

# MSt/MPhil Reports 2023-24

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## Report on MSt and MPhil (Medieval Studies) in English, 2023-24

(Including MSt in English and American Studies and MSt in World Literatures in English)

Dr Philip West, Chair

### Part I

#### A. STATISTICS

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

There were 101 candidates at the start of the year; 5 (4 MSt, 1 MPhil) suspended over the course of the year and 2 withdrew. Thus 94 students received outcomes at the first (July) or second (September) Marks Meetings.

###### (a) Classified examinations

| Class       | Number  |         |         | Percentage (%) |          |         |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|----------|---------|
|             | 2023/24 | 2022/23 | 2021/22 | 2023/24        | 2022/23  | 2021/22 |
| Distinction | 32      | (31)    | (40)    | 32.32%         | (32.63%) | (43%)   |
| Merit       | 41      | (34)    | (32)    | 41.41%         | (35.79%) | (33.4%) |
| Pass        | 20      | (23)    | (18)    | 20.20%         | (24.21%) | (19.4%) |
| Fail        | 1       | (2)     | (1)     | 1.01%          | (2.11%)  | (1.1%)  |
| Incomplete  | 5       | (5)     | (2)     | 5.05%          | (5.26%)  | (3.3%)  |
| Total       | 99      | (95)    | (93)    |                |          |         |

##### (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.

There was no scaling of marks.

#### B. New Examining Methods and Procedures

As in every year since 2019, provisional marks were released on-course during the year.

Further to the comments in last year's MSt/MPhil report, the sighted second marking system introduced in Trinity term 2023 for the dissertation element was not repeated this year; thus all MSt and MPhil coursework was 'double blind' marked according to customary practice in Oxford.

### **C. Changes for the Faculty to Consider**

n/a

### **D. Examination Conventions**

Candidates are made aware of the examination conventions in the MSt/MPhil Handbook, which was issued by the Graduate Office online (via Canvas) in early October 2023. It has been continually available since that date.

One significant change to the marking conventions introduced by the Board this year was that where an essay's raw marks were 10 or more apart, markers were instructed to send the essay for automatic third marking. This brings the MSt more into line with similar marking conventions in the Final Honour School, and was seen as necessary and welcome change by the Board which should be maintained in future years.

## **Part II**

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

The first marks meeting on 3 July ratified the vast majority of candidates, with only 9 candidates (out of a cohort of 99) receiving outcomes after the second Marks Meeting in September due to extensions granted by the Proctors, or by suspensions. (5 candidates are still awaiting final outcomes due to having suspended.) 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.

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 Mitigating Circumstances Sub-Committee monitored and approved all comments sheets and feedback forms for students with SpLD forms.

The role of External Examiners was clarified by the Chair in the letter of welcome sent following the first Board meeting in October. External Examiners' role is 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 carry out any necessary third marking. The Board decided in its Michaelmas term meeting to preserve the latter role (as third markers). 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. Internal third marking would of course further increase the marking burden on colleagues already carrying a very considerable load in relation to the MSt/MPhil, on top of Prelims and FHS responsibilities. The Chair is enormously grateful to all colleagues who took on this task in 2023-4. The vast majority of essays were marked by Faculty postholders, but 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, and the next Board will want to be vigilant of this, and to consider whether or not to follow Divisional advice on third marking.

The new internal members of the Board in Michaelmas term were Rebecca Beasley, Peter Boxall, Ollie Clarkson, Will Ghosh, and Nicole King, with Daniel Sawyer, Dirk Van Hulle, and the Chair staying on from 2022-3. All External Examiners continued from last

year, with Michael Rossington and Rex Ferguson completing their terms, and Alfred Hiatt, Lucy Munro, Madhu Krishnan, and Kasia Boddy now in their second year of three.

At the first meeting of internal examiners in October, the Board approved both the 23-24 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 second 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. As in 2022-3, MSt/MPhil dissertations were not included in the October distribution, as students' topics are not known in sufficient detail until the end of Hilary term.

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 8<sup>th</sup> 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.

The Mitigating Circumstances Sub-Committee (Rebecca Beasley, Peter Boxall, and the Chair) met before all Hilary and Trinity term (and indeed Long Vac) meetings where marks were received. Individual cases were considered carefully and graded according to the required classification system. As per comments above, comments sheets and feedback forms were also checked by the committee to ensure that SpLD certificates had been taken into account.

