, Dr Michael Kalisch, Dr Margaret Kean, Prof. Marina MacKay, Prof Laurie Maguire, Prof. Simon Palfrey, Prof. Seamus Perry, Prof. Claire Preston (External), Prof. Diane Purkiss, Dr Sophie Ratcliffe, Dr Noël Sugimura, Dr David Taylor, Prof. David Womersley.

## **FHS 2021 EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

### **FHS Paper 1: Shakespeare Portfolio**

The Shakespeare portfolio continues to produce wide-ranging work that is both carefully considered and intellectually challenging. As a year group, candidates in 2020-21 are to be congratulated with coping so well with the many pandemic-related turbulences that impacted on their library access as the quality and range of submissions remained remarkably high this year.

Successful essays this year had all made efforts not only to provide focussed independent analysis but to justify their choice of subjects: to locate their topic within a larger critical framework and to know why it was inherently significant and appropriate for their submission on the Shakespeare paper. This was modelled and managed in a huge variety of ways but it was when this balance had been achieved that essays sang out as clear and confident critical interventions. It was obvious that a wide initial grounding in Shakespearean materials, critical approaches and productions had proved foundational to many of the strongest portfolios, with candidates then able to hone their own focus and draw in contextual information to elevate and develop fresh, lively readings.

Sharp close readings were often key in lifting or letting down an essay: there were impressive essays where textual detail was used to develop the line of enquiry productively and insightfully, but other essays where such close interpretative evidence was lacking or where sweeping, broad claims went unsupported. (Considered and judicious selection of quotation supported a larger argument more effectively than word search sequential listings of examples). Less strong essays tended to get caught up in detail, provided descriptive summaries of plot or scene rather than analysis and engagement with the pertinent details, and often lost a sense of where the argument was going or even what the wider contextual argument might be.

The range of thematic approaches taken by candidates for FHS 1 this year was as wide as ever. They impressed with their knowledge of the Shakespearean texts and with their work on adaptation (including music), performance studies, literary theory, disability studies, critical race theory, early modern contexts, book history, eighteenth-century editing and much more. There was some impressive work that drew out complex issues of translation, intertextuality and 'influence' in very subtle ways. In all cases, but perhaps particularly when working with film reception, candidates needed to work hard to find the correct balance in their essays to showcase clear comparative exegesis within the word limit. The majority of candidates concentrated on literary analysis but some commentary responses were also submitted for the portfolio.

On the whole, essays were written to a high standard, and were correctly formatted, and referenced, but the overall level of presentation did dip somewhat this year, e.g. internal inconsistencies within submissions were identifiable with regard to referencing and bibliographies. All appropriate allowances were made for personal circumstances but proper scholarly editions should be employed for basic citations and work on this paper: Arden and Oxford editions are both available online via SOLO. It is also helpful for all three

essay titles to be at the start of the document, and then for each of the essays to also be headed by its own singleton title.

## FHS Paper 2: Literature in English 1350–1550

The standard of work was pleasingly high. On the whole, candidates responded well to the opportunities (and challenges) of the OBOW format, and are to be commended for producing impressive work in such extremely disruptive circumstances.

Most commentary work was at least competent and knowledgeable, and some of it was notably thoughtful and analytical. The best commentaries demonstrated an elegant understanding of the passage as a whole, revealed through careful, intelligent close-readings and relevant contextualisation within the structure of the text as a whole. The open-book approach made it easier for more students to think about source and about the placement of the extract in the text; there was also some welcome use of the MED. While some of the best scripts demonstrated an impressive understanding of the movement of the poetic line and of how Chaucer exploited the possibilities of the rhyme royal stanza, others did show some confusion about metre. In particular, some students assume that anything other than a strict ten-syllable line is irregular, and many would benefit from spending a little more time reading about metre and (especially) understanding the flexibility of Chaucer's use of the fledgling five-stress line. There was also some apparent confusion about the flexibility of Middle English syntax: some candidates seemed to think that ME and Mod. Eng. syntax very similar, and therefore commented on what they understood to be deviations from a standard. Reading a wide range of texts in the original Middle English (and *not* in translation) is recommended.

In the essays, students wrote on an interesting range of texts, inclusive of Tudor texts, and it is heartening to see that more students are confident in writing about issues relating to gender or race than was the case a few years ago. Langland (and religious dissent) seem very much out of fashion, and students are far more likely to write on Chaucer's dream visions than on the *Tales*. Most essays were fairly textual (the open book format is perhaps helpful here). The best essays had clear, coherent arguments, moved across texts, and demonstrated historical and critical awareness. There was also some good work on manuscript contexts and book history. While some students are critically aware, a few cite only very outdated works of criticism that become 'straw men' in their essays. A very few scripts were noticeably weak: occasionally even citing primary Middle English texts in translation and making very basic errors in understanding or factual knowledge.

In many scripts, there were surprisingly high levels of spelling and grammatical errors, problems with sentence structure, misplaced apostrophes and so on.

Both essays and commentaries suffered from the word length permitted, succumbing to verbiage and loss of focus. The 2000-word *upper* limit lured some candidates into considering it a length that had to be achieved at all costs (and in some cases, exceeded), rather than what it was (an upper limit). The result was a tendency among quite a few candidates to write general essays on the topic at hand, rather than addressing the specific question set in a focused way with strong signalling of the argument throughout. In general, it is recommended that essay-structure and argumentation receive more focused attention.

### **FHS Paper 3: Literature in English 1550–1660, excluding the works of Shakespeare**

#### *Materials addressed*

The candidates' favoured questions were 2 (dialogue or choice of literary form for didactic material); 4 (processes of creation/revision); 8 (provocative questions); 14 (wonder or architecture); 15 (grief in numbers); 16 (imitatio); 17, 18 (same-sex love); 19 (relationship between individual and society); 21 (animal-human relations & curses); 23 (monarchic self-fashioning). All questions were attempted, though some attracted very few answers and others very many.

We saw very high-quality work: imaginative, detailed textually, with good developments of argument. Really outstanding essays managed to combine range with depth of analysis. Top essays always had argumentation and relevance to the fore. A good essay stood out from a weak essay because of its precision, clarity and relevance. There was sensitive attention to, and use of, the material text: woodcuts in Spenser, the layout of the page, dates of reprints. There was also careful engagement with manuscripts, referenced through digital projects. Essays also showed awareness of chronology, situating authors' material within his or her own canon or in relation to key historical dates (for example, 'this poem pre-dates [event] by several years but seems prescient'). Candidate showed a sense of authors' career arcs: John Donne was more than just the author of love lyrics or holy sonnets, for instance, with his sermons being widely referenced, and candidates were aware of different kinds of writing at different dates. Accuracy was, in general, better. The best answers took the opportunity to write new, fresh, rich answers which used texts flexibly; weaker answers often seemed to have imported text from essays written about different topics, and then tweaked it with greater or lesser success. A surprising number still showed issues with timing, with some essays short, or showing signs of haste in composition. If we have the same format in future, it would be good to remind candidates that they don't need full scholarly apparatus; that the 'minimal-tweak' method does not make for critically sophisticated and acute or lively writing; and that we're not expecting more than we would in a 3-hr exam.

The top essays often discussed multiple genres within one essay, showing that they were thinking thematically across genres. Marlowe and Donne were well served in this respect with *Dr Faustus* and Donne sermons featuring in larger essays about religious writing. There was a lot of nimbleness and flexibility about form: candidates were happy to bring together different forms in productive ways, juxtaposing pamphlets with lyrics with sermons. There was an expansive sense of candidates being able to move around the textual records of the period. Formalism featured frequently in essays and was usually well done with analysis of line breaks, metre, rhyme.

There was good range in the authors on which people answered and very many answers involved women writers, such as Aemilia Lanyer, Hester Pulter, Lady Mary Wroth and Katherine Philips. These were often paired with male writers – Spenser, Marvell, Herrick, Milton, Nashe - in interesting and unexpected comparisons. They were not ghettoised in a 'women writers' question but took their place alongside male poets in questions about composition, revision, the use of metaphor, religious writing, et cetera. Critical race studies have clearly taken root and there was some very good work done with texts such as *The Island Princess* or *The Renegado* as well as the court masque. The masque seemed to be explored more frequently than in previous years and the range of masques being studied

was wider – not just confined to Ben Jonson. For some reason, William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat* emerged as a favourite text for this year's examinees, paired with many other texts of various genres in response to a whole range of different questions.

These new attentivenesses did not displace the more familiar work of John Donne, Ben Jonson, John Milton and Philip Sidney. Travel writing was widely cited and is clearly another growing interest. The default starting point tended to be statements about hegemony or colonialism but the better essays pushed beyond that. Witches and witchcraft featured heavily, visible perhaps because there was a specific question on such material. There was a lot of good writing on the epyllion where more than the usual suspects were discussed. Overall, drama questions were not answered very often and, when they were, they were poorly done when they attempted to talk about drama qua drama. Outstanding essays got to grips with an entire genre e.g. looking at the evolution of city comedy from the late 1590s into the 1630s.

Many answers showed instances of literary-critical ability, good knowledge of some aspect of the period, and covered a reasonable range of literary texts and these all got due credit in the 2.1 range. The very best essays felt freshly argued, and kept the question in view throughout and generated insights from it, while evincing all the qualities mentioned.

