



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

**FACULTY OF
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**EXAMINERS' REPORTS
2014**

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PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

2013-14

PART I

A. STATISTICS

There were 234 candidates for English Prelims this year, 17 candidates for the Preliminary Examination in English and Modern Languages, and 8 for the Preliminary Examination in History and English. Due to medical circumstances that made alternative arrangements such as quarantining impracticable, one candidate from the main school sat an alternative version of Paper 2. Another candidate from the main school who had been unable to appear for one of the papers was given the opportunity to sit that paper in September and passed. No candidates were required to re-sit any of the papers.

Medical certificates and other submissions, such as Proctorial communications, were presented on behalf of 26 candidates, and alternative arrangements were requested on behalf of 7 candidates. As last year, certificates and letters were taken into consideration by the Medical Cases sub-committee, and its recommendations were discussed by the full board at the first marks meeting. There were noticeably fewer late submissions of the Paper 1 portfolio (5) this year than there were in 2013 (15), and only a small number ultimately resulted in late submission penalties.

1. English Prelims: numbers and percentages in each category

2013-14	Total no candidates: 234	%
Distinction	59	25.2
Pass	175	74.78
Fail/Partial Pass	0	0
Incomplete	1	0.4

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

Paper	2013-14	%
1 Introduction to English Lang and Lit	49	20.9
2 650-1350 (4120)	45	19.2
3 1830-1910 (4121)	46	19.6
4 1910 to Present (4122)	56	23.9

3. PAST STATISTICS

i) English Prelims and Moderations: numbers and percentages in each category

Category					%	%
	2012-13	2011-12	2010-11	2009-10	2011-12	2010-11
Dist.	46	51	48	54	23.2	21.4
Pass	186	167	176	182	75.9	78.6
Fail/Part. Pass	2	2	0	1	0.9	0
Inc.	1					

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

Prelims

Paper	2013
1	20.5
2	23.1
3	10.7
4	25.5
Overall	19.6

Moderations

Paper	2012	2011	2010
1	27.7	22.8	26.5
2a/4a	21.9	13.3	28.9
2b/4b	19.9	24.7	28.2
3a	23.4	27.5	16.0
3b	27.2 [11 scripts]	30.8 [13 scripts]	9.6 [33 scripts]
Overall	24.0	23.8	24.1

4. Preliminary Examination in English and Modern Languages

The 17 candidates all passed. 3 achieved Distinctions overall, and 1 further candidate achieved a Distinction in English.

5. Preliminary Examination in History and English

The 8 candidates all passed. 4 achieved Distinctions.

B. GENERAL REMARKS

The number of Distinctions awarded this year (25%) was higher than last year (19.5%). As last year, there were no failures related to academic performance in any of the papers. That a quarter of the candidates examined this year achieved a Distinction is but one sign among many of the intellectual seriousness and commitment that the examiners repeatedly found across all four papers and in the work of a wide range of candidates, and these qualities were also evident in the work of candidates in the joint schools. The examiners warmly acknowledge this in their reports on the individual papers below.

This was the second year of the new syllabus, and the Board is extremely grateful to its predecessors in 2012-13 for identifying and achieving the aim, as stated in last year's report, of leaving 'useful precedents and a "green footprint"'. The examples of conscientious deliberation and careful self-scrutiny that they set made many aspects of our work this year, such as the

application of criteria for the marking of portfolio submissions and examination scripts, the scrutiny of question papers, and of individual markers' profiles, straightforward.

As last year, Paper 1 portfolios were marked before the start of the written examinations and this year, in order to ensure that examiners were not overburdened, there were four examiners for each of the two sections (including one assessor for Section A). In keeping with the principle of rigorous self-scrutiny followed last year, the examiners for each section met during the marking process for the purpose of co-moderation. The process involved scrutinising individuals' emerging marking profiles in order to identify possible distortions or anomalies at an early stage, and ensuring that the classification criteria were being applied reasonably and fairly. During this process, a selection of scripts at either end of the range of marks (that is, in the high 70s and the 40s, respectively) were read by more than one examiner in order to confirm that the range of marks was being applied fairly. Examiners also shared their emerging marks profiles in the course of marking Papers 2, 3 and 4. This was felt to be particularly important and helpful in the case of a Preliminary Examination, in which so much relies on the judgment of individual markers. One salutary result was that the scrutiny of marks profiles occupied relatively little time at the final marks meeting, and it is recommended that co-moderation before the final submission of marks remain a component of examining at this level.

In several important respects, candidates' performance on Paper 1 was similar to that of last year. As in 2013, Sections A and B of the paper this year generated similar ranges of marks and the average marks given for each of these sections were extremely closely to the average overall mark for the examination. The percentage of Distinctions generated by the paper (20.9%) was very close to the percentage generated last year (20.5%) and although this figure was slightly lower than that for the percentage of Distinctions generated overall this year, it will be noted that the portfolio generated the second-highest number of Distinctions among the papers. In general, therefore, results for the portfolio were in line with those for the other papers.

As last year, all questions on both sections were answered. The paper appears to be establishing itself very well, in that a wide range of candidates appeared to be securely attuned to the intellectual opportunities that it provides, and to the skills that it requires. Examiners for both sections were impressed by the seriousness and, in many cases, the intellectual creativity, imagination and ambition with which candidates approached this paper, and by the range of solid

knowledge typically displayed in support of such ambition. As the examiners note in their report below, some essays in both sections bore the traces of having been prepared on the basis of questions taken from last year's paper. It is important, therefore, to underline here how necessary it is that candidates should adapt their material appropriately for the specific tasks required in each section.

Whether on medical grounds or in the case of borderline initial classifications, eleven of the portfolios were identified for re-reading in their entirety between the penultimate and final marks meetings; in 4 further cases, individual essays were re-read. This resulted in ten upward adjustments to final marks, including five to Distinction level. Across the remaining three examination papers, 11 scripts were re-read on the same grounds, with some readings resulting in no changes to the final mark.

Paper 2 (Early Medieval Literature c. 650-1350) had the lowest number of Distinctions (19.2%) by a very slight margin, a change from last year (23.1%). But as the examiners note in their report, this paper is generating exciting literary and cultural responses, and there was great variety in the way that questions were answered, both in terms of the texts chosen, and also in terms of literary critical approaches. Responses were not just well-informed, but often seriously scholarly, and candidates are to be commended not merely for the amount that they had learned, but for the intellectual depth of their engagement with this unfamiliar material in the course of a challenging academic year overall.

Paper 3 (Literature in English 1830-1910) had a significantly higher number of Distinctions (19.6%) than last year, a statistic in line with the figures generated by the other papers this year (though see further remarks about gender distribution below). In line with this, the examiners acknowledge in their report the salutary effects of directed rubrics and the generally high state of preparation that candidates demonstrated in their work for this paper. They also identify a number of problems that affected weaker scripts: rubric violation, regression to plot summary, the use of imprecise terminology and the uncritical use of secondary material.

Paper 4 (Literature in English, 1910 to the present) generated the highest percentage of Distinctions this year (23.9%), although not by a wide margin, and it will be seen from the table above that the number of Distinctions awarded was in line with the numbers for the other papers.

It will be remembered that last year's examiners described an 'uneven performance' across the paper, with marked differentiation between strong and weak scripts. This year's examiners noted similar features in the scripts they encountered. The kernel of their observations is that the emphasis in the new syllabus on 'Literature in English' is salutary and has enabled many candidates to demonstrate an ambitious range of reading, but that other candidates clearly find the consequences of such broadened scope for this particular paper overwhelming, struggling to bring their material into focus and to situate it in critical, historical and cultural terms. One important implication of the examiners' remarks this year is that candidates need to think hard about the critical rationale for their selection and deployment of materials in response to particular questions.

One general point emerges from more than one of these reports, and that is the issue of presentation. The examiners respectfully remind candidates that the criteria for marking essays and timed examinations include consideration of the extent to which candidates have attended to the organisation and presentation of their essays. This includes correctness of grammar, spelling, and punctuation and, in the case of portfolio essays, correctness of apparatus and the form of footnotes and bibliography. On a significant number of occasions, examiners encountered scripts that did not require to be typed, but were, nevertheless, extremely difficult to read for a variety of reasons (cramped or sprawling handwriting; faint ink; multiple deletions of words, phrases, or whole paragraphs; asterisked paragraphs requiring mental insertion by the reader into the main body of the argument). Examiners cannot ignore these aspects when arriving at their final marks. Presentation, whether in the case of portfolios or of timed examinations, is one element of an examination over which candidates have the highest possible degree of control, and they are urged to use such control appropriately.

C. CONVENTIONS OF CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA (INCLUDING JOINT SCHOOLS)

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

PART II

A. ADMINISTRATION

As in previous years, the Mark-It database and Oracle Student System (OSS) were used. The examination paper for portfolio submission was posted on Weblearn as a downloadable file at noon on Monday of week 4 of Trinity Term. An email was sent to the Faculty undergraduate mailing list with the link. Candidates were offered the option of collecting a hard copy from the Examinations Secretary on the same day (Monday of week 4) if they had difficulties accessing the material. This year, the process of electronic submission was made considerably easier by the replacement of submission on hardware with the requirement that candidates submit the electronic version of their portfolio to an email address accessible by the Examinations Secretary, inserting their candidate numbers in the subject-line of their email.

The examiners are extremely grateful for the administrative support that they received this year. Angie Johnson, the Examinations Secretary, worked extremely hard throughout the year to support the board in all aspects of its work, and the Chair is particularly grateful for her help in negotiating the new systems in place following the reorganization of the Proctors' Office, and in liaising with the Examination Schools. Kate Gear, the Undergraduate Studies Administrator, also provided invaluable guidance to the examiners, not least in relation to the administration of the Joint Schools, and in sharing with the Chair, where relevant, the deliberations of the Undergraduate Studies Committee.

During the Long Vacation, the Chair received a request for feedback about examination administration beyond Faculty level and has responded with comments, sent through the appropriate channels, regarding aspects of the administration conducted this year by both the Proctors' Office and the Examination Schools.

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

Candidates	2014	%
All Genders	234	100
Women	160	68.37
Men	74	31.62
Distinctions	number	%
All	59	100
Women	35	59.3 (22% of women)
Men	24	40.6 (32% of men)

PAST STATISTICS: Prelims

Candidates	2013	%
All Genders	235	100
Women	146	62.1
Men	89	37.9
Distinctions	number	%
All	46	100
Women	28	19.2 (61% of total)
Men	18	20.2 (39% of total)

PAST STATISTICS: Moderations

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

This year, female candidates achieved a significantly higher number (35), and considerably higher percentage (59.3) of Distinctions overall than did male candidates (24/40.6% respectively, as opposed to 18/39% in 2013). In the two years in which the new Prelims syllabus has been running, therefore, more of the candidates who have achieved Distinctions have been female. But these numbers must be considered in the context of the fact that this year, 32% of men (a + 7.2% variance from a notional ideal whereby females perform the same as males) and 22% of women (a -3.3% variance) achieved Distinctions. This is a wider gap than last year (when the figures were 20.2% and 19.2% respectively). This must also be considered in conjunction with the fact that the number of female candidates overall rose this year to 160, which was 68% of the cohort (as against 146 from last year; 62% of that cohort), whereas the number of male candidates declined to 74, or 32% of the cohort (from 89 last year; 38% of that cohort). To put this in different terms, an increase of 14 women this year was accompanied by 7 more Distinctions for female candidates; but there were 15 fewer male candidates, and 6 more Distinctions among men, than there were last year. The percentage of men who achieved Distinctions this year (41%) was significantly higher than the percentage of men in the cohort overall (32%).

This significant difference in performance was reflected across all the papers this year, thereby generating a rather different story from 2013, when the spoils were more evenly divided, with women outperforming men in Papers 2 and 3 and men performing better in Papers 1 and 4. In the case of the Introduction to English Language and Literature portfolio, 24.3% of men achieved Distinctions, as opposed to 19.4% of women. On Early Medieval Literature c. 650-1350, exactly the same percentage of men (24.3%) achieved Distinctions as for Paper 1, this time as opposed to 17% of women. The gap was most apparent in the case of Literature in English 1830-1910, where 31.1% of men achieved Distinctions as opposed to 14.4% of women (a striking contrast from last year, when the figures were 12.3% for women and 7.9% for men). The gap is arguably more striking when it is taken into consideration that these percentages reflect exactly the same number of men and women (23 in each case). In the case of Literature in English from 1910 to the Present Day, 27% of men achieved Distinctions, as opposed to 22.5% of women. This year, therefore, it was on Papers 2 and 3 that the variation in performance by gender expressed itself most markedly. It is difficult to know what inferences to draw from this year's results, particularly as the new syllabus is still bedding itself down, but it is clear that this issue must remain under keen scrutiny.

PART III

1. Introduction to English Language and Literature

i) Paper 1 Section A

There was a significant amount of highly impressive distinction-level work, and an extremely good standard of work overall, particularly given that this is studied in the first term of the first year. It was clear that many candidates had made the most of the rich range of printed and electronic resources available to them. The strongest scripts demonstrated serious-minded application to the close study of language. Poor scripts were often the result of a lack of comprehension of the exercise: candidates should ensure that they comprehend the differences between the kinds of task asked of them in both sections of the paper. Weaker scripts also showed signs either of inadequate preparation or of uncritical, or unclear, thinking: for example, some candidates treated language as incidental to a broader, conceptually-based argument rather than as the essential medium through which to construct, or test, such arguments.

Many fewer scripts than last year offered a purely literary response to passages without paying sufficient attention to issues about language or to close analysis of formal linguistic features. Frequently there was an imaginative choice of passages that were interesting not just for their content but because of the ways in which their language gave expression to their subjects. There were some extremely deft analyses of the language of drama, particularly, but not only, in response to question 9. There was much nuanced and well-informed discussion of relationships between language and society, and of language in emergent technologies. In these areas, it was particularly noticeable that a wider range of secondary scholarship was mobilised. This was also true in the case of responses that concerned themselves with the use of language in advertising, journalism and politics. Answers on gender and sexuality made adroit use of recent scholarship and techniques of analysis. In the best answers, secondary materials were not used simply to illustrate a point, but to form part of an unfolding and flexible argument. Answers on metaphor showed literary and linguistic flair and range, and were not content simply to recycle categories from Lakoff and Johnson. Responses that concerned themselves with grammatical niceties were often extremely scholarly and refined.

Much better use was made this year of readership figures to calibrate social positioning in the case of advertising/ journalism. Flexible use was made of electronic resources to analyse language, but it remains extremely important that these should always be used relevantly. A number of scripts rather routinely reported data from, for example, the Gunning Fog index without explaining why this might have been significant for the particular issue being addressed. There was some very effective use of concordances to analyse lexical positioning and collocational meaning. Dictionaries, however, were used far less sensitively, often being positioned as repositories of unquestionable, authorised meaning. This was odd, given the critical attention paid to them in lectures. For example, the most consistently used dictionary was the *OED*, yet such use was mostly limited to establishing working definitions for words. Etymology, semantic change, and statistics regarding usage over time may readily be established via the dictionary in its online version, but were under-used. There were comparatively few answers on diachronic study, perhaps because it is much harder to undertake this work when the paper is studied in the first term of a literature degree.

While it is expected that some candidates will produce commentaries based on previous work, or indeed use passages that they may have chosen before the release of the examination paper, a significant number of scripts this year did not rework those existing materials to respond to the precise issues of the question addressed. It was often very clear which question from a previous paper, or sample paper, the materials presented had previously answered. The examiners encourage candidates to make sure that the materials they have chosen – whether passages or entire commentaries – have been tailored to meet the requirements of the questions that they have chosen. Using two texts from the same author limits effective comparison, and is to be avoided. Some passages, particularly from poetry texts, could have been shorter so that analysis could have been more precise and focused: less is often more in the case of this particular exercise. 70 lines is a great deal of text to assess in 2000 words and the weaker scripts usually opted for overly-long extracts: it was comparatively rare to encounter a script that made good use of such material.

Presentation was generally of high quality, although the examiners wish to emphasise how important it is that candidates date and give full bibliographical references for the passages they

use. Some candidates omitted dates entirely, or assumed that the date of first publication was always the same as the date of composition (where this could be known or conjectured). Unless sound and demonstrable academic reasons dictate otherwise, texts should be cited in their original published version and, where appropriate, candidates should show awareness that the date of composition might differ from the date of first, or subsequent, appearance in print. Similarly, great care must be taken to ascertain the true date of material accessed online. Wherever possible, candidates should use published transcripts in the case of e.g. film scripts, song lyrics, and radio or TV/web-derived discourse, and should not attempt to reconstruct their own versions as this reduces the opportunity for error. Candidates should also pay close attention to the presentation of extracts, which should be clearly identified and annotated with line numbers (e.g. every five lines). The weakest scripts either failed to number their extracts at all, or failed to make use of numerical annotation as a way of finding their way around the texts and thereby saving words in the commentary.

ii) Paper 1 Section B

The papers were generally of a very high standard. Some exceptionally exciting and interesting work was submitted. Many candidates offered essays that were rigorous, thoughtful and engaged with ethical, formal, theoretical and philosophical issues in meaningful and urgent ways. Work of distinction level took many shapes – some candidates used theory to interrogate literature; some did the reverse. Some chose to compare two or three philosophical or theoretical approaches to the question – or to compare the works of theorists within a particular field; others used literature as focus, thinking about the ways in which it performs theoretically.

Particularly original and interesting work was seen in the area of paratext and peritexts, and in discussions of identity. Work on narrative was also particularly lively, and avoided the ubiquitous Kermode/Brooks pairing seen so often last year. Scripts tackling the Brecht quotation (Question 9) often tended towards the descriptive rather than the analytical - there was a tendency to summarise the history of Brecht rather than offering an original argument. Question 2 concerning voice and absence attracted some lively and subtle writing – but also garnered some confused material about Barthes and Foucault. Writing well about Barthes and Foucault seems to remain a challenge in this Paper, and is not helped when Barthes and Foucault essays are treated ahistorically.