The Marks Meeting in July was a blended meeting, with a number of External Examiners unable to travel to Oxford. Examiners confirmed the marks awarded to Dissertations and agreed penalties for late and over-length work; accepted the recommendations of the MCE Sub-Committee; and classified the candidates. (There were no cases of poor academic practice to consider this year.) Preliminary nominations for the Charles Oldham Prize and the Marilyn Butler Prize were identified (these were confirmed at the second Marks Meeting in September). 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, and is especially grateful to Rex Ferguson and Michael Rossington, who are now standing down after three years.

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 those who had submitted essays later following granting of Proctorial extensions. The procedures followed were the same as for the main Marks Meeting.

The MSt/MPhil examination process is a complex machine with innumerable moving parts. The Chair has been very fortunate to have worked for the past two years with Nina Crisp, the MSt/MPhil Administrator, and would like to thank her again for the exemplary running of the process this year, and for being always being a step ahead of every challenge. Grateful thanks also go to Holly Bickerton, who has worked alongside Nina at various points during the year, and to Andy Davice for timely advice on several occasions.

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

n/a

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

n/a

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

n/a

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

| <b>Internal</b>           | <b>External</b>                          |
|---------------------------|--|
| Dr Phil West (Chair)      | Professor Kasia Boddy (Cambridge)        |
| Professor Peter Boxall    | Dr Rex Ferguson (Birmingham)             |
| Professor Rebecca Beasley | Dr Alfred Hiatt (Queen Mary, London)     |
| Dr Oliver Clarkson        | Professor Madhu Krishnan (Bristol)       |
| Dr Will Ghosh             | Professor Lucy Munro (KCL)               |
| Dr Nicole King            | Professor Michael Rossington (Newcastle) |
| Dr Daniel Sawyer          |  |
| Professor Dirk Van Hulle  |  |

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2024

|   |                           |              |  |
|---|---------------------------|--------------|--|
| <b>External examiner name:</b>  | Rex Ferguson              |              |  |
| <b>External examiner home institution:</b>                            | University of Birmingham  |              |  |
| <b>Course(s) examined:</b>  | MSt in English Literature |              |  |
| <b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )                  |                           | Postgraduate |  |
| <b>Year of term of office:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> ) |                           | Last year    |  |

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

| <b>Part A</b>   |  |                                  |            |           |                    |
|---|--|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|--------------------|
|   |  | <i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>N/A / Other</b> |
| A1.   | Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>                                      |                                  | ✓          |           |                    |
| A2.   | Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:<br><br>(i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and<br><br>(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><b>* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b></p> |  |                                  |            |           |                    |

**\*\* A6. and A7. If you are in your first year of term of office you should enter select N/A / Other.**

## **Part B**

### **B1. Academic standards**

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

The MSt sets a rigorously high bar in terms of its expectations of student achievement but in this year, as in the others I have examined, this is routinely met by the excellent standard of student work. What is most impressive is how little work falls below the upper level of pass (57-64). This reflects how high the standard is overall. I have no doubt that student achievement on this programme compares favourably with similar programmes at other higher education institutions around 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).**

I read some outstanding work this year and feel that the essays and dissertations at the higher end of the distinction category are of a publishable standard. This material was marked by a genuine sense of intervention into contemporary critical debate. As I remarked in my report from last year, my feeling is that the work in the upper merit category (high 60s) would be marked at distinction in other institutions that I have experience of. As these marks carry significant repercussions in terms of whether a student might succeed or fail in subsequent PhD funding applications the question of whether to increase the generosity of marks just a touch should be given due consideration.

### **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.**

Although I think that some marks could be increased slightly I am entirely satisfied that the marking is scrupulously consistent and fair. I was extremely impressed by how marker's comments both demonstrated such deep engagement with student work and articulated the rationale for the judgments reached. The entire process, including the conduct employed in working with the exam board both remotely and in set meetings was in line with university regulations and guidance.

### **B3. Issues**

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

Two points worthy of consideration:

- The final box in the mark sheet that allowed for an explanation as to how the final mark was agreed upon by the two markers was not always filled in. At times, this was unproblematic as there was a very small gap between original marks and a decision to meet in the middle had obviously been taken. At other times the disparity was greater and the final decision less clear. I would urge markers to ensure that this box is always completed even if only in brief detail. It really is highly useful for externals but also serves as a useful step in the process of making a decision too.
- I had quite a lot of third marking this year. Four essays in each of the first two terms and then four dissertations. I was happy to do this but I have begun to wonder if this is the best way of adjudicating these cases. My expertise was stretched with a lot of the examples and obviously while I have developed a decent sense of the marking standards and norms employed in the department I'm not fully embedded in it as your own staff are. Perhaps a layer of internal adjudication should be considered.

