

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

Part I

A. STATISTICS

(1) NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES IN EACH CLASS/CATEGORY

There were 95 candidates at the start of the year; 3 (2 MSt, 1 MPhil) suspended over the course of the year and two have not completed assessment.

(88 MSt, 4 MPhil 1st year, 3 MPhil 2nd year)

Category	Number			Percentage (%)		
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Distinction	31	(40)	(50)	32.63%	(43%)	(42.7%)
Merit	34	(32)	(37)	35.79%	(34.4%)	(35%)
Pass	23	(18)	(21)	24.21%	(19.4%)	(21%)
Fail	2	(1)	(1)	2.11%	(1.1%)	(1%)
Incomplete	5	(2)	(8)	5.26%	(3.3%)	(6.7%)

(2) VIVAS

Vivas were not used.

(3) MARKING OF SCRIPTS

All essays and dissertations were double-marked. In cases where the first and second marker were unable to agree a mark for an essay, that essay was sent to the appropriate External Examiner, who acted as the third marker.

Scaling of marks was not used.

B. NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Marks continued to be released on-course this year, a practice reintroduced in 2019-20.

As in previous years, blind double marking was retained for the B and C Course essays, with each marker submitting marks and comments sheets prior to discussion with their co-marker. Also as in previous years, course tutors served as first markers for B- and C-Course

essays. In cases where internal markers were unable to reach agreement, the essays, marks, and comments were sent to the appropriate External Examiner for adjudication. For purposes of monitoring, External Examiners were also sent the highest and lowest essays from each course, as well as any pieces of work for which the internal markers' raw marks had fallen on either side of a border.

As a result of the UCU marking and assessment boycott in May, Dissertations this year were marked by sighted second marking. The Board agreed this change in an additional meeting on 5 June, and, after Divisional approval, it was communicated to students by the Faculty on 26 June. Sighted second marking was chosen in order to retain the principle of double marking while enabling colleagues to mark a greater volume of essays while not drastically extending either their workload or the timeframe of marking. The boycott had greatly amplified the former for those not boycotting, while the latter could not be extended because, following University changes to procedure in the past few years, many students now choose to graduate immediately following the release of results in July (the Graduate Office received a number of inquiries about the issue of graduation in July, especially from overseas students).

C. CHANGES FOR THE FACULTY TO CONSIDER

It is not proposed to continue second sighted marking in 2023-24, but it may be useful to note here that colleagues adapted quickly and effectively to the system. Informal feedback was positive. Such queries as the Graduate Office and Chair received about it mostly related to difficulties with the timing of first and second markers' stints under this system (where the latter follows the former, rather than being simultaneous as in blind double marking).

D. EXAM CONVENTIONS

Candidates are made aware of the examination conventions in the MSt/MPhil Handbook, which was issued by the Graduate Office online (via Canvas) on 4 October 2022. It has been continually available since that date.

On 26 June candidates were emailed by the Chair of Teaching Committee, informing candidates of the change to sighted second marking. The information in this email was incorporated into the Handbook in a revision released on 4 August 2023.

[2019-20, Regulations for the Conduct of University Examinations: Part 4 Examiners: Period of Office, Casual Vacancies, Resignation, and Removal \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)
[Exam Conventions - October 2022](#)
[Exam Conventions – August 2023, with MAB update](#)

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

Process

The first marks meeting on 17 July ratified the vast majority of candidates, with only eight candidates (9% of the cohort) left to receive their outcomes after the second Marks Meeting. As usual, the delay for these students was a result of deadline extensions granted by the Proctors. Five candidates have outcomes still pending due to longer extensions. It is worth repeating yet again (as the Proctors do when informing students) that extensions,

particularly for the Dissertation in Trinity Term, will normally result in a delayed release of results and classification. A very considerable effort was made this year by the Chair and MSt Administrator to ensure as many students could be classified in July as possible, following the anxiety created by the UCU boycott.

The SPLD form was changed this year so that markers could acknowledge their having read the inclusive marking guidelines by ticking a box on the first page. This seems to have been well received by markers, who availed themselves of the tick box. Many markers also refer to SPLD notices in their own comments.