As in the case of Section A, some candidates needed to put more thought into reworking material generated before the examination in order to respond to the precise requirements of this year's questions. And it was a surprise that even some of the strongest candidates seemed to miss some of the basic requirements of essay presentation. There was some mis-spelling of names, e.g. that of Viktor Shklovsky, and although bibliographies were mainly well done, there was a small tendency for a modern paperback edition to be the only offered item: e.g. 'Aristotle (1996)'. The examiners particularly wish to emphasise that essays should not be stapled, but secured by one treasury tag in a hole in the top left hand corner. Each essay should be secured with a different tag – so all essays should be separate. This is not a whim. Not following this point of rubric makes it very difficult for an examiner to mark the essay, and to attach their comments.

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

All 8 History and English candidates submitted the English language and literature portfolio and two candidates achieved Distinctions on this paper. As last year, the first section remained the same for this cohort as for candidates in the main school, while the second section was set separately in order to reflect the intellectual frames of reference and methodological concerns specific to the joint school. As is the case with the main school, this paper appears to be working well in eliciting generally sophisticated answers that show awareness of the differences in approach not only between the two sections of the paper but also between the two disciplines. The exhortation in last year's report that candidates attend the faculty lectures on Paper 1 topics, rather than confining themselves to classes scheduled for students in the joint school, appears to have been heeded, as the answers for Section A showed that candidates had a secure grasp of the technical vocabulary, specific resources and analytical approaches required for the work undertaken in that part of the paper.

2. Early Medieval Literature c. 650 - 1350

Answers on this paper were consistently knowledgeable and seriously engaged with early medieval literature. A much greater proportion of candidates chose to focus on pre- rather than post-Conquest literatures, especially for the commentaries: there were only a small handful of commentaries on *Havelok* and *Ancrene Wisse*.

The standard of commentary work was impressive, especially on the Old English texts. Essay answers often showed a creative and critically adroit discussion of works written both before and after 1066. *Beowulf* and *Orfeo* were drawn into fruitful conversation, and *The Song of Roland* proved an effective comparator with *Maldon* and also with Saints' Lives. The *Lais* of Marie de France were discussed alongside early Medieval Romance and furnished interesting arguments about monstrosity in texts written before the Conquest. As in the case of the commentaries, there was surprisingly little work on *Ancrene Wisse*, though it was discussed in insightful ways in response to the question on boundaries and also in conjunction with early lyrics and *The Dream of the Rood* in response to the quotation from 1 Peter.

There was strong awareness of semantic resonance in both passages, and variation of translation. There was also sharp codicological knowledge, astute discussion of metrical effects and pertinent attention to the semantic and stylistic significance of grammar. For the most part, the style of the passages attracted sensitive comment. The best commentaries addressed this issue with literary flair. Some of the more competent commentaries, however, felt rather clinical: their knowledge could not be faulted, but they read a little like efficient 'ticking off' of items such as hapax legomena, hypermetric lines, envelope patterns, and variation. Candidates should think hard, therefore, not merely about what elements to include in their commentaries, but how best to integrate those elements into an analytical narrative rather than treating the commentary largely as a box-ticking exercise. The most impressive commentaries on *Beowulf* ranged well beyond discussion of the two combatants. The most impressive commentaries on *Rood* were as precise about its theology as its poetry. In commentary work on this poem, and also in essays, discussion is very much more convincing if precise theological diction is employed, such as 'incarnation', or 'hypostasis' rather than referring more broadly to 'the Christian message of the poem'.

In commentaries, and in essay work, there was some lively, and very well-informed, discussion of material objects, even if Bill Brown's statement did not quite receive the close critical attention it was hoped his statement would draw. And invariably, answers, however well – informed, and based on detailed textual knowledge, were significantly more engaged and engaging if they framed an argument in response to the terms of the question. Questions 2, 3 and especially 4, prompted a large number of essays that used close textual knowledge to illustrate

the ‘themes’ of heroism, or of nationhood, rather than constructing an argument. In question 3, the phrase ‘hostile environment’ was often taken only literally and produced effective, but rather stolid, work on the elegies. There was inventive work in response to question 11, and it attracted critically sophisticated discussion of gender, of naming and of voice in both Old and Early Middle English texts. There was some sparkling work on Saints’ Lives in response both to this question and to question 13. Answers to question 2 often lacked precision because the texts discussed were not dated, and this mattered very much indeed when texts written at different times or in different contexts were discussed. There was some exceptionally deft work on translation and paraphrase that showed great literary sensitivity both to early texts and to their modern avatars.

A few scripts did not satisfy the rubric that states that in the essays, candidates must show substantial knowledge of three texts. A couple of sentences on a riddle, or a passing reference to *Beowulf*, does not pass muster. And it is a pity that some otherwise well-informed, and critically interesting responses attracted a penalty for their lack of range.

It would be even more pleasing if more candidates took a little more time and trouble over the crafting of their work. Some answers were written so messily with multiple crossings out, and asterisks and redirections that they were extremely difficult to follow. It would be sensible for candidates to practise writing by hand in preparation for three-hour exams, not just in the interests of keeping handwriting legible, but also because the cutting and pasting mode of composition does not transfer easily from keyboard to script. Further, it is not necessary to write as much as possible. Selection and careful honing of knowledge is just, if not more, important. It was a great pleasure to read answers that were knowledgeable, but concise, and whose graceful and shapely turn of phrase reflected the literary sensibility of their writers.

3. Literature in English 1830-1910

Answers for this paper were mostly very good, and often excellent. Candidates in general seemed well prepared for the questions that were set, and also responded thoughtfully and argumentatively to the quotations and rubrics. All questions were attempted. The most popular choices were realism (13), the proximities of genders (17), and the question on religion (20).

Framing question 17 in terms of both genders seemed to avoid the perennial problem of the downloaded essay, while candidates who wanted to write about women/the new woman also offered interesting responses to questions about lives and texts (8). As a whole, the more directed rubrics seemed to lead to more animated and engaged answers. The best answers were many and various - some involved themselves in nuanced work on style and form, on historical context, others in publication and reception, or in theoretical approaches to texts. There was not a great deal of writing on American authors but what there was included particularly fine work in the area of African-American writing – often engaging with the question concerning texts and lives (8).

It was notable that many of the weaker answers summarized what was happening in the texts at a plot level, or offered interpretations of the texts that were not located or supported by accurate quotation. The answers that were less strong also often reflected attempts to think about texts in their social context and history, without thinking about the history of the publication or reception of the texts themselves. Free-floating mentions of ‘the reader’ could have been made more precise. Many of the answers on realism focused on Eliot and Gaskell – and few who wrote on these writers considered the texture of their prose. Dickens, too, was often discussed purely at the level of plot summary. Discussions of Eliot tended to focus around a set of very similar quotations from *Middlemarch*. ‘But why always Dorothea?’ is a good question, and one the candidates seemed to like, as they asked it in almost every Eliot essay. While using well-known texts and well-known quotations from these texts, was no bar to distinction level work, candidates are reminded that ‘originality of argument’ is one of the marking criteria. They are advised to think about ways of making their particular engagement with their material distinct.

Candidates did not generally draw much on the work of critics, and when they did, a high number used such texts uncritically. When researching and thinking about writing about a topic in relation to criticism, candidates are advised to investigate current work in the field, and to be aware of how any criticism that they do use is situated within literary and cultural history. The error noted last year – the tendency to jump forward a century, claiming that, for instance, that *On the Origin of Species* was written in 1959 – was seen again in a number of scripts, to the extent to which the examiners wondered if there was some confusion about what the term ‘the nineteenth century’ means. There were occasional violations of rubric. A few candidates ignored

the directive following a quotation and wrote simply on the quotation, meaning that their essay risked irrelevance. Others wrote more than one answer substantially on the same author.

4. Literature in English, 1910 to the present day

The best papers, of which there was a pleasing number, were admirably knowledgeable, critically alert, informed about history and theory, able to wield a critical argument: in other words admirably, and in one or two cases exceptionally, stylish intellectually and – even better, perhaps – stylishly put. The weaker papers were short of ideas, critical force, knowledge, and thin in every way, not at all approaching the quality one might expect. Happily the majority of papers possessed many and various qualities well above this level.

There was much evidence of wide and close, even if often scattered, reading. On the English front it was good, for instance, to see novelists like Henry Green, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Alan Hollinghurst getting the attention they deserve. And overall the reading of novels proved the textually most wide-ranging and even adventurous – even though, plainly, much of the important English fiction of the stretch 1930-2010 is not being at all looked at. In relation to British/Irish poets and playwrights candidates stuck mainly to well-trodden pathways – no bad thing, of course, though Beckett and Pinter could do with the occasional uncoupling.

The opening of the paper's scope to 'Literature in English' as opposed to 'English Literature' did entail certain plusses. It was good in general terms to find that some people had read e.g. Nabokov and Frank O'Hara with interest and flair. Everybody should read Nabokov and Frank O'Hara at some time in their lives. But the drawbacks of such scope are manifest in the wide paucity of critical/historical grasp and grip. There were clear signs of many students assembling a more or less random set of texts for their Paper 4 menu, connected by nothing more than their having been written in English. Many pairs and trios of authors/texts offered in answer to the topic questions – such as the city, or gender – had no connection, whether national, cultural, aesthetic, or generic, other than that they happened to involve the topic in question. Such evidence suggests that many candidates do not have sufficient interest in, or sense of, the cultural, textual, contextual, and historical dimensions of whatever texts happen to have been

dwelt on in term, and both national and transnational literatures lose out in the process. Candidates need to have a critical rationale for their selection and use of texts, a firm grasp of the texts themselves and an awareness of their multiple contexts. The weaker papers lacked anything but the vaguest knowledge about the particular place and placings of the literature they invoked. This was also evident from the arrestingly recurrent mis-spellings of so many keenly invoked persons and concepts: Batchelard, Shloevsky, Dreyfuss, Liebstd, aposiopoesis, deixsis, flaneur, tealogical, persona, to cite but a few. (Not to mention the old old favourites – Ellman, *Howard's End*, *Finnegan's Wake*.)

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATIONS IN CLASSICS AND ENGLISH

2013-14

Part 1.

A. Statistics.

(1) Numbers & percentages in each category

	<u>2013/14</u>	<u>2012/13</u>	<u>2011/12</u>	<u>2013/14</u>	<u>2013/12</u>	<u>2011/12</u>
Distinction	2			33.33%		
Pass	3	6		50%	100%	
Fail	1			16.67%		

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

(3) **Marking** of scripts for the English paper was single. That for the Classics papers was (again this year) double.

B. New Examining Methods & Procedures. This was the second year of examination of a new syllabus for C&E Prelims. The papers for C&E and CML are now finally harmonized on the Classics side.

Part II

A. General Comments on the Examination.

The results were encouraging this year for Course I. The Passmore Edwards Prize was awarded to Harriet Evans (Exeter College). For Course 2, the candidates performed extremely well and the examiners felt it was a shame that there was no prize in recognition of outstanding achievement in the first year for these candidates.

B. Numbers & Performance. For Course I, there were six candidates, all of whom took each of the five papers. There were three candidates for the qualifying examination in Course II.

D. Comments on Papers & Individual Questions

Paper 1: Introduction to English Language and Literature

In Section A, the strongest scripts demonstrated serious-minded application to the close study of language. Poor scripts were often the result of a lack of comprehension of the exercise: candidates should ensure that they comprehend the differences between the kinds of task asked of them in both sections of the paper. Weaker scripts also showed signs either of inadequate preparation or of uncritical, or unclear, thinking. But many fewer scripts than last year offered a

purely literary response to passages without paying sufficient attention to issues about language or to close analysis of formal linguistic features. In Section B, the papers were generally of a very high standard. Some exceptionally exciting and interesting work was submitted. Many candidates offered essays that were rigorous, thoughtful and engaged with ethical, formal, theoretical and philosophical issues in meaningful and urgent ways. A few essays bore the traces of having addressed questions from last year's paper rather than this year's, so candidates must make sure that they appropriately adapt material generated in the course of the year when answering particular questions.

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

Performance in this paper was pleasing, with all scripts being awarded marks in the upper half of the 2:1 category or above. Candidates had read widely and thoughtfully, and all demonstrated a knowledge of the primary texts that was characterised by depth and range. The level of detailed engagement with the material was markedly good, as was the candidates' ability to relate their material closely and intelligently to the set questions.

This year a specific rubric was added, encouraging candidates to deploy relevant classical knowledge even where the question did not specifically require it. The majority of candidates did so in a pertinent and illuminating fashion that bodes well for the future of this as a unique paper within the English school.

Paper 3: Unseen translation from Greek and Latin

Again this year, this paper was generally poorly done. Common mistakes involved gender and number and thorough revision of syntax is strongly advised for future candidates.

Paper 4: Greek and Latin Essay Questions

The work for this paper was the strongest of all the Classics papers, although answers would have been sharper had candidates attempted to define the terms of the question (e.g. for question 3, the meaning of 'sequel' was taken for granted). The essays in Section C, by contrast, were generally well handled and the range of reference impressive.

Paper 5: Greek and Latin Translation and Comment

It is essential both to translate the passages *AND* to comment upon them in this paper. For prepared translations, the examiners felt that the translations in general needed to be more accurate. The commentaries were often disappointing, sometimes merely summaries, or they focused on either linguistic or broader contextual matters but rarely managed to do both.

C&E Qualifying Examination (Course 2)

All candidates did very well indeed (two took the Greek option, one Latin). Careful preparation clearly pays off; there were lots of excellent and idiomatic translations, great performances in unseens and all displayed an excellent command of grammar.

All Course 2 candidates are to be commended.

F. Members of the Board of Examiners

Prof Fiona Macintosh (Chair)

Dr Katharine Earnshaw

Dr Mishtooni Bose

Dr Helen Moore

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH AND MODERN LANGUAGES

2013-14

Extract from MML Prelims Report

Joint Schools

This year, the Chair chaired HML, PML EMEL and EML, for all of which there is a separate meeting. Meetings for HML and CML took place after the main ML final meeting, and marks for History and English were not available at the ML pre-final meeting. Meetings went smoothly with routine review of all marks and special cases. In the case of HML it is my understanding that because of its software package History is unable to extract a separate list of History results for its preliminary meeting. It would clearly be ideal if final marks could be arrived at on the day before the final Joint School meeting, but where that is not possible, the Chair needs to double-check all final lists and the OSS entries carefully. This was the case once again this year.

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

Professor Andrew Kahn

Chair of Prelims 2014

FINAL HONOURS SCHOOL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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

2013-14

This examination report is the last where all students sat papers under the old syllabus. Some of the points it makes are for future reference; others are simply for record.

Many thanks to Angie Johnson, Undergraduate Exams Officer, for her diligence, attentiveness and wisdom throughout the FHS examination process; Marion Turner for organising Course 2 with such aplomb and for giving astute and helpful advice as deputy chair; and Jeri Johnson for producing crucial extra statistics for our final meeting. Thanks, too, to an amazing FHS Board, every single member of whom set exam papers without demur, took on a large quantity of FHS marking, and attended lengthy meetings. Eddie Jones, Kate McLoughlin and Jennifer Richards were model External Examiners. Their trenchant observations and thorough feedback ensured the continued rigour of our examination process; their advice will help us plan the year to come. A large number of faculty assessors, often non-postholders, gave their time to marking FHS papers while also teaching, researching and administrating; they are to be congratulated for their dedication and collegiality. Staff of the Exam Schools ensured the examinations were efficiently run; grateful thanks to them. The candidates were diligent, hard-working, determined and impressive.

1. Statistics

There were 204 candidates, 10 of whom took Course 2

Outcome	1st	2.1	2.2	3	Pass
Numbers	53	148	2	0	1

Percentages including recent years

	1 st	2.1	2.2	3	Pass
2010	24.7%	74.1%	0.8%	0.4%	0%
2011	24.7%	74.1%	1.2%	0%	0%
2012	31%	66.1%	2.9%	0%	0%
2013	33.9%	65.2%	0.9%	0%	0%
2014	26%	72%	1%	0%	0.5%

49 'old style' Firsts and 4 Alternative Firsts were awarded this year – fewer Firsts than last year. 2.1s were proportionately up in number. We are now roughly in line with where we were two years ago in 2010-11. Given that External Examiners have worried about grade inflation over the last two years, this year's marks are not a matter of concern: we seem, as a faculty, to have adjusted for the 'upward drag' initially created by the Alternative First.

We should, however, be conscious that Alternative Firsts call into question the way we rank candidates. Traditionally, examiners have been told that a 'new' First, created as a result of rereading after the Board's First Meeting, should not 'leapfrog' over an established First in rank order. The alternative route to a First, however, makes leapfrogging unavoidable: raising a single paper to a 70 will sometimes raise the candidate's aggregate mark beyond that for the lowest First. That is not a cause for concern, but colleagues are advised that leapfrogging may have occurred around the 2.1/First border, and that we should not put too much emphasis on rank order.

2 Examiners and Assessors

All papers were initially double marked; where agreement was not reached they were triple marked. All marks were then scrutinised by the Chair and the Deputy Chair before being submitted to the FHS Board. Over the Board's two day-long meetings, 61 anomalous and borderline papers were further marked; eight new Firsts were awarded as a result of remarking. The External Examiners inspected our examining process by reading the complete run of papers for the top First, the bottom 2.2, and six borderline 2.1/First and 2.2/2.1 candidates. Final marks were once again checked by the Board before rankings were confirmed.

3 Medical Cases

Changes in the Proctors' office over the last year created problems in advance of the Medical and Special Cases meeting and after it. Over the coming year, it is to be hoped that there will be rationalisation in the Proctorial office so that locating and collating this crucial material will not be so time-consuming.

4 Gender

Gender statistics were monitored and were found to be close to those of last year, in which concerns had been raised. Women achieving a First overall were still down -5.2% from the ideal of complete parity (the same as last year – compare -3.6% in 2010, and -1.2% in 2011). Men achieving a First overall remained up +8.7% from total parity; again, the same as last year (compare +5.7% in 2010, +2% in 2011). Women achieving 2.1 were +5.3, which is better than last year's +4.7 and better still than +4.2% in 2010, +1.8% in 2011; men were -9% from the ideal, which is not dissimilar to last year's -7.8% and the year before's -8.8% (but compare -6.7% in 2010, -2.9% in 2011). Whether the new syllabus, with its slightly greater emphasis on course work, will make the difference smaller or larger remains to be seen. It is clearly important

to continue to monitor gender, though the FHS Board again wondered whether other social factors – schooling, home background – might make as significant, or more significant, a difference.

