FORM OF REPORT ON EXAMINATIONS

Report on MSt and MPhil (Medieval Studies) in English, 2025-6

Professor Erica McAlpine (Chair)

Part I

A. STATISTICS

There were 109 candidates at the start of the year; 1 suspended over the course of the year.

Thus 108 students received outcomes at the first (July) or second (September) marks meetings.

(1) Numbers and percentages in each class/category

Category	**Number**			**Percentage (%)**		
	2025/26	**2024/25**	**2023/24**	**2025/26**	**2024/25**	**2023/24**
Distinction	**39**	(28)	(32)	**36.11%**	(36.84%)	(32.32%)
Merit	**43**	(27)	(41)	**39.81%**	(35.53%)	(41.41%)
Pass	**19**	(17)	(20)	**17.59%**	(22.37%)	(20.20%)
Fail	**2**	(1)	(1)	**1.85%**	(1.32%)	(1.01%)
Incomplete	**5**	(3)	(5)	**4.63%**	(3.95%)	(5.05%)
Total	**108**	(76)	(99)			

(2) If vivas are used:

Please include numerical detail of any vivas which were held, with an indication of the effect of any vivas on classes or results.

--Vivas were not used.

(3) Marking of scripts

Please give details of scripts which are not double-marked:

All essays and dissertations were double marked, as usual. In cases where the first and second marker were unable to agree a mark for an essay, that essay was sent to an appropriate member of the exam board (or occasionally another member of the faculty), who acted as the third marker (in the past we have sometimes sent third marking to externals, but we decided to stop that practice last year).

Please state whether qualitative checks were used where scaling has been employed.
There was no scaling of marks.

B. NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This year we included guidance (for markers) on the marking sheet around the length of feedback in order to help standardise the amount of feedback each student received. This did help even out the length of feedback for most students.

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

We implemented the changes proposed last year by GSC to the classification rules; this seemed to go well and resulted in a fairer distribution of categories.

Our biggest concern over procedures at the moment has to do with the increasing number of extensions, which pushes marking far into the long vac (and in some cases into the new academic year). See comments below under “general”.

D. Please describe how candidates are made aware of the examination conventions to be followed by the examiners (Please attach to the report a copy of the examination conventions and any other relevant documentation, including the relevant standing orders – see *Examination Regulations*, Regulations for the Conduct of University Examinations, Part 4, cl. 4-1-4.2,

https://examregs.admin.ox.ac.uk/Regulation?code=rftcoue-p4epoocvacaresiandremo

Candidates are made aware of the examination conventions in the MSt/MPhil Handbook, which was issued by the Graduate Office online in early October 2025. It has been continually available since that date.

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

The final outcomes board meeting on 8 July ratified the majority of candidates, with some candidates remaining to receive their outcomes later due to extensions and/or missing elements. The board held a second meeting by confidential correspondence in September to ratifying the remaining marks. 5 candidates are still incomplete due to extensions.

There were a large number of extensions this year—both self-reported, short extensions and longer, proctor-approved extensions. Those extensions pertaining to the dissertation meant that a significant portion of the marking fell during the summer vacation—which resulted in faculty members having to work longer into the vac even than last year, and also students receiving their marks quite late (sometimes after they would normally have graduated). Students are made aware, when extensions are granted, that their results and classification may be delayed, especially if the extension is in respect of a Trinity term submission. But the board wondered how we might alleviate the additional burden on markers, many of whom had not counted on receiving essays to mark in July or even August. Particularly when these essays have to be third marked, the process becomes very attenuated. And with so many students self-certifying for extensions, all of the deadlines are beginning to seem less and less firm, which is often not beneficial (even to the students receiving the extensions). In particular, having an extension on one paper earlier in the year

seems to make it more difficult to get the next one in on time (given how compressed the course is), so that students who take an extension for their Hilary term essays often feel the crunch with their dissertation deadline and end up extending that too.

Markers this year continued to be alert to SpLD covering forms, making use of the new box on the cover sheet to acknowledge having read and taken into account the inclusive marking guidelines. Some markers also spoke to the SpLD notice within their own comments, where appropriate. The Chair monitored and approved all comments sheets and feedback forms for students with SpLD forms.

The role of External Examiners was much the same as usual this year: to scrutinize essays at the top and bottom of a particular B- or C-course, and where raw marks cut across a borderline (including Pass/Merit at 64/5), and also to scrutinize tricky cases where there was a large difference between the initial raw marks (resulting in third marking). The Board decided to continue allocating all third marking to internal Oxford postholders. (This is a decision for each individual Board, though it should be noted that Divisional advice is to use internal third markers, with Externals not 'normally' expected to do it.) Our internal third marking increased the marking burden on colleagues already carrying a very considerable load in relation to the MSt/MPhil, on top of Prelims and FHS responsibilities, but we felt it resulted in consistent treatment of the essays. The Chair is enormously grateful to all colleagues who took on this task in 2025-6. The vast majority of essays were marked by Faculty postholders, though a small but important contribution was also made by colleagues working in college posts.