**B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities**

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

Nothing to report here.

**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.*

Thanks once again to all involved. It was a pleasure to act as external.

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>Signed:</b> |  |
| <b>Date:</b>   | 9/7/24  |

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



## EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2024

|   |  |              |            |
|---|--|--------------|------------|
| <b>External examiner name:</b>  | Alfred Hiatt   |              |            |
| <b>External examiner home institution:</b>                            | Queen Mary, University of London   |              |            |
| <b>Course(s) examined:</b>  | MSt in English Language and Literature 650-1550;<br>MPhil in English Studies (Medieval Period) |              |            |
| <b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )                  |  | Postgraduate |            |
| <b>Year of term of office:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> ) |  |              | Other year |

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

| <b>Part A</b>  |  |                                  |            |           |                        |
|--|--|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|------------------------|
|  |  | <i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>N/A /<br/>Other</b> |
| A1.  | Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>                                      |                                  | X          |           |                        |
| A2.  | Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:<br><br>(i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and<br><br>(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          |           |                        |
| * <b>If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b> |  |                                  |            |           |                        |

**\*\* A6. and A7. If you are in your first year of term of office you should enter select N/A / Other.**

## **Part B**

### **B1. Academic standards**

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

The academic standards achieved by the students on the courses examined are, in general, higher than those achieved by students at other higher education institutes of which I have experience. The best students consistently produce work of outstanding quality, some of which is of publishable standard. I saw very few poor scripts, and no fails. Work that, here, is of middling standard would be in the top bracket of results at my own institution and elsewhere.

- 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 on the courses I examined wrote on a wide range of material. The work I saw spanned the entire medieval period, from early medieval to the late fifteenth century. It was impressive to see students working with a mastery of, variously, Old English, Old Norse, Middle English and Latin texts (not necessarily all at once, of course). The direct engagement with medieval languages is a strength of the course and the level of linguistic competence shown by the students is as good as, or better than, that of counterparts elsewhere.

### **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.**

All work that I saw was scrupulously assessed. Markers made consistent reference to assessment guidelines in determining grades. Where markers differed in their initial assessments they either were able to resolve differences in thoughtful and conscientious ways, or (following established procedure) submitted the assessment to me for adjudication. I saw nothing to make me think that students were not being treated fairly.

### **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.**

Two brief comments, building on similar remarks last year:

1. It might be worth requiring students to translate (or provide translations of) all quotations in medieval languages (full translations into modern English for Old English, Anglo-Norman, French, Latin, Arabic etc; glosses for Middle English), using an appendix if necessary to save on word count. This is quite commonly done presently but my impression is that it is not a uniform requirement.
2. Examiners should be encouraged to provide positive feedback (i.e. identifying what students did well) in at least the same quantity as the identification of faults and missed opportunities.

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>Signed:</b> |  |
| <b>Date:</b>   | 10/7/2024  |

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

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2024

|   |                        |              |            |
|---|------------------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>External examiner name:</b>  | Madhu Krishnan         |              |            |
| <b>External examiner home institution:</b>                            | University of Bristol  |              |            |
| <b>Course(s) examined:</b>  | MSt English Literature |              |            |
| <b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )                  |                        | Postgraduate |            |
| <b>Year of term of office:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> ) |                        |              | Other year |

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

| <b>Part A</b>  |  |                                  |            |           |                    |
|--|--|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|--------------------|
|  |  | <i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>N/A / Other</b> |
| A1.  | Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>                                      |                                  | X          |           |                    |
| A2.  | Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:<br><br>(i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and<br><br>(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          |           |                    |
| * <b>If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b> |  |                                  |            |           |                    |

**\*\* A6. and A7. If you are in your first year of term of office you should enter select N/A / Other.**

## **Part B**

### **B1. Academic standards**

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

Academic standards are in line with the achievements of students at other institutions of higher education.

- 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 would say that student performance is slightly higher than in other institutions with which I have experience. Achievement is in line with this.

### **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.***

Marking and assessment is highly rigorous. I was impressed by the quality of feedback which, while variable across markers, was uniformly succinct and robust (a hard balance to achieve!). All marking appeared to me to have been done fairly, with external third marking used appropriately.

### **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?***

N/A

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

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

I was particularly impressed by the range and diversity of assessment on the world literature module and its ability to ground literary practice within materiality.