The role of External Examiners was clarified by the Chair in the letter of welcome sent following the first Board meeting in October. In particular, he emphasised that the Externals' role of scrutinising essays at the top and bottom of a particular course, and where raw marks cut across a borderline, does not involve re-marking them, or indicating what they might have awarded. The Board decided in its Michaelmas Term meeting to preserve the role of Externals as adjudicators in instances where the internal markers cannot reach an agreement. This may be something to reconsider in future years now that the Division's advice is that Externals should not 'normally' be expected to act as third markers, but this is a decision for each individual Board.

Outline of the year's meetings

The new internal members of the Board in Michaelmas Term were Ros Ballaster, Rachel Malkin, Pablo Mukherjee, Daniel Sawyer, and Phil West, with Sandie Byrne and Marina Mackay continuing from 21-22. Following the UCU boycott Freya Johnston replaced Ros Ballaster on the Board. When it proved impossible to find a postholder to replace Pablo Mukherjee, permission was obtained from the Proctors to meet as a reduced Board for the Trinity Term meeting.

Of the External Examiners, Michael Rossington and Rex Ferguson returned from 21-22, with Alfred Hiatt, Lucy Munro, Madhu Krishnan, and Kasia Boddy all beginning as new Externals.

At its first meeting of the internal examiners, in October, the Board approved both the 22-23 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 first year that the Chair of the MSt had met with the Chairs of Prelims and FHS to allocate marking duties in September. (Previously, the MSt duties had been allocated by the MSt Board itself at its first meeting.) This change in procedure was brought about by the Faculty's move to allocate major marking duties at the start of the academic year using a points system to create equity across colleagues. The exception to this allocation rule, this year and in future years, was the MSt Dissertations, since the topics are not known until later in the year and specialist marking has to be allotted at that point.)

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.

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. Unusually, several additional meetings were held later in Trinity Term to discuss possible approaches to mitigations in the light of the UCU marking and assessment boycott. The Chair is very grateful to members of the Board for their additional participation in these

discussions at such a busy time of year, and to the Chair to the Faculty and members of the Marking and Assessment Boycott Committee for their support and advice.

The Mitigating Circumstances Committee (Marina Mackay, Dirk Van Hulle, and the Chair, with Daniel Sawyer kindly standing in for Dirk Van Hulle in the February meeting) met before the Hilary and Trinity Term meetings. Covid cases were far less significant factors in MCE notices this year, after two years in which the pandemic featured very heavily in students' applications to the Proctors. Individual cases were considered carefully and graded according to the required classification system. The Chair scrutinized comments forms to ensure that all SPLD cases had been considered by the markers.

The Marks Meeting in July had to be rearranged due to the change in marking timetable following the introduction of sighted second marking (discussed in Part I). Permission had been sought for a number of External Examiners to attend remotely, and the technology for this – set up by the Faculty IT Officers - operated flawlessly on the day; the Chair is very grateful to all who made this possible. At the meeting, examiners confirmed the marks awarded to Dissertations; agreed on penalties for late and over-length work, and for a number of cases of poor academic practice; accepted the recommendations of the MCE Committee; and classified the candidates. Preliminary nominations for the Charles Oldham Prize and the Marilyn Butler Prize were identified. The External Examiners participated fully in these discussions, asking pertinent and helpful questions, checking procedure and Faculty practices, and offering specific advice on particular cases. The Chair was immensely grateful for their thoughtful, constructive, and timely input throughout.

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 such penalties as are set out in the Examination Regulations. The candidates whose work was considered here were those who had submitted essays later following granting of Proctorial extensions. The procedures followed were the same as for the main Marks Meeting.

Criteria

n/a

External Examiners' Comments

The detailed written reports of the External Examiners are attached. Summaries of key points articulated by the External Examiners in the first Marks Meeting, and in their written reports, follow below. The External Examiners expressed their profound thanks to Nina Crisp at the July meeting for her kind, efficient, and lucid communication during the exam process.