Every effort was made to distribute marking as evenly as possible; nevertheless, the demands made by our PGT courses on colleagues' time and energy are increasing (the total number of MSt students is *much* higher than it used to be – **we had close to 30 more students this year than we did last year**), and the next Board will want to be vigilant of this as it allocates marking across the strands. Due to patterns of faculty leave and unexpected grants and marking exemptions, along with the increasing number of students on certain strands, it sometimes became difficult to find markers (for instance, for dissertations on the American and World strand). The number of dissertations each postholder should expect to mark has gone up (it used to be 2-3 – but this year many postholders needed to mark 5, even occasionally 6 dissertations if they work in one of the later periods). I would like to thank especially those colleagues who went above and beyond their normal marking duties and/or who were willing mark essays outside of their normal field of specialization – something that will increasingly need to happen as the MSt programs grow.

At the first meeting of internal examiners in October, the Board approved both the 25-26 timetable and also the Chair's allocation of co-markers for the Michaelmas and Hilary C-Course options and the B-Courses. This was the fourth year that the Chair worked with the Chairs of Prelims and FHS to allocate marking duties before term, following the Faculty's new system of 'marking units' designed to distribute workload evenly across postholders. The system works well to ensure fairness, but of course cannot itself reduce the overall burden of marking.

At the first Hilary term meeting, marks for the C-Course essays were confirmed, and penalties applied as necessary for over-length work and late submissions. At the second meeting, in 8th Week, dissertation markers were recommended and agreed by the Board. This process is lengthy and complicated by the differing number of postholders in each period (and the differing number of students on each strand). The chair would like to thank board members for logging their suggestions for supervisors in advance of this meeting, though the process still needs to be tweaked (especially since the members of the board do not have access to the overall marking allocation spreadsheet when they are making their suggestions).

At the first Trinity term meeting, marks for the B-Course and C-Course essays were confirmed, and again penalties applied for over-length work and late submissions. The Mitigating Circumstances Sub-Committee (two members of the board, plus the Chair) met before all Hilary and Trinity term (and indeed Long Vac) meetings where marks were received. Individual cases were considered carefully and the new system implemented this year (which replaced the “grading system” for severity) was easier to manage.

The Marks Meeting in July was an in-person meeting with two internal examiners joining via Teams (pre-agreed due to unavoidable conflicts). Examiners confirmed the marks awarded to Dissertations and agreed penalties for late and over-length work; discussed and accepted the recommendations of the MCE Sub-Committee; and classified the candidates. (There was one case of potential poor academic practice/plagiarism to consider this year, though the board agreed that the increasing use of AI by students across the university poses a new complexity to how we consider these categories.) The number of extensions necessitated delaying the full discussion of prizes until the later September meeting. The External Examiners’ contributions to discussions were vitally important, as always, in both particular points of debate and in the way they provided perspectives on our examining processes. The Chair would again like to thank them for such universally thoughtful and constructive input.

A second Marks Meeting was held by Confidential Correspondence in September, at which all the same tasks were carried out, e.g. ratification of marks and outcomes, and agreement of penalties required by the Examination Regulations. The candidates whose work was considered here were mainly those who had submitted essays later following granting of Proctorial extensions. The procedures followed were the same as for the main Marks Meeting. There were a few MCE cases to discuss and approve action on—these, too, were handled by confidential correspondence by the board (the MCE committee met by Teams on two occasions in September to follow up on a couple of cases).

The MSt/MPhil examination process is often complicated, with urgent tasks cropping up unexpectedly. The Chair has been very fortunate to have worked this year with two extraordinary members the graduate office team—Nina Crisp and Holly Bickerton. The process would have been impossible without their efficiency, careful handling, wisdom, and hard work. Grateful thanks also go to Andy Davice for his advice on several occasions.

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

[Redacted]

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

Average marks for each component of the course this year are as follows:

Michaelmas term C course: 68.39
Hilary term B course: 68.66
Hilary term C course: 67.93
Dissertation: 68.03

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

n/a

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

[Redacted]

F. NAMES OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Internal:

Professor Erica McAlpine (Chair)

Professor Laura Ashe

Professor Elleke Boehmer

Professor Morgan Day Frank

Professor Lorna Hutson

Professor Kate McLoughlin

Professor Hannah Sullivan

Professor Daniel Wakelin

External:

Professor David Amigoni (University of Keele)

Professor Daniela Caselli (University of Manchester)

Professor Orietta da Rold (University of Cambridge)