5 Training

The Chair held two meetings, one in Michaelmas, one in Hilary, to train new markers. External Examiners felt, however, that some examiners – often more practised examiners who had not been present at the meetings – failed to refer to the full range of the examining criteria in their comments. They also drew attention to use of the word ‘plagiarism’ which was, on some occasions, applied too casually to derivative work. Plagiarism is a grave offence. It should be brought to the attention of the Chair of Examiners and the Proctors as soon as it is spotted: a plagiarising candidate must be interviewed by the Proctors, and may not be allowed to take a degree at all. *Derivative* work should be penalised: it is highly unimpressive. It is not, however, degree-threatening.

6 Paper setting

Most papers are co-set to ensure range. On a few occasions this year, however, each examiner came up with a series of questions in isolation which then overlapped so significantly that new questions had to be requested. Examiners are asked to agree and divide the *themes* with their co-setters before coming up with questions in order to avoid future such problems.

7 External Examiners

A set of guidelines was created for External Examiners, all of whom, this year, were new to the job. This facilitated the smooth running of the examination process and is to be recommended for subsequent years.

8 Prizes

Gibbs Prizes

1 Best extended essay in Course I, Paper 7: James Tozer, Magdalen

2 Best extended essay in Course I, Paper 8: Elizabeth Culliford, St Hilda's

3 Best extended essay in Course II: Samira Lindstedt, St Anne's

4 Best overall performance in Course I of the Honour School: Namratha Rao, Brasenose

5 Best overall performance in Course II of the Honour School: Samira Lindstedt, St Anne's

6 Distinguished Performance: Alicia Smith, St Catz

Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize: jointly won by Rowland Bagnall, St John's and Adam Heardman, St John's

REPORTS ON INDIVIDUAL PAPERS

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

Course 1

Paper 1 The English Language

This year's finalists were the last cohort to take FHS Paper 1. All questions set by the examiners were attempted. In section A, popular topics included performativity, dictionaries and digital media: the last of these generated some particularly original and thoughtful essays. In Section B, some of the most frequently chosen questions were on metaphor, media 'translations' of official documents, and the relationship between language and visual images in texts designed to persuade. The best commentaries were sophisticated in both the choice of texts and the analysis presented. Overall, the standards achieved by this year's candidates were broadly in line with previous cohorts.

Paper 2 Shakespeare

The overall performance of candidates for this paper showed deep and broad engagement with Shakespeare's work – every one of his plays and poems was mentioned at least once – and their literary, historical and critical contexts. All questions were attempted with Q9 ('action is eloquence') and Q4 (performativity in monarchy) proving the most popular. On the whole, candidates engaged well with the quotations, often showing creative responses that were substantiated by textual and critical knowledge.

The best candidates were erudite and moved without apparent difficulty across a wide range of material in both individual plays and Shakespeare's *oeuvre*. There was excellent work on Shakespeare's use of his classical forbears, on Shakespeare and Aristotle, and on Shakespeare's narrative poems. Some of the strongest work also compared Shakespeare to other early modern playwrights and poets. Use of contextual frameworks wasn't confined to contemporary history and culture but also included genuine engagement with, for example, philosophical concepts or Shakespeare in translation. Once again, the most successful answers combined innovative groupings of plays and/or poems and impressive knowledge of critical approaches in their subtle and persuasive arguments. It was good to see extensive use of recent criticism (Bradley's 'tragic flaw' appears to have been banished at last) although Faculty members were the most often-cited secondary materials, which meant they were often endorsed uncritically rather than discussed or

refuted. There were signs that even strong candidates struggled with the pressure of an examination in their first essays, which tended to be more disorganised than their other efforts.

There was some strong work on plays in performance, showing that candidates have understood that productions of the plays (staged and cinematic) can be used as critical responses. While the examiners welcome this approach they also noted that candidates were often uncritical, endorsing productions without, for example, analysing considerable abbreviations of playtexts. So, although candidates were eager to interpret Shakespeare's female characters as 'strong' they did not examine the cutting of all Juliet's long speeches in both Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's films.

The use of variant texts has also improved with the strongest candidates using differences between quarto and folio to analyse the plays rather than just stating what the differences are. On the evidence of this year's exam it appears the Q1 of *Hamlet* is well ahead of the quarto of *King Lear* as most often-discussed quarto text. Once again, the examiners caution against reductive interpretations: Q1 was quite often endorsed as superior *because* it was shorter. This is a tenable opinion, but many seemed not to realise that it might not command universal assent.

As in previous years, the weakest work struggled for relevance, often focusing on a single word in the quotation or ignoring the quotation altogether and 'downloading' a tutorial essay instead of candidates considering how best they might adapt their knowledge to the demands of the question. Weaker essays were also descriptive and there was a disappointing number of character studies that ignored all sense of context, even at the simplest level, such as where the plays under discussion fitted into Shakespeare's writing career. All instances of irrelevance were heavily penalized, including some essays that had otherwise excellent qualities.

Very overexposed topics included 'identity' and 'performativity' in monarchy, about which even strong candidates struggled to find anything novel to say, and the unmasking of theatricality in plays-within-plays, which only occasionally led to anything fresh. The impetus to be 'original' may go some way to explaining a narrowing of reference to such matters such as the use of the trapdoor at the Globe, or to RSC's 'Such Tweet Sorrow', as well as disappointing reluctance to engage with Shakespeare's language. The examiners noted a lack of ease with the text that manifested in large number of misquotations as well as a tendency to concentrate on single events in plays. For example, *Julius Caesar* is mostly a rhetorical duel between Brutus and Antony, and, for some candidates, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet* are plays-within-plays wrapped in yards of verbiage. Whilst the examiners saw some very well-informed work on Shakespeare's use of Chaucer (often including *The Two Noble Kinsmen*), the weakest essays concentrated on Gower's prologue to *Pericles*, without showing any knowledge of the play he was introducing, or discussed *Troilus and Cressida* using Chaucer's rather than Shakespeare's spellings.

Paper 3a 1100-1509

This paper generated many excellent essays on a huge variety of topics. All questions were attempted. The most popular questions were 2 on the relationship between the material and the immaterial, 9 on romance and the nation, 10 on conventions, and 17 on the body. Some of the less popular questions – e.g. on landscape, or interiority, or clothing – elicited particularly interesting answers. The most popular texts included *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's dream visions, *Pearl*, medieval drama, the *Owl and the Nightingale*, and Margery Kempe. There was also quite a lot of work on Malory, a range of verse romances, Julian of Norwich, *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Cloud of Unknowing*, *Piers Plowman*, Hoccleve, lyrics, Henryson, and *Mandeville's Travels*. Although early medieval texts were well covered, few students write on texts from the very end of the period, and it is to be hoped that the new syllabus will encourage more work on early Tudor texts. Some students have clearly read a wonderful range of medieval literature; in contrast there were a disappointing number whose range was astonishingly limited. The best essays demonstrated an ability to switch fluently between texts, rather than comprising discrete sections on each text under consideration. Both this year and last there have been some problems with candidates allowing one author to dominate their entire script. It seems worth reminding candidates sitting the new Paper 2 next year that they will be permitted to write one whole answer, or the equivalent (ie two half-essays) on Chaucer, but not more. Students should also be reminded that quoting Middle English texts in modern translation is not acceptable.

While most students wrote relevant answers, there were some clearly 'downloaded' answers, and answers which responded very partially to the quotation. Some, for instance, dealt with 'devotion' but not 'Christocentric devotion' in response to question 12, and 'conventions' were taken to be just about anything (question 10). The best answers not only constructed clear and relevant responses with forceful but measured arguments, but also really engaged with the terms of the question or quotation. Some essays demonstrated that the candidates were really thinking on their feet in the exam room. Students who construct clear and unexpected arguments always stand out.

Most students seemed to have a decent knowledge of the period but there were various factual errors – often to do with kings – as well as generalisations. Most students seem at least somewhat critically aware, though it is unusual to find students who really seem grounded in influential, recent criticism. Very few students allowed secondary criticism to dominate their essays. It was also unusual to find essays that did not quote from or use the primary texts, though there were some; there were also some that only quoted a very small amount, or that quoted inaccurately, e.g. attributing quotations to the wrong character. But, conversely, there was not much close reading: few students really pay attention to issues relating to, for instance, imagery, metre, form, and diction. And many students don't manage to get across a sense of engaging with a text as a whole; the best students are able both to get across a sense of an overall interpretation of the text and to engage in detailed readings to support that bigger argument. Writing only about a very

small part of a text is a particular problem with the *Canterbury Tales*: there are always a few candidates who focus exclusively on a couple of tales, often from Fragment I, with no sense at all of the bigger text, or of other texts. Similarly, some candidates seem only to have read a very limited section of Malory's works, sometimes only one book. While very short essays were invariably very weak, very long essays were not always strong: some candidates do seem to value quantity over quality and would have benefited from spending a little more time in the planning stage, thinking about argument construction and relevance.

Some essays on manuscript contexts, and some on staging drama, tended to ignore the texts themselves almost entirely. Candidates are reminded that their essays should always deal with primary texts in some detail. Some of the best answers on the paper dealt with texts in a 'situated' way – for instance plays and their performance contexts, or lyric poems in their manuscript contexts, but such answers did not neglect the texts themselves. Some students are impressively knowledgeable about a whole range of aspects both of medieval culture and of ways of approaching the period. For instance, some students are aware of interesting ways of thinking about source and analogue, and of how they can fruitfully bring medieval English literature into conversation with French, Latin, and Anglo-Norman texts in particular. Some essays demonstrated engagement with, for instance, ecocriticism, new formalism, or postcolonialism; others commented on recent performances of medieval plays or the glossing practices of medieval scribes. While the weakest essays were depressingly similar and predictable in scope (very limited) and approach (descriptive), the best essays were surprising, elegant, and truly scholarly in the breadth and depth of understanding that they conveyed.

Paper 3b 1100-1509

Most candidates answered on passage (a) or (b) and passage (e), although Henryson and Malory were popular second choices and a small number of candidates wrote on Ancrene Wisse or Langland. The best commentaries combined a good knowledge of the work as a whole with detailed close reading of the passage in front of them. There was some superb analysis of Pandarus's rapid shifts in style and tone in passage (a) – from 'jape' to 'tydynges' to 'sermoun' – and a pleasing number of candidates commented on his parody of Petrarchan love lyric. Aspects of speech and dialogue, such as oaths, were less well commented on. Interestingly, the second passage (b) attracted many of the stronger candidates, and there were a variety of different interpretations of Troilus's monologue, with some fine commentary on philosophical argumentation, the tension between personal grief and public performance, and on Troilus's literary self-fashioning. Overall, candidates found it easier to write about the poetry; there was some excellent work on rhyme, rhythm, metre and stanzaic structure, as well as on alliterative patterning and details of syntax. Grammatical and rhetorical terminology was sometimes used without a clear understanding of what it meant (particularly in the case of parataxis and hypotaxis), and some candidates just listed rhetorical terms with little or no consideration of what they brought to the reading of the passage. Many candidates focused impressionistically on

the sounds of alliterating letters, rather than examining the formal linking of words and ideas through alliteration. The weaker candidates treated the commentary as if it were an essay and downloaded pre-prepared material on manuscript, sources, verse-form and general themes; this was particularly the case with comments on Chaucer's use of Boccaccio, the details of which were either misremembered or vague and unhelpful. Others focused exclusively on the placement of the passage within the work as a whole; this was very much evident in the case of Malory. A few candidates were still struggling to understand the language of Chaucer and especially Pearl. The best scripts, however, engaged immediately and in a sustained way with nuances of language, style and form, and used these details to build up coherent and occasionally original interpretations of the passage chosen. Overall, it was encouraging to see what close, detailed and perceptive work some candidates were able to produce under timed conditions.

Paper 4 1509-1642

The overall standard of work on this paper was good, with a small number of genuinely outstanding scripts. All the questions were attempted, with question 1 (humanist pride), 3 (the courtly figure of *allegoria*), 6 (the poetry of these times abounds in wit), 12 (Tamburlaine's map), 13 (the distinction between interior and exterior), 19 (the private space), and 20 (distinction of genres) being the most popular. Questions 13 (England as a shifting entity), 15 (Whitney on 'my books and pen'), and 18 (on ruins) had very few takers—probably because they demanded quite specific knowledge from candidates. While the slight unevenness in question choice was not a problem it would be good (especially now that the paper will shift its end date to 1660) for candidates in future to think about topics such as English/British identity and writing by women, especially given the strong critical publications in this area in recent years.

It appears that most candidates now prepare for this paper by revising a set of three topics (for example 'the early modern sermon', 'London in plays and pamphlets', and 'the politics of representing Queen Elizabeth I'). This is a sensible way of working and it tends to result in competent, well-supported, essays tackling a series of authors whose work can be linked by tracing a single theme. One significant downside of the topic approach, however, is that candidates often lock themselves into the mode of historical survey. As a result, they end up paying little attention either to the ambiguity of individual authors' positions or to the complexity of the works of literature they produced. Poetry and drama are frequently used, quite simplistically, as a source for determining the 'beliefs' of the period. This year only a very limited number of scripts showed sustained interest in development across a work of literature (e.g. the idea that a character might function somewhat differently in the first compared to the last act of a play). Likewise, only a few candidates tied formal properties such as metre, rhyme, or stanzaic form to analysis of what a poet might be saying. Many candidates present literature in this period quite straightforwardly as a medium for delivering accessible moral advice.

A second problem with the set topic approach is that it tends to produce rather inflexible responses to the paper's title quotations. Taking a quotation as a prompt for the discussion of a

specific topic is entirely legitimate, but this way of working becomes problematic if a candidate simply welds a pre-loaded essay onto an introduction that only briefly mentions the title quotation's key terms. To tackle a period paper candidates do need to have read widely in the period and—one would hope—to have attended lectures on subjects beyond their chosen three. Often candidates showed an inability to place the question in context. Such failure seems to be the result of insufficient knowledge of the period as a whole. Some very good topic-based essays had to be penalized by the examiners because the candidate had done almost nothing to address the quotation in its own terms. The limited number of really high scoring scripts in this paper came from candidates who showed striking depth of understanding of the question across all three of the essays they delivered.

This is not to say that the topic approach is a bad one; in many ways this paper shows the rewards of moving beyond the old single-author approach. The topic of generic blending/distinction, for example, was very well handled, with some strong work on tragicomedy, domestic tragedy, city comedy, and pastoral. Quite a lot of the work on religion was also well grounded. In the best of these essays, sermons were intelligently connected to poetry and there was subtle attention to key theological debates. Donne was a bit of an exception to this welcome development: too many candidates still presented a simple narrative of conversion in his case. It is also a bit surprising that religion, as a topic, was discussed in relation to such a small group of writers (principally Herbert, Donne, and those translating the Psalms). Writers such as Sidney and Spenser (who tend to be discussed under the heading of politics) or Marlowe (usually related to humanist crisis) might usefully be brought in to expand the range of debate on religion.

Overall, this paper elicited a solid rather than spectacular set of responses; deeper engagement with individual works of literature and with the question quotations would be the way to move beyond that. The conclusions of this report should apply pretty directly to the paper in its new 1550-1660 format. It will be a pity to lose some of the good work on early Tudor literature that made its way into this year's answers, but no doubt there will be compensations in the treatment of writing up to and beyond the Civil War.

4a 1832-1900

Four candidates took this paper.

4b 1900 to Present Day

Across English and the Joint Schools with English, all questions were addressed by at least one candidate, except numbers 10 ('Yeats, Pound, Eliot. . .politically wicked') and 20 ('Film is a real thing'). All the major figures were addressed (Joyce, Yeats, Eliot, Woolf, Forster, Beckett, Mansfield, Auden, Rhys, Pound, Pinter, Conrad, Rushdie, Orwell, e.g.) but there was also a pleasing array of less discussed writers and texts (Mahon, Green, Amis, Barnes, de Bernieres,

McEwan) particularly from the U.S. (Nabokov, Olsen, Stevens, Williams, H.D., Thom Gunn). Candidates in these Schools performed at either an exceptionally high standard (I or high II.i) or very poorly (low II.ii). Those who wrote well brought to bear precise (and correct) and detailed knowledge of the texts into full, *argued* analyses written directly in response to the question. Those who performed badly dumped pre-prepared answers into ill-fitting questions, spelled authors' names incorrectly (repeatedly), misquoted wildly, or got titles of works wrong in answers that themselves strayed and wobbled rather than presented an argument. The best work here was subtle and sophisticated, showing an impressive range of primary and secondary reading, and a capacity for mature analysis, for intervening in extant critical debates, for contextualizing and thinking through matters at once literary, historical and linguistic.

Paper 5 1642-1740

Examiners were impressed by the high quality in expression and understanding demonstrated in the majority of papers. Most answers are well-informed, full of precise information, and able to recall a wide range of material which they investigate with gusto. Quotation is accurate, copious, and this year candidates were making a clear effort to explicate nuance and investigate literary technique, so that critical reading was not merely perfunctory or instrumental. Candidates made genuine efforts to engage with some quite challenging questions and it was rare to find an answer that was irrelevant. Few though succeeded in sustaining engagement with the title much beyond the first few paragraphs. A considerable number fielded complex arguments that brought together materials – whether from the same author/genre or a wide range of different works – into compelling dialogue. Weaker essays tended to offer surveys of three or more works loosely held together by word association with some part or phrase from a question title. Too many listed intellectual-historical facts and offered little or no close reading of the texts to which they pertained. Only Marvell's garden poems seem to invite close textual attention.