Otherwise quite a lot of ingenuity went into the adaptation of the questions on the paper to topics that had evidently been prepared. Examiners frequently felt surprised by the ways in which topic and question had been matched up. Who would have thought, for example, that a question on the effect of poetry's formal constraints on emotion (Donne's 'fetters', question 15) could be applied to revenge tragedy or domestic tragedy? But so it was.

### **Criticisms**

While some essays were subtle and engaging in addressing the quotation as well as the rubric, others with varying degrees of shamelessness bent the prompt in order to offer a preprepared answer. One of the examiners felt strongly that the few questions on religion were confining, and perhaps that confinement was reflected in candidates' difficulty in addressing what they were actually asked.

Another issue that concerned examiners were the disappointing number of clusters of answers that had exactly the same argument and used exactly the same texts - obvious evidence that students think that learning and understanding a class or a lecture means job done, with no original branching out or diversifying from there on their own. They should know that it doesn't look good to examiners, and is a waste of the opportunities offered by our degree.

While some scripts ranged extraordinarily widely across the full spectrum of a genre such as the epyllion, others confined themselves to a punishingly narrow range of texts; some candidates considered in a whole script a tiny handful of short lyrics and one play. The weakest essays often gave single-text answers. It is not an adequate response to any paper to represent the period via three texts.

Weak essays simply paid lip-service to the question prompt and received penalties for relevance. An exam question on the eye ('what can the eye not do?') was often used as a general invitation to write about the body. Yes, the eye is a body part and can therefore be a springboard to an essay on the body. But the candidate needs to spend time setting up the argument, making the link, and arguing for the causality in their essays' direction. Another dispiriting distortion concerned a question on monarchic self-fashioning, which unleashed the long-dead and unlamented Marlovian over-reacher from his shallow grave as candidates

interpreted the question as an opportunity to write on monarchs in Marlowe. That might just pass muster, but not when Dr Faustus was somehow crowned king as well...For other candidates, it became an answer simply about advice to monarchs i.e. monarchical fashioning.

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

Despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic and the new eight-hour OBON format, candidates generally produced good quality work and are to be commended for having done so in such challenging circumstances.

The best work was, as ever, interesting and scholarly, with incisive, well-illustrated arguments directly answering the question/prompt. The top range of work showcased energetic thinking and admirable intellectual range not only in each individual essay, but also across the entire script. Other work was characterised by solid knowledge of texts and competent exposition but often exhibited a lack of analysis beyond the conventional ideas found in secondary reading; it was usually characterised by irrelevance to the question, using a descriptive approach and/or showing a limited knowledge of the texts and contexts. Even at the better end, essays could have shown more attentiveness to genre. In general, there was much less engagement with language, style, and form this year than in previous years.

The range of topics addressed this year was most refreshing. There was a welcome resurgence of drama right across the period (Behn was by far the most popular), and the best essays carefully eschewed plot summaries and/or unhelpful surveys of prefatory material. Some rewarding work on science and literature was also present, though a fair number of scripts seemed to follow a trend. There was also a healthy resurgence in writing on urban poetry, travel, and commerce as well as early fiction and diarists, though a number of essays displayed similar pairings and/or ideas rather than producing independent arguments and close readings. Essays on the labouring poets (especially Duck and Collier) as well as Thomson's *Seasons* showed up a number of times, though often with a similar orientation, and with a rather narrow range. Little work was done on ode-writers after 1740, though Young and Lillo made a welcome return. While essays on satire were notably less good this year, there were some exceptions, specifically in relation to a wider discussion of Scriblerian satires. Next to no work appeared, however, on Rochester's satires, and libertinism was generally treated in a rather cursory manner. On a more positive note, it was heartening to see candidates writing well on Pix, Collier, and Killigrew.

Essays engaged with theological contexts and /or religious politics as well as party politics proved to be rather slender this year, though there was some impressive work on Bunyan, Wesley, and Dryden. Pleasing attentiveness was given to combining authors this year, with single-author essays less frequent (the exception in this regard was Milton, which is understandable). The strongest work on Milton, either in single or comparative essays, demonstrated a very good grasp of both his poetry and theology.

Topics, such as race, empire, and colonialism, received admirable attention as well. Despite the appearance of range, critical perspectives on these subjects often proved to be rather narrow; candidates often homed in on particular moments or quotations without always producing nuanced analysis and/or demonstrating wider knowledge of texts and contexts. This tendency was also discernible in a number of essays on the novel, especially on Richardson and Fielding, though there were a few noteworthy exceptions. Wider reading in these authors, including Defoe, made for better and more nuanced essays on a variety of subjects.

Overall, the best essays deployed rewarding combinations of texts, showing an independence of thinking through close reading that was paired with a very strong knowledge of the relevant intellectual, cultural, and literary contexts. Essays that lacked



such range or relied on 'gobbled' learning produced much less intellectually energetic and incisively argued essays. Longer essays (which were perhaps encouraged by the upper word limit of OBON examinations) were not the better for it: they tended to lose argumentative focus and became either diffuse and/or repetitive by the final paragraph. It was also noted that essays that simply substituted one set of critical assumptions for another were lacking in the intellectual sophistication evident in essays which displayed independence of thought and critical reading, even when the author's sympathies lay with the writer(s) under discussion. The best work therefore challenged critical assumptions, including those held by the candidate. It followed that raw, independent thinking that clearly and precisely engaged with the terms of the prompt and its accompanying quotation, and which produced a properly focused argument built on close readings and sustained critical analysis was therefore rewarded highly by the Examiners. At the opposite end of the spectrum, poor academic practice was penalised by Examiners.

## **FHS Paper 5: Literature in English from 1760 to 1830**

The best scripts (as always) were stylish, incisive, and well-written, discussing a good range of texts and authors, and drawing intelligently on secondary literature. Some scripts incorporated historical knowledge with purpose, and a number of candidates produced some impressive pieces of close reading. There were very good answers about both poetry and fiction, and some attractively thoughtful essays about the drama. Some answers were structured around a comparison of texts or authors, and, when the comparison was sustained and the pairing was justified, this was often very effective; but there were also some truly excellent essays about single authors, often communicating an impressive acquaintance with a wide spread of their works and times.

Less impressive scripts were characterised by a handful of recurrent shortcomings. First, too many answers began with a more or less convoluted opening paragraph that sought to wrestle the terms of the question around to the topic that the candidate evidently had already to hand. Of course it is often true even in the traditional exam format that some candidates seek to “download” (but metaphorically) the essay they have prepared, but the 8-hour on-line mode seems to exacerbate the perennial problem of “relevance” very markedly while also making it much more pervasive. Related to this question of relevance is a failure often to engage with the precise words of the question that is being asked: to be asked, for example, about the “representation” of slavery is not properly an opportunity to discourse about slavery in general, nor does an invitation to discuss how writers might “understand the experience of solitude” warrant a descriptive survey of people who happen to be on their own. Second, and again this would seem a consequence of the format, candidates frequently adduced lots of material and secondary criticism but without successfully integrating it meaningfully into their own arguments so that the effect at times came close to survey-like name-checking. Third, and conversely, several examiners noted the sadly narrow range of material that some candidates evidently thought sufficient to sustain an argument: essays about Austen which dwell almost entirely upon *Northanger Abbey*, or answers involving two short poems by Keats or two essays by Lamb, are going to find it difficult to shine. Such narrowness would be disappointing in the traditional exam format but is doubly so when candidates have much more time and open books too. Finally, non-fictional prose was generally not dealt with well. Many candidates answered the question about the sublime with what seemed only a dim sense of the concept; and the discussion of political writings was mostly disappointing, relying on pretty broad-brush accounts of Godwin and Burke and others, and with very little attempt to engage with such writings as writing.

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

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

Ten candidates took this option and the standard of submissions was very high. Candidates chose to explore a range of innovative directions in relation to language and persuasion, from constructions of individual commodification, to discourses of food, culture, medicine, politics, and society, and explorations of gender and the body. Submissions were often closely detailed, demonstrating an admirable grasp of theoretical principles as well as some astute, and agile, close reading of specific examples, while often making highly effective use of the insights available from critical discourse analysis. Appendices were used well, often to create a corpus of examples used for analytical/ comparative purposes within the body of the essay. Many candidates enjoyed the opportunity to draw on cross-cultural and cross-period perspectives, displaying good historical knowledge in relation to language and relevant socio-cultural framing. Visual as well as verbal and rhetorical techniques prompted some richly documented comment and discussion, as did the resources of a range of online archives and corpora. There was a very pleasing level of ambition and engagement in all the submissions, with the best yielding some extremely perceptive and insightful explorations of their chosen topic. The standard of presentation was commendable.

### *Others and Coetzee*

It was a pleasure to read the fourteen essays for the Others and Coetzee Paper 6 this year. There was impressive range in the “others” invoked in these essays, and across the board the essays refused to flatten the differences between their subjects, but rather offered readings of both writers that were mutually illuminating. Most essays take their cue from some evidence of Coetzee’s engagement with the writers or concept in question, but some also place Coetzee in company not of his choosing, and to great critical advantage. Even those that proceeded from known connections with Coetzee frequently offered a different version of that “other” to challenge the established terms on which Coetzee’s work is often discussed – terms frequently determined by his own critical writing. The method of bringing Coetzee’s work into dialogue with a broad range of literary and critical interlocutors is clearly an intellectually enlivening one, and on the evidence of these essays encourages a high degree of critical independence. The best essays achieved this while engaging judiciously with the extant criticism, while others would have gained from such engagement.