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

***Please provide any other comments you may have about any aspect of the examination process. Please also use this space to address any issues specifically required by any***

***applicable professional body. If your term of office is now concluded, please provide an overview here.***

I have no other comments.

|                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Signed:</b> | <b>Madhu Krishnan</b>    |
| <b>Date:</b>   | <b>15 September 2024</b> |

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

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2024

|   |                                  |              |            |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>External examiner name:</b>  | Lucy Munro                       |              |            |
| <b>External examiner home institution:</b>                            | King's College London            |              |            |
| <b>Course(s) examined:</b>  | MSt/MPhil in English (1550-1700) |              |            |
| <b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )                  |                                  | Postgraduate |            |
| <b>Year of term of office:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> ) |                                  |              | Other year |

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

| <b>Part A</b>   |  |                                  |            |           |                    |
|---|--|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|--------------------|
|   |  | <i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>N/A / Other</b> |
| A1.   | Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>                                      |                                  | X          |           |                    |
| A2.   | Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:<br><br>(i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and<br><br>(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><b>* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b></p> |  |                                  |            |           |                    |

**\*\* A6. and A7. If you are in your first year of term of office you should enter select N/A / Other.**

## **Part B**

### **B1. Academic standards**

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

Academic standards are in line with those at my own institution, King's College London, 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).***

I read some extremely impressive work this year, even the less successful essays bearing evidence of sustained reading, thought and engagement. The best of the dissertations was very nearly of publishable standard as it stood, and would certainly merit publication with relatively minor revisions. It was equal to the best work that I have seen from high-achieving students on the MA programmes at King's. The comparative strength of the work of weaker students is also a distinctive aspect of the programme – even students whose work was assessed as being in the pass category had moments of penetrating insight or offered new perspectives on their material. It was also striking that most of the essays and dissertations reflected the strengths of the programme as a whole by bringing literary critical, theoretical and book-historical approaches together, some doing it more successfully than others, but all demonstrating hugely commendable levels of dedication and curiosity.

### **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 marking was judicious and fair throughout, and very consistent. (This was especially noticeable in the dissertations, where I scrutinised the work of 10 different markers across six pieces of work.) It was conducted according to the regulations, and the Chair of Examiners and other colleagues worked very hard to ensure equality of treatment for students. I had very few quibbles with any of the agreed marks. Based on the comments of the examiners on the essays where I was asked to adjudicate, I could see exactly why they had awarded their original marks, even though in all cases – having weighed up the piece of work, comments and marking guidance – my mark ended up being closer to one marker than another. The feedback to students is thoughtfully prepared, focused and clear, and markers clearly take care to synthesise their comments; the extent of the feedback also seemed to be a bit more consistent this year.

### **B3. Issues**



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

I would recommend, as I did last year, that markers always complete the final box on the First Marker Comment Sheet, where the rationale for the agreed mark is recorded, as there are still some cases in which it has been left blank. As external examiner, this information is especially helpful where there is a 10-15 mark discrepancy, or one that goes across a grade boundary. Moreover, in cases where the markers are unable to agree it would be helpful to know why. Similarly, the Faculty's reminder to markers to frame some of their feedback as explicit guidance to students on how to improve their work in future assignments appeared to have been followed by some markers and not others. This being said, I do understand the challenge that ensuring consistency across so many individual markers, and I very much appreciate the efforts that colleagues are making in both of these areas.

I was glad to hear from Professor Horobin in his response to my 2023 report that the structure and duration of the MSt programme is being monitored and statistics on student achievement produced. Managing the dissertation project within the tight timeline of the MSt is clearly challenging for students and supervisors; it was also noticeable this year that more than one student had changed their plans between submitting their approved topic and the dissertation itself, with less than positive results in some cases.

One practical issue raised by a piece of work that I scrutinised was a question of how to assess work that includes material in languages that are unfamiliar to markers. This question was discussed at the exam board in July, and it would be helpful for colleagues to have guidance from the Faculty on best practice.

**B4. Good practice and enhancement opportunities**

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

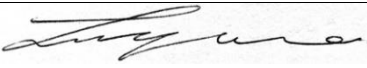
I continue to be impressed by the remarkable range of approaches and topics that the MSt and MPhil programmes cover, and by the rich opportunities that they offer for the study of non-dramatic early modern writing, and by the ways in which the resources of the Bodleian and other libraries are deployed in teaching.

The programmes also benefit from the considerable care and dedication of the Chair of Examiners, the Academic Administration Officer and her colleagues, whose work represents best practice in the running of complex assessment patterns.