All questions were answered. Question 4 (a quotation from *Paradise Lost*) and 10 (Defoe's Moll claiming historical veracity) were by far the most popular question choices. Only a small percentage recognised that the speaker is Satan in the former and took the statement as an uncomplicated expression of the author's position. Question 14 was also very popular but candidates often took considerable latitude with this quotation ignoring its pointed reference to the 'stage' to talk about satire in general. The few answers to question 20 about the contribution to our understanding of the period by recent critical developments in history of the book or eco-criticism were very impressive. Elsewhere, however, one of the most notable weaknesses of the paper was that few demonstrated engagement with recent critical debates or agendas. Even with the best known authors, analysis seems to take place in a critical vacuum with the candidate only in dialogue with the text. Often the familiar critical arguments of key critics were rehearsed without acknowledgement: C S Lewis and Stanley Fish still seem to be the only voices worth hearing, or admitting to have heard, with regard to 'Paradise Lost'. The only modern critics who received explicit acknowledgement were, in the main, Oxford postholders. This often hampered

essays seeking to make grand claims about genre especially with regard to the novel where a very slim range of works (Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, Behn's *Oroonoko*, and a recent newcomer, Haywood's *Love in Excess*) are made to bear the burden of demonstrating innovation. By comparison, candidates are very well informed about historical context, understand the political, religious and (frequently) philosophical meanings of the primary works under discussion. Candidates often showed a sound knowledge of literary and political debate/factionalism in the period. Blackmore and Shadwell are clearly being read first-hand rather than taking the verdict of their antagonists, Pope and Dryden. The most popular authors were: Milton (by a wide margin), then Rochester, Swift, and Marvell (although still very few pay any attention to the later works), followed by Dryden (although only one or two answers recognised he was also a dramatist), Montagu, Defoe, Swift and Pope. Other writers discussed included: Bunyan, Gay, Cavendish, Katherine Philips, Hutchinson, Browne, Denham, Herrick, Shaftesbury, Blackmore, Duck, Collier, Finch, Thomson, and Aubin. Answers rarely focussed on single authors however and tended to show a preference for grouping works according to theme (science, labour, class, gender, the city) or genre (some good answers and understanding of the Georgic and Epic). Topics which attracted most attention were: Restoration comedy (ever popular and ranged from the most pedestrian of answers to those that tried to look beyond Wycherley and Etherege); writings about/satirizing the Royal Society (Hooke, Cavendish, Butler, Shadwell); travel writing (often poorly done though and unthinking in terms of genre); class and gender; textual editing (often very well done); Ancients and Moderns (often a bit hackneyed in terms of argument but a few very fine); miscellany collections; gardens (very popular and very varied in terms of success); periodical literature (Addison and Steele but also others including Ned Ward). Examiners saw more work on devotional poetry than usual; especially popular were Traherne and Vaughan who were handled with great sensitivity to tone. Several authors and works gained new traction and attention in essays this year: George Lillo's *London Merchant*; the poetry of Sarah Fyge Egerton and Mary Leapor; Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* and Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* are fast starting to rival 'Upon Appleton House' as the most often cited and discussed shorter works on this paper; and Dryden's *The State of Innocence* along with Bentley's edition often featured alongside discussions of *Paradise Lost*. Restoration tragedy is still out of favour it appears and those writing on the comedy rarely venture beyond *The Country Wife*, *Man of Mode* and *The Way of the World* (their authors variously spelled). Much of the writing about 'libertinism' worked with a reductive definition of 'hedonistic pleasure-seeking' with little understanding of a philosophical or political valence. Where Hobbes was cited in this respect, treatment was frequently second-hand and sometimes wrong-headed. Only a handful of the many essays on Rochester seemed vaguely aware of the important work (especially by Harold Love) on Rochester and scribal culture.

Paper 6 1740-1832

Overall, performances on this paper were strong. There were a number of outstanding scripts and a very large number of good responses, on either side of the 2.i/1st borderline. Typically,

candidates displayed a good grasp of a number of writers, engaged with the specific terms of the title quotation or question without merely recalling a pre-prepared answer, and offered pertinent quotations from memory.

Many answers were comparative between authors and many were very successful. Occasionally this approach resulted in answers that appeared superficial, perhaps not moving beyond one well-known poem for each writer considered. Answers on single authors were at least as likely to be successful and the best responses on familiar writers ranged into less well known texts too. Insightful close reading was rare, even amongst the best scripts. Many of the essays discussed the paraphraseable ideas in texts with little comment on language, imagery, style or form. Sustained critical engagement was also infrequent. Numerous candidates cited critics in passing, but few candidates outlined a critical debate or position and still fewer directed their own argument in relation to such. Although penalties were rarely applied, presentation was sometimes hit and miss, even allowing for the constraints of a three-hour exam. Candidates should remember to underline titles they would italicise in print (e.g. novels) and put single quotation marks around poem titles (when not independently published). Very often these conventions were missed altogether, or both applied at the same time for any given novel or poem.

Every question was attempted. Questions 13 ('tranquil nature'), 15 ('Poetry can never make a philosopher...') and 17 ('A traveller I am...') attracted the most essays, across the whole range of achievement. The best answers offered innovative responses to the question, taking into consideration the full sense of the quotation. The weaker answers tended to take up one word from the quotation and move off on a trajectory of their own. For each of these questions there is more than one aspect which the best essays profitably considered: for example, 'tranquil nature' and 'repose', 'useful/ornamental' and 'philosopher/statesman', 'traveller' and 'tale ... of myself'. Question 12 (Burke on the French Revolution) was often answered, usually contrasting Burke and Wollstonecraft. Question 9 (Austen's Marianne on jargon and hackneyed language) was attempted as often about other writers as about Austen. It was often answered generally about the 'limitations of language', with little to say about 'jargon' specifically. The question on gothic proved tricky. Several candidates took Hazlitt's comment about the tottering state of 'all old structures of the time' as a literal reference to the ubiquity of crumbling buildings, so their essays were narrowly focused on gothic architecture, missing the invitation to offer a historically contextualised argument. Even those that did offer a more historically specific version of the gothic commonly showed a patchy understanding both of contemporary events and of developments in the genre itself between, say, *The Castle of Otranto* and *Frankenstein*.

The most frequently rehearsed answers were on Richardson (usually *Pamela*) and Fielding (usually *Shamela*), Sterne (almost always *Tristram Shandy*) and Wordsworth (*Lyrical Ballads* and *The Prelude*). These essays achieved marks across the ability range, but candidates are nevertheless encouraged to refer to more than just the most frequently cited texts. In contrast to

the approach with Wordsworth, surprisingly few candidates wrote essays exclusively on Coleridge or Shelley, both of whom tended to appear in conjunction with other poets, represented by one or two of their best known poems. There were some good answers on revision (not always in response to question 10), some promising answers on women romantic poets, and a small number of interesting, innovative answers on 'non-literary' texts (perhaps in combination with more familiar writing). There were very few answers on drama in general or on question nineteen (on theatre) in particular. Few candidates wrote on pre-Romantic poetry aside from Gray, or on, among others, Burney, Edgeworth, Scott, and Peacock.

Paper 7 Special Authors

7a (i) *Beowulf*

There were four candidates for this paper.

7a (ii) Alfred

There were two candidates for this paper.

7a (iii) Exeter Book

There were three candidates for this paper.

7b (i) Chaucer

Almost all of the six essays submitted for this paper were either very decent or excellent. The best were richly detailed, wide-ranging, critically-informed, and conceptually sophisticated. They moved confidently between Chaucer's texts, analyzing an excellent range of material and focusing both on the best-known and on more obscure texts. Several candidates demonstrated the ability to focus on particular words and details and really to draw out the nuances of the texts; several also demonstrated subtle understanding of manuscript contexts, and of cultural and political contexts.

Most candidates were not sufficiently critically aware. Some relied on very old-fashioned and outdated criticism, and many did not seem to have read the most influential and important recent books in the field, which was really surprising; others had not read books that were key to their own area of investigation. At other times, candidates name-checked critics but had not properly engaged with their arguments. So most candidates do need to do more really to locate themselves in the field, and to support their arguments with a critical understanding of the secondary literature.

Most candidates also demonstrated problems with presentation: typos, misquotations, omitted words, and referencing problems were worryingly common.

7b (ii) Langland

There were two candidates for this paper.

7b (iii) N Town Cycle

There were two candidates for this paper.

7c (i) Spenser

There were nine candidates this year for Spenser and the quality of the submissions ranged from high-grade publishable work at the top end to some very mediocre essays at the tail. Some of the top-end work was rigorously theoretical and superbly grounded in an understanding of Spenser's European influences. Such essays richly explored the implications of the chosen title quotation, making it a theme across the argument as a whole. These pieces avoided survey and offered instead the kind of focused argument that is the mark of good graduate work. At the other end of the scale, weaker submissions showed very little knowledge about the nuances of Spenser's position (making unsupportable claims about his relation to his sovereign and overconfident assertions about the moral purpose of his work). Such candidates had clearly not looked at resources such as Andrew Hadfield's new biography of the poet, or even at reliable guides such as *The Oxford Handbook*, and presented some worryingly dated and misleading interpretations as a result. The majority of work, in the middle ground, was solidly informed about the life and work of the poet and covered a good breadth of Spenser's writing. Well written and well supported work that clearly addressed the title quotation just tipped into the first class bracket, but candidates should feel encouraged to take a bolder, more distinctive approach.

7c (ii) Milton

Nineteen candidates chose this paper and tackled almost all of the quotations. The majority of the work submitted was of a very good standard, with some outstanding essays. The most accomplished essays, on the whole, strayed further from safe territory (Milton's theodicy, 'the reader' in Milton's epics, authorship issues) to explore topics such as Milton's philosophic and scientific interests, his views on language, tragedy, or gender, the relationship between poetry and music, or literature and the visual arts. There was also a refreshing upsurge of interest in Milton's wider theological thinking outside the major poems. The epics were most frequently discussed, but a pleasing range of other texts came under scrutiny, including obscurer prose works and the Trinity manuscript of Milton's poems. In a few instances, examiners felt that essays had limited their potential by restricting the range of primary material to one or two works; others might have done more to justify their limited selection from the corpus. The most successful scripts showed firm engagement with modern secondary criticism, and only a few essays felt under-contextualised. The most successful directed their learning into close encounters with the language of Milton's texts, and also developed a sustained argument across

the full length of the essay. Weaker essays were let down by lack of structural control, usually resulting in an episodic essay or superficial development of argument.

7c (iii) Jonson

There were 13 candidates for this paper. 10 themes were set; no-one attempted quotations 3 and 9. The examiners were pleased to see such a strong set of essays: all of them all demonstrated considerable competence across the range of criteria. However, although the examiners rewarded the generally high level of achievement, they did not see truly exceptional work this year.

It was good to see so much interesting work combining a range of texts from Jonson's poetry, plays, masques and prose and from across his writing career. There was evidence of careful scholarship and some particularly impressive work on the differences between quarto and folio editions. The best work also showed an awareness of Jonson's authorial persona, a good understanding of critical responses to his writing, an awareness of relevant cultural and historical contexts and a strongly sustained argument. The strongest essays were able to balance range of reference with incisive close readings.

Once again, the examiners suggest that candidates should think carefully about how their preparatory work for this paper relates to their final essay, and always seek to synthesize this material imaginatively with their chosen theme. If appendices are included, it's important that their relevance to the essays' argument is clarified and their purpose explained.

7d (i) Marvell

There were five candidates. All showed a good understanding of a substantial range of writing by Marvell and engaged effectively with criticism. The strongest evidenced ambition and competence in charting Marvell's career as well as nuanced close reading of both prose and poetry. The influence of work in history of the book was discernible with attention to debates about potential coterie relations, manuscript and print publication. Weaker essays tended to rehearse familiar arguments about the intellectual and philosophical debates of the period and struggled to see Marvell's work as anything other than reflective of them. Essays were in the main well-structured and forcefully argued contributing intelligently to the lively debate in the field about the value of exclusively historicist method in the treatment of Marvell as writer. Only three out of the ten quotations were addressed and quotation 2 (a quotation from the elegy to Villiers) was especially popular.

7d (ii) Dryden

There were two candidates for this paper.

7d (iii) Haywood

There were no candidates for this paper.

7e (i) Wordsworth

Seven candidates took this paper. Five quotations were responded to, with two answers each on quotations two (solitude) and seven ('stability'). Essays were spread across the ability range. The best essays combined good close analysis, engagement with (often recent) criticism, and a clear line of argument. The weaker essays were less successful on each of these counts, and there was also a surprising number of typographical issues in several of the essays. With one or two exceptions, the essays ranged well across Wordsworth's writing career, discussing less well-known texts as well as the unavoidable ones. The best essays situated poems within developmental narratives of Wordsworth's creative practice or political commitment. This year, there were good comments on revision and the textual histories of the poems, and on the influence of Dorothy. As in previous years, those candidates who paid close attention to the style and formal features of the poems were the more successful.

7e (ii) Austen

Thirteen candidates chose this option, and seven quotations were attempted: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8. The best answers engaged fluently, thoroughly and sensitively with the quotation provided, and were well structured as well as locally attentive to detail; they ranged widely over Austen's juvenilia, mature works, and letters, and drew on a range of contemporary fiction and writing on fiction, as well as on more recent critical works. Some excellent critical insights came out of close analysis of the novels, and from a comparison between the work of Austen and her contemporaries. There was some very deft reading of biographical works relating to Austen; such analysis was especially impressive when it enriched points being made about the style and the approach of the fiction. Several essays were a pleasure to read because of the sheer enjoyment of Austen that they made evident in many different ways. Other answers showed an impressive grasp of how Austen transformed her source material and of her visual sense (and appreciation of landscape); there was some equally persuasive work on the ethics of reading in her juvenilia and novels.

Less accomplished work included unnecessary plot summary and tended to equate Austen's statements about writing to her unequivocal and undoubted intentions and beliefs. Some essays included sections that were only tenuously connected to the quotation provided, and had the appearance of prepared work that had been slotted in, or lacked a clear structure. In a number of cases, better checking would have ruled out minor errors. Candidates are reminded that they cannot simply weld together a series of essays that they have written in the course of the term: these will not automatically cohere into an answer that responds appropriately to the chosen quotation, nor will the result make sense as a whole.

So much has been written about Austen's small body of work in the past two hundred years: it is heartening to observe that original, strikingly perceptive answers on her continue to be produced by many of our candidates.

7e (iii) Byron

Five candidates took this paper. The standard of answers was high and the quality and verve of the writing in several of the pieces were particularly noticeable as a strength. Several wrote well about *Childe Harold*, *Don Juan* and Byron's comedy. Most of the essays offered some moments of good close analysis, though this could have been sustained more fully in a number of cases. The most frequent weakness was a lack of focus and clear argument. Few candidates engaged in detail with a body of criticism. Otherwise, the quality of the writing and the detailed attention to the formal features of the poems made these essays successful.

7f (i) Tennyson

8 candidates took this paper, and much of their work was excellent: stylish, well informed, and engaging. In several cases candidates had conducted fruitful independent research—including archival work in Lincolnshire, the British Library, and some of the more rarely tapped resources of the Bodleian. The few weaker essays struggled to find new things to say on old topics (Tennyson and sound, Tennyson and contemporary science), but most were resourceful in finding ways to refresh even the most heavily worked terrain—reading Tennyson's elegies for Hallam, for example, comparatively with 'rival' productions by friends and family. In short, there was real excellence on display, and very little that was less than competent.

7f (ii) Dickens

12 candidates took Dickens. The examiners were impressed with the general level of the work presented for this paper. Most essays were not only well informed (thoroughly in command of the primary and secondary literature), they were also conceptually ambitious, imaginatively engaging, and critically independent. Those that tackled familiar subjects such as Dickens and the law, or Dickens and gender, were usually able to add new elements to the debate, and to deepen their lines of argument through close analysis of stylistics. Several chose strikingly non-standard topics, made clearly relevant to the prompts given: Dickens and poverty voyeurism, cannibalism, dogs, it-narrative, legal proceduralism. Not the least pleasure of reading the scripts was seeing a widespread ability to move with ease between the fiction, the journalism, and the letters, and to think about the ways in which the writing evolved (there was some excellent original work on manuscripts and textual variants, and good use made of the Number Plans). Some independent research was also conducted via sources more commonly employed at graduate level, including the Reading Experience Database. Overall, this was an exceptionally proficient and enjoyable batch of essays. One slight demurrer: several submissions, including some of the best, would have benefitted from more careful proof reading at the last stage.

7f (iii) Wilde

There were nineteen candidates who wrote on seven of the ten quotations. There were some really excellent essays, distinguished by a sophisticated and informed understanding of Wilde's

engagement with contemporary debates, his complex relation to literary genres and traditions, his challenge to the conventional hermeneutics of reading, and his simultaneous engagement with and subversion of critics' terms and assumptions. Notably, the strongest essays were also dexterously and precisely written, whereas weaker essays were often rather leaden in expression, reducing Wilde's complex and playful statements to flat and inadequate summaries, thereby losing all sense of nuance and implicit debate. An impressive number of candidates drew with confidence on a wide range of Wilde's writings, including reviews, journalism, letters and the transcripts of his trials, and were alert to the ambiguities and complexities of the dialogic form, avoiding identifying any single voice as Wilde's own. Weaker essays structured their arguments around simple and problematic binaries such as public/private, performance/reality, aesthetics/ethics. Across the board, from some first-class essays to some low second-class, many essays were rather fractured and episodic in structure, moving abruptly from text to text without a clear through-line argument or framing rationale.

7g (i) Conrad

Nine candidates took this paper. As ever, the best work here showed the ability to sustain and develop an argument over the length of the essay, included both deep analysis and range of textual, historical and even, occasionally, theoretical material. The weakest tried tortuously to warp the quotation to the topic they really wanted to address, and then dumped a pre-prepared piece, or struggled to hold an argument together, or discussed only one or two texts, or reiterated critical platitudes only. At their most sophisticated, candidates showed an ability to handle primary texts with subtlety, to think through the implications of Conrad's paratextual manoeuvres, to situate him within a precise context of other writers and interlocutors, to challenge critical truisms, to examine the relation between Conrad's aims and ideas and those of his publishers.

7g (ii) Yeats

There were twelve candidates for Yeats. This year saw some outstanding and some weak essays. Yeats is a challenging poet at the best of times, and the less good work struggled to do little more than quote critics at great length, without discussion or analysis, reiterating not wholly understood clichés rather than articulating and controlling an argument defined with any critical insight. The best tested received critical opinion, understood the complexities of Yeats's relation to Ireland, defined with precision his particular poetics, read closely with perspicuity and, occasionally, wit. There was some strong work with textual variants and manuscript material. Again, the weaker candidates discussed (or even mentioned) only a handful of poems, the stronger displayed an exceptionally close knowledge of, seemingly, the entire breadth of the poet's extraordinary output: plays, essays, autobiography, as well as the poetry. Quotations 4 ('The Moods'), 7 ('applied arts of literature. . .social life') and 8 ('rage to end all things') went unaddressed, while 3 ('September 1913') was the most popular, followed by 1 ('The Stolen Child'); the remainder had one taker each.