### *Film Criticism*

Despite the pressures and restrictions of the pandemic, the work on the *Film Criticism* module was generally of a very good standard. The main disadvantage was the impeded access to the library collection of films. It was harder for the students to watch the range of films they normally would (and to be able to view specific ones immediately if the occasion arose, for example, when researching their essay topics). We noted three welcome occurrences last year: the setting of critical questions rather than simply titling with topics, a focus on aesthetic qualities, and taking long standing appraisals of certain films or directors and holding them up for renewed scrutiny. There were still some good instances of qualitative appraisal (for example, ‘tension and release’, and ‘tone’), but in general the critically evaluative dimension was less in evidence this year. The students felt more

comfortable with straight topics (for example, 'costume', 'hiding'). The critically evaluative dimension is an important aspect of an option on film criticism (as distinct from other aspects of film studies), and the convenor will continue to think of different ways to encourage the students to include this as an explicit aspect when conceiving their essays. Nevertheless, many of the essays were excellent despite this – a third of the fifteen essays received first class marks (a typical ratio) – and the quality of film analysis and interpretation continue to be impressive given that the students only get five weeks to practise the skills.

### *The Good Life*

Fourteen candidates returned work on this paper. The essays, on the whole, were wide-ranging, often ambitiously interdisciplinary, and usually well argued. While some students used the conceptual frameworks and individual texts of specific seminars as the basis for their essays (Cavell, Cukor and comedies of remarriage for instance), they still produced probing and original work. Others submitted sophisticated essays on an entirely new set of topics and texts. Most of the essays managed to address – however implicitly – the key methodological concerns of the paper: how art-works might 'think' about moral issues in creative and complex ways; how art can be made to relate to philosophy without over-riding the differences between both. The best work treated the formal and technical elements of literature and film, while offering persuasive accounts of their philosophical significance. Strong essays used art-works to test philosophical theories, not simply to confirm their truth. Weaker work, on the other hand, tended to argue in an over-general key, and looked too glancingly at individual texts. The overall standard, however, remained high.

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

This option was taught remotely, by Teams, in MT 2020. There were 8 students, and as usual, the course was built on two principles: the first, to develop the students' overall knowledge of these three major aspects of Old Norse literature, and the second, to accommodate any individual interests and preferences. Unusually, at the students' request, we spent part of the first class in discussion of how medieval literature in general, and Old Norse literature in particular, has been weaponized by far right and white supremacist ideologies. Through most of the term, students gave brief presentations which formed the basis of the week's discussion. Towards the end of term, I arranged brief one-to-one sessions with every student, to discuss written work, and we had a plenary session in which all students presented. All the students gave confident and polished presentations, contributed enthusiastically to discussion, and did not seem to be disconcerted by the technology involved.

In spite of the obvious difficulties presented by Covid restrictions, all of the work submitted was of very high quality, and some of it would be exceptional even in conventional years. This may have been because this course is designed to treat Old Norse literature in translation, and the difficulties of getting hold of texts were not so acute, since many sound modern translations are widely available online, or in paperback editions. Interestingly, the degree of critical sophistication in the essays did not seem to have been impeded by difficulties in accessing secondary material, and all the essays had pleasingly up-to-date bibliographies. The essays were surprisingly evenly spread across the three genres, and there was some excellent cross-genre work. Most students used a wide range of texts in their final submissions. No essay fell below a top Ilii mark, and five were first class.

### *Oscar Wilde and the cultures of the fin de siècle*

Fifteen students took this option, and the standard of essays was impressively high with most achieving at least a high 2:1. All the essays offered some detailed and original close reading, together with a lively engagement with key issues and ideas. Students addressed a wide range of texts and topics, including the material book, visual cultures, utopian writing, sexuality and gender identities, servants and hidden labour, the eroticizing gaze, and the politics of solipsism. Essays displayed an impressive command of critical debates and a pleasing readiness to carve their own path. The strongest essays combined sophisticated and perceptive analysis with a robust and clear line of argument, whereas weaker essays tended to collect observations together under a loosely defined theme, often allowing central terms to slip vaguely between different meanings. All the essays were characterized by a pleasing energy and individual engagement with the material.

### *Early Modern Literature and Crime*

15 candidates took this option. Submitted essays were generally of a very high standard and showed independent research and analysis. Gender politics and anxieties were discussed (in various ways) by a number of candidates but the focus of essays ranged widely. Candidates showed good knowledge of print cultures, religious and urban contexts, and early modern politics. The best work this year was critically sophisticated and perceptive but weaker submissions often had some structural flaws, e.g., in the balance between general context and specific analysis. All essays were presented with care. The examiners were impressed by the quality of the work, especially given the huge disruptions experienced by students due to the Covid-19 situation in Michaelmas 2020.

### *American Renaissances*

The most successful essays in American Renaissances developed an original reading of one or two main texts, and then worked through that reading with, against, and alongside secondary critical, theoretical, and historical texts. In the most ambitious and highly-rewarded essays, the argument of the essay was powered by close and attentive reading of the period texts, but also reading that did not simply replicate the ideas of other critics or scholars. Weaker essays tended to use the secondary materials—critical, theoretical, historical—to ‘explain’ the period texts in a way that suggested a prefabricated approach and an unwillingness to be surprised by the period texts or to take intellectual risks. The more successful students had also clearly done reading that helped them develop background knowledge that prevented them from obvious historical and factual errors, even when the background knowledge did not always turn up in direct citations. This willingness to do ‘extra’ reading, even when it did not directly feed into the essay, was especially important for students who did not have extensive previous knowledge of American literature. This might also be true, in general, for the Paper 6, which often asks students to expand beyond what they have already done in Oxford.

### *Writing Feminisms/Feminist Writing*

There were nine candidates who took this option.

Essays were particularly strong across the board, and addressed texts spanning thousands of years – from Homer to the recently published. They explored a wide range of authors and

genres, in English and in translation, high and low: the Epic, poetry, novels, short stories, life-writing, experimental literature, utopian science fiction, dystopic literature, auto-theory, metafiction, critical fabulation. Essays focused on a broad range of topics, including: intersectionality; gender and race; gender and postcolonialism; reading texts by women of colour; trans and nonbinary identity; transphobia; biology & trans theory; literary experimentalism; institutional critique; classical reception and feminist revision; the “grievable”; parody; local, global and transnational; environmental humanities and water scarcity; eating. Essays explored a wide spectrum of feminist theory and criticism, with a strong interest in intersectional, African-American, African, postcolonial and trans feminisms as well as *écriture féminine*, difference feminism and ecofeminism. Feminist approaches were fruitfully combined with poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, phenomenological and existentialist, deconstructive, African, African-American, critical race, postcolonial, queer, trans, New Materialist and posthumanist theory and criticism. The strongest essays demonstrated wide critical reading and combined close readings with attentive exploration of relevant feminist theory. A few of the essays made up for a lack of style or clumsy presentation with innovative research into their topics; the best essays exhibited beautifully-crafted and lucid prose with original claims backed up by examples from the text and engagement with relevant criticism. Weaker essays tended to let their arguments run away with them or did not demonstrate enough knowledge of their subject matter. Overall, the essays contributed in fascinating ways to current debates in feminist thinking.

#### *Old Norse*

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

#### *Tragedy*

This paper 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 made unexpected comparisons between texts (including drama, poetry, novels, and films), sustaining and justifying them with analytical and theoretical precision. Meanwhile, 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 ‘tragedy’ as a cultural and historical phenomenon, combining literary and sociopolitical analysis to good effect. There was some highly fruitful work on film, and many if not most candidates made good use of their freedom to discuss texts of their own choosing beyond the seminar reading list. Of the set texts, some thoroughly brilliant work was done on *Madame Bovary*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Caché*, and *The Moviegoer*.

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

Fifteen students took this option. Extended essays this year were often lively, original, and of significantly high quality; there was a high proportion of first-class marks.

Students wrote on a pleasing range of authors and texts, drawing on a variety of critical approaches. Work was submitted on Elizabeth Bowen, Walter Brierley, Noel Coward, Henry Green, Graham Greene, Patrick Hamilton, Christopher Isherwood, Rosamond Lehmann, Una

Marson, George Orwell, Jean Rhys, Stevie Smith, John Sommerfield, Evelyn Waugh, and Virginia Woolf. Writing by these authors was shown to engage with a wide range of contemporary phenomena, including media, technology, commerce, architecture, and the visual arts. Drawing on such diverse topics as Barbara Hepworth, telephones, alcohol, and sweets, students brilliantly explored the possibilities of the course, demonstrating how a combination of enthusiasm and diligent focus can lead to exemplary critical work. The best work also evidenced clear expression and argumentation, and engagement with recent scholarship in the field.