Alfred Hiatt

Alfred reported that in this, his first year as External, he had found the standard of work to be excellent, and unsurpassed at any other university course of which he has experience. He felt that students had responded well to the teaching provided, whether they ended up at the higher or lower end of the outcomes range. A wide range of topics was on show in the work he read, as was plenty of independent thinking. A willingness to analyse texts in languages other than Old or Middle English (e.g. Latin, French, Arabic) was particularly impressive, though it also raises the question of what opportunities and resources are available to assist students with acquiring other languages.

Marking was rigorous, consistent, and fair, with markers offering clear and valid justifications of their marks on their comments sheets and in their feedback sheets. The feedback perhaps emphasizes shortcomings rather more than achievements, however. Some feedback suggested that a topic had 'overreached' (e.g. in terms of material covered), and the Faculty could think further about how the supervision process helps candidates narrow down a topic to a feasible scope; the discussion of this at the Final Marks Meeting gave Alfred confidence that this was a matter that is in hand.

Lucy Munro

Lucy wrote that the best work was genuinely outstanding, verging on publishable, and all students showed sound research, analysis, and critical writing skills. A huge range of topics was covered, including much innovative work with unusual combinations of primary texts; the wide range of resources available to students was well used, including early printed books and manuscripts. Lucy highlighted the strong, committed work on gender and race in each of the courses and in the Dissertation.

In both the marking procedures and the exam board procedures great effort was made to be equitable, fair, and scrupulous. Feedback to students gave clear justification of marks and borderlines were used judiciously. The Board meetings themselves were efficiently run and gave space for discussion of issues arising from assessment. Lucy noted that for one course the first marker had not completed the box about how agreement was reached, which meant that it was more difficult to follow the decision. It would be worth ensuring that this was done in all cases. In terms of feedback to students, markers could also lay more emphasis on recommendations strengthening submissions yet to come.

An interesting question Lucy raised was how students are advised (e.g. in A-Courses) to handle the relationship between the past and present, e.g. such issues as anachronism, presentism, and shifting vocabularies around gender. She also questioned what additionally could be done to help students work within the 6,000-word essay form for the B- and C-Courses, which could sometimes be a problem.

Michael Rossington

Michael reported that the standard of work was comparable with, and in some cases superior to, that of students on Masters programmes at other HEIs. All essays show clear understanding of the nature of research in literary studies, and the writing and presentation were mostly excellent, reflecting well on teaching and supervision as well as the provision of scholarly resources in the university. The best essays were publishable and stunningly original.

He also expressed his confidence that the assessment process ensures equitable treatment for students and has been conducted fairly and within the regulations. Markers' duties were carried out with diligence and care, and the process as a whole was robust and well executed. The feedback process, though onerous, is best practice. He also mentions that the sighted second marking process introduced for the Dissertation in June worked well. Michael recommends that internal makers are given guidance for minimum and maximum word-counts for comments on their feedback sheets. On another note, he also recommends that greater clarity is provided on what constitutes 'auto-plagiarism' (Handbook, p. 34). For instance, a clearer distinction could be drawn by us between wholesale repetition of material from earlier work (including undergraduate theses) which might constitute auto-plagiarism, and legitimate and natural development of ideas and interests.

Rex Ferguson

Rex reported the truly impressive standards of scholarly rigour and originality in the work he'd scrutinised. He highlighted the valid distinction between Merit-level work and Distinction work, noting that the latter makes a greater leap towards demonstrable significance and originality. However, he also considered that there is room for more generous marking at the very top of the Merit band, where work with an agreed mark of 68 or 69 might have been graded as a low Distinction level at other institutions.

While praising the synthesis of feedback given to students, Rex noted that occasionally this was sometimes less well integrated, leading to a discordant note that could confuse students, preventing them from getting the best advice from the excellent feedback system. While expressing his confidence in the Board's handling of poor academic practice and plagiarism cases, Rex made a number of helpful suggestions regarding possible changes to our procedures. One approach would be that any such cases are considered by a separate committee, whose findings are then fed into a final exam board. Another is that more detailed information about particular cases are distributed to the entire Board in advance of the meeting. He also recommends highlighting issues like auto-plagiarism to students early in the course.

Rex also drew attention to the commentary box on the First Marker's form in which the markers describe how agreement was reached. This is useful not only for Externals' scrutiny, but also for the markers themselves, in requiring them to express precise and justifiable reasons for their decision. For these reasons, we should ensure that it is completed.