Professor Graeme Macdonald (University of Warwick)

Professor Adrian Streete (University of Glasgow)

Dr Fionnghuala Sweeney (University of Newcastle)

External Examiner report for the academic year 2025/26: Professor David Amigoni (Keele University)

External examiner name: Professor David Amigoni

External examiner home institution: Keele University

Level: Postgraduate

Division: Humanities Division

Faculty: Faculty of English Language and Literature

Course(s) examined: KEGL: Master of Studies in English

Year of office: Other year of term of office

Part A

12. Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? (Please refer to paragraph 15 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

12.1. A1. i) Academic standards of students

Yes

12.2. A1. ii) Academic achievements of students

Yes

13. Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:(Please refer to paragraph 16 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

13.1. A2. i) The frameworks for higher education qualifications?

Yes

13.2. A2. ii) Any applicable subject benchmark statement?

Yes

14. In relation to the academic process:

14.1. A3. Does it measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?

Yes

14.2. A4. Is it conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?

Yes

15. In relation to the information and evidence provided to you:

15.1. A5. i) Did you receive it in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

Yes

15.2. A5. ii) Did you receive sufficient information to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

16. Regarding your previous report, please indicate whether you:

16.1. A6. Received a written response to your previous report?

Yes

16.2. A7. Are satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?

Yes

Part B

17. B1. a) How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?

The academic standards compare very favourably. There is a culture of very high standards across the assessing unit, shared by all tutors/assessors, and communicated effectively to students through programme documentation and assessment feedback.

18. B1. b) Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).

I looked at work across the entirety of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century courses offered by the programme. Impressive student achievement is evidenced through skills of close reading and literary analysis, but also a strong commitment to context building through primary source and archival work and critically informed approaches to secondary material. The standard of work achieved on this programme is always highly competent, frequently excellent, often outstanding. I saw work this year, in particular in the dissertation submissions, which was of publishable standard, making a strong and original contribution to the discipline. I noted the way in which a period frame can be used to enable students to interrogate another period, for example in the Hilary Term C courses, 'The Lure of the Medieval in the Long Nineteenth Century, 'British Romantic Poetry: Victorian and Twentieth Century After Lives'. These modules enable students to develop skills and knowledge in more than one period, while also enabling them to think critically and creatively through intertextual connections in fluent and well constructed prose arguments. Thus, the programme enables students to achieve a real depth of literary expertise that compares very favourably with other M level programmes offered by other providers.

19. B2. Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

The assessment process is conducted with a consistent and impressive rigour. All work is double marked, and agreement is reached between markers; there is a shared understanding of assessment goals, often substantial agreement and, in the case of divergences a genuine debate and discussion between markers to ensure that a fair and consistent assessment is returned to students with full and constructive feedback. I was fully satisfied that assessment practices were conducted fairly. Where there were significant divergences between markers, the system of third marking worked effectively to produce a justified and fair outcome (that also reached an understanding of the sources of the divergence). During the course of the year, I was contacted about matters that needed to be resolved for the Board, and these were always shared in the context of University regulations. The same was true of the final Board in July where we assessed a potential case of academic misconduct: full reports were shared in advance, and a full, principled and fair discussion was conducted at the Board.

20. B3. Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University? If you acted as external examiner for multiple courses, please indicate whether the issues related to all or selected courses.

No, I encountered no issues on which I need to report back.

21. B4. Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

Behind the rigorous and fair assessment process sits, of course, a complex and intensive framework of programme delivery providing excellence in learning and teaching opportunities. The assessment results demonstrate that this is working effectively. I've commented above on courses which explore period framings within other periods: I believe this to be an excellent feature of the programme which enhanced cross-cultural and historical literary understanding. I'm struck by the supported intellectual independence that the programme cultivates in its students: this is evident in all the written assessments, and in particular the dissertation. Markers frequently comment on distinction standard being a potential passport to doctoral work, and the markers are careful in distinguishing between different levels of distinction. At the same time, and given the limited opportunities for doctoral work being experienced across the sector, it may be useful for markers to comment affirmatively on how students are building, potentially, towards other kinds of profiles (for example, expertise in archives and the heritage sectors).

22. B5. a) Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the professional service team who provide us with access to the materials in the course of the year, as well as preparing us for the final board. I've always found instructions to be clear, and the materials accessible. The team are always brilliant at helping when we do encounter snags and glitches.