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

This was the first year that the Paper 6 Special Topic 'Faith, Proof and Fantasy on the Early Modern Stage' was taught. There were ten students and the topics covered by the essays were varied, but all responded to the specific questions and critical debates on which the course turned, while applying in distinctive ways and to different texts. First class essays managed to bring together ways of analysing stage space and the spaces of fictional or rhetorical invention in really fresh and original ways. The best of the essays persuasively argued that Ben Jonson, contra the critical consensus, is a playwright fascinated by the unconscious. Others took up different kinds of exploration of how drama thrives on hermeneutic uncertainty: some looked at representations of fame and rumour, some at the social history of oaths and promises, some at the representation of household boundaries, some at sensory perception and motifs of deluded sight. Most discussed the plays we had read on the course in addition to others they had chosen to explore. I am hoping to encourage an even wider range of dramatic texts for the coming year, as inevitably there was a tendency for students to work on plays they read for the first couple of seminars in the course, and this gives an impression of a narrowness that belies the wide applicability of the course's concerns.

### *The Avant Garde*

Students on this course took the opportunity to develop an impressive range of independent topics in relation to authors studied on the course. The strongest essays examined a well-focused topic, and provided sustained, detailed readings of primary texts within a well-researched and well-theorised critical context. Clarity and coherence were rewarded: some weaker essays suffered from an inability to shape the independent research into a structured, well-evidenced argument. Knowledge of relevant critical fields was generally good. Some weaker essays were marked by problems with spelling, grammar and citation.

### *Possibilities of Criticism*

Students responded very well to the challenge and invitations of this course, and thought inventively about the critical forms most appropriate to the texts and questions they were exploring. Much of the work was adventurous and probing, some of it beautifully written. Topics varied widely across periods, modes, and media, including drama, novels, film, poetry, criticism, theory, philosophy, translation, and rap; works studied included those by Carson, Catullus, Mansfield, Benjamin, Pater, Sebald, Wordsworth, Rooney, Birch, Kierkegaard, Shakespeare, Locke, Wittgenstein, Deleuze, Leibniz, Jarman, Proust, Kane, Conan Doyle, and the anonymous Wanderer fragment.

*Medieval Welsh/Old and Middle Irish*

As usual these papers were taken by a very small number of candidates, so small that even commenting on generalities runs the risk of identifying individuals. The papers were all tackled well, with all results in the range between a high 2.i and a good First. the quality and interest of the essays was a bit better than is usual in the normal exam format; there was almost no 'downloading' of essays.

*Seeing through Texts: the Visual and Material in Late-Medieval Literature*

8 candidates submitted essays for this option.

Overall the work was of a very high standard, which managed to work in a genuinely interdisciplinary way to bring the visual, material and literary together, and make worthwhile readings of the texts discussed. The best essays deftly handled the challenges of analysing visual and other media alongside written texts, and also addressed some of the methodological questions that this kind of work raises. Essays that took a more fixed approach to the meaning of texts or art objects, or were less coherent in their arguments, scored less highly.



## **FHS Paper 7: Dissertation**

This year, as in previous years, dissertations broached an extremely wide range of material, in terms of genre and historical sweep. Submissions covered everything from Old English texts to the contemporary graphic novel, with a considerable body of work in American and world literature; there was also a range of interdisciplinary work addressing relationships between literature and other media, particularly music, art, and film, as well as work in numerous historical periods on literature and material culture.

Examiners were generally extremely impressed by the overall standard, and remarked on the large number of candidates displaying high levels of critical skill, flair, and a genuine excitement in their chosen subject. Scope and range were various, and there was excellence of all kinds – candidates offered single-author dissertations, others took on comparative pieces, while other essays addressed a wide range of authors and/or adopted a thematic approach. A number of very strong dissertations focused on less widely studied figures, texts, topics, or subfields, but highly original and successful work continues to be produced on canonical authors too. Whether single-author or multi-author in their concerns, dissertations showed a generally good sense among candidates of the scope appropriate to a project of this length.

Whatever the chosen remit, examiners noted that the best dissertations were those in which candidates were seen to reflect on their own critical practice and methodology, noting how their reading was itself the product of a particular combination of contemporary disciplinary trends and/or showing a clear and well-informed awareness of their own contribution to the field. Work at the weaker end of the scale was driven by concerns that weren't explicitly articulated, and showed less of an attempt to orientate the reader by making a case for the critical interest and significance of the dissertation's argument and/or approach.

The bulk of the dissertations took a literary-critical/historical approach. Many candidates who did this kind of work impressed with their precision – they had clearly undertaken the necessary independent research to render their uses of context productive and illuminating, steering away from shorthand descriptions of an era or historical moment. While praising some exceptional archive work, and readings of drafts, variants, and manuscripts, examiners were keen to note that independent close reading of primary texts was equally rewarding to read, and equally rewarded. A small amount of transhistorical work was in evidence – while this was very difficult to achieve, the results, when well done, were also impressive.

Successful dissertations of all kinds were alert to and insightful about the formal/specifically literary dimensions of their primary texts.

As noted last year, the vast majority of dissertations focused on white writers, and again, there was little attention paid to critical and theoretical discussions of how race has shaped literary fields. (With a few exceptions, there was little sense that white people and white cultures 'have' race, too, or that white writing might be discussed as having some relation to racial thinking.) Again, as last year, a number of candidates paid attention to gender and sexuality. Some candidates took a strongly theoretical approach, or used theory to good effect, the literature and the theory mutually illuminated as a result. Weaker dissertations could show a tendency to lean on a prefabricated critical/theoretical framework, or to reduce complex works of (primarily queer) critical theory to simplistic tags. Examiners also warned against the critical method of blanket disagreement with other critics in a field,

although some dissertations would have benefited from a less uncritical reliance on a narrow range of secondary sources.

The examiners felt that candidates had done remarkably well to manage despite disruption to library access and had proved extremely resourceful. Minor problems with referencing were, quite understandably, more common this year, although difficulties with ordinary citation mechanics sometimes marred otherwise stylish work. All statements of specific mitigating circumstances in cover sheets were taken fully into account by markers.

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

Fourteen candidates sat this paper. A good range of topics was covered, including some thoughtful and interesting work on the riddles, place and landscape, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, anonymous homilies and saints' lives, and the metrical charms, as well as more traditional essays on *Beowulf*, Alfredian literature, and elegiac poetry. The best candidates were able to combine wide-ranging knowledge of the period with wonderfully detailed close readings and brought in material and historical context judiciously. There was some impressive knowledge and use of Anglo-Latin literature. The strongest candidates were able to exploit the OBOW format to add precision and detail to their comments and to develop their close readings, but some of the weaker candidates simply filled their essays with long quotations without analysing these or using them as part of their argument. While some were very successful in sustaining a sophisticated argument within the prescribed limits, others needed to allot more time to improving the organisation and structure of their essays.

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

Candidates pleasingly drew on a wide range of lyrics: as well as English, which most candidates used as a touchstone in one of their essays, the lyrics in Arabic and Welsh were especially popular, followed by French in many scripts, and in a few cases Norse, Spanish and Italian. Candidates were able, as the paper explicitly encourages, to work on texts in translation, and this led to useful comparative studies. Candidates might have missed chances to reflect on the use of translation, just briefly, whether as a caveat, e.g. in close reading, or as an idea contributing to their argument, e.g. in questions on 'authenticity' or comparative literary approaches. And many candidates fruitfully engaged with diction or form – crucial for analysis in depth – in the original languages, especially in Norse and Welsh, which was perhaps facilitated by the 'take home' format of examination this year. Lyrics invite close reading, even within the confines of short timed essays, and the best essays took up this invitation to think hard about the language, form and function. Equally, some of the strongest essays strengthened their critical vocabularies by engaging, albeit fleetingly, with critical theories, either about the lyric itself, or from other fields: e.g. queer theory, which was used fruitfully to deepen some arguments (and to critique the assumptions of some questions). There is scope to do more like that, given the topics invoked: e.g. ecocriticism might have been usefully adduced in questions on nature, or analyses of race and nation in questions comparing cultural traditions. In general, though, candidates showed responded to the paper's invitation to engage closely with lyrics themselves in depth, and to read in breadth across several medieval cultures.

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

This year's portfolio submissions demonstrated some very good work, despite the disruption that affected the second half of the academic year. Individual essays and commentaries engaged productively with a range of topics, including language contact, lexicography, historical sociolinguistics, slang, 'writing from below', registers and text types, and the linguistic challenges of translation. Candidates tended to favour Late Middle and Early/Late Modern English, though there were also some very good answers which engaged with material from earlier periods, including Anglo-Norse contact and the (dis)continuities between Old and Early Middle English. Overall, the best essays and commentaries were well-supported by both primary analysis and effective use of secondary reading, rooting their discussion in linguistic scholarship and theory while paying scrupulous attention to the details of language and its use. Commentaries which exhibited close attention to all levels of the language, alongside rigorous accuracy in the use of linguistic terminology in ways appropriate to the question, gained high marks. Weaker work tended to fall into the habit of descriptive 'feature spotting' while neglecting to unpack – and analyse -- the implications of the features described. Most candidates engaged thoughtfully with the questions set, using their material effectively in response.