Madhu Krishnan

Madhu commented that academic standards were consistent with comparator universities, and that the finest work was of publishable quality. The cohort at Oxford is larger than most, but the range of achievement is similar to that of cohorts at other universities.

Marking was universally equitable and fair; even in cases where agreement could not be found, the markers had engaged fully and fairly in their work. While feedback forms did vary in length, they were always rigorous and comprehensive.

One issue Madhu raised was that of what scope there is to consider alternative formats for assessment. There is great value in maintaining the essay as the gold standard of assessment, but other forms of assessment could be considered, such as critical-creative writing, journalistic writing, and review writing.

Administration

Following two years of burdensome complications arising from Covid-19, this year began relatively straightforwardly. From September to December the administrative role was undertaken by Holly Bickerton, now in her second year in post, and then following Holly's departure for maternity leave in early December, by Nina Crisp. Helpful assistance was received at various points from Andy Davice and Zoë Hart. Huge thanks are due to all of the above, but in particular to Nina, whose excellent work was essential to the success of the process – all the more so in what rapidly became an extremely difficult administrative situation from Easter onwards. It should be recorded that the additional administrative burden created by the UCU marking and assessment boycott fell very heavily indeed on the Graduate Office (and other members of the Faculty administration) and on the Chair, who all spent a great deal of additional time fielding inquiries from students, colleagues, and the Division. It is a testament to the hard work of the Graduate Office that all of our students who submitted their work received outcomes, something which was certainly not the case across the Division.

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

n/a for MSt/MPhil.

C. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

n/a for MSt/MPhil.

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

n/a for MSt/MPhil.

E. NAMES OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Internal	External
Dr Philip West (Chair)	Professor Kasia Boddy (Cambridge)
Dr Sandie Byrne	Dr Rex Ferguson (Birmingham)
Professor Freya Johnston	Dr Alfred Hiatt (Queen Mary University of London)
Professor Marina MacKay	Professor Madhu Krishnan (Bristol)
Dr Rachel Malkin	Professor Lucy Munro (King's College, London)
Professor Pablo Mukherjee	Professor Michael Rossington (Newcastle)
Dr Daniel Sawyer	
Professor Dirk Van Hulle	

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2023

External examiner name:	Alfred Hiatt		
External examiner home institution:	Queen Mary, University of London		
Course(s) examined:	MSt in English Language and Literature 650-1550; MPhil in English Studies (Medieval Period)		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

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

Part B

B1. Academic standards

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

The overall standard of work I saw was excellent, unsurpassed by any other university course I have had experience of. It is clear that the quality of student attracted by these degrees is very high, and that students are working well and responding to the teaching they are receiving. This is true not only of the very best work I saw but also of less successful work which was nevertheless, comparatively speaking, of an impressive standard.

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

As stated above, student performance and achievement on the programmes I examined was outstanding, and compares favourably with other university courses in this area. Students appear to be responding well to the demands of the programme, and to the material they are studying. Writing is frequently sophisticated and often engages with current and recent critical debates. I noted a relatively wide range of topics, and plenty of evidence of students thinking in independent and at times original ways. A particularly impressive feature of several essays was the willingness of students to analyse texts in languages other than Old or Middle English, including erudite discussions of Latin, French and Arabic material.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

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

I can confirm that the marking in all courses I examined was rigorous, consistent, and fair. Markers made the criteria for their marks clear both in their internal comments to each other, and in their feedback to students. Feedback regularly included guidance on how to improve the mark.

B3. Issues

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

No.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

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

B5. Any other comments

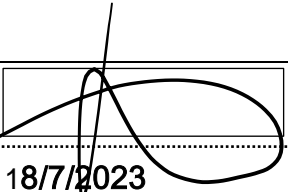
Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.

As this is my first year as an external examiner on the above programmes, the following remarks are intended only as points for consideration, and are likely to reflect my ignorance of practices at a local level:

-- The above observation about students writing on texts outside the corpus of Old and Middle English material (i.e. including Latin, French, Arabic texts) does raise the question (faced by all Master's programmes in medieval subjects) of how students who do not come to the programme with language skills can engage with the material as well as those who do.