23. B5. b) Now that your term of office is concluded, please provide an overview here.

External Examiner report for the academic year 2025/26: Professor Daniela Caselli (The University of Manchester)

External examiner name: Professor Daniela Caselli

External examiner home institution: The University of Manchester

Level: Postgraduate

Division: Humanities Division

Faculty: Faculty of English Language and Literature

Course(s) examined: KEGL: Master of Studies in English

Year of office: Other year of term of office

Part A

12. Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? (Please refer to paragraph 15 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

12.1. A1. i) Academic standards of students

Yes

12.2. A1. ii) Academic achievements of students

Yes

13. Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:(Please refer to paragraph 16 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

13.1. A2. i) The frameworks for higher education qualifications?

Yes

13.2. A2. ii) Any applicable subject benchmark statement?

Yes

14. In relation to the academic process:

14.1. A3. Does it measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?

Yes

14.2. A4. Is it conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?

Yes

15. In relation to the information and evidence provided to you:

15.1. A5. i) Did you receive it in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

Yes

15.2. A5. ii) Did you receive sufficient information to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

16. Regarding your previous report, please indicate whether you:

16.1. A6. Received a written response to your previous report?

Yes

16.2. A7. Are satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?

Yes

Part B

17. B1. a) How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?

Academic standards achieved exceeded those of other institutions.

Students on the MSt and MPhil in English (2025-26) displayed intellectual ambition, scholarly rigour, and commitment to the discipline.

This applied to all students, including those achieving results in the lower classification bracket.

18. B1. b) Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).

Students were guided well by their tutors. Students devised original essay topics which addressed gaps in the current scholarship, developed clear lines of argumentation, and defended their interpretations through evidence from primary, archival, and secondary sources.

High standards were expected and met. Students scrutinised sources in depth, constructed solid bibliographies, and demonstrated first-hand knowledge of all primary and secondary sources used. The work was presented very well.

The work at the upper end of the distinction category displayed a remarkable breadth and depth of knowledge, an ability to construct precise and convincing arguments, and a sharp sense of how to organise the material. Essays marked in this category demonstrated advanced research skill and showed promise for further post-graduate study.

Essays awarded 78% and above, and especially dissertations marked in this category, made original contributions to knowledge and were at times of publishable standard.

All essays I saw this year showed remarkable intellectual ability. At the lower end, some were held back by a tendency to describe their material; some addressed topics which were less well-defined.

As I mentioned last year, students are well served by the structure of the Course, which moves from a formative assignment on the A- List course, followed by the B-Course research skills options and then the Special Options under C. This is a pedagogically exemplary course of study.

19. B2. Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

Blind double marking followed by a discussion between markers ensures the rigour of the assessment process, strengthened by the practice of sending the work to a third marker when an agreement is not reached. In these ANF cases, the process was transparent and I could see why decisions were made and marks agreed.

The feedback always engages with the details of the arguments developed in the essay. Markers explain their points of criticism by referring to specific moments in the essays and dissertations, making it clear to students why they might have misread the material or why their contentions might have been unpersuasive.

The feedback offers specific guidance to students on how to improve. Some markers offer comments addressed more directly to the student, placing more emphasis on the constructive quality of the process.

The full range of marks was adopted, with evidence of marks in the 80%. The difference between borderline cases (both between Merit and Distinction and Merit and Pass) was marked clearly.

This year, the feedback forms sent to the students summarised effectively both markers' comments, highlighting strengths and addressing weaknesses.

20. B3. Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University? If you acted as external examiner for multiple courses, please indicate whether the issues related to all or selected courses.

no issues

21. B4. Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

The course assesses students' ability to write persuasive, cogent, and well-researched essays which have the potential to make original contributions to scholarship.

Colleagues teach students to develop lucid arguments, use evidence effectively, engage first-hand with archival sources, and be attentive but not reverential to secondary criticism; this practice puts them in the best possible place to adapt their skills to any future profession.

The A-,B-, C- structure of the course is an example of best pedagogical practice, leaving students some time to adapt to the course and its demands, experiment with non-assessed forms of writing, and then demonstrate an ability to develop key research skills before choosing specialised options.

The blind double marking ensures fairness and rigour across the board.

22. B5. a) Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body.

I would like to thank Nina Crisp and the administrative team for their effective communication and prompt responses. The process was very smooth.

This is my second year as External Examiner. I have read essays written on 'Literature and Science', 'Irish Women's Writing', 'Contemporary Poetry by the Book' in the Michaelmas term, and 'Modernity and the Sea', 'Modern Lyric', and 'Modernism and Philosophy' in the Hilary Term. I have enjoyed work on artists' books, the subjunctive in Beckett, and potentiality in Woolf. In the Summer, I have read dissertations.

Students are well prepared by the time they submit assessed work. The design of the courses through the A-, B- and C- stages lays the ground for work which meets the highest standard of rigour and originality.

Marking was accurate, consistent, and constructive. Students working at Distinction level made original contributions to knowledge. In the Merit bracket, students showed remarkable critical acumen, a solid knowledge of the critical tradition, and an ability to reflect on their own position as critics. Students who received a pass mark were able to engage with the texts convincingly. They were guided to pursue valid research questions even when the execution was limited by a descriptive approach. The standard was consistently high when compared to similar postgraduate programmes in the country.