#### **FHS Course II Paper 5: The Material Text**

There were seven candidates for this paper, and in general the standard was pleasingly high, as perhaps one might expect from a self-selecting cohort dealing with such a specialized topic. There was a good distribution of material in the responses as a whole, and the Commentaries in Section A were rather even split (four on the Nowell Codex and three on the Vernon Manuscript). The most successful Commentaries made intelligent and effective choices with regard to the selection of areas suggested in the rubric (Layout; Scribal practice; Glossing and/or annotation; Copying, compilation and readership; Textual transmission; Editorial practice most appropriate to the specific manuscript-page chosen for analysis, and overall there was good degree of close and well-informed engagement; the weaker Commentaries generally fell down on issues of presentation and argument. With regard to the Essays in Section B, it was notable that most candidates elected to offer topics of their own devising, again making for a splendid variety of topics, covering an impressive chronological, geographical, linguistic, and generic range, and demonstrating (as one might hope) a generally high level of engagement. Some of the more common themes involved the interaction of text and illustration, although it was noteworthy that scant attention was paid to (for example) inscribed objects; most responses were firmly focused on manuscripts. Again, the stronger Essays demonstrated an impressive range of primary and secondary materials, while less successful were those with too narrow a focus and a poorly structured argument. That said, the overall standard was generally impressive, and it is clear that students are deriving great benefit from the paper.

**Award of prizes.**

- The Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize is awarded jointly to Arthur James (Magdalen College) and Bruno Atkinson (Balliol College).
- The Gibbs Prize for the Best Dissertation is awarded jointly to Alexandra Gunn (St Edmund Hall) and Joseph Turner (St Anne's College).
- The Violet Vaughan Morgan Prize for the Best Dissertation is awarded jointly to Alexandra Gunn (St Edmund Hall) and Joseph Turner (St Anne's College).
- The Gibbs Prize for the Best Performance in Course I is awarded to Ella Johnson (St Peter's College).
- The Gibbs Prize for the Best Performance in Course II is awarded to Gabriella Bailey (New College).
- Gibbs Prizes for Distinguished Performance are awarded to the following candidates: Francesca Gardner (Magdalen College), Lily Smart (St Hilda's College), Arthur James (Magdalen College), Bruno Atkinson (Balliol College), Francesca Peacock (Lincoln College), Molly Johnson (St Catherine's College), Eleanor Cousins Brown (Brasenose College), and Jacqueline Brown (St Catherine's College).

## **FHS EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

Peter Boxall

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Peter Boxall	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	Sussex University	
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	English BA	
<b>Level:</b> <i>(please delete as appropriate)</i>	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 work that I saw was extraordinarily high. The best work was certainly publishable. The quality of written expression was uniformly impressive. The best work is significantly more adventurous and ambitious than the highest marked work in other universities where I have examined in the UK. There is also no tail, so the lowest marked students are producing work of an impressive standard.

- 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 the full run of scripts of a number of candidates, and so was able both to gain a clear sense of each of those student's work in its entirety, and to see how the degree programme works as a whole.

In doing so, I was deeply impressed by the quality of the teaching, and by the range and seriousness of the students' research. This year students were seriously hampered by Covid, but the combination of the mitigating measures taken by the faculty, and the dedication of the students, have allowed candidates to excel regardless. This is my first year so I can't compare this year's work to previous years', but I have no hesitation whatsoever in confirming that the work produced here is of an exceptionally high standard. This produces its own difficulties, which I will discuss later in the report.

### 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.***

In most universities in the UK, the practice of blind double marking is being attenuated – this is not the case at Oxford. All scripts that I looked at were blind double marked, so I could clearly see both the raw marks and the agreed marks. There is no better way of ensuring rigour in assessment than this. Where the two markers could not agree, a third marker was called in to adjudicate, and again I was able to see that the process was rigorous and fair. In the board itself, there was a completely impeccable attention to detail, and an absolute commitment to ensuring that the outcome of the examination process was fair in every case.

### B3. Issues



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

This was an unusual year because of Covid, and because of the measures taken to reduce its impact. There are a couple of issues that arose as a result of that mitigation.

There was some discussion at the board turning around the question of how much work can be set aside in mitigation, while still feeling sure that the student has covered enough of the degree to warrant the granting of the award. In every case, I felt satisfied that the correct decision was taken in this regard – and I certainly had no concern that students were graduating without covering the required ground. But the discussion did suggest that some rules might be put in place to give clearer guidance on the maximum amount of work that can be set aside for any individual student.

The board discussed the possibility that measures taken this year under Covid conditions might set precedents for future years that would be problematic, but I am confident that the board guarded effectively against precedent-setting.

Covid mitigating measures were on the whole effective. I could see that the 8 hour exam format was not always successful, however, and also that it produced a very significant increased workload for faculty members (as students wrote much longer essays than normal).

I have one observation that is not Covid related. The question of standards, I am sure, is raised by externals very frequently. But it is the case that the standard of work here is significantly higher than elsewhere in the UK. This is a problem for students when they are competing for funding outside of the Oxford community. Blind double marking tends to prevent grade inflation, and the introduction of moderation or single marking at other universities is increasing the gap between, say, a 75 at Oxford and the same mark almost anywhere else. I don't think there is an easy solution to this problem, other than to recommend that you give serious consideration to the range of marks between 70 and 90, and encourage faculty to use this range judiciously, but more freely than they are at present.

**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.***

Laura Ashe chaired the board with wonderful professionalism, dedication, attention to detail and good humour. It was a great pleasure to see an exam board working autonomously, and being empowered to make local decisions. The dedication and care of all of the board members ensured that the board took good and careful decisions in every case.

I was very impressed by the rigour of the examining processes, and the clarity and transparency with which agreed marks were reached.

I was particularly impressed by the work of the mitigating evidence committee. There were a very large number of cases submitted this year. This is partly because of Covid, but it also appeared to me that Covid has exacerbated some existing conditions, which is cause for concern, as levels of ill health and anxiety in the student body seem very high. The board was exemplary in the care and compassion with which it responded to mitigating evidence, and the commitment it showed to ensuring that it reached fair decisions in every case.

It was a deep pleasure to see that this year the gender attainment gap has disappeared. I know this has been a priority for Laura Ashe as chair of the board. It is necessary, as was noted at the board, to understand clearly how this has come about, to ensure that it is a permanent solution.

**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 say how impressed I have been in my first year by the range and ambition of the degree programme, the quality of the teaching, the rigour and fairness of the examining process, and the attention to detail at the board.

<b>Signed:</b>	<b>Peter Boxall</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>August 29<sup>th</sup> 2021</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.**

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> <i>(please delete as appropriate)</i>	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		
<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?***

As mentioned in last year's report, the standards are very high and I saw work that made this clear across the board. This year I was given a greater range of marks to look at, and this confirmed my sense both of the quality of the work and the rigour (as well as fairness) of the marking. The work compares very well (being either in line with, or stronger than) work produced at other institutions of which I have experience (Russell Group).

- 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 asked to consider the run of scripts for 4 candidates (with degree classifications including a high first, an alternative first, a high 2:1, and 2:2). It was very helpful, as well as informative, to see such a spread of work. While even the weakest properly attempted work was competent and engaged, the strong work really stood out as being both intellectually exciting and academically sound. Students were able to respond to texts, contexts and concepts across a wide historical range, and the quality of their work did not, on the whole, seem at all to depend on the specific nature of the material being discussed (in other words: they may have had a preference for a certain topic, but this was not particularly visible). Close reading was a real strength in many essays/exams I looked at - and the strongest candidates were able to theorise through engagement with close reading. Such work was not at all narrow, though in one case there seemed to be a real reluctance to engage with secondary criticism (this candidate was unusual, however, and still managed to produce some really excellent work).

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

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

The process is very rigorous. Work is double-marked and, if necessary, a third marker is consulted. The marking sheets were almost all very clear and showed a good rationale for how marks were agreed (if there was a discrepancy). In some isolated instances the rationale was not given (mostly when the difference was one of 1 or 2 points and did not affect a mark borderline). It is worth considering whether the higher range of marks is used as fully as it could be. Some of these candidates will be going on to do postgraduate work and this will affect their chances when applying for funding. (I noticed greater willingness to use the full range this year, but it is still worth pointing out that in many institutions an average of 73 would no longer be considered a 'high first'.)

It was - again - very helpful to be invited to the MCE Committee meeting. It was clear that great efforts had been made to develop a fair rationale for how mitigating circumstances would be handled across the board. This ensured parity of treatment, while allowing particular cases (especially where a candidate had faced terrible hardship during the pandemic) to be handled judiciously and with sensitivity. Professor Laura Ashe's leadership was exemplary, and it time was made for important discussions to take place to ensure fairness both at the MCE Committee meeting and at the Board itself.

### B3. Issues

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

I would encourage further thought about a wider range of assessment formats (which I am aware is being discussed), though the work produced in these traditional formats is often imaginative, intelligent and impressive. Reliance on exams in particular could be reconsidered.

It might be worth introducing some plagiarism training in the first year that ensures that all students understand fully the different kinds of plagiarism and how to avoid these in their work.

### B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

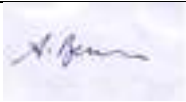
***Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.***

See comments above - it is clear that students are being offered a wide-ranging, in-depth and intellectually stimulating degree programme.