7g (iii) Woolf

Twenty-two candidates took this paper, with the most popular theme being 4 (a quotation from *To the Lighthouse* about wanting to be on a level with ordinary experience). The best essays were adventurous and rigorous. They had identified a clear topic, had a clear argument to present, and had pursued the topic through a wide range of Woolf's texts: not just the novels, but the essays, longer non-fiction, diaries, letters, and memoirs. They demonstrated a good eye for the telling word or imagistic detail. They were able to position their arguments in relation to secondary work without being overshadowed by it; some, while remaining broadly sympathetic to Woolf, were willing to recognise limitations or problems with her works and/or with the claims made for them by other critics.

The merely competent essays tended to explore, as if for the first time, hackneyed questions – for example, how Woolf's experiments with literary form related to her politics, or to her idea of the self – and provided accounts that unquestioningly accepted existing criticism. Woolfian dualities such as granite/rainbow were presented as if they were powerful and original analytic tools. Most candidates attempted to survey the existing critical work; the weaker essays, however, were uncritical and unanalytical.

In the weakest essays, the relation to the title theme was far from clear; in some cases, had the question number and title not been typed out at the head of the essay, one would have been hard-pushed to identify it from the content of the essay. Even some of the stronger essays were riddled with typographical and factual errors – surprising numbers thought that Arnold Bennett's surname was 'Benett' or 'Bennet', while in *The Years* the Pargiter family were more than once supplanted by the 'Partigers' – and such errors were more frequent among the weakest candidates. More than one candidate did not understand how to organise a bibliography alphabetically.

7h (i) Walcott

There were two candidates for this paper.

7h (ii) Roth

Thirteen candidates opted for this paper. Several candidates failed to engage with the terms of the quotation, either by misconstruing its main terms, or by ignoring its inconvenient aspects. Candidates who wrote about a large number of novels struggled to offer more than a superficial discussion. The weakest essays addressed Roth's fiction by analysing particular scenes or characters without any regard for the fictional context in which they are involved. The stronger essays tended to focus more closely on fewer novels, and demonstrated a richer awareness of Roth's complexity. There was some good work on the intellectual and social contexts of particular novels, especially in response to quotations about the Holocaust and the self as a theatre. Quotations not addressed were those on writing and failure, the usefulness of an "amiable

irritant”, and on the situation of literature in a country “where everything goes and nothing matters”.

7h (iii) Friel

There were four candidates for this paper.

7i (i) Emerson

There was one candidate for this paper.

7i (ii) Dickinson

7 candidates took the paper. The weaker essays offered a patchwork of tutorial essays, whereas the best essays presented a tapestry of ideas woven from fresh thinking and novel engagement with the poems and critical traditions. At the top end, the best essays were scholarly, lucid, critically-informed and argued with verve. Still, there was occasionally a failure to state the essay’s argument despite the fact that ‘argument’ is one of the four criteria of assessment for this paper.

Candidates would do well to replace gender stereotyping (i.e. women are like this/men are like that) with proper theoretical grounding and wider reading. They should be encouraged to address more substantially Dickinson’s many literary relations (i.e. more substantial engagement with the Transcendentalists, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and British Victorian poets, etc.). The examiners were not impressed by ‘name-dropping’ for the sake of rather cursory comparison; candidates often introduced another important nineteenth century writer – say Fuller, Emerson, Melville, or Whitman – and only spent a couple of sentences paraphrasing their entire career, begging the question of whether any of these writers had actually been read. Occasionally, a candidate would take some time to draw out the complexity of a particular comparison, and this worked well. A few of the candidates made an effort to incorporate historical contexts into their arguments; this was almost always welcome, and sometimes impressive.

7i (iii) Faulkner

16 candidates took the paper. Half of the candidates answered quotation 8 (on the past), 4 candidates elected quotation four (on naturalistic prose and race), and the remaining 4 candidates answered quotations 1, 7 and 10. At the top end, essays were sophisticated, clearly written, critically engaged and beautifully argued. Many candidates demonstrated substantial engagement with the quotations, which was an improvement on previous years. They also linked Faulkner to other literary texts in interesting and illuminating ways. A pleasing range of Faulkner’s texts was covered by the best essays, which consistently went beyond *Absalom! Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury* into more recondite areas.

The examiners noted a preoccupation with race that was not always matched by an awareness of the complex historical and theoretical dimensions informing it. Some weaker essays seemed to have been composed as a collage of tutorial essays, and therefore lacked coherence.

Several essays lacked an overarching argument despite the fact that this is explicitly stated as one of the criteria for assessment. Less satisfactory essays also showed insubstantial engagement with critical traditions.

Paper 8

Paper 8 (a): An Extended Essay:

Pre 1500

Ten candidates took this paper, which was generally done well; there was some absolutely outstanding work. The topics ranged widely across the period and across genres and approaches. The best essays tended to demonstrate flexible approaches to the texts uniting, for instance, close reading and a detailed understanding of manuscript layout or medieval authorial practice. Some candidates were working at a very high level indeed, and were exceptionally well aware of current work in the field; they produced truly scholarly pieces of work. Several candidates were notably engaged with theory, and this tended to work well, although such candidates were not always making the best use of the wealth of theoretically-engaged criticism available. At the lower end of the scale, weaker candidates had read surprisingly little secondary material, and had not managed to define a clear and interesting topic; this led to essays that were too general and based on unsupported and unconnected ideas. Some candidates are writing on a 'theme' rather than developing an argument: they spend too much time on summary and synthesis, rather than building on the work of critics to produce their own arguments. Defining a clear topic at an early stage is really crucial if a candidate is to produce a successful essay. At times, there were really glaring omissions in the bibliography. On the other hand, the sheer range of topics attempted demonstrates that students are engaging with the period in diverse and sometimes fascinating ways.

1500-1600

This year 8 candidates submitted essays in the period, with a range of subjects including: marginal glossing; psalm and sermon cultures; historiography; and early modern publishing.

The standard overall was very good, with a number of excellent examples that either displayed impressive and insightful primary research or rigorous critical sophistication. The examiners were particularly pleased that a number of candidates had taken the opportunity offered by extended work to engage with relatively unusual and technically demanding fields, such as book history or literature and medicine. Weaker pieces were conversely less ambitious in their scope

and depth of research, sometimes resembling long tutorial essays rather than the product of a genuine extended project.

Essays were generally accurately written and carefully presented, with only occasional lapses and errors.

1600-1700

There were eight essays submitted in the period range 1600-1700. All were of good quality: well-researched, elegantly written, and showing impressive depth of immersion in the period. Candidates generally showed good contact with primary literature and a willingness to read, in depth, beyond the established canon. There was also a nice familiarity with important criticism, with many candidates feeling able to engage with scholarly publications in a nuanced, restrained manner. The best work contained some beautiful close reading in combination with sophisticated thinking about intellectual history (taking on clichés and making neat and effective distinctions between individual writers and individual works). There was no weak work in this selection of scripts, but less strong submissions relied on stolid, very orthodox, accounts of attitudes in the period and failed really to investigate the complexities of their primary texts at a sufficient level of detail.

1700-1800

There were 17 essays that fell in this field. Essays addressed a wide range of different material, genres, and authors. The majority of essays addressed prose fiction and there was strong interest in travel writing, urban culture, and epistolarity, in material culture (dress, performance, masquerade, objects) and in popular genres (the broadside ballad, crime narrative). The best candidates derived their argument from attentive and historically well-informed reading of primary texts. Only a few showed a strong understanding of the critical conversations underway in the field (book history, cognitive studies, thing theory) or successfully located their own understanding in relation to those conversations. Some essays were overambitious and tended to fall into surveys, while at the other end of the spectrum claims about entire genres and literary movements were precariously derived from a single work.

1800-1900

20 essays fell in this field, and the sheer range of 19th-century writers and subjects treated within this historical tranche of the paper merits applause: from Austen and Scott through to Butler and Yeats, with Dickens, Carlyle, Eliot, sensation writers, Gissing, Ward, and many others in between. The comparative rubric drew out some very interesting combinations—some relatively standard but well worth fresh consideration (Dickens and Gissing, for example; Eliot and Carlyle; sensation writers of the 1860s); some much less commonly ventured on. The best of the essays identified topics that allowed candidates to be genuinely original (the demarcation between novel and sermon, for example) or to extend established areas of debate by considering

writers not commonly treated in the critical literature (Austen and Scott on the understanding of teenage development *avant la lettre*). The more successful essays had also thought hard about the rationale for comparison (the actual relationship of influence between writers; or their different attitudes to a common element in their literary or political culture; or the likeness or telling difference to an external view). Weaker essays tended to lack such a clear rationale or failed to achieve a persuasive balance of consideration between the chosen writers (with one or more comparator left far in the background of what was really a one-author story). A few simply struggled to control a too-ambitious range of writers, where space could never have allowed justice to be done to all.

1900-1950

17 candidates wrote on this period. The range of topics for the paper was wide, crossing genres (poetry, drama, fiction) and subgenres (science fiction, dystopian fiction, travel writing, periodicals, opera libretti), bringing multiple disciplines together (particularly music and literature), treating various historical, political and intellectual contexts ('Edwardian decline', the New Woman, anthropology, non-standard English), as well as theoretical or quasi-theoretical ideas (metaphor, bathos, gender, embodiedness, memory, impressionism), and treating a range of writers not often discussed in the period papers. The best work, as ever, showed the same virtues that guarantee success elsewhere: wide and yet detailed reading, an ability to articulate clearly, to sustain and develop and persuasively manage, an argument. Those who struggled again struggled for the same reasons as ever: inability to handle an argument at length, reiteration of critical platitudes, lack of understanding of contexts or history or even the trajectory of the careers of the authors they were discussing. At their best, these essays displayed inventiveness, wit, and original critical analysis, and would have been at home among the best of Master's level work, but the less strong work suggested that candidates will have real difficulty with the dissertation under the new syllabus. They appeared to need more support and direction than they got for this paper, and with the dissertation they will need to be able to work even more independently.

Contemporary and Theory

38 candidates produced work in this field. The standard on the whole was disappointing. Arguments were too often either associative or journalistic in tone. Critical theory was often used in a very superficial way, and many essays suffered from simplistic or hazy conceptualization. A particular problem was an evident desire to bundle together disparate texts and themes, with only a very blurred sense of how those texts or themes might be related. By contrast, the best essays identified their area of investigation briskly and sensibly, showed command of critical vocabulary, related close readings to a clear sense of the wider purposes and contexts of their chosen texts, and retained their clarity of focus throughout.

Many candidates seemed to think that the business of literary criticism is simply to assess literature for its conformity to acceptably liberal values on matters of race, gender and sexuality: if a text can be made to show that identity is 'fluid' or 'performative', it is approved; if not, then it is a failure.

There was a good deal of low 2.1/borderline 2.2 work, and much of this could be divided into two categories: candidates showing high competence in the handling of rather basic materials (the sort of material that they dealt with at A Level or even earlier. These essays predictably covered writers and topics such as: Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, Dystopic fiction, Caryl Churchill & Sarah Kane, Children's literature, Sylvia Plath & mental health); or candidates fumblingly handling more challenging materials, without adequate conceptual setup or clear enough critical language. The considerable body of 2.2 work had the demerits of both of these categories, handling simple texts and ideas without adequate critical tools.

One final category of essay should be mentioned: a number of potentially first-class essays failed to make the grade because they wasted too many words on honing their critical concepts or justifying the nature and scope of their projects. Doing this is desirable, but it needs to be done more efficiently: if candidates set up their ideas at such length that they don't have space to apply them, and particularly to read their texts closely and subtly, one cannot give a first-class mark.

American

40 candidates wrote on American literature, and the range of topics addressed was varied. It included impressive work on the Black Arts, Haitian authors, postmodern writers, Poe, and David Foster Wallace – there were also a couple of really outstanding pieces of work that managed successfully to incorporate discussions of alternative media.

Compared to previous years, this batch of essays appeared increasingly liberated from reductive historical mythology ('the American Dream', 'American individualism', etc.). Yet these hollow generalisations did haunt some of the weaker essays. Students often struggled to achieve balance within their essay – typically to the detriment of one of their chosen authors. And candidates should try to avoid setting themselves explicit examination questions – part of the point of Paper 8 is to move away from such securities and broaden the scope of the approach.

There were a handful of essays that embarked upon surveys of American literature within a designated timeframe (a totalising history of all things American in period X, or so it seemed) but greater scholarly depth is required for a meaningful examination.

There was a curious disconnection between many of the essays and their essay titles. This element also plagued the introduction of many of the works and students appear confused about the relationship between what an essay claims to do and what it in fact does (good essay structure and signposting should alleviate this point).

Postcolonial

There were 7 essays on postcolonial topics submitted independently of the CTST. There was some strong work on ideas about literature and nationalism, but several candidates struggled to define clear and compelling topics. The weakest essays were poorly conceived, and displayed little evidence of detailed work. There was also a tendency to address familiar themes in rather routine ways. Canonical writers such as Coetzee and Rushdie were especially prominent, and (with two notable exceptions) essays focused almost exclusively on the novel.

Children's Literature

Five candidates wrote on Children's Literature. Overall the quality of work submitted for this paper was disappointing. Essays tended towards forms of historical survey with little close engagement with texts, and no archival research.

Most essays tended towards the fannish with little sense of the literary quality of the texts selected. Almost none showed close-reading or any real sense of engagement with the texts themselves (paratextually or intertextually); and when potentially engaging and original subject matters did surface such as recent publishing trends, including the culture of fan websites and fan culture – the argument was never reattached to any engagement with texts. Instead, lists of examples were produced.

Paper 8c – Centrally taught topics

Comparative Literature

Overall, this was an impressive crop of essays. Topics were very varied and included (for instance) Truth, Laughter and the Material World in Plato, Erasmus, Rabelais and Urquhart; Imaginings of Venice in Schiller, Byron, Ruskin, Mann; Dante's Ulysses in Tennyson and Pascoli; Shakespeare and Molière in C20th translations; Performativity in Heidegger and Beckett. The best essays justified their topic and method clearly, and combined sharp close reading and strong scholarship with the reach of argument required by this option; the shortcomings of the weaker essays tended to be unsupported generalisation and over-reliance on secondary sources.

Fin de Siecle

The five fin de siecle final essays ranged widely across the literature studied in the course. All essays showed competence in textual analysis and understanding of the literature under discussion, and a few showed an unusual degree of originality. There was a welcome diversity of approaches; while some essays focused on one author in great depth, others compared authors and works in light of a particular theme or idea such as Gothic uses of the uncanny, the concept

of degeneration, or depictions of childhood. Generally the essays were of a high standard and reflected a genuine engagement with the material.

Film Criticism

Eight students took this paper. Essays were mostly solid to very good, satisfactorily fulfilling the aims and objectives of the option. Topics included identity, colour, narrative agency, and body/costume. Though students were too unaccustomed or too fearful (dealing with the different medium perhaps) to attempt a genuinely evaluative approach, their analysis of film style was detailed, and their interpretive work was revealing.

Paper 9 [Introduction to Old English]

There were four candidates for this paper.

Course II

A1 600-1100

There were 13 candidates for this paper (including joint schools), and, despite some unevenness in standard, the paper produced some very good quality work. All of the questions were attempted except for four: Q. 10 (on genre), Q. 13 (on kingship), Q. 16 (on history writing), and Q.17a (on engagement with the pre-Christian past). The most popular question were by some distance Q. 2 (on saints' lives), Q. 7 (on place and/or the wondrous), and Q. 8 (on manuscript context). Work on saints' lives was of variable quality, with some sophisticated responses sitting alongside essays that failed to interrogate the various ways in which saintly protagonists might act as exemplary characters. There were excellent answers on both the Anglo-Saxon sense of place and the importance of manuscript context—the latter perhaps showing the ongoing influence of work undertaken for paper A4. Overall, the range of material covered was very good, with texts such as *Andreas*, *The Wonders of the East*, and the Exeter Book Riddles featuring prominently. On the other hand, Wulfstan did not receive any attention this year, and homilies other than saints' lives were not well represented. There was surprisingly little consideration of heroic and Germanic contexts, particularly for texts other than those commonly covered at Prelims. The best answers produced nuanced and original responses and were supported by detailed reference to the primary material. Weaker answers, whilst often still notable for their sound knowledge of the texts in questions, were marked by a failure to appreciate the complexity of the issues discussed, and a lack of precise engagement with the question.

A2 1100-1530

There were 9 candidates for this paper. Of the questions, 10 was the most popular (5 attempts); questions 2, 5, 8, 9, and 17 were not attempted. There was relatively little overlap in the texts that were discussed, although Malory, *Gawain & the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, *Havelok*, *King Horn*, *Kempe*, and Skelton's *Bowge of Court* all made three or more appearances. With a couple of glowing exceptions, the quality of scripts was on the whole quite surprisingly disappointing. Although most essays were relevant to the questions, range was often very restricted, with answers focusing on one or two very short texts, and too often including what looked like pre-prepared material. The weaker answers also showed a striking lack of sophistication and awareness of critical traditions. The strongest ones, on the other hand, included some lovely close readings, selected very ably from a wide range of material, and cross-referenced fluently between texts; a couple also paid very pleasing attention to manuscript context.

A3a Chaucer

There was some outstanding work on this paper, but the majority of scripts were no more than competent. There was a surprising lack of true engagement with the material (in sharp contrast to the Course I Paper 7 on Chaucer). The weaker scripts demonstrated only very limited range and many essays failed to do sufficient textual work, or to get across a sense of reading texts in sustained and detailed ways. In contrast, the best work demonstrated very high close-reading abilities, impressive range, critical awareness, and a strong understanding of relevant contemporary contexts. The stronger essays had clear arguments; weaker ones tended to be descriptive and to lack strong relevance to the question or quotation.

A3b Langland and Gower

Only questions 13 and 14 were attempted more than once (twice each); 4, 5, 9, 10 and 15 were also attempted. Almost all candidates wrote exclusively on Langland; it was slightly disappointing that only one wrote on Gower, and that there was very little comparative work. The weaker essays tended to focus on individual episodes from *Piers Plowman* and discussed them in relatively unsophisticated terms; some of their material appeared to be pre-prepared, and these candidates did not appear to have engaged with the poem as a whole or to understand how it changed over time. There was some outstanding work on Langland, however, showing impressive awareness of *Piers Plowman*'s complex textual tradition and the state of current scholarship. These essays also included some excellent close readings and paid attention to the literary qualities of the text.