I drew the attention of the Board to one essay which received the lowest mark on the C course. I suggested that some of the shortcomings listed in the feedback might be reconsidered in view of the disability plan I was sent.

There were a few discrepancies between first and second markers in the HTC batch. These were resolved successfully in most cases and resulted in marks which I was happy to confirm.

The Board has already noted and might want to take into further consideration my remarks regarding a possible pattern: a few essays on the borderline between Merit and Distinctions focus on feminist theory and gender and sexuality studies. Students are obviously interested in thinking about literature in relation to these fields. Although the students approaching these issues produced unfailingly competent essays, they seemed to lack the confidence needed to articulate their position in relation to contemporary debates with a force comparable to students addressing other theoretical problems (such as the relation between the textual and the visual or science and literature, for instance).

I would like to conclude by congratulating colleagues on the excellent work produced by their students.

23. B5. b) Now that your term of office is concluded, please provide an overview here.

External Examiner report for the academic year 2025/26: Professor Orietta Da Rold (University of Cambridge)

External examiner name: Professor Orietta Da Rold

External examiner home institution: University of Cambridge

Level: Postgraduate

Division: Humanities Division

Faculty: Faculty of English Language and Literature

Course(s) examined: KEGL: Master of Studies in English

Year of office: First year of term of office

Part A

12. Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? (Please refer to paragraph 15 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

12.1. A1. i) Academic standards of students

Yes

12.2. A1. ii) Academic achievements of students

Yes

13. Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:(Please refer to paragraph 16 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

13.1. A2. i) The frameworks for higher education qualifications?

Yes

13.2. A2. ii) Any applicable subject benchmark statement?

Yes

14. In relation to the academic process:

14.1. A3. Does it measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?

Yes

14.2. A4. Is it conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?

Yes

15. In relation to the information and evidence provided to you:

15.1. A5. i) Did you receive it in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

Yes

15.2. A5. ii) Did you receive sufficient information to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

16. Regarding your previous report, please indicate whether you:

16.1. A6. Received a written response to your previous report?

16.2. A7. Are satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?

Part B

17. B1. a) How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?

The academic standards achieved by students are exceptionally high and compare very favourably with those of equivalent postgraduate programmes at other institutions with which I am familiar. The strongest submissions demonstrated originality, intellectual independence, sophisticated engagement with primary and secondary materials, and, in several cases, clear potential for doctoral research. Particularly impressive was the combination of advanced specialist skills in manuscript studies, palaeography, editing, provenance research and material-text scholarship with the capacity to reflect critically upon those skills in sustained scholarly argument. The breadth and depth of expertise displayed across the cohort would be difficult to match elsewhere. In my experience, opportunities for this level of advanced training in medieval textual cultures are increasingly rare, making the programme distinctive nationally and internationally.

18. B1. b) Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).

Student performance across the MSt and MPhil programmes was consistently strong. A substantial proportion of work achieved distinction level, and the best submissions demonstrated originality, methodological sophistication, excellent scholarly apparatus, and confident engagement with complex primary materials. Particular strengths included intellectual ambition, strong close reading, manuscript and material-text expertise, engagement with multilingual sources, and the development of independent arguments. The strongest B-course submissions showed how effectively the programme develops specialist research skills while encouraging critical reflection on those methods through appropriate forms of assessment. Students can then build on this to write outstanding dissertation work in this field. Several dissertations and assessed essays demonstrated clear doctoral potential. Where work fell below distinction level, this was rarely due to lack of effort or subject knowledge. More commonly, marks were limited by issues of execution, including structure, organisation, engagement with critical scholarship, clarity of argument, or the ability to sustain promising ideas throughout an essay. The classifications awarded accurately reflected these differences in performance and were applied consistently across the cohort. Compared with

students on comparable postgraduate programmes at other institutions with which I am familiar, the overall standard of achievement is exceptionally high.

19. B2. Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

The assessment process was conducted with considerable rigour, care and fairness and was fully consistent with the University's regulations and guidance. First and second markers assessed work independently prior to discussion. Where significant differences arose, the agreed procedures were followed carefully, including the use of third markers where appropriate. Borderline cases received particularly thoughtful scrutiny and discussion, ensuring equitable treatment of students. The quality of marking was exemplary. Marks were well aligned with the published criteria and were supported by detailed and constructive reports. Joint examiner reports were generally balanced and transparent in explaining both strengths and weaknesses. The examination process also benefited from a notably collegial culture, with examiners demonstrating excellent professional judgement in resolving differences and reaching fair outcomes.

I have no concerns regarding consistency, standards, procedural compliance, or equity of treatment.