-- In general I felt that feedback perhaps tended to emphasise shortcomings of work more than achievements. While markers are rightly and helpfully clear about what can be improved, they could keep in mind a balance with the positive qualities (if any) they've found. (It may be of course that students received oral feedback which was more positive in tone).

-- One common theme of examiners' comments on MSt dissertations was that candidates had overreached, e.g. by concentrating on too many texts, or not developing particular aspects of their dissertations due to a lack of space. This raised a question about levels and nature of supervision candidates had received. Following discussion at the Board, however, it is clear that internal examiners have thought very carefully about the MSt dissertation and have put in place a system of support for candidates that runs throughout the academic year.

Signed:	
Date:	18/7/2023

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk AND copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2023

External examiner name:	Lucy Munro		
External examiner home institution:	King's College London		
Course(s) examined:	MSt/MPhil in English (1550-1700)		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)			Postgraduate

Please complete both Parts A and B.

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

Part B

B1. Academic standards

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

Academic standards are in line with those at my own institution and the other institutions at which I have examined at Master's level (the Universities of Kent and Reading).

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

The best of the work that I read was of genuinely outstanding quality – the top dissertation would have needed only minor revision to make it publishable – while students achieving pass marks nonetheless demonstrated sound skills in research, analysis and critical writing. Both dissertations and essays covered a huge range of topics, and students made innovative selections and combinations of primary texts. A few slightly thin bibliographies aside, the level of scholarship was extremely high. It was also good to see students drawing on the range of resources available to them, including early printed books and manuscripts, and deploying skills such as palaeography and bibliographic analysis. I particularly enjoyed seeing students' serious and committed work on gender and race in essays that I scrutinised on each of the courses and the dissertation, and the way in which these issues were brought to bear on questions around editing, publishing, biography and literary form.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

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

The assessment process was rigorous and fair, and considerable effort was made in the exam boards to treat students fairly and equitably, within the structures of the University's regulations and guidance. Marking was judicious and fair; the feedback is focused, clearly justifying the marks awarded. Borderline marks were used judiciously, and markers demonstrated a clear sense of the distinctions between different grade boundaries. I appreciated the opportunity to attend the February and June exam boards as well as the final exam board in July, and found that the meetings that I attended were efficiently run and thoughtful in colleagues' handling of the issues arising from assessment.

B3. Issues

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

I had very few issues with anything that I read, but I have already raised a handful of minor points with colleagues in the Faculty in my comments ahead of the February, June and July exam boards:

1. It was useful to see the rationale for agreed marks, where that section of the first marker's form had been used - it was blank in one set of forms that I received, meaning that the markers' decisions weren't as easy to follow for that course.
2. Some of the sets of agreed comments offered focused feedback on how students can improve their work in future assignments, but not others. I would encourage markers to do this, given that students will be moving on from these assignments to the next rather than reworking these specific essays.

3. The structure of the MSt programme, with a June submission for the dissertation, clearly puts some pressure on students, especially those with a less clear sense of their project and (perhaps) less practice in developing an argument for a long-form piece of writing. I know that the Faculty is monitoring the ways in which the dissertation is supported throughout the degree programme and considering what the most effective approach might be.
4. It would be useful to offer some explicit guidance to students on how to handle in their research and writing the relationship between the early modern and the present day, together with related issues such as historicism, anachronism and presentism, and how to deal with shifting frameworks and vocabularies, especially around gender. This might be something to consider in the A-course, as it affected essays that I read from both the B and C courses.
5. Many students face technical issues in sustaining an argument across 6000 words, and it might be helpful to offer some guidance on this. Interestingly, this didn't seem to be as much of a problem in the dissertations (10,000 words) - perhaps suggesting that students took their feedback for course essays on board, or that they were more self-conscious about how they structure longer-form assignments.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities


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

The MSt/MPhil offers a remarkable range of approaches and topics, especially through the C courses, underpinned by the conceptually rigorous work of the A and B courses. It is distinctive and innovative in the ways in which courses stretch the boundaries of the early modern (especially, but not only, on 'Of Essays', 'Imagining Early Modern Lives' and 'Twelfth Night'), and in the variety of approaches that it offers for the study of non-dramatic early modern literature.