**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 my comments above suggest, I have very much appreciated the efficiency and thoughtfulness of Nina Crisp, the Academic Administration Officer, and Philip West, the Chair of Examiners during this assessment cycle.

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Signed: |  |
| Date:   | 17 September 2024   |

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

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2024

|   |                      |                     |                   |
|---|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| <b>External examiner name:</b>  | Michael Rossington   |                     |                   |
| <b>External examiner home institution:</b>                            | Newcastle University |                     |                   |
| <b>Course(s) examined:</b>  | MSt. in English      |                     |                   |
| <b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )                  | <b>Undergraduate</b> | <b>Postgraduate</b> |                   |
| <b>Year of term of office:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> ) | <b>First year</b>    | <b>Last year</b>    | <b>Other year</b> |

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

| <b>Part A</b>  |  |                                  |            |           |                    |
|--|--|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|--------------------|
|  |  | <i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>N/A / Other</b> |
| A1.  | Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>                                      |                                  | ✓          |           |                    |
| A2.  | Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:<br><br>(i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and<br><br>(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?***  |                                  | ✓          |           |                    |
| * <b>If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b> |  |                                  |            |           |                    |

**\*\* A6. and A7. If you are in your first year of term of office you should enter select N/A / Other.**

## **Part B**

### **B1. Academic standards**

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

As in my first and second years, this year the standards achieved by candidates for the English MSt. programme whose work I've been sent for scrutiny or third marking are comparable with, and in many cases superior to, those achieved by students on taught Masters programmes at other universities where I have acted as an internal or external examiner.

- 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).**

Almost without exception, student performance and achievement in the work sent to me for third marking and scrutiny has been exceptionally good. Most work I've seen has been from the English Literature 1700-1830 strand but I was also sent B and C course essays and dissertations from the 1830-1914 strand (which I was very happy to read). I've been consistently impressed by the students' understanding of what constitutes research, their energy and enthusiasm for their topics, their awareness of the importance of good academic practice (including good writing) and of adhering to the highest standards of scholarship, including in matters of presentation and referencing. On the evidence of what I've seen, it is impossible to conclude anything other than that teaching, supervision, research training and skills training are of the very highest standard.

### **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 rigour and care with which the assessment process has been conducted is indisputable. The internal examiners, the Chair of the Board and professional services staff have shown limitless dedication and commitment to ensuring equity of treatment for students. I'm confident that the assessment I have seen has been conducted fairly and within the University regulations and the guidelines sent to examiners. As in previous years, my letter of invitation at the start of this academic year stated that 'the role of external examiners is to monitor marks and marking procedures, and to adjudicate in instances where agreement has not been found between the internal markers.' In performing my role, I've been guided in a consistently helpful way by the Academic Administration Officer (for which I'm extremely grateful). The work of internal examiners has also been consistently impressive. The fair-mindedness with which first and second markers go about their task, the generous and rigorous way in which they comment on student work, in whatever grade band the agreed mark falls, has been exemplary. In addition, I feel assured that the agreed marks, almost without exception, correlate with the verbal descriptors in the relevant grading bands. In

respect of process, the Final Exam Board meeting was conducted in an exemplary way by the Chair of Examiners supported by staff from the Academic Administration. Ample opportunity was provided for members of the Board to discuss specific individual cases and the principle of equity of treatment for students underpinned all deliberations.

### **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.***

There was abundant evidence of good practice and innovation in learning and teaching in the essays and dissertations I read this year. A highlight was 'Word, Image, Enlightenment', a cross-European and highly interdisciplinary course that works excellently in its own right and offers perfect training for those wishing to move on to doctoral research in the long C18. As in previous years, the B course in the 1700-1830 strand also stood out; here essays displayed a sophisticated, critical grasp of the repertoire of skills necessary for reading books and manuscripts as material objects and, in one case, engaged impressively with the principles as well as practice of textual editing. In several courses, the firsthand use made of manuscripts and rare books in the Bodleian and other Oxford libraries was gratifying to witness. Giving students the opportunity to think across periods of literary history through focussing on a specific topic or literary form also seemed to work very well (e.g. in the C courses 'Place and Nature Writing' and 'The English and American Ode'). As in previous years, I admire the way that markers press high performing students in their feedback and comments, challenging them to develop their skills further and giving them a sense of what constitutes the very best scholarly and critical work in the field.

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


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

I only have a couple of minor observations to make about this year.