20. B3. Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University? If you acted as external examiner for multiple courses, please indicate whether the issues related to all or selected courses.

I have no significant concerns regarding academic standards, assessment procedures, or the operation of the programme.

The only minor observation relates to feedback. While the quality of examiner reports is generally excellent, in a small number of borderline cases it would be beneficial if joint reports articulated even more explicitly why ambitious and promising work did not reach the next classification band. Such clarification would further assist students in understanding the distinction between merit and distinction-level achievement and would be particularly valuable for students considering further academic research.

This observation does not indicate an issue and should be viewed as a minor enhancement rather than a concern.

21. B4. Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

The programme demonstrates a number of examples of exceptionally good practice.

As already noted, the B-course provides distinctive and highly effective training in medieval manuscript and textual culture. The assessed component successfully integrates practical skills with critical reflection and produces work of a remarkably high standard. Students develop advanced expertise in areas such as manuscript studies, palaeography, textual editing, provenance research and material-text scholarship, while also demonstrating the ability to translate those skills into sophisticated scholarly argument. This represents a significant pedagogical strength that deserves to be maintained and celebrated

Another outstanding feature of the programme is the exceptional breadth of its teaching across the medieval period. The range of Option C papers enables students to engage with subjects spanning the whole chronological sweep of medieval literary and textual culture, from Old English and early medieval studies through to the later Middle Ages. The opportunity for students to pursue advanced study across such a broad historical and linguistic range is increasingly unusual and represents a distinctive strength of the Oxford programme. In my experience, few institutions are able to offer comparable breadth while maintaining such consistently high academic standards. The programme therefore represents a model of thoughtful teaching, rigorous assessment, and scholarly ambition across the medieval period.

22. B5. a) Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body.

Finally, I would like to thank the administrative staffer their help and support during the examination process. I would like to congratulate the Board and teaching team for a successful year. The quality of student work reflects the dedication and expertise of all those involved in delivering the programme. This teaching creates a learning environment that is genuinely distinctive.

I was particularly impressed by the manner in which the final examiners' meeting was conducted. The discussion of individual cases was careful and reflective. It shoed a clear commitment among all members of the Board to ensuring that students were treated fairly and consistently. The quality of academic judgement displayed in the discussion of complex cases was exemplary and reflects a strong culture of collective responsibility for maintaining standards. The Board should be very proud of the achievements of its students and of the programme it has built and sustained.

23. B5. b) Now that your term of office is concluded, please provide an overview here.

External Examiner report for the academic year 2025/26: Professor Graeme Macdonald (Warwick University)

External examiner name: Professor Graeme Macdonald

External examiner home institution: Warwick University

Level: Postgraduate

Division: Humanities Division

Faculty: Faculty of English Language and Literature

Course(s) examined: KEGL: Master of Studies in English

Year of office: First year of term of office

Part A

12. Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? (Please refer to paragraph 15 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

12.1. A1. i) Academic standards of students

Yes

12.2. A1. ii) Academic achievements of students

Yes

13. Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:(Please refer to paragraph 16 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

13.1. A2. i) The frameworks for higher education qualifications?

Yes

13.2. A2. ii) Any applicable subject benchmark statement?

Yes

14. In relation to the academic process:

14.1. A3. Does it measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?

Yes

14.2. A4. Is it conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?

Yes

15. In relation to the information and evidence provided to you:

15.1. A5. i) Did you receive it in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

Yes

15.2. A5. ii) Did you receive sufficient information to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

16. Regarding your previous report, please indicate whether you:

16.1. A6. Received a written response to your previous report?

16.2. A7. Are satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?

Part B

17. B1. a) How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?

Academic standards are consistently very high on average. They are easily comparable with the highest achieving students in my own (RG) institution and in fact often surpass them. The word lengths are comparable and the demands similarly so. The only difference is the length of the dissertation - 10,000 words. (My own institution demands 16000 words at Master's level.) I appreciated the discussion explaining the rationale for this - which I found persuasive.

18. B1. b) Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).

I read material from the Mst in World Literatures. Literatures of Empire and Nation, 1880-1935; Post-migrant Literature and Culture

B Course work on Canadian Material Print cultures; Elegiac Documents; The Black Radical Tradition; Literature and Artificiality from Modernism to the Present - and Dissertations.

The majority of the essays and dissertations I read demonstrated an impressive range and depth of scholarly endeavour and intellectual achievement in the candidate’s specific topic. Students are clearly highly invested in the material. They react very well to their searching and sophisticated – and often quite elaborate – question topics. The best ones sustained and explored their topic with searching authority and scholarly rigour. Quite a few demonstrated highly nuanced and original work. These were indicative of work with the scholarly potential to push beyond a Masters essay. The work I have read is generally very good and often superb. In occasional places I thought the marks might have even gone higher - into the 80s, where it would be at my own institution.