B5. Any other comments

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

As a first-time external examiner this year, I very much appreciated the efficient and generous support of Nina Crisp, the Academic Administration Officer, and Philip West, the Chair of Examiners.

Signed:	
Date:	23 August 2023

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk AND copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2023

External examiner name:	Michael Rossington	
External examiner home institution:	Newcastle University	
Course(s) examined:	MSt. in English	
Level: (please delete as appropriate)	<u>Undergraduate</u>	Postgraduate

Please complete both Parts A and B.

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

Part B

B1. Academic standards

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

As before, my experience this year is that standards achieved by students on the English MSt programme at Oxford are comparable with, and in some cases superior to, those achieved by students on Masters programmes at other HEIs of which I have experience,

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

I thoroughly enjoyed reading almost all the work sent for me to review, most of which related to English Literature 1700-1830. Some of the best essays were outstanding in every way. There was ample evidence that candidates understood what constitutes research and were being asked to meet appropriately high academic standards for Masters-level research. Writing and presentation were, for the most part, excellent. This clearly reflects well on the teaching and supervision of these students and it is evident that the resources available to them (digital, print and archival provision, as well as staff expertise) are of a very high order. In one or two cases, I read stunningly original work which was almost of publishable quality. Overall, student performance and achievement compares very favourably with other HEIs of which I have experience.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

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

I am confident of the rigour and conduct of the assessment process, that it ensures equity of treatment for students and that it has been conducted fairly and within the regulations and guidance that were communicated to me. The letter of invitation asked me to perform two functions: to monitor marks and marking procedures and to adjudicate in cases where the internal markers had flagged an essay as ANF. The Chair of Examiners and the Academic Administration Officer for this programme were unfailingly efficient and helpful in providing me with the means to perform these tasks. In addition, first and second markers provided diligent, detailed and careful comments. There is no doubt that the assessment and marking procedures are robust and well executed. Although I occasionally may have quibbled with an agreed mark, this was almost always because I thought it was slightly too generous. I thought the Second-Sighted Marking procedure adopted for Dissertations worked well.

B3. Issues

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

No.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

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

Highlights for me this year were essays I read on the 'Prose Fiction of the Late C18' and 'Historical Fictions of the Long C18 on Screen and Page' C courses and, as last year, the B course. It is evident from the quality of work produced that the teaching and supervision of students on these courses is inspiring and appropriately challenging. I particularly admired the way that the very strongest work on these courses and on others that I read was given thorough and stretching feedback by the internal markers. At the other end of the scale, I thought a Dissertation given a Fail mark by the internal markers was treated with careful rigour and demonstrated that good practice in marking on this programme is across all levels of student performance. I think the student-facing Feedback sheet, onerous though the work involved may be for the internal markers, constitutes best practice. I would like to commend the Chair of Examiners for the conduct of the Final Exam Board meeting. This has been a challenging year for students and colleagues and ample opportunity was provided at the meeting for sensitive matters to be discussed in full.

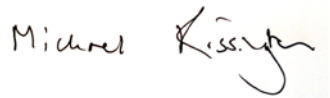
B5. Any other comments

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

Further to a matter I raised in last year's report which Professor Horobin addressed in his letter to me of 29 November 2022, I received first marker, second marker and combined feedback documents in a timely manner this year. This was most helpful and welcome.

I recommend that consideration is given to guidance for internal markers on minimum and maximum word-counts for comments on their feedback sheets. (Occasionally I noticed significant variation in the amount of commentary given to students by internal markers).

I share the view expressed by other members of the Final Exam Board that greater clarity needs to be provided to students and staff about what, exactly, constitutes 'auto-plagiarism' (p. 34 of the programme handbook). As noted at the meeting, many students develop at postgraduate level ideas they begin to address in their BAs (especially in dissertations). While wholesale repetition of work submitted for an earlier degree is clearly out of order, wording relating to auto-plagiarism needs to acknowledge that the development of ideas and interests from BA to MA is understandable, legitimate and often to be encouraged.