A4 Introduction to Textual Criticism

Most of the ten candidates sitting this paper were well informed on theories of textual criticism, and the scripts showed a good knowledge and understanding of the sorts of decisions that editors of medieval texts need to make. Most commentaries paid full attention to the layout and

presentation of the text and to the needs of the audience; it was disappointing, however, that so few candidates felt able to comment on textual emendations, even when these were clearly marked. Although the translations invited some literary commentary on the stylistic and poetic choices made by different translators, very few candidates picked up on this opportunity. The best commentaries combined a good general knowledge of manuscript context and theories of textual criticism with precise and detailed close reading, and it was pleasing to see how this paper has equipped students to make their own judgments on the relative merits of different editions and translations. The essays were on a variety of topics, and many ranged beyond the set texts and considered manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Gower and other late medieval writers; there was some particularly interesting and wide-ranging work on the future of electronic editions.

A5 The Development of the English Language

Ten candidates took this paper. Their standard was very high; they approached a variety of topics with confidence and detailed knowledge. Standards of presentation were equally good, and it was cheering to see the potential for close analysis which the portfolio submission facilitates being used to good effect. Candidates dealt with a range of topics, including spelling reform, private and public discourses, critical engagement with the history of English in a variety of ways (lexis, morphology, syntax, as well as questions of periodization, and translation between different periods).

B10 Archaeology of Anglo Saxon England

Four candidates sat the paper.

B15 Old Norse

There were 7 candidates. A lot of very good work was done on this paper, and all of the questions except the last two (on Snorri, and on linguistic issues) were attempted by at least one candidate, and showed an informed, lively and often original engagement with the chosen texts. Questions on *Hrafnkels saga* were the most popular, although the passage from *Hrafnkels saga* set for translation was not done very well by many candidates, and very poorly by some. The passages from the Eddic poems were done very well, by contrast.

B16 Old Norse Texts

There was one candidate for this paper.

B17 Old Norse and Icelandic (Essay)

There was one candidate for this paper.

B19 Medieval French 1100-1300

There were two candidates for this paper.

B20 Medieval French 1300-1500

There were two candidates for this paper.

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

FHS English Language & Literature;

FHS History and English

Examiner: Dr Eddie Jones, University of Exeter

This was my first year as external examiner. Communication during the year, and the material sent in advance of the July meetings, was full and clear. It included the previous year's examiners' reports (both external and internal), so some continuity could be ensured from one examining regime to the next. I was also an examiner for the joint school of History and English. I would have appreciated a little more information on the design and assessment of this programme earlier in the year, as I received for FHS English.

The work I saw on my visits to Oxford included two entire runs from Course II, a selection of scripts from the core medieval papers in Course I (papers 3a and 3b), and a few scripts and portfolios selected by the First Markers Meeting for re-reading. In all cases I found the marks awarded to be appropriate and in line with standards elsewhere, and I was happy to confirm the candidates whose complete runs I read as a strong first and a top 2.1 (but not a first), respectively.

Oxford English students write confidently and often with flair on an impressive range of medieval texts and authors, including plenty of non-canonical material. I was struck, too, by the quality of argument and expression in the work of those candidates whose performance in other respects had placed them at the weaker end of the cohort. This must, I think, be recognised as one of the benefits of the tutorial system. On the other hand, the submitted work revealed some uncertainty among even the best candidates over referencing: many students seemed unsure which style to use, and how to use it. Students need clear advice on referencing, and the resources to back it up (eg regular feedback, online tutorials and/or tests); discussion of referencing can also be a place to reinforce messages concerning plagiarism and related issues (on which, more below).

In exams, candidates were often picked up for failing to address the precise terms of the question; how harshly to penalise such cases was a frequent source of disagreement between markers. The temptation to reproduce a pre-prepared essay in response to a relevant key word in a title quotation is easily understood, especially under the pressure of exam conditions. That pressure is increased when a student who already knows that s/he will have to write three answers in three hours is confronted with a list of twenty quotations (to take the example of paper 3a) whose relevance to the texts s/he is hoping to discuss is not immediately obvious. It is

not surprising that students sometimes panic and make poor decisions. Adding 15 minutes reading/thinking time to the start of the exam could yield better-considered answers. Those Course II papers that ask for two answers in three hours (eg paper A3a), and yield high quality work, could provide an alternative model.

In general, the markers' comments that I saw were very full, well-considered, and clearly-written. In a minority of cases, however, the comments were in note form and rather opaque to an outside observer, and in a couple of examples I was not able to reconstruct the process by which the markers had come to their agreed mark for a paper. The Faculty needs to take steps to ensure that the good practice of most markers in this respect is observed by all.

Third markers are employed when there is a large discrepancy between the original markers' raw marks, or in cases where agreement cannot be found within the marking pair. The system seemed to be working well. However, some thought might be given to the comments offered by third markers. It would be more helpful to those of us interested in the process (externals, but also potentially the candidate) if, since the third marker is not blind-marking but adjudicating between the two given marks, s/he could directly address the disagreement: "Although I accept this aspect of *x*'s criticism, this is outweighed by these aspects highlighted by *y*".

It became obvious during the meetings of the Board that some attention needs to be given to how consistency is guaranteed across the main papers where big runs of scripts are divided among several markers. A way needs to be found of moderating between the marking team. Various options could be weighed up (eg staggering the division of the runs, giving one of the markers a sampling-and-moderating role across the marking team, statistical analysis). If a process of moderation takes root, then I can see no reason in principle why papers could not in future be split among a larger number of markers, thereby easing the extraordinary burden that FHS marking must place on examiners and assessors.

To turn to the workings of the Board at its July meetings. The Board itself is a small group compared to that at most other HEIs, but I was struck by its focus and its commitment both to the candidates and to the integrity of the examining process. One question we discussed, and that could be given some further thought, is the best way to ensure that matters discussed by the Board (not only revisions to policy, but also shifts in nuance and emphasis) are disseminated more widely to the rest of the faculty, to new markers, college tutors, and the student body.

The greater part of the two marks meetings was taken up with borderline cases. The database had already identified for us those candidates who had narrowly missed the criteria for a higher class (usually a first), and all such candidates were discussed fully. (In other HEIs it would be normal for such discussions to be minuted in case of a subsequent student query or appeal, but this is not done at Oxford.) There was a further 'grey area' of candidates who had (as it were) narrowly missed narrowly missing the criteria. There are no established conventions to define this grey area, but the Board seemed to reach consensus quickly in such cases, and I was not persuaded

that a complex piece of customary legislation (as is used by History & English, for example) would have made for a more efficient process. Selected papers of most borderline candidates were sent for re-reading. I was reassured to see that the outcome of such re-reading was more often than not a confirmation that the candidate belonged in the lower class, and that when marks were raised it was only within the parameters set by the raw marks already awarded. You are effectively policing the borderline between 2.1 and 1st. The 25% of firsts this year represented a return to historical levels after a couple of 'bumper' years, and does not in any way seem inappropriate.

The question of plagiarism came up in a couple of cases this year, though in the end, after further investigation (and a lot of extra work for the Chair), it became clear that the markers had not meant to imply that an academic offence had been committed. However, the episode highlighted the need for a clear policy and set of procedures around plagiarism that are understood by all markers (and college tutors, and students), and that can therefore be set in motion the moment that there is any suspicion that plagiarism has occurred. The Board should not be investigating cases of suspected plagiarism; its role should be to receive notification of any penalties imposed after an investigation, and to feed those into its classification process (as is done currently with penalties for late submission, for example).

Plagiarism is too dispiriting a note on which to conclude. Instead, I will reiterate how impressed I have been, in this my first year of appointment, with the quality of the candidates' work and the dedication and hard work of the examining Board. I trust that their extraordinary commitment is duly appreciated and recognised by those colleagues not currently involved in examining! Lastly, I am personally grateful – but I think I am joined by the whole Board in this – to Tiffany Stern, who oversaw every aspect of the examining process, and chaired the meetings themselves, with an exemplary blend of patience, calmness, humanity and good humour. That her successor was not at the meetings to see how it should be done seemed like an opportunity missed.

FHS English Language & Literature;

FHS Classics and English

Examiner: Professor Jennifer Richards, Newcastle University

This was my first year as external examiner of BA English and English and Classics at Oxford. I was sent much helpful information in advance of the exam board, including, most usefully, last year examiners' reports. All questions I raised were answered promptly by Ms Angie Johnson or by Professor Tiffany Stern. I was given several runs of scripts to read, plenty for me to get a good sense of the students' work and the marking process. I was also always given clear direction on what I needed to do. At no point did I feel 'at sea', and I must warmly thank both Ms Johnson and Professor Stern for the time they took to induct me. Their preparation for the Exam Board was meticulous, and the process ran extremely smoothly. Plus, the hospitality of the English faculty was second to none: thank you.

I was really impressed by the care taken by the Exam Board to ensure that the process ran professionally. First, Professor Stern deserves congratulations in this her last year as Chair. She was an exemplary chair, always on top of her role, well informed, and scrupulous in the attention she gave to each candidate. The members of the faculty who took part in the examining process were equally diligent and conscientious. I was struck by the number of people who volunteered to read borderline scripts and also by the care they took over this. There was no attempt to 'raise' candidates who fell into this category. 8 candidates on the 2.1 / 1st achieved the higher degree class, 13 did not. This year about 26% of the candidates achieved firsts.

I can confirm that the:

- academic standards set for awards are appropriate;
- assessment processes are rigorous;
- standards of student performance in the programmes are comparable with student achievements at other higher education institutions that I have examined at.

All of this is commendable. Further thoughts and recommendations follow:

Remarking and scaling

As an examiner I am usually opposed to remarking finals' borderline candidates when the marking is obviously fair and professional. At Oxford, it is different, though. There are so many markers involved across the faculty and no clear sense of how colleagues are trained or mentored. This means that marking discrepancies are more likely and thus it is crucial that there should be a robust process of third, sometimes fourth marking. This is in place. When a problem is raised – for example, a significant discrepancy (15 marks or higher) –scripts are read by a third

examiner, and sometimes they are seen by an external too. The re-marking process is managed in the sense that we are all bound by the raw marks. (I think that's fine.)

There is a huge amount of statistical information on marking performance, and this was analysed at the Exam Board. Again this is commendable. But this information needs to be used during the year, shared with colleagues at the very least, but also perhaps used to determine who marks with whom. In addition I would echo the advice made by my predecessor Professor Helen Wilcox last year, that *all* markers should attend a training workshop. I think this is important. We routinely practise marking together in my department to ensure that we understand and use degree class descriptors. That may be a step too far at Oxford (although it can be a revealing exercise), but there are issues that do need to be addressed: the use of the full marking scale, especially at the lower end and the consistent use of penalties for rubric violation. Plagiarism, too, is a topic that needs to be explicitly discussed (see below). We did discuss scaling some marks but that discussion felt rushed and last-minute; in the end we were right *not* to do this. The analysis of mark profiles should really happen before the final Exam Board meets (surely this is possible given that we meet over 2 weeks?).

The markers always provided quite detailed feedback explaining the mark they had arrived at, but the final mark awarded after discussion was never explained. I really do think that even a brief sentence explaining how markers resolved their differences is needed. This is good practice; it might be part of an examining workshop, and it would also help externals understand the full examining process.

Plagiarism

Markers need advice on the university's plagiarism policy and how to implement it. There were two candidates whose scripts were given to the externals because concerns about indebtedness / plagiarism had been raised by an internal marker. In the one case I was given there was no fault on the part of the candidate. The internal marker had been perhaps a little zealous; the matter was resolved by a third marker.

It is commendable that markers are alert to the possibility of plagiarism. But if cheating is suspected – let's call it by its real name – then markers must provide evidence before they accuse a candidate. They can use a software programme like 'Turnitin' of course; or, in the more serious case above where the work cited was probably the marker's own, then it would probably be easiest for the marker to check this, provide page numbers etc., and simply explain why they have raised the alarm.

I note that no minutes are taken at the Exam Board. I think this is unusual. Minutes are taken at all other Exam boards I attend / have attended for two reasons: (i) so that the Board has a record of decisions made in case of an appeal and (ii) so that precedents as well as good practice are carried over year after year. How else would you remember why marks were raised to give a candidate, say, a Pass without honours?

I look forward to returning to Oxford again next year and I am especially looking forward to reading the work that the English students produce under the revised curriculum which will provide opportunities for more varied assessment. The assessment has been very exam-heavy although the students practise essay writing throughout the year. I am pleased to hear that oddity is being addressed.

FHS English Language & Literature;

FHS English and Modern Languages

Examiner: Dr. Kate McLoughlin, Birkbeck, University of London

This was my sole year as external examiner, standing in at short notice for Professor David Attwell who was unable to attend. I attended the School's special cases committee on 30 June 2014, the first examiners' meeting on 1 July 2014, the final examiners' meeting on 8 July 2014, and the examiners' meeting for the FHS English and Modern Languages on 9 July 2014.

I should like to start by commending Professor Tiffany Stern, exam board Chair, for her most efficient and friendly chairing, Ms. Angie Johnson for her stalwart administrative support, my fellow external examiners for sharing their wise advice and the Board members for their collegiality. The Board discharged the duties of examining scrupulously, fairly and humanely, and I was particularly impressed by the attention given to special cases, by the meticulous system of recording assessors' marks and comments, and by the provision made for third marking.

In the course of the examination process, a number of procedural issues arose, specifically with regard to:

- plagiarized and derivative work;
- rubric infringement;
- scaling marks up or down.

These all need to be addressed by the incoming Board but rather than suggest particular solutions, I would make some general remarks. Most importantly, procedures in each case need to be clear, fair and publicized, so that markers and candidates alike are aware of them in advance of the exam process. The distinction between plagiarized and derivative work needs to be understood by both markers and candidates. An allegation of plagiarism is serious, and the procedure that ensues from it should be followed timeously and rigorously and offer the candidate an opportunity to put his or her case in defence. Derivative work should be reflected in the marks given under the criterion of 'argument'. Similarly, a clear system of mark penalties should be in place for rubric infringement and, again, it should be obvious to all how such

infringement differs from a poor performance under the 'engagement' criterion. The issue of whether marks should be scaled up or down to smooth out disparities between pairs of markers requires resolution before the next set of exam board meetings.

My other remarks relate to marking:

1. From the comments made by assessors on the mark-sheets, it appears that assessment criteria are not being universally and uniformly applied – at least, not explicitly. The mark-sheets have the criteria printed on them and, in my view, it would be appropriate to draw all markers' attention to them at the outset of the marking cycle and encourage them to mention them explicitly in their comments.

2. There did not seem to be any statistical reason why borderline cases might be re-read with a view to confirming or adjusting marks. (This was exclusively done when a first was within reach.) The computer currently alerts attention to 'three or more 70s' but I think it would be more useful and fairer if there were a threshold average that had to be reached before a change of class could be considered. This would create a numerically demarcated zone of discretion in which the Board could review marks with a view to changing a class.

3. As mentioned by last year's external examiners, there is a marked reluctance to utilise the 2.2 band of marks. In reading scripts to check parity with other institutions, my sense was that a low Oxford 2.1 might well be a 2.2 elsewhere and a high Oxford 2.2 might be a middle or low 2.2 in other institutions. It seems that the 2.2 class is now regarded like the old 3rd class. The knock-on effect is that the 2.1 class now covers a range of performances and might itself need to be split.

4. I agree with the suggestion that any paper which fails (below 40) should go automatically to a third marker.

Overall, to judge from the four runs of scripts I read, the FHS English Language and Literature is in rude health. Candidates are widely read, conscious of critical debates, and able to organise and express their arguments with clarity and conviction. The very best work is of publishable standard, demonstrating extensive contextual and critical knowledge, admirable sensitivity to primary texts, and sophisticated, thoughtful and imaginative arguments. The candidates and their tutors are to be congratulated.

FHS English and Modern Languages

I attended the examiners' meeting on 9 July 2014. I should like to thank Dr. Stephen Parkinson, chair of the board, and Professor Ros Ballaster, the English Faculty liaison. Matters were dealt with meticulously and fairly, with careful attention to special cases.

FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF CLASSICS AND ENGLISH 2014

This year there were 6 candidates, all of whom took the Tragedy Link paper as well as the Epic Link. There was a wide range of other options: Greek Literature of the 5th Century BC; Latin Literature of the 1st Century BC; Ovid; Augustine; Comparative Philology; Sexuality and Gender in Greece and Rome; The Reception of Classical Literature in Poetry in English; Shakespeare; English Literature from 1100–1509; English Literature from 1900 to the present day; Paper 3 combined; English Literature from 1740–1832; English Literature 600–1100. Some candidates also submitted theses.

Classifications (no data for 2012/13 due to the small number of candidates that year):

Class	Number			Percentage		
	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12
I	2	-	4	33.33	-	50
II.i	4	-	4	66.67	-	50
II.ii	0	-	0			
III	0	-	0			
Pass	0	-	0			
Fail	0	-	0			

Prizes:

The Passmore Edwards Prize for the best performance in C&E was awarded to Isaac Harrison-Louth, Oriel College.

Examining Procedures:

This year both the ‘traditional’ and alternative routes to a first were in place, but both of the candidates awarded firsts achieved them in the ‘traditional’ way.

Papers:

Reports for papers in each of the parent schools can be found in the examiners’ reports for Classics and English respectively.

Epic Link Paper:

The standard on this paper was not universally high; although some candidates managed to produce detailed and subtle answers to some questions, many of the essays suffered from a limited range and /or only intermittently engaged with the actual question.

The commentaries for Question 1a often tended to treat it as an exercise in noting the English authors' choice of words in translating the Latin or Greek, which is of course a legitimate aspect to explore, but all too often this was at the expense of offering much interpretation (if any) of how the original texts worked in their original contexts.

For Question 1b, most candidates ducked the question of *quite* what the Classical references in the opening lines of the passage were doing. Some talked well about the garden imagery and sexual symbolism.

Tragedy Link Paper:

The overall standard was not particularly high. All essay questions, with the exception of 5 (on imagery from the natural world) and 6 (on minor characters), neither of which was attempted, attracted pretty much equal numbers of takers. The best essays combined a nice range of examples and a variety of critical viewpoints with sense and some sensitivity; the weaker essays suffered in particular from a failure to keep a tight focus on the question.