19. B2. Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University’s regulations and guidance.

The comments on all the essays and dissertations I read were consistently fair and judicious. They were also assiduous and clear. Markers do an excellent job of encouraging and applauding the

positive elements in each essay and are prudent and critically precise in pointing out shortcomings. I very much appreciated the rigour of the 3rd marker process, which resolved differences with precision and conviction, making perfect sense. The tone of comments is consistently poised and intellectually productive, with constructive encouragement accompanied by robust and helpful criticism. Markers are sensitive and clear in pointing out shortcomings and ways towards improvement. The comments knit consistently and effectively to the marking descriptors. I am very convinced the students are afforded an equitable and fair assessment regime within the University's regulations and guidance.

20. B3. Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University? If you acted as external examiner for multiple courses, please indicate whether the issues related to all or selected courses.

I queried the guidelines for monitoring and declaring AI use at the exam board and was shown the practice. I wondered if each final essay should have an equivalent statement about AI use printed on it (this is the practice at my institution) but was persuaded otherwise when shown the present practice. I assume this will be under constant revision and trust it will be, given the liveness of this developing concern and issue across all contemporary academic contexts.

21. B4. Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

I found the manner in which students come to their essay topic (with a long-ish statement of context and intent) excellent intellectual practice. There is clear progressive and cumulative forward momentum in the chronological development of work towards the span of the academic year. The incorporation of learning from A-B-C courses is clear and imprinted on the work I read and the very best ones do it with real scholarly acumen. I appreciated the emphasis on material from B courses which seems a vital and crucial component of learning that can be applied to the more interpretive tasks of C material. The academic pathway is clear and effective. I would also emphasise the correspondence between marker comments and marking descriptors, which was carefully followed and well-articulated across the marking I read.

22. B5. a) Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body.

I found the third marking process just and effective. A very robust and well maintained process. (And - crucially - not just one where third markers fall into the median mark between disparate marks.)

This was my first year examining and I would like to commend the work of the English Faculty administrators for sending me all materials in very good time, for explaining the process with great clarity and patiently answering all of my questions. The exam board was run very professionally, with great care and precision and - crucially - all in good humour. All very much appreciated for a rookie!

23. B5. b) Now that your term of office is concluded, please provide an overview here.

External Examiner report for the academic year 2025/26: Professor Adrian Streete (University of Glasgow)

External examiner name: Professor Adrian Streete

External examiner home institution: University of Glasgow

Level: Postgraduate

Division: Humanities Division

Faculty: Faculty of English Language and Literature

Course(s) examined: KEGL: Master of Studies in English

Year of office: First year of term of office

Part A

12. Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? (Please refer to paragraph 15 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

12.1. A1. i) Academic standards of students

Yes

12.2. A1. ii) Academic achievements of students

Yes

13. Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:(Please refer to paragraph 16 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

13.1. A2. i) The frameworks for higher education qualifications?

Yes

13.2. A2. ii) Any applicable subject benchmark statement?

Yes

14. In relation to the academic process:

14.1. A3. Does it measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?

Yes

14.2. A4. Is it conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?

Yes

15. In relation to the information and evidence provided to you:

15.1. A5. i) Did you receive it in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

Yes

15.2. A5. ii) Did you receive sufficient information to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

16. Regarding your previous report, please indicate whether you:

16.1. A6. Received a written response to your previous report?

16.2. A7. Are satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?

Part B

17. B1. a) How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?

There are few, if any, PGT degrees of comparable depth and breadth in the UK HE system. However, I am confident that the academic standards achieved by students on this degree are comparable to equivalent degrees elsewhere, and often higher. Your systems all seem to be working well and I could see why decisions were made and why, especially with split marks, which is always reassuring as a new external. I can confirm that the marking was fair and judicious throughout all the work that I read this year. It was especially helpful to have sight of the moderation comments exchanged between markers.

18. B1. b) Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).

I read essays from across two strands on the programme: 1550-1700, and 1700-1830. I sampled essays from core and optional modules, and so got a good sense of the breadth and depth of your programme, which is superb. I like how the core courses encourage students to develop their own research interests, and I read some excellent work here. Over the range of assessed essays, I saw clear evidence of excellent teaching, and of students extending themselves intellectually in their written work. On the dissertations, I was very impressed by the quality and ambition of the work I read. Those students at the lower end of the marking scale produced solid work, while work at the top of the scale was of superb quality.

19. B2. Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

Everything I read and saw points to the highest professional standards and rigour being applied to the assessment process. Students are treated fairly and the regulations were followed throughout the process, both electronically and in the final exam board, which was conducted in exemplary fashion.

20. B3. Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University? If you acted as external examiner for multiple courses, please indicate whether the issues related to all or selected courses.