- (1) I did not always receive a Combined Feedback sheet and I noticed that in the CF sheets I was sent very occasionally the feedback was slightly under 350 or over 500 words.
- (2) I noticed that the approved dissertation topic differed quite markedly from the dissertation abstract in a few cases. A degree of difference is, of course, inevitable given the deadlines for each (Week 6 of Hilary Term, Week 8 of Trinity Term). Nevertheless, some further discussion of the student's brief for the

approved dissertation topic and the timing of its submission might be worth considering.

In conclusion, I've been greatly impressed by the MSt. programme over the past three years. Student achievement is almost without exception very impressive. The standards of assessment are unwaveringly high and the expertise, commitment and dedication of all staff involved in delivering and running the programme deserve the highest commendation. This year was perhaps the smoothest running of the three (with the legacy of Covid impacting in 2021-2 and industrial action in 2022-3). Nevertheless, I should emphasize that the standards of student performance, staff feedback and administrative support have been consistently high throughout my three year term. I can honestly say that it's been a privilege to be an external for this course.

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>Signed:</b> |  |
| <b>Date:</b>   | 28 July 2024  |

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

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM 2024

|   |                         |              |            |
|---|-------------------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>External examiner name:</b>  | Kasia Boddy             |              |            |
| <b>External examiner home institution:</b>                            | University of Cambridge |              |            |
| <b>Course(s) examined:</b>  | MSt in English Studies  |              |            |
| <b>Level:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> )                  |                         | Postgraduate |            |
| <b>Year of term of office:</b> (please <i>delete as appropriate</i> ) |                         |              | Other year |

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

| <b>Part A</b>   |  |                                  |            |           |                        |
|---|--|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|------------------------|
|   |  | <i>Please (✓) as applicable*</i> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>N/A /<br/>Other</b> |
| A1.   | Are the academic standards and the achievements of students comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have experience? <i>[Please refer to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines for External Examiner Reports].</i>                                      |                                  | x          |           |                        |
| A2.   | Do the threshold standards for the programme appropriately reflect:<br><br>(i) the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and<br><br>(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><b>* If you answer "No" to any question, you should provide further comments when you complete Part B.</b></p> |  |                                  |            |           |                        |

**\*\* A6. and A7. If you are in your first year of term of office you should enter select N/A / Other.**

## **Part B**

### **B1. Academic standards**

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

I have considerable experience examining Masters level work at Cambridge and UCL (as internal) and Glasgow and KCL (as external). The work produced by Oxford MSt students is easily as good as the best of that, and in many cases better.

- 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).*

\*In Michaelmas, I scrutinised 9 essays from 2 modules; in Hilary, 14 essays from 3 modules and third-marked 6 essays (3 from one module; 2 from another; 1 from a third); in Trinity, I scrutinised 7 dissertations.

The essays I scrutinised (and in some cases third-marked) covered a wide range of topics and approached the material from a variety of perspectives.

### **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 markers tended to pay careful attention to the stated criteria for each grade. The only exceptions were the cases in which I was asked to be third marker. Most might have been resolved if both examiners had reconsidered their comments and scores more closely against the criteria set out in the guidelines. Discrepancies also occurred when examiners disagreed on the *extent* to which certain practices should be rewarded or penalised (in particular, questions of scope, structure, and scholarly presentation). I'm not sure how the Guidelines could help with that. The feedback comments were all roughly comparable in tone and in length, and the best provided detailed comments on how the writer might improve.

### **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?*

1. I noticed that serious disagreements in marks – i.e. those requiring third marking – were confined to a small number of the modules that I was asked to scrutinise. I don't know if there's any pattern to this or whether the Board wants to keep tabs on such things.



2. At the board meeting, it was striking that not all of the MSTs had a similar number of very high scoring students. Again, this may change from year to year - I don't have access to historical data concerning final results (to see if there is a pattern) and applications (perhaps the strongest students gravitate to particular courses) – but the distribution of marks across stands does seem worth considering since there are serious implications for PhD funding.


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

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

1. I was delighted to see that issues around self-plagiarism from BA work did not occur this year. The measures that the Faculty has introduced to prevent this seem to be working well.
2. Last year I mentioned that feedback reports varied considerably in length. The Guidance to Examiners now specifies 350-500 words and this was largely adhered to.
3. I was delighted to see that raw marks that are 10 or more apart are now automatically sent to a third marker.
4. And that raw marks were available on the spreadsheet at the Final Board Meeting.
5. It was good to see a return to blind second marking (despite the extra work this entails).

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

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

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Signed</b><br>: |  |
| <b>Date:</b>       | <b>22 October 2024</b>  |

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