### 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 for his help during the process. The online site worked well and it was handy to have all of the relevant papers in one place.

<b>Signed:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	16 July 2021

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.

Claire Preston

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Claire Preston	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	Queen Mary University of London (Emerita)	
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	English FHS; Joint Classics and English FHS	
<b>Level:</b> <i>(please delete as appropriate)</i>	Undergraduate	<del>Postgraduate</del>

**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?				Yes, as far as I know.
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?				Cannot remember.

A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?			Don't know.
* <b><i>If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</i></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 best students are equivalent across Oxford, Cambridge, and Queen Mary. There is a much larger cohort of average or below-average students at Queen Mary than at Oxford or 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).***

I am not sure what the difference is between this question and the one above – this appears to rephrase the earlier one.

### 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.***

Examining practice appears to have been very fair and very carefully considered in order to help students manage the unique difficulties posed by the pandemic. The consideration of MCEs was also careful, fair, and sympathetic to the exigencies faced by students, and I am completely satisfied that justice has been done for all those who deserved special consideration owing to the inevitable misfortunes that can befall individuals in a large cohort. There is probably no way of mediating in advance in order to discourage certain kinds of undocumented and unverifiable applications (ie, 'I was under stress' or 'there was building work' cannot usually be considered mitigating circumstances), but the size of the list was disturbing, and produced a great deal of work for the chair even though no action could be taken in most cases. I think it would be useful at least to signal to students that a submitted MCE may not be acted upon, and indeed is unlikely to be acted upon.



### 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.*

1. The tutorial system is best practice, but there is, alas, not enough money in the world to extend it to all universities. Long may it flourish here at Oxford.
2. Double-marking, though standard in some universities such as my own, is not common to many; it is a practice that should be preserved here at all costs.
3. There is widespread student misunderstanding or ignorance of the nature of plagiarism throughout academic institutions, and Oxford is no exception. There are some cunning plagiarists, to be sure, but for the most part students caught in 'bad academic practice' have absolutely no idea that they have behaved unethically. Many universities now have compulsory plagiarism training for incoming undergraduates and it would be helpful to establish it here. I would suggest that the definition and understanding of plagiarism needs to be harmonised among the Proctors and the English exam board, and that a sterner view of such infringements (in line with standards in this discipline) is 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.***

My comments apply mainly to FHS English because the externals were not asked to do anything like the same work for FHS English and Classics. The MCE considerations and the handling of a potential plagiarism case were, as in the former, also exemplary in the latter, and I have no concerns about any other aspect of the examining and assessment process for English and Classics.

<b>Signed:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	17 July 2021

**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 (MEDIIEVAL STUDIES) IN ENGLISH

(including MSt in English and American Studies)

Jeri Johnson, Chair

### Part I

#### A. STATISTICS

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

There were 118 candidates at the start of the year (not all of whom have yet completed the degree; one has withdrawn; four have suspended; four have been given such extensions that they have not yet submitted their final work). At this point, 109 have completed the course.

Outcome	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Numbers	50	37	21	1	8

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
2017	43.2%	45.7%	6.2%	5%
2018	35.2%	54%	5.4%	5.4%
2019	32.3%	57%*	2%	9%
2020	46%	48*	1%	5%
2021	42.7%	49.6%*	1%	6.7%

2021\* 32% at Merit and 18% 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 2020-21, the traditional practice of releasing on-course marks was continued, as re-introduced last year. In a year of pandemic, 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. While this year we did not send complete runs of scripts for individual candidates of higher, medium, and lower achievement, to Externals, we may well want to re-introduce this practice in the coming year.

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

**C. CHANGES FOR THE FACULTY TO CONSIDER**

See Chair's Report below

**D. PUBLICATION OF EXAMINATION CONVENTIONS**

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

**Part II**

**A. GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE EXAMINATION**

See attached report.

**B. 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 Peter McDonald (St Hugh's)  
Professor Lloyd Pratt  
Professor Dirk Van Hulle

### **External**

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

## **M.St. and M.Phil. in English, Chair of Examiners' Report for 2020-21**

### **A. Process**

As a result of COVID-19, this was yet another extraordinary year for the MSt/MPhil. While no general 'safety net' policy was put in place for this year (though candidates in the second year MPhil had their first-year marks scrutinized in the light of last year's policies), the change in the procedures for submissions of Mitigating Circumstances meant the Special Cases Committee had a larger number of cases to consider this year. Further, what seemed to be the Proctors' practice in this pandemic year of granting every request for extension that was sought meant that the 'Final' Examiners' Meeting was not final at all; there were still more than 15% of the cohort for whom at least one piece of work had not been submitted. A second 'final' meeting was required to ratify the marks of these candidates, and still there are, at the submission of this report, eight candidates (7% of the starting cohort) with further extensions or suspensions. In a few cases, candidates who received interim marks, or whose final classification they wanted to query, submitted retrospective Mitigating Circumstances appeals. Of course, this meant that results were delayed for those with significant extensions. 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.

2. The Board thought that some clarification of the role of the External Examiners was needed: when scrutinizing, or third marking, a script, e.g., might they be allowed to exceed the higher, or fall below the lower, of the raw marks or, as has been the practice previously, confine their marks to the boundaries set by the first two marks?
3. Further, it was thought 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 would be in addition to the usual practice of sending work where the raw marks fall on either side of borderlines or an 'ANF' was submitted. Further, there was a request by the Externals to return to the practice (in a non-Covid year) of sending complete runs of single candidates' work from the upper, middle and lower ranges of achievement.

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

There were four new internal examiners this year (Andy Orchard, Emma Smith, Lloyd Pratt and Fiona Stafford) with three continuing from last year (Jeri Johnson (Chair), Peter McDonald (St's Hughs), and Dirk Van Hulle). (We seem to have one fewer internal examiner than we had last year.) Of the Externals, all were continuing from last year (Raluca Radulescu, Jane Goldman, Fiona Green, Christina Lupton, Javed Majeed, Helen Smith).

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

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

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

Special Cases Committee (Jeri Johnson (Chair), Emma Smith, Fiona Stafford) 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. The Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize was not awarded this year, though the Marilyn Butler prize – for the candidate with the highest Dissertation mark – was awarded. The External Examiners offered sustained and helpful contributions to the various discussions and were, throughout the process, exemplary in their responses to every request and in their scrutiny of the process, particularly given the unique circumstances endured by all.

A further Exam Board meeting was 'held', this time by confidential correspondence, to complete the acceptance and ratification of marks for the considerable number of 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**

This year the administrative burden was again significant, due to the ongoing pandemic, the anxiety of students, the redesigned process for the submission for consideration of Mitigating Circumstances, and (as said before) the very large number of extensions and late submissions, and the consequent and often very complicated correspondence with Proctors, Education Committee, individual colleges, and sometimes other offices. Administration for the examination was undertaken primarily by Sue Clark, with Emily Richards and Andy Davice providing assistance at important points. Thanks are due to all those involved, particularly to Sue Clark, whose excellent work was crucial to the smooth running of the year. There was considerable disruption running up to the Final Board meeting, as Sue had left the Faculty at this point, and her permanent replacement was not in place until the beginning of November. Holly Bickerton has now taken Sue's place and we look forward to working with her.

## **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 Sue Clark and Emily for their kindness, efficiency and expedition in the administration of the exam process.

### **Jane Goldman**

Jane noted that despite the difficulties of the last year, the work had been of the usual high standard and eloquence. She was impressed with the students' engagement with criticism and theory, but would welcome more engagement with poetry. She recognised the valuable conversations between markers in agreeing marks. She would welcome more adventurous work.

### **Fiona Green**

Fiona explained that this is her third year as External Examiner and passed on her congratulations for 'keeping the show on the road' and maintaining the high standards in difficult circumstances: she applauded the hard work, resilience, agility of course convenors and students. She noted the scrupulous processes and standards of assessment, and was impressed by the range of material she looked at.

She would recommend mandatory third marking in cases where examiners marks differ by a significant margin: this year she explained she had seen Hilary term C essays, a 74-63 split resolved at 70; and a 67-52 resolved at 58. She felt there were brief explanations about how the agreements across those 11 or 15 marks had been reached; but still left her wondering why third reading was not mandatory in these types of cases when marks differ by a significant amount. Fiona said should would have been happy to read more ANF cases.

Fiona noted that Examiners' comments in almost all cases were helpful and detailed and questioned why these comments weren't sent to candidates, rather than us doing feedback.

Finally, Fiona praised the course details booklet saying it is 'an absorbing read in itself'. She applauded the faculty's willingness to modify and update the A courses, particularly the 1830-1914 A course, which meets its aim of 'deepening students' sense of established and emerging critical debates in the field', in its attention to globalism, diaspora, gender and sexualities.

#### **Christina Lupton**

Tina said that marking was careful and impressive, but she had noticed a few abrupt comments in the comment sheets from one or two markers. She understands that feedback that goes to students is different and carefully checked. As in the past, she commented on the conservative field of dissertation topics, not in line with the adventurous B and C essays and again she felt the 18 Century dissertations were old fashioned and not responsive to coursework. She commented on several cases where the quality of prose was highlighted as being less polished but recognised that the strength of ideas was good. She questioned this tension and said it didn't happen to such a degree at other institutions where she had been involved. Overall, however, she recognised terrific work in difficult circumstances.