Staff comments on written work were engaged and constructive. At times, there's a tendency to focus on the deficiencies of a piece of work, and so less space is given to what a student might do to improve. I also noticed an occasional discrepancy between markers' comments – most were generous in scope and detail; a few read more like short notes. However, the assimilated feedback of both markers' comments is very helpful to students, and throughout the work I read, the pedagogic care and professionalism of staff was absolutely clear.

21. B4. Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

The department might want to discuss the points in the box above, especially the first, as this was also raised by another external. In general, though, I would say that this programme is one where the quality of learning opportunities for students is already of such a high standard that any further recommendations would be superfluous.

22. B5. a) Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body.

This was my first year as external for this degree and all the experience was very smooth. I was able to access all the information I needed thanks to Nina Crisp and her team, and Erica McAlpine, the chair of the board. This is an outstanding degree, and the students on it clearly have access to some of the finest teaching and research staff working in early modern and eighteenth century literature in the UK. Students produce high quality work across a wide range of topics and authors: the best work I saw was close to being of publishable standard; even the lowest graded students still produced solid work of which they can be proud. My congratulations to students and staff on a very successful year.

23. B5. b) Now that your term of office is concluded, please provide an overview here.

Dr Fionnghuala Sweeney (Newcastle University)

Part A

A1. Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? (Please refer to paragraph 15 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

i) Academic standards of students

Yes

ii) Academic achievements of students

Yes

A2. Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:(Please refer to paragraph 16 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports)

i) The frameworks for higher education qualifications?

Yes

ii) Any applicable subject benchmark statement?

Yes

In relation to the academic process:

A3. Does it measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s)?

Yes

A4. Is it conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations?

Yes

A5. In relation to the information and evidence provided to you:

i) Did you receive it in a timely manner to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

Yes

ii) Did you receive sufficient information to be able to carry out the role of External Examiner effectively?

A6. Regarding your previous report, please indicate whether you:

i) Received a written response to your previous report?

n/a

Are satisfied that comments in your previous report have been properly considered, and where applicable, acted upon?

n/a

Part B

B1. a) How do academic standards achieved by the students compare with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which you have experience?

The academic standards achieved by students are comparable with those achieved by students at other higher education institutions of which I have experience.

B1. b) Please comment on student performance and achievement across the relevant programmes or parts of programmes and with reference to academic standards and student performance of other higher education institutions of which you have experience (those examining in joint schools are particularly asked to comment on their subject in relation to the whole award).

Student performance across the degree was in line with academic standards of other higher education institutions of which I have experience. The marks attained varied across modules as might be expected, but individual achievement within grade boundaries was notable: even in instances where the mark was not in the highest grade category, it was clear that students were learning much through the process of engaging with the module and the assessment.

B2. Please comment on the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, including whether it ensures equity of treatment for students, and whether it has been conducted fairly and within the University's regulations and guidance.

The assessment process was rigorous and impeccably conducted. The feedback provided by markers on essays was concise and constructive, with a strong formative element. The feedback in all cases explicitly addressed the marking criteria, and the marks awarded were a fair reflection of the work done. Marks were consistent with the feedback provided. All the work I saw had been scrupulously second marked. It was clear that productive discussions occur between markers, and, in instances in which an agreed mark could not be arrived at, the material was passed promptly to a third marker, with final marks decided fairly and in line with the published criteria. I note that the marking criteria for literature are excellent: clear, precise and grounded in the standards and rubrics of the discipline. My observation is that the process was conducted fairly within the University's regulations and guidance, including in relation to students with special circumstances.

B3. Are there any issues which you feel should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University? If you acted as external examiner for multiple courses, please indicate whether the issues related to all or selected courses.

The highest standards of professionalism amongst colleagues was evident throughout the modules and assessments I reviewed. I would like to mention two things which may merit collegial discussion. The first concerns the award of marks of 80 and above. In my view, this can distort final degree classifications, and result in inequitable outcomes. It also imports a model of knowledge from the sciences and medicine into the humanities, a model that, in my view, is anathema to the humanities project. Giving students a clear sense of where they are in relation to their learning and writing and

the current research in the field is more helpful to student in the longer run than an inflated mark, and helps underline the significance of research-led teaching and expert review of assessments.

B4. Please comment/provide recommendations on any good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and any opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.

I saw much good practice in the teaching and assessment on the MSt. I've made a short list below of things of particular note in no particular order:

B5. a) Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body.

It was my pleasure to review the MSt in English Literature essays and dissertations throughout the academic year 2025-'26. I would like to extend my thanks to all colleagues involved in the assessment process, but in particular to administrative colleagues who were unfailingly kind, professional, patient and who speedily helped me with any difficulty I encountered. The MSt is an excellent programme both in its conceptualization and implementation and I look forward to reviewing more excellent student work next year.