Many thanks to the external examiners, and to Angie Johnson (English), and to Andrew Dixon and Erica Clarke (Classics).

Examiners: Dr Rebecca Armstrong (Chair), Dr Malcolm Davies, Prof Bruce Gibson (Liverpool, External), Prof Stephen Harrison, Prof Gregory Hutchinson, Prof Jennifer Richards (Newcastle, External), Dr Lynn Robson, Dr Daniel Tyler, Dr Philip West

FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF ENGLISH AND MODERN LANGUAGES 2014

1. Statistics

There were 22 candidates (21F 1 M) in the joint school, of whom 8 were awarded first class degrees. A Gibbs prize for Joint Schools with Modern Languages was awarded to Naina Bajekal (New College). Oral Distinctions were awarded to 8 candidates (4 French, 1 German, 1 Italian, 1 Russian, 1 Czech).

1.1 Numbers of candidates, by Modern Language

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
French	13	12	16	16	10
German	4	5	5	5	5
Italian	2	1	-	-	-
Spanish	1	3	1	6	6
Portuguese		1	-	-	-
Russian	1	1	-	-	-
Czech	1	-	-	-	-
Total entries	22	23	22	27	21

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

	I	II.1	II.2
French	5 (6, 5,)	8 (6, 11)	0 (0-, 0)
German	2 (2, 3)	2 (3, 2)	0 (0, 0)
Italian	1 (1, -)	1 (0,-)	0 (0, -)
Spanish	0 (2, 1)	1 (1, 0)	0 (0, 0)
Portuguese	- (1, -)	- (0, -)	- (0, -)
Russian	0 (0, -)	1 (1, -)	0 (0, -)
Czech	0 (-, -)	1 (-, -)	0 (-, -)
Total	8 (12, 9)	14 (11, 13)	0 (0, 0)
Total (%)	36.4% (52.2%, 41%)	63.6% (47.8 %, 59%)	0% (0%, 0%,)

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

	I	II.1	II.2
Female = 21	8 = 100% (58.3% 77.77%, 84.6%)	13 = 92.9% (81.8% 63.63%, 100%)	none 0% (100%, 0%)
Male = 1	0 = 0% (41.7% 22.22%,)	1 = 7,1 % (18.2% 16.37%)	none 0% (0%, 0%)

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

	I	II.1	II.2
Female = 21	38.1% (43.75%, 38.88%)	61.9% (56.25%, 63.63%)	0% (0% 0%)
Male = 1	0% (71.4%, 50%)	100% (28.6%, 50%,)	0% (0%, 0%)

2. Examiners

English: Prof Ros Ballaster (co-ordinator), Dr James McBain, Dr Michele Mendelssohn, Dr Kate McLoughlin (external)

Modern Languages: Dr Stephen Parkinson (Chair), Dr Ian MacLachlan (French), Dr Georgina Paul (German) Dr Emanuella Tandello (Italian), Dr Jonathan Thacker (Spanish), Dr Julie Curtis (Russian), Dr Jan Fellerer (Czech) Dr Danielle Hipkins (external)

3. Conduct of the Examination and Final Meeting

The Modern Languages office received a number of queries from EML candidates regarding the interpretation of EML examination regulations for permissible combinations of papers, revealing a lack of informed advice at the College level. The provision for an Optional Additional paper in English was a cause for some confusion, as there is no requirement on candidates to identify which of their papers is the additional one. While this does not complicate the processing of marks, as candidates offering an additional paper are assessed on language papers and the best six content papers, the issue became crucial when candidates wishing no longer to offer an additional paper were unsure of which papers they could or should withdraw from.

The Chair and Coordinator had a very productive pre-marks meeting at which medical cases were evaluated and a small number of borderline re-readings were agreed. The Chair would wish to commend to the Modern Languages faculty the explicit English Faculty guidance on re-reading practice.

It was noted that the two faculties had divergent practices in the marking of Joint School scripts. In Modern Languages the scripts of joint school candidates are marked and moderated with the main school cohort for each paper, the marks being separated only at the point of insertion into marks processing programmes. In English the joint school candidates are marked as separate script batches, and sometimes by different pairs of examiners. The Joint Standing Committee may wish to consider whether this procedure may lead to inequality of treatment.

The marks were efficiently processed by the Modern Languages Faculty's in-house system. The transmission of marks between Examination offices was less than satisfactory, with handwritten English mark sheets needing manual retranscription. It is to be hoped that the successful piloting of electronic submission of marksheets in Modern Languages will be extended to English. The algorithm for combining the marks of English papers 3a and 3b, not explicit in the Examining Conventions, was successfully incorporated into the marks programme at a late stage. The implementation of the Alternative Route to the First, agreed by both Faculties, had not been incorporated into the programme, but was uncontroversially applied to three candidates.

The conclusion of the final meeting was slightly delayed by the need to adjust the signing list to accommodate a change of external examiner. Prompt action by Faculty and Examination Schools staff prevented disruption to the meeting.

Stephen Parkinson
Chair of Examiners

FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF HISTORY AND ENGLISH 2014

Part I

A. Statistics

All candidates

Class	No						%					
	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
I	4	2	0	5	2	3	33.3	22.2	0	62.5	22.2	25
II.1	8	7	4	3	7	9	66.7	77.8	100	37.5	77.8	75
II.2	-	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	-	-
III	-	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	-	-

All candidates, divided by male and female

Class	Number										Percentage (%) of gender									
	2014		2013		2012		2011		2010		2014		2013		2012		2011		2010	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
I	3	1	0	2	0	0	3	2	0	2	100	11.1	0	33.3	0	0	100	40	0	28.6
II.1	0	8	3	4	1	3	0	3	2	5	0	88.9	100	66.7	100	100	0	60	100	71.4
II.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
III	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

A. New scrutiny procedure came into effect for FHS 2014 by which the minimum average mark of candidates attaining a First by the Alternate Route was changed from 66 to 67.5.

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

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

12 candidates took the examination. There were four firsts and eight upper seconds, with no mark below a 2:1; the proportion of firsts was therefore up on the two previous years (see statistics above).

The examination process ran entirely smoothly, primarily thanks to the expertise of the History Administrator who is warmly thanked. The English Paper 3 continues to require manual entry of the split marks and operation of the algorithm to deliver the final result—but given the small number of candidates this is not onerous.

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

The male candidates outperformed the female candidates this year. The size of the joint school is not large enough to support a statistical analysis, but the board notes that the English main schools saw a significant imbalance in achievement which may require consideration at Faculty Board level.

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

There were no particularly salient issues requiring report.

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

None.

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

The examiners were pleased to see an exceptionally strong performance by the top candidate (and Gibbs Prize winner) this year—and the highest proportion of firsts for four years.

F. Members of the Board of Examiners

Prof. H. Small (Chair)

Mr P. Ghosh

Ms J. Johnson

Dr N. Nowakowska

Dr S. Park

Dr J. Sexton

MST AND MPHIL (MEDIEVAL STUDIES) IN ENGLISH

2013-14

Part I

A. STATISTICS

(1) Numbers and percentages in each class/category

Category	Number				Percentage			
	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
Distinction	22	43	29	28	31	50	34.5	37.3
Pass	49	43	54	47	69	50	64.5	62.7
Fail	0*	0	1	0	0	0	1	0

*Seven students (10%) have yet to complete; each piece of 'failed' work can be re-submitted once (by Monday of 0th week of Michaelmas term); should re-submitted work not pass (60 or above), this will convert to a 'Fail'.

(2) Vivas

Vivas were not used.

(3) Marking of Scripts

All scripts were double-marked. Third-marking was used in cases of stubborn disagreement.

B. EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

There were no changes to the criteria used in 2012-13. The double route to the Distinction was retained. Discretion to round up averages, up to a maximum of 0.5%, was again made available by the Proctors. The Faculty may wish to consider whether, in the light of comments from some external examiners, this rounding up should be made automatic rather than discretionary. The Final Examiners' Meeting was brought forward by one week. This slight compression of the timetable gave rise to no difficulty.

C. CHANGES FOR THE FACULTY TO CONSIDER

1. The Faculty may wish to consider whether written work for the MSt should be submitted in electronic form as well as hard copy. This would be helpful in the cases of suspected plagiarism.
2. At present the feedback given to the candidates is often simply a redaction or *précis* of the examiners' comments on the marking form. The Faculty may wish to consider whether examiners should be encouraged to focus their feedback more narrowly on remediable shortcomings, as well perhaps as offering succinct advice about strategies for improvement. So to revise the nature of the comments on the feedback form will create additional work for examiners and assessors.

D. PUBLICATION OF EXAMINATION CONVENTIONS

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

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE EXAMINATION

See attached report.

B. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ISSUES

Grades by reference to gender:

	Percentage: Female / Male			
Category	2013/14	2012/2013	2011/12	2010/11
PGT School	59 / 41	66 / 34	65 / 35	63 / 37
Distinction	59 / 41	53 / 47	41 / 59	57 / 43
Pass	59 / 41	79 / 21	78 / 22	66 / 34
Fail	0 / 0	0 / 0	100 / 0	0 / 0
Incomplete*	57 / 43	67 / 33	100 / 0	100 / 0

*Candidates who received fail marks during the programme.

C. DETAILED NUMBERS

N/A for MSt.

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

N/A for MSt.

E. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUALS

This part is physically separate.

F. THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Professor David Womersley (Chair)
Dr Giles Bergel
Professor Charlotte Brewer
Dr Kathryn Murphy
Dr Sos Eltis
Dr Peter McDonald
Dr Hannah Sullivan
Professor Daniel Wakelin

Professor Claire Connolly (UCC)
Professor Clare Hanson (Southampton)
Professor Nicholas McDowell (Exeter)
Professor Jeremy Smith (Glasgow)
Professor Peter Stoneley (Reading)
Dr Matthew Townend (York)

M.St. and M.Phil. in English, Chair of Examiners' Report for 2013-14

A. Procedures

There were three new internal examiners this year (Womersley, McDonald, and Sullivan) and one new external (Townend). At the first meeting of the Board (at which only internal examiners were present) the criteria for classification and the timetable were approved, and Michaelmas 'C' options were allocated to markers. Slight alterations were made to the wording of the feedback and marking forms, in part to tighten and clarify, in part in response to concerns expressed by the externals in 2012-13.

After all meetings prior to the final meeting the external examiners were sent the minutes. After those meetings where marks were reported and agreed the externals were sent the marks and invited to comment. No comments were received. In addition the Chair wrote to all externals at the beginning of the year to introduce himself, to explain in general terms the running of the examination, and to encourage them to contact him if they had any concerns or questions. None did so.

The majority of the marking was handled by the internal examiners, but nevertheless a large number of assessors was required.

As in previous years, essays and dissertations with highest, lowest, and borderline marks were sent to the externals, not for third marking, but to allow them to assess the appropriateness of standards and marking. After consulting the Chair in 2012-13, it was agreed slightly to alter the criterion for identifying which dissertations should be sent to the externals for review. Last year the dissertations of all candidates whose marks total, before the addition of the mark for the dissertation, was 210 or above were sent to the relevant external. This year only those dissertations where the confirmation of the higher of the raw marks would result in a change in classification were sent to the relevant external. The purpose of this change was slightly to reduce the marking load of the externals, which it was felt had been too heavy in 2012-13. In practice, however, this change of principle coincided in 2013-14 with a rather different distribution of raw marks, and as a result the reduction in the marking load of the externals was greater than intended. Nevertheless, the marking load was still sufficient for the externals to acquire the necessary familiarity with the examination, and to be able therefore to offer the required reassurances concerning quality and standards. The change in criterion was recorded in the minutes of the first examiners' meeting, and this was sent to all external examiners.

At the final examiners' meeting the examiners confirmed the marks awarded to dissertations, discussed three problematic cases, and then classified the candidates. The overwhelming majority of candidates could be classified without difficulty. Very careful and extended consideration was given to the few who could not. The judgement of the external examiners was particularly appealed to in these cases.

The examiners then proceeded to reflect more generally on the examination, focusing particularly on the large number of late submissions, and the larger than usual number of pieces of work which were failed. Once again, the decisive role of the dissertation in classification was discussed and arguments for and against the current dispensation considered. More positively, the exceptional performance of candidates in the 650-1550 strand was noted: the Faculty may wish to consider the possible reasons for this anomaly.

The Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize was awarded to Ms Kirsten Macfarlane for her essay titled '*an earthquake of nobility: Ruling Passion and Populace in Shakespeare and Early Modern Theories of Kingship*'.

B. Administration

Claire Rylatt looked after the administration for the examination until she left the English Faculty on 2 May 2014. Thereafter, Kate Gear assumed responsibility. The whole process worked very smoothly, thanks to the experience and attention to detail that Claire and Kate brought to the work. It is difficult to see how this aspect of the examination could be improved.

C. Criteria

The criteria for classification were the same as in 2012-13. The two routes to a Distinction were retained: a candidate must gain 70 or over on the dissertation and an average of 70 across all four elements (three essays and a dissertation); or the candidate needs 68 or over on the dissertation and an average of 72.

D. External Examiners' Comments

The reports of the external examiners are attached. The following comments were made at the final examiners' meeting.

Professor Stoneley mentioned that he had enjoyed reading the work sent to him, and that one piece was as good as any piece of graduate work that he had ever seen. He felt that it was disappointing that students were not performing in the dissertation, and that the dissertation should be weighted. With regard to electronic submission of work, he felt that this would be useful in terms of reviewing the word length of essays.

Dr Townend said that he had read good work over the year, and that he had found it very learned and scholarly. He had been happy with the level of marking, and felt that it had not been over-generous (with all students on the MSt 650-1550 strand achieving a distinction grade). The markers' comments had been full and helpful and it was good to have a dialogue explaining how marks had been agreed. He would be happy to see more work in future years. Dr Townend also recommended that the faculty should provide more specific information in the marking criteria outlining the procedures that would be used for borderline cases, as well as detailing how the Board might exercise discretion in determining final classifications. He also suggested that some

consideration might be given to the grade descriptors, noting that originality is only mentioned in the descriptor for marks above 80 and that the descriptors for pass marks may appear quite negative; it could be useful to mention what candidates have done well, as well as where there is room for improvement. He mentioned that word counts had not been provided on all essays.

Professor McDowell mentioned that he had seen significantly less work this year compared to the previous academic year, and that as he had seen only those with the highest and lowest marks, he felt that he had less of a sense of the marking overall. He said that while the expected role of the externals had been clearer this year it would be good for there to be a little more consistency with practice between years. It was a pity to have seen fewer B-course essays, which last year had been some of the most interesting work to read, and he would be happy to receive more essays to review. He mentioned that the system for showing how marks had been agreed was a good one; however on some occasions further information from the assessors would have been helpful.

Professor Connolly echoed previous comments that she had also seen less work this year, with a shift in the role of externals from third marking to overseeing the process. She suggested that it would be helpful to have the role articulated clearly at the start of the academic year. When reviewing marking forms, she had noticed higher levels of agreement this year with more evidence provided on how agreements had been reached. She felt that the B-course remains a strong aspect of the Oxford MSt, however also noted a drop in performance in the dissertation. Professor Connolly suggested that some difficulty seemed to lie in the suitability of chosen topics and that perhaps students might be guided away from these at an earlier stage.

Professor Smith mentioned that he had seen good work but that it was not as strong as that of last year, and he noted that in general marks were lower across the Language strand. He felt that it would be helpful for the Faculty to articulate in the marking criteria things that might be considered for borderline classification cases (such as the full run of marks, results in the dissertation etc). He also felt that it would be helpful to consider where the borderline falls and when cases will be reviewed. Professor Smith recommended that the Faculty think about the weighting of the dissertation and perhaps consider a system of credits to help with this.

Professor Hanson mentioned that she had a sense of having been underworked this year and was less secure in her sense of what was happening across the cohort. She also felt that some consideration should be given as to the feedback provided to students, and that it would be useful to provide them with more insight as to the process of a mark being agreed along with the general review of the work.

**REPORTS OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINERS FOR MSt AND
MPHIL (MEDIEVAL STUDIES) IN ENGLISH**

MSt 650 – 1550 and M.Phil. (Medieval Studies)

Examiner: Dr Matthew Townend

This was my first year acting as external examiner on the MSt and MPhil in English (with especial responsibility for the medieval, 650-1550 strand). I am very grateful to Faculty staff for their care and professionalism in the course of the year, and for their hospitality on the occasion of the exam board in July. In making my report, I would like to comment under the following headings:

Academic standards and quality of student work

It is clear that academic standards on the medieval strand of the MSt / MPhil are very high indeed, and fully appropriate to the degree being awarded. The student work that I saw this year was, on the whole, very impressive (indeed, I saw no failing work), and I enjoyed reading it very much: I don't know if this was an exceptional year, but essays and dissertations consistently showed high levels of scholarship, originality, insight, and sheer hard work. There were eight students on the medieval strand this year, and all eight gained thoroughly deserved Distinctions. Congratulations to them!

It is evident, therefore, that students are benefiting from high-quality teaching on the medieval strand, both in terms of the taught courses in Michaelmas and Hilary Terms, and dissertation supervision in Trinity Term (all eight students gained a mark of 70 or higher on their dissertations). Particularly gratifying was the prominence of work on Old English (with five of the eight students writing their dissertations in this field): Oxford has recently renovated its Old English provision with two key appointments, and it is clear that these are having a great effect.

Assessment procedures

Student work was assessed very fairly and conscientiously, and the double marking process is very robust. Levels of agreement between examiners are generally good, and I saw no wild disagreements. Examiners' comments were full and fair, and the record of marker dialogue in particular was excellent, an item of good practice that I would certainly commend. I understand that, in terms of student feedback, an edited digest of examiners' comments is prepared and released: obviously it is good that students are receiving helpful feedback on their work, but this

does sound like quite a lot of work for staff, and it might be better for all parties if examiners simply wrote their comments with the student in mind as well as their fellow examiner.

Examiners were clearly making good and fair use of the Faculty's grade descriptors. These are generally fine, but it struck me as odd that 'originality' only becomes a criterion for work marked at 80+, when lots of work given a lower mark can certainly be said to have elements of originality. I would also suggest that the descriptors for the lower mark bands are, at present, phrased in a somewhat negative manner, as if student work is primarily being assessed in terms of what is wrong with it, rather than what deserves credit; a bit of re-writing might be worthwhile here.