#### **Javed Majeed**

Javed said the standard of work was high, some of it publishable (e.g. one essay on prison writing) and that essays not of distinction quality were interesting and engaging to read.

Essays for the world literature strand can be interdisciplinary in useful ways and sometimes productively adventurous. He felt that markers' comments were constructive and balanced, with a clear indication of how the agreed mark was arrived at and that, where appropriate, markers took into account learning difficulties when signalled by candidates.

#### **Raluca Radulescu**

Raluca applauded the splendid work in adverse circumstances. In particular, she was impressed with engagement with primary sources, even in lockdown. She felt the higher mark range could be used more, but praised markers for their careful comments.

#### **Helen Smith**

Helen had previously requested the opportunity to see the feedback that gets issued to students, and still thinks this would be valuable for future External Examiners.

Helen noted that it is interesting to see that again most candidates see a decline in marks when they reach the dissertation: only three candidates received their highest marks for the dissertation. She acknowledged that there may be a range of good reasons for this, but it doesn't show the kind of upward trajectory the Faculty would wish to see, and feels this merits further consideration.

Helen noted that markers pay detailed attention to student work, which receives careful scrutiny. In general, markers' comments are engaged, thorough and thoughtful and she found it very helpful to see the markers reflect on discrepancies in grades and how they were resolved.

The quality of the work produced across the degree is highly impressive. The best work she read was stellar, showcasing a stimulating set of topics, ideas and analyses.

She felt mitigations in relation to Covid have been fair and full, and the Faculty and students should be congratulated on navigating a very difficult year and maintaining the most rigorous standards of scholarship, writing and assessment.

I am grateful to my colleagues for their help, professionalism, and cheerful efficiency in the running of this process during the (second) tumultuous academic year, 2020-21. Thank you particularly, and hugely, to Sue Clark without whom this year would have been impossible. We wish her all the best with her future endeavours.

Last year's Chair signed off with a wish for what he hoped would be 'a less extraordinary 2020-21'. While it was not to be, let us hope the same for 2021-22.

Jeri Johnson  
Chair, MSt/MPhil Examiners  
November 2021



**PGT EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

Jane Goldman

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Jane Goldman		
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University of Glasgow		
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	Mst in English Studies		
<b>Level:</b> <i>(please 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?	✓		
<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

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

The academic standards achieved by students on this Mst compare very well with those of MLitt students in English Literature at Glasgow, my own institution, and with the MLitt students in English Literature at St Andrews where I also serve as an external. As noted in previous years, the Oxford degree is over 9 months whereas ours is a full year and allows for a lengthier dissertation. Nevertheless, Oxford students produce very impressive dissertations, and as at Glasgow the majority achieve Merit or Distinction on the course. The range of options available to students is rich and impressive, and, in relation to my own areas of expertise, commensurate with comparable courses at mine and other institutions, such as our MLitt in Modernities, and Virginia Woolf Writes Modernity (my own version of your wonderful Virginia Woolf: Literary & Cultural Contexts). The students' achievements at Distinction, Merit and Pass levels are commensurate. We mark on the scale of 22, which I think works better than your 100, in that the full range of upper marks is more often invoked; whereas you tend to stall around 80 as the uppermost.

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

I saw students' work from:  
 Michaelmas Term C  
 Virginia Woolf: Literary & Cultural Contexts  
 Modernism/Philosophy  
 Citizens  
 Literary London 1820-1920  
 Hilary Term B  
 Hilary Term C  
 Fiction / Nonfiction in Postwar Us Literature  
 Fiction in Britain since 1945  
 Dissertations

Oxford's student performance and achievement is on par for work in similar courses in my own university and the sector. As in previous years, I saw in the work I read strong skills in writing about texts in historical and cultural contexts, in imaginative engagement with archival materials, and in close literary critical analysis of texts and sources, as well as thorough engagement with critical reception, despite restrictions to library access due to the pandemic. Oxford students tend not to write more sustained engagements with literary theory, nor more broadly with current trends in subject-wide theoretical matters and concepts to the fore. A reliance on 'Jstor', for example, for secondary reading produces work informed by the record of critical debate directly related to primary texts may be at the expense of reading about broader questions, and pressing concerns in our subject area. At Glasgow we are currently addressing curriculum revision in terms of decolonisation, and exploring how this might be inflected in all courses, something the student body is urging. Is this being addressed at Oxford I wonder? Another matter we have been addressing is maintaining poetry on the curriculum. I saw an outstanding dissertation on ekphrasis and poetry this year, but I note at Oxford as elsewhere in the sector the majority of students' preference is for study of prose over poetry, and wonder what might be done to make sure poetry is factored into expectations of student achievement. I also see in my own and other institutions more encouragement than at Oxford of experimentation with the essay/dissertation form itself and with creative-critical responses. But that said, the standard of Oxford students' more conventional approach to essays and dissertation writing is admirably high. In my stint as external every year I have read truly outstanding work.

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

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

The assessment process was conducted most efficiently and with great rigour. I was impressed not only by the level of scrutiny and dialogue between markers but also the conscientious discussions at the board itself. The blind double marking is exemplary and where marks and comments diverge the process of resolution is scrupulous and students are treated fairly and equally. Where matters were raised in the exam board they were settled fairly and following conscientious discussion. The exam board was most efficiently run online by Teams. The handover to a new exam board convenor was smooth.

## **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.***

See above.

Gold standard blind double marking; full, conscientious, detailed and constructive markers' comments.

Truly distinctive strengths in archival work.

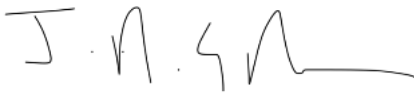
Exemplary range and depth of topics.

Constructively framed and helpful 'Covid impact on coursework' statement on the essay top sheet.

**B5. Any other comments**

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

This was my final year of service as external. Truly it has been a pleasure and an education in this and previous years to read the students' work, and to witness the fruits of such dedicated and inspiring teaching on such a broad and rich range of topics and options. The administrative and academic teams are to be congratulated on successfully negotiating the exceptionally challenging years under the pandemic. While the formal board was very well conducted online, I would hope that there will be a return to normal on site and in person meetings as soon as it is safe to do so.

<b>Signed:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	17 October 2021

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.

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2021**

Fiona Green

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Fiona Green	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	University of Cambridge	
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	MSt and MPhil in English Studies	
<b>Level:</b> <i>(please 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?	✓		
<p><b><i>* If you answer “No” to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</i></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?*

Academic standards achieved by students on the M.St / M.Phil in English Studies are in line with standards achieved at other institutions of which I have experience, and especially with my home institution (Cambridge). Much of the excellent work I saw this year showed the benefit of the bibliographical component of the course. Although Covid had clearly had an impact on student performance, this showed itself for the most part in the large number of extensions to coursework and dissertation deadlines that had been granted. Such flexibility on the part of examiners and the faculty is to be commended. The quality of the work itself did not seem to have suffered.

- 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).*

See above (1a) ( 1 [b] seems to ask the same question)

### **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, with blind double marking followed by discussion and agreement between examiners ensuring a thorough a careful assessment of each piece of coursework and of dissertations. Marking criteria are clear and explicit, and examiners' comments for the most part in keeping with those criteria.

Examiners' meetings were conducted with equal care and attention, and in full compliance with the guidelines for classing. The 'Merit' mark is especially helpful in distinguishing between low and high marks in the 60s.

Due account was taken of exceptional circumstances, by individual markers when these circumstances pertained to the availability of texts and other resources, and by a separate committee when Covid had impinged on student health and welfare.

Covid meant that a large number of extensions were granted, and this necessitated some later meetings by circulation. The paperwork and processes connected with these have all been in good order.

### **B3. Issues**

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

I suggest again the Faculty consider mandatory third marking in cases where examiners marks differ by a significant margin. This year, for example, I saw among the Hilary term C essays, a 74-63 split resolved at 70; and a 67-52 resolved at 58. The guidance to examiners says that 'the first marker should include the reasons for any large discrepancies in raw marks, and state how the agreed mark was found, according to the marking criteria set out below'. There were brief explanations about how the agreements across those 11 or 15 marks had been reached; but it still left me wondering why not make third reading mandatory when marks differ by, say 10+. As an external examiner, I would have been happy to read more ANF cases.

I found the examiner's comments in almost all cases helpful and detailed; I'd like, again, to suggest that the Faculty consider saving time and labour by sending these comments to candidates, rather than writing up a third, joint report, which involves another round of consultation. Guidance about student feedback says 'it is essential that the feedback comments explicitly address themselves to the published marking Criteria'; if all examiners' comments were explicitly aligned with marking criteria (most already are), then it seems entirely acceptable return two separate reports along with a single agreed mark.