Signed:	
Date:	4 August 2023

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk AND copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2023

External examiner name:	Rex Ferguson		
External examiner home institution:	University of Birmingham		
Course(s) examined:	MSt in English Literature		
Level: (please <i>delete as appropriate</i>)			Postgraduate

Please complete both Parts A and B.

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

complete Part B.

Part B

B1. Academic standards

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

The standards achieved by students on the MSt in English Literature are excellent. The highest-level work is truly outstanding and of publishable standard. What is perhaps even more impressive is that, in examining essays from both terms and a selection of dissertations, I only read one essay that dropped below a mark of 60. This accurately reflects the consistently high standard of work being produced – something that is rare in PG taught programmes across the country.

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

The best work (rewarded with pleasingly high marks) was characterised by truly impressive levels of scholarly rigour and originality. As one would expect, the merit work across taught modules and in dissertations had much to recommend it but typically just lacked the same leap towards demonstrable significance and originality. The 'pass' work that I read was hard-working and intelligent but slightly more pedestrian in focus and argumentation.

In my judgment, much of the work that just misses out on distinction (so 68, 69) would, in many other institutions that I have experience of, be graded at the higher level. As these grades can have very real consequences for students wanting to move on to PG research I think it would be entirely justifiable for the marking at this particular point to be just a touch more generous.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

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

I found the grading to be accurate and remarkably consistent across modules and markers. The rationale for reaching marks, both individually and when agreement had to be found, was clear. The comments from markers were also extremely well-considered and demonstrated an absorbed engagement with the work presented. The justification of marking decisions was convincing.

B3. Issues

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

I think two matters might be worth thinking about:

- The record of marking includes a sheet for both first and second marker and then a feedback sheet for the student. In the vast majority of cases, the tricky task of synthesising the two sets of marker comments into coherent and useful student feedback was

accomplished with great skill. On a few occasions, however, this standard just slipped slightly and the feedback read as a rather blunt reprisal of, at times, discordant comments. I don't raise this to suggest that it is a huge problem but just to register this slight inconsistency in what is, when done well, an excellent practice.

- In the exam board meeting we were asked to adjudicate on four cases of potential plagiarism. This was expertly handled by the chair and other members of the board that had knowledge of the cases in question and I feel satisfied that fair judgments were made in all cases. At the same time, it also seemed like a more definitive process and set range of potential judgments and penalties would have aided our discussion. In my own institution, decisions on plagiarism or poor academic practice are taken in a separate committee and then fed into a final exam board. This would be one option to adopt. Another would be to disseminate details of plagiarism cases with copies of the relevant documents to board members in advance of the meeting. I appreciate that these matters are not easy, and were probably amplified this year by a surprising number of cases coming up – this, in itself represents a potential issue also as two of the cases were related to potential self-plagiarism of undergraduate work. Addressing this hazard with students in the early stages of the programme might therefore be advisable.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

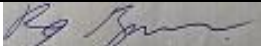
*Please comment/provide recommendations on any **good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment**, and any **opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities** provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.*

- The work that I read was either double blind-marked or sighted second marked. In both instances, the paperwork included at the bottom of the first marker comment sheet that asks for a commentary on how the two markers reached agreement on the final mark. This is extremely useful – both for me as an external but also because it must help the markers focus upon the precise and justifiable reasons they have for moving from either one, or both, of the original marks. Ensuring that this is always completed would be an excellent practice.

B5. Any other comments

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

It was a pleasure to act as external examiner this year. Well done to everyone involved in what have often been difficult circumstances.

Signed:	 Rex Ferguson
Date:	13/7/2023

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk AND copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2023

External examiner name:	Kasia Boddy		
External examiner home institution:	University of Cambridge		
Course(s) examined:	MSt in English Studies		
Level: (please <i>delete as appropriate</i>)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

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

Part B

B1. Academic standards

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

I have experience examining Masters level work at Cambridge and UCL (as internal) and at Glasgow and KCL (as external). The work produced by the students at Oxford is easily as good as the best I've encountered elsewhere, and in many cases, better. What I particularly admired was the fact that real research shaped much of the coursework as well as dissertations.