Classification and documentation

Under this heading I do have some suggestions to make – though I should begin by saying that a great deal of very clear and helpful documentation is already available, from the English Faculty's excellent MSt / MPhil handbook to the suite of University policies accessible to externals via the WebLearn site. But the English Faculty's documentation on classification procedures in particular could, I think, be fuller and more explicit, especially in the light of section 2.3.3 ('Marking scheme and conventions for classification') of the University's Policy and Guidance for Examiners. This section contains the following paragraphs:

At their first meeting, the examiners should satisfy themselves, e.g. in the light of comments from their predecessors, that their conventions (including marking scheme and method of aggregating marks) are comprehensive and unambiguous. If this is not the case, they may suggest amendments and formalise interpretations: any such modifications must be approved by the supervisory body responsible for the course and the examination. Modifications must be published to prospective candidates not less than one whole term before the examination takes place or, where assessment takes place in the first term of a course, at the beginning of that term.

Marking conventions should be as clear and comprehensive as possible. They should include details of the decimal precision of the calculations (and thus conventions for rounding), details of the nature of any scaling used and criteria for the use of such scaling. They should also include details of academic penalties for late submission.

Final marks must be expressed as **whole numbers** not decimal points, using the full 100-point scale. A copy of the finalised conventions must be supplied to each candidate and to the Proctors' Office.

I think that there are some further steps that the English Faculty might take to ensure that its 'conventions [...] are comprehensive and unambiguous'. For example, there is at present no statement in the documentation on the weighting of marks (that is, how marks for individual papers are combined to calculate the overall average), and this lack of clarity is not helped by the fact that the University of Oxford does not credit rate its courses. (In the event, it turned out that

the four units of assessment – three course-work essays and the dissertation – were weighted equally, though whether this is the best arrangement is another question, and one that the Faculty has, I understand, pondered repeatedly in recent years.)

At the meeting of the exam board on 8 July 2014, two specific issues arose, both of which might be addressed through fuller documentation:

- (1) Identification of ‘borderline’ candidates. A number of candidates had been identified as being on a ‘borderline’ between Pass and Distinction, and the dissertations of such candidates had been sent to designated externals for them to make a judgement. But it was not immediately transparent how such borderline candidates had been identified, as there is currently no statement on the matter in the Faculty’s documentation. When I raised this question at the exam board, the Chair of Examiners was able to give a clear and coherent explanation, but I would suggest that an explicit statement in advance on the identification and treatment of borderline candidates would be helpful.
- (2) Rounding or non-rounding of overall averages. Although marks for individual papers were expressed as whole numbers (inevitably, since each paper had only one unit of assessment), candidate averages were recorded to two percentage points. The Faculty’s classification criteria for a Distinction require students to gain either a mark of 70 or above on their dissertation and an overall average of 70 or above, or a mark of 68 or above on their dissertation and an overall average of 72 or above. This year there were candidates (on separate MSt strands) who achieved the dissertation mark for a Distinction, but were 0.25% short on their average. The Chair’s guidance to the exam board was that the University of Oxford allows discretion on whether or not to round up to a whole number in such cases. (Such a principle cannot, as far as I can see, be found in University guidelines, but the Faculty’s Academic Officer has helpfully advised me that the English Faculty has received specific permission to do this from the Proctors.)

I continue to have some concerns about this procedure. At present, the English Faculty’s documentation is lacking a statement about rounding or discretion, including – very importantly – an indication of what sorts of criteria might be invoked in deciding whether or not to exercise discretion and raise a student to a Distinction. Even if an exam board is able to reach reasonable and coherent grounds for applying discretionary rounding in some cases but not in others, there is a danger that – without written guidelines that need to be observed – such a procedure might amount, in effect, to exam boards devising new and supplementary classification criteria on the spot (an occurrence which would neither be transparent to students nor fully in accord with section 2.3.3 of the University’s Policy). So I would recommend strongly that the Faculty should publish in advance its policies and procedures on these, and any other related, matters.

MSt 1550 – 1700

Examiner: Professor Nicholas McDowell

This was my second year as external examiner for the MSt. in English (1550-1700) and once again I found it a smoothly-run and indeed enjoyable process, for which I thank the administrators and the chair of examiners, Professor Womersley. The experience of examining was however different this year with regards to the expectations and workload of external examiners, and I shall begin by addressing these differences, which relate to my report from last year.

Examining Process and Response to Last Year's Report

In my report for 2012-13 I made several comments about the issues which arose from asking external examiners to offer a third mark for each essay and dissertation that was sent to them, regardless of whether or not the two internal examiners had been able to agree upon a mark. I felt uneasy about this, as it was not clear to me whether I should be changing marks that had been agreed internally. In practice I only offered a third mark in cases where a mark could not be agreed internally. This year I was sent only the highest and lowest marks, along with a couple of borderline marks, but was not asked to offer a third mark, apart from a single occasion when I was asked for a third mark because a candidate needed a distinction in one paper to get a distinction in the course overall. This led to a much lighter workload.

While the external examiner's role is much reduced to one of checking consistency and standards rather than focusing on individual scripts, I can see the logic of making this change; indeed the change responds to the points I made in last year's report. However, the external examiners were not made aware at any point that the change was being made, so it was initially confusing. I raised these points at the board, and the chair explained that there had been a decision to try to ensure marks were agreed internally rather than being sent to externals for a decision. On balance I think this is the best policy, although it leaves externals with less to do and risks turning their job into one of rubber-stamping. At the same time it is fairer to the students, some of whom under the old system could rather arbitrarily have their marks changed by externals. Perhaps, though, future changes to fundamental process could be communicated to externals in advance rather than retrospectively.

There were other reasons for the decreased workload in 2013-14, which included a commendable response to my concern in last year's report about the wide variation in internal marking of the B-course bibliography essays. Some of the discrepancies in marks between internal examiners were very large, and as external I had had to make decisions on marks in four cases. In response, a detailed paragraph of instruction about what is expected of a B-course bibliography essay has been inserted into the MSt. Handbook. I felt this year there was much greater consistency of

expectation and grading by internal examiners, and also a clearer sense among students of what was expected of them in this paper.

The other reason, I assume, for a decrease in workload was the decrease in the number of students taking the early modern MSt.. This issue was valuably discussed at the board, as part of a discussion of the future of the programme, and it was considered likely to be a blip.

Appropriateness of Academic Standards; Fairness and Rigorousness of Assessment Processes

I was entirely happy with the academic standards for awards, which are appropriate to a taught Masters course at a world-leading English faculty. I was impressed with the amount and quality of comment provided by internal markers, and was nearly always able to see how their discussion had led to a particular final mark. There seemed to be less disagreement this year, which may or may not be due to encouragement from the chair of examiners!

Standards of Student Performance and Comparability of those Standards

Once again, a high percentage of work that I examined was in the distinction range (70+) and throughout all forms of assessment I observed work of a very high standard for a 9-month taught postgraduate course. There did seem to be a slight dip in performance overall compared to last year, a point made by several of the internal examiners present at the board. Once more I was particularly impressed by the incorporation of bibliographical methodology and approaches into the students' work—this aspect of work in the early modern period in Oxford is far superior to that in most institutions, and the English Faculty is evidently employing its unparalleled resources in book history to impressive effect at postgraduate level.

Issues to Bring to the Attention of Supervising Committees

None, other than possibly the issue of notifying examiners in advance about fundamental changes to the process of external examining, discussed above.

Good Practice

I was once again very impressed by the quality of teaching and student work in this course. The response to my comments last year has been impressive, and illustrates that the Faculty does listen to its externals. The board itself was once more a model of incisive discussion, concern for both students and standards, and (importantly) always good-humoured.

I look forward to my examining role in 2014-15.

MSt 1700-1830; 1830-1914

Examiner: Professor Clare Connolly

This was my second year of appointment as external examiner. As with last year, the administration of the examination process was conducted with efficiency and courtesy. Instructions and expectations were made very clear at the start of the year via the documentation received. Despite these continuities, the experience did feel quite different from last year. I received smaller numbers of scripts and was given more time to read and comment. There were far fewer circumstances where I was asked to act as third marker. I report these changes quite neutrally: in many ways the changes were positive, not least as they showed the Faculty's attention to last year's comments regarding more judicious use of external advice. The Board may however wish to reflect upon its processes in this respect, and to consider its use of its external members.

In the case of the essays and dissertations that I read, I saw very strong evidence of sound internal marking, appropriate consultation between the markers, and relevant and helpful feedback.

As with last year, the work that I read was mostly good and quite often excellent. The hallmark of this degree continues to reside in the thorough archival and bibliographical research enabled by the excellent library resources and expert academic advice available at Oxford. I saw some cases where genuinely original work emerged from a deep knowledge of the texts discussed. As with last year, however, the framing of research questions and elaboration of the conceptual apparatus could have been stronger across the work I read. Issues of critical and conceptual framing emerged in particular in relation to dissertations, almost all of which would have benefitted from clearer and more explicit framing of an argument.

There was an opportunity to discuss this and other matters at the examiners' meeting, which was conducted with exemplary efficiency. The members of the board whom I met are deeply engaged teachers, clearly engaged in safeguarding the quality of the degree and upholding the highest academic standards.

MSt 1900 – present day

Examiner: Professor Clare Hanson

Academic Standards

The academic standards for this award are appropriate and are consistently applied. The marking criteria are clearly articulated and helpfully inform the markers' written comments on student work. They have been slightly amended by the Examining Board to reflect the complexity of the judgements involved in the assessment process.

Assessment Processes

Assessments are blind double-marked and the agreed mark is the result of a discussion between the two markers, with a rationale for the agreed mark being recorded on the forms seen by the External Examiners, although it is not clear from the 'Guidance to Examiners' whether this rationale also appears on the form that goes to the students (for further comments on feedback see below). The marking is rigorous and is fairly conducted according to institutional guidance.

Standards of Student Performance

The work produced by students on this course is exceptional, demonstrating independence of mind, sharp critical insight and scholarly rigour. As last year, I was particularly impressed by the 'B' course essays which very productively blend textual scholarship and critical analysis. The essays for the 'World Literatures' strand were also extremely good: intellectually ambitious, conceptually sophisticated and compellingly argued. I only saw one outstanding dissertation this year (out of a total of five) and overall the marks for the 2013-14 cohort were slightly depressed in comparison with last year.

Issues for Faculty Attention

The MSt is a taught course which has a very compressed time-frame. In view of this, student feedback needs to be of high quality, particularly during the first two terms. It is rather difficult to comment on this part of the assessment process as the Externals do not normally see the feedback forms which go to students. However on the basis of those I have seen, together with the 'Guidance to Examiners', I have some points to make. The QAA emphasises that feedback should allow students to grasp the strengths and weaknesses of current work but should also help them to see how they can improve in the future (they use the rebarbative term 'feedforward' for this). The feedback form is currently the only formal mechanism for feedback on the MSt course and as it is presently constituted, I'm not sure it always fulfils this dual purpose. I'm struck by the fact that the markers' original comments – which are so often immensely thoughtful, detailed and instructive - do not actually reach the students because of the 200 word limit on the comments for the joint report. While this limit may have been imposed to ensure consistency and to keep the markers' load at a reasonable level, I am not sure that it is in the students' best interests. I would like the Board (a) to reconsider this word limit; (b) to consider the possibility

that the student should see both markers' comments (which would of course change the nature of the comments); (c) to consider including 'suggestions for improvement' as a matter of course on the feedback form (these are as valuable for extremely able students as for those who are performing less strongly).

It is a privilege to read the work of the MSt students, which is so clearly grounded in stimulating teaching as well being informed by rich library resources. I would particularly like to stress the intellectual energy evident in the work I read from the World Literatures strand this year.

Finally, I would like to thank the Board of Examiners and Kate Gear as Graduate Studies Officer for their efficiency and helpfulness.

MSt English and American Studies

Examiner: Professor Peter Stoneley

I am pleased to report on the MSt in English for this academic year, as external examiner covering the American Literature papers. I am convinced that the degree has been managed and examined in a highly professional manner. The administrative officer, Ms. Gear, sent all materials in good time, and with clear guidance as to the external's role. Professor Womersley conducted the final exam board in a thorough and courteous way.

The work sent was very interesting, with some exceptionally sophisticated and interesting work at the top of the range, and even in the lower ranges, intelligent and interesting – if flawed – essays. The internal markers provided clear and detailed written commentaries as to how they had arrived at a mark, and I am confident that the standards were appropriate, and the processes were conducted fairly.

I am slightly uncomfortable that the final degree classification rests heavily on the performance in the dissertation, and yet the dissertation bears the same number of credits as the other components. This can lead to the situation – as happened this year – in which a student has a high overall average, and yet is awarded a Pass, not a Distinction. It is not a problem to prioritise the dissertation, as it is a longer piece of work, and it might show research potential and “exit velocity.” But my feeling is that anomalous overall marks could be avoided by weighting the dissertation component to reflect this sense of its relative importance.

We spent quite a bit of time at the final exam board looking at borderline candidates. It struck me as unusual that the rounding up of marks by .25 or by .5 – which can alter a classification – should be a matter for discretion. Rounding up is in every other institution in which I have examined a numerical event which is triggered automatically when a certain threshold is reached. The question under the current regulations is when should discretion be used and not used? Is there a clear set of principles under which such discretion might be used? Although I

am happy that the exam board exercised discretion in a fair and consistent way (looking at preponderance and exit velocity), I thought that there was room for clarification in the regulations.

The externals were sent significantly less work to read this year as compared to last year. I would appreciate a slightly fuller engagement with the degree in terms of the amount of work sent. Having said that, the turnaround time – especially for the dissertations – is very tight, so I would struggle to manage a large increase.

Inevitably there were some large deviations in the percentages of Distinctions awarded from one strand of the degree to another. The mean percentage was probably around 25%. I do not wish to venture any opinions on these disparities, as they vary from one year to the next, and I can only comment on the strand for which I was sent work. But I think it is important to monitor such disparities, and where there seem to be consistent patterns, perhaps there should be further analysis and discussion.

Again, it was a pleasure and a privilege to read excellent Masters work, to see such scrupulous and intelligent examining and management, and to be hosted so graciously.

MSt English Language

Examiner: Professor Jeremy Smith

I was the External Examiner for the MSt focusing on English Language, a programme that is (I understand) new to Oxford. The *Guidance for Examiners* requires me to make a formal response on the following points:

“(i) whether or not an institution is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements”

As far as I know, QAA has not yet as far as I know formulated a subject benchmark-statement for any PGT degree in the arts and humanities. However, extrapolating from general good practice, it is possible to determine the range of intended learning outcomes to be expected from a well-designed programme in English Language. I would expect that, by the end of such a programme, students would be able to demonstrate: awareness, knowledge and understanding of current debates in English Language and English Linguistics; a grasp of appropriate theories and methodologies in these fields; handling of conceptual, analytic and communicative skills appropriate for these subjects; advanced problem-solving and other skills relevant to successful pursuit of high-level research in these subjects, developed through a variety of learning and teaching methods; advanced intellectual skills in critical and evaluative reasoning from a variety of theoretical perspectives; enhanced communication skills appropriate for a postgraduate

qualification; advanced skills in information-handling, including IT/ICT skills and (where relevant to the research project) skills in statistical analysis; and skills in high-level time management and organization. These intended learning outcomes are those formulated for the equivalent programme at my own institution, and I can report that students on the Oxford MSt programme – though required to demonstrate their achievement of these outcomes over a time-period shorter than our own 12-month timetable – have clearly met them. The Oxford MSt is an impressive programme, wide-ranging in content and ambition, that requires students to develop in short order some extremely impressive skill-sets in both quantitative and qualitative research methods wholly appropriate to current trends in English Language studies. Although the quality of the work produced was perhaps not so generally outstanding as it was last year, and I was a little disappointed not to be shown much work with a historical perspective, the best students are very good indeed, and I saw some really good work. The MSt is in my view an excellent “research-preparation” degree.

“(ii) whether or not the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the institution’s policies and regulations;”

As last year, the assessment process seemed to me scrupulously carried out, in line with the published required outcomes for the programme and the established descriptors. The internal examiners undertook their task with considerable care, and the organization and chairing of the process, including the formal board, was absolutely exemplary. I wish to place on record my real appreciation of the hard work undertaken by Kate Gear and the administrative team; Kate and her colleagues deal with everything swiftly and efficiently and patiently, and I know that is not easily achieved with programmes of such complexity.

“(iii) whether or not the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the external examiners have experience.”

I have undertaken comparable examining at Master’s level at many UK HEIs, and I can report with complete confidence that the academic standards and achievements of students are at least comparable with those of these other institutions.

I am also asked to offer “informative comment and recommendations” on (a) “good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching, and assessment observed by the external examiners;” and (b) “opportunities to enhance the quality of learning opportunities provided to students.”

I have indicated already that the Oxford programme is quite exemplary in what it offers students. In terms of content it is clearly exceptional, and organisation is quite simply excellent. I do have a few suggestions that could be, perhaps, looked into:

(1) As I suggested last year, and would now strongly recommend, the University might consider -- as is commonplace and fully accepted in other institutions, both in the UK and overseas -- expressing weighting in terms of credits (which of course indicate student-workload), with special weight being awarded to dissertations. Although dissertations are flagged as having an importance for the award of distinctions, I think the use of credits would make the matter transparent and thus defensible; it would also underline to students the importance of this instrument of assessment. I did observe that, in all but two of the programmes offered for the MSt in English Studies, the marks for dissertations depressed students' profiles overall.

(2) This year, there were some issues to do with the definition of borderlines, and I think it would be most helpful if a set of written protocols, promulgated to the students beforehand, would again make the processes involved in awarding degrees and distinctions more transparent. A definition of what is meant by a borderline, in terms of zones where discretion might be exercised, would be helpful. Although I am very comfortable with the grading for all the degrees awarded, and with the scrupulous attention paid by the examiners to each student-profile, I am sure that some thinking-through on borderlines outside the hurly-burly of an examination board would be helpful and would make procedures more robust.

I was very sorry to learn that the MSt in English Language may not be offered next session, and hope that this hiatus is short-lived. I enjoyed my visit to Oxford, very much, and hope my contribution was helpful.