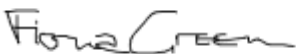
#### **B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities**

***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 Faculty is to be congratulated on such a rich and varied course. I've noticed over three years a pleasing willingness to modify and update A courses, and this year was especially impressed by the 1830-1914 A course, which absolutely meets its aim of 'deepening students' sense of established and emerging critical debates in the field', in its attention to globalism, diaspora, gender and sexualities, and the way it introduces students to a range of perspectives by specifying a number of relatively short critical and theoretical texts. The reading lists for that course strike me as especially exciting and manageable. This willingness to modify and update should be very much encouraged. There might be an opportunity, for example, to revisit the Course Details description of the 1700-1830 A course. Perhaps the secondary material provided in seminars challenges, complicates, and historicises the bare list of canonical authors (Dorothy Wordsworth the only woman before 1900; the transatlantic slave trade starting to look like a conspicuous omission, and so on). If so, it would be good to give more sense of this in Course Details.

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

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

Signed:	
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Date:

13 November 2021

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.

Christina Lupton

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

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

<b>Part A</b>					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A / Other</b>
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? [Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].		x		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? [Please refer to paragraph 7 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].		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		

**\* If you answer “No” to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part 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 ability of students to find and use primary and original materials is unrivalled. The level of their writing is also higher than at any other institution I know. Their ability to use theory well and to engage in the most up-to-date debates in eighteenth-century studies is below average.

- 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 students use the different parts of the MSt. Their bibliographic training carries through well into some of the dissertations and the deep knowledge of their period offered by the A course is also beneficial in shaping their ability to write even at this level of their education as experts in their field. The standard of writing is impressive, often publishable.

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

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

The assessment process is commendable in its thoroughness and transparency. Students receive detailed and constructive feedback on their work, which is subject to real scrutiny and discussion. Many markers are absolutely outstanding in the level of attention they give to every aspect of student writing. Disagreements between examiners are fairly worked out. I do think students would benefit from seeing comments from all of their markers, rather than just a synthesis of opinions. I also think that a lot of emphasis placed on elegant prose in the essays achieving distinction goes unstated. This shows up as an anomaly when so many other requirements for excellence are clearly elucidated.

### **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.

As I stated last year, I think students might be given more encouragement to develop slightly broader and riskier dissertation topics. As it stands, their dissertations are often narrower in scope than course essays, and don't always seem to be a place where students fully unfold their abilities and interests. This may have to do with the fact that they declare their topics before other courses are over. I recognise this may be a result of the pandemic having limited their opportunities to interact with archives and special collections.

**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 whole process of the exam board runs with admirable professionalism. It's been a pleasure to serve these last years, and to read such rigorous and interesting work.

<b>Signed:</b>	<i>Tina Lupton</i>
<b>Date:</b>	7th July 2021

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 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 delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

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

<b>Part A</b>					
		<i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A / Other</b>
A1.	Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		Yes		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 7 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		Yes		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?		Yes		
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?		Yes		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?		Yes		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?		Yes		
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?		Yes		

**\* If you answer “No” to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part 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 standards are higher than those achieved by students at other higher education institutions.

- 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. When candidates submitted statements on the impact of Covid-19 curtailing access to sources, this was duly taken into account by markers. On the whole, 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?***

There are no issues to address. The instructions were clear, and the administration efficient.

### **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>	23 <sup>rd</sup> August, 2021

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.

Raluca Radulescu

<b>External examiner name:</b>	Raluca Radulescu (Prof.)	
<b>External examiner home institution:</b>	Bangor University	
<b>Course(s) examined:</b>	MSt in English	
<b>Level:</b> <i>(please delete as appropriate)</i>	<u>Undergraduate</u>	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?		v		
A2.	Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect the frameworks for higher education qualifications and any applicable subject benchmark statement? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>		v		
A3.	Does the assessment process measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?		v		
A4.	Is the assessment process conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?		v		
A5.	Did you receive sufficient information and evidence in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?		v		
A6.	Did you receive a written response to your previous report?				N/A
A7.	Are you satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?		v		



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

## **Part B**

### **B1. Academic standards**

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

I have been impressed, as I was last year, with consistency in the way academic standards achieved by the students on this programme compare with those achieved by students at several other higher education institutions in the UK and Ireland.

- 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 academic year I feel I have acquired a more rounded picture/grasp of the work of the students, and have sampled more work of a very interesting nature – the essay topics were varied and the execution, under careful supervision, was equally varied, though always of a high calibre. In particular, I want to highlight the excellent use of online resources where the COVID 19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns have been ongoing. Student essays, including on rare manuscript materials, display thoroughness, of a kind expected at this level, but even more praiseworthy given limited access to the original manuscripts (at times, at least). 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 are just about visible – which bodes well for students who will likely consider doctoral research.

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

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

I can confirm, in the second year of my appointment, that, once again, I am happy with the feedback I have encountered on assessments (both essays and dissertations) and the rigour and conduct of the assessment process. In particular I note a change in the way in which the discussion between markers is recorded, with clear and fair comments, rigorous attention to classification of marks, and overall consistent application of the same principles. One particular marker tends to follow the marking criteria closely, and I think this could be encouraged more, so as to make it even clearer to students where they can improve and what aspects have been less than satisfactory in their work. The assessment process continues to be robust and staff maintain the highest standards in teaching and assessment. I am satisfied with the arrangements put in place to mitigate the effects of COVID19 lockdown, i.e. lack of access to libraries and resources have been on a par with those in other institutions I work at or am external examiner at.

Administrative support has been splendid, as before, and I have felt supported in my role. The chairing of the final board was collegial and transparent, and a long discussion about marking in another area showed that every external examiner and internal member of the board was made welcome, their views heard, and due process followed in terms of fairness to 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?***

As the whole process has remained virtual, it has been quite difficult to explore /experience in more depth any other aspect of the programme than reading the scripts and checking the marking. In other words, those informal discussions one would expect to have before the board with members of staff and the chair, and which contribute to an external examiner's grasp of the programme, clearly couldn't take place. I very much want to confirm, however, that I have not felt that anything was missing, or could have been improved, or that the students have been disadvantaged in any way, given that fairness and transparency prevailed throughout the year in both written communication and the oral discussion at the board. I still think there is a slight imbalance in terms of summary feedback /marking summary among the different scripts /submissions I have seen, in that there is a great degree of variation between the length of comments offered on submissions, which may lead to some students expressing dissatisfaction.

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

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

Once again this year I am happy to confirm, the high calibre of the teaching and supervision on this programme, as experienced by myself as examiner in my reading of the students' work. I continue to enjoy seeing the abstracts for dissertations, and the move between plan and execution – as a reflection of the research progress made between those two key stages in a project.

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

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

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

<b>Signed:</b>	<b>R. L. Radulescu</b>
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Date:

2 September 2021

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> <i>(please 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?		✓		

**\* If you answer “No” to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part 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. Students perform very effectively across the degree; work at the top level is assured, imaginative, thoroughly researched and incisive, and is very evidently of doctoral standard. Even weaker students are working at a high level, producing impressively researched and ambitious work. **The accommodations and adjustments made in response to the Covid-19 pandemic were clear, generous and appropriate.**

- 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).***

As in previous years, I read essays from across the degree and got a good sense of the variety and scope of the student work. I did not see as large a number of dissertations this year because of the high number of extensions necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. As noted above, the best work I read was stellar, showcasing a stimulating set of topics, ideas and analyses. Students who performed less well still showed evidence of thoughtful scholarship, a serious engagement with the subject, and a clear concern for good writing and effective expression. There was impressive and ambitious range on display. Students are well prepared for doctoral study at any HE institution. I third marked two ANF pieces, in all of which I could see and understand the reasons behind the markers' disagreement, and the relative merits and demerits of the work in question.

### **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. I was pleased to see clear statements of how disagreements had been resolved; these were thoughtful, clear and fair. Student work is scrutinised closely, and marks were examined carefully, both prior to and at the final examiners' meeting. I was given access to an appropriate selection of material, which allowed me to gain a confident sense of the cohort as a whole, and the range of students' achievements. I did not see a full run of

marks for any students, which had been a helpful innovation in the previous year, and which I am pleased to hear will be brought back next year. It was, however, interesting and helpful to see the full range of dissertation topics.

### **B3. Issues**

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

As I have noted in previous years, it is usual for external examiners to be invited to view the feedback returned to students and to comment on practice in this area. It would be helpful and interesting to see how the discussions between markers and the sometimes varied approaches to marking are presented to the students. I warmly encourage the Faculty to give future externals the opportunity to see this feedback. The Faculty may also wish to reflect on the time-consuming nature of the present process as I understand it, which involves considerable additional work for the first marker and for the degree convenor.

As in previous years, I noted a general downward trajectory towards the dissertation for students, with only three students achieving their highest mark in this component. My sense is that this is not the trajectory the Faculty wish to see, and it might be helpful to revisit the question of why this is happening, while also noting the particular challenges of the past two years.

There was some lack of clarity around how far externals are or are not permitted to intervene in relation to specific marks 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 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.***

Very warm thanks to Sue Clark, Emily Richards and Jeri Johnson for their efficiency and clear guidance, especially in the continuing adverse circumstances we have faced this academic year. It has been a pleasure to act as external examiner for the past three years, for this prestigious, challenging and engaging degree programme. Students benefit from excellent teaching, imaginative and well-crafted courses teaching and courses, and very careful scrutiny of their work, and are very effectively prepared for doctoral study at any HE institution.

Signed:	
Date:	7 <sup>th</sup> July 2021

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