- 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 was strong across the 7 modules and 4 dissertations that I was asked to consider. It was pleasing to see that candidates were able to write on quite diverse material and in quite different ways. Marks tended to cluster in the upper 60s and low 70s, but this seemed a proper response to work of a similar quality.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

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

In all cases, the marking was carefully attentive to the stated criteria for each grade and the feedback documents were all roughly comparable in length and in tone, helpfully combining praise, criticism and advice on how the writer might improve. On the whole, examiners responded to the work in its own terms: rewarding achievements of various kinds and penalising different kinds of errors.

B3. Issues

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

Comments for the Faculty:

- a. We spent quite a lot of time considering cases of self-plagiarism (or near self-plagiarism) mostly from BA work. This is only revealed (by Turnitin) when the student has been an undergraduate at Oxford. Students who had previously studied at other universities may, however, have been just as guilty. Prevention is perhaps better than penalty and I wonder if the Faculty might consider reintroducing the dissertation workshops that I understand used to run. Supervisors might also be encouraged to ensure this does not occur.
- b. While the final feedback report sent to students were all consistent, some of the

original reports were half the length of others.

- c. Point no. 3 in the *Guidance for Examiners* states that 'reasons for any large discrepancies in raw marks should be given', but it does not explain what might constitute a large discrepancy. It might be worth specifying a number, and, or additionally, considering whether, if the disagreement is greater than a given number, the script might *automatically* go to a third marker. (In Cambridge, this happens when the raw marks are 7 or more marks apart.)
- d. It might be useful for the Examination Board if the raw marks were presented on the final mark spreadsheet; this would enable the Board to identify further discrepancies in the profile and perhaps approach an external to read across the work.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

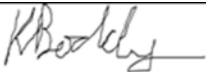
*Please comment/provide recommendations on any **good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment**, and any **opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities** provided to students that should be noted and disseminated more widely as appropriate.*

It is hard to assess how much difference the shift (due to the MAB) from Blind to Sighted Second Marking made. Of the 4 dissertations I moderated, the marks were very close in three cases. I hope next year that we can return to blind marking.

B5. Any other comments

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

Dr West ran the examinations impeccably despite the uncertainties associated with the MAB. As an external, I appreciated being kept in the loop throughout, and especially the invitation to a meeting to consider how the dissertations should be marked this year. Nina Crisp provided all the information I needed, kept in touch about adjustments to the schedule, and patiently answered all my questions as a first-time marker.

Signed:	
Date:	26 October 2023

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk AND copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2023

External examiner name:	Professor Madhu Krishnan		
External examiner home institution:	University of Bristol		
Course(s) examined:	Mst/Mphil English Literature		
Level: (please delete as appropriate)		Postgraduate	

Please complete both Parts A and B.

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

Part B

B1. Academic standards

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

Academic standards were comparable with students in comparator universities. I saw a wide range of work, the finest of which was of publishable quality. While quality across work varied, in all cases there was evidence of attempts to engage with literary criticism and history at an appropriate level.

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

As above, the quality of student performance was comparable to that of other institutions of a similar size and demographic. The cohort was considerably larger than at other institutions, but nonetheless showed adequate and reasonable performance and achievement.

B2. Rigour and conduct of the assessment process

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

Assessment was rigorous and fair. In all cases, students were treated equitably. In one case, I was asked to third mark an essay, and found that both markers had engaged fairly and fully in their work, and was able to agree a compromise mark. All feedback, though variable in length, was rigorous and comprehensive, with clear evidence for the marks given. I was, however, surprised to learn that it is forbidden to annotate student essays with detailed feedback.

B3. Issues

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

No.

B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities

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

The programme essays which I read were all of the traditional literary critical variety. I believe there is great value in maintaining the essay as the gold standard of assessment, but would recommend that a more varied assessment structure might be considered, particularly one which would enable students to engage with critical-creative writing, journalistic writing and review writing.

B5. Any other comments

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

No other comments.

Signed:	Professor Madhu Krishnan
Date:	14 August 2023

Please ensure you have completed parts A & B, and email your completed form to: external-examiners@admin.ox.ac.uk AND copy it to the applicable divisional contact set out in the guidelines.