FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF HISTORY AND MODERN LANGUAGES EXAMINERS' REPORT 2020

Part I

A. Statistics

All candidates

Class	No						%					
	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
I	17	11	11	9	5	5	77.2	64.7	47.8	60	35.7	38.5
II.1	5	6	12	6	9	8	22.8	35.3	52.2	40	64.3	61.5
II.2	-	-	-	-	-	-				-	-	-
III	-	-	-	-	-	-				-	-	-

All candidates, divided by male and female

Class	Number										Percentage (%) of gender									
	2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
I	9	8	9	2	4	7	5	4	3	2	100	61.5	90	28.6	66.7	41.2	83.3	44.4	60	22.2
II.1	0	5	1	5	2	10	1	5	2	7	0	38.5	10	71.4	33.3	58.8	16.7	55.6	40	77.8
II.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
III	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

B. NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This year because of the pandemic new classification rules were agreed. In History the Special Subject gobbets papers were cancelled; in HML half of Paper II, and papers IV, V, IX, X, and XI, and the oral examination, were cancelled. In HML, the remaining half of Paper II counted as 0.5 of a paper and the rest were weighted x1. Candidates were assessed on totals varying between 5.5 and 7.5 papers; they were classified on the language paper marks (1.5 papers) and on their 4 highest content paper marks. The overall average was obtained by combining the average over the History papers and the average over the ML papers in the ratio of their original registration choices. A simple calculation of averages was also done without balancing; classification was determined by whichever was the better of the two averages. Type 2 'safety net' measures were put in place. The 2019 conventions are attached for comparison.

C. INFORMING CANDIDATES OF EXAMINATION CONVENTIONS

Candidates were informed of the changes to the Examination Conventions through direct email correspondence to individual candidates on 22 April 2020.

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

The examination process for History & Modern Languages candidates this year was inevitably much disrupted and was unusual in many respects, but ran successfully thanks to the resilience of candidates and the laudable efforts of the administrative staff of both faculties and all those marking papers and sitting on the board. 22 candidates took this Joint School, almost as many as in the peak year of 23 in 2018. Of these 22, 17 gained a First Class degree, and the remaining 5 Upper Seconds. There were, as is now usual in this joint school, no 2:2s or lower classifications. This impressive outcome equated to an unprecedented 77% of candidates receiving a First, higher than in any previous year. This result may be presumed to be anomalous because of the reduced range of exercises on which candidates were being assessed and in particular the removal of the oral examinations, the Special Subject gobbets examination and ML papers IV, V, IX, X and XI.

The Chair and the Modern Languages Coordinator met in advance of the Final Marks Meeting to identify borderline candidates' papers which needed to be scrutinized/reread, in accordance with the established procedure. The resulting scrutiny at the borderline did not automatically push marks up; in several cases it led to no movement of marks in an upward direction.

All Mitigating Circumstances submissions (11, many related to the specific circumstances of studying for and sitting examinations online and usually at home) were considered before the main examiners' meeting by the Chair and the Modern Languages Coordinator. Recommendations were made to the full board meeting that several marks be disregarded, or automatic penalties waived, though it is to the credit of candidates that a number of examinations undertaken under very difficult circumstances had already been awarded high marks. At the meeting itself all cases were discussed whether or not the special circumstances would have any impact on the overall classification of the candidate. Reports were filed on each case, on the consideration given at the meeting and the outcome.

Two issues were raised in the final meeting which might call for change in next year's procedures. The first concerns the synoptic evaluation of the bridge essay as an exercise unique to this school and a paper which can play a vital role in the scrutiny of borderline candidates. It was suggested that the bridge essays might be included among the materials recommended for sampling and review to the external examiners nominated to this school to equip them better to adjudicate on individual essays and to comment on the role of the exercise within the degree.

The second issue concerns the different handling of Mitigating Circumstances material in the two parent schools. This presented itself in unique form this year when the previous three-level grading of gravity was not used, but also raises a more general question of usual practice. In History and its other joint schools, all applications, with candidate numbers but of course not names attached, were reviewed by small panels which made recommendations to the final meeting and all the applications were also available to the whole board of examiners at that final meeting. In Modern Languages and its other joint schools, all applications were similarly reviewed by small panels which made recommendations; those recommendations supported by the full materials were then reviewed by larger panels including external examiners; but the recommendations as forwarded to the final meeting of the whole board were supported only by brief summaries of the mitigating circumstances judged relevant to the recommendation made. It is recommended that in future years the final HML meeting sees only a brief assessment of the severity of the mitigating circumstances relevant to each candidate

and a recommendation for action and that an ML external examiner be added to the small panel meeting.

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

The percentage of female candidates achieving a First was for the first time higher than that achieving an Upper Second, but not as high as that of the male candidates, all of whom achieved Firsts. Strange though this year's circumstances were, the situation should clearly continue to be monitored.

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

The HML "Bridge Paper" is a unique component of the HML degree. In 2018 and 2019 this was one of the weaker areas of performance, with only 6 out of 23 candidates and 4 out of 17 achieving a first-class mark on the paper. This year performance was slightly stronger, as 8 candidates out of 22 secured first-class marks for the bridge essay and three candidates achieved their highest mark on it. Unlike last year, those scoring first-class marks were studying a range of languages (French, German and Spanish). It is striking both that the marks awarded by the two markers, one drawn from each faculty, rarely diverge by much and that the modal mark, achieved by 7 candidates, was 68. This would seem to be an exercise on which literary and linguistic scholars and historians agree that high competence is often achieved, but that excellence is a more striking achievement than on some other components of the examination.

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

None.

E. Members of the Board of Examiners

Prof. Steven Gunn (Chair)
Prof. Karen Leeder (Modern Languages Coordinator)
Prof. James McDougall
Prof. Julia Smith
Dr Reidar Due
Prof. Elena Lombardi
Dr Daniela Omlor
Prof. Annette Volfing
Dr Carl Watkins (External Examiner for History)
Dr Emma Herdman (External Examiner for Modern Languages)

EXAMINATION CONVENTIONS 2019

FOR THE HONOUR SCHOOL OF HISTORY AND MODERN LANGUAGES

CLASSIFICATION CONVENTIONS

The following criteria will be used to determine a candidate's overall classification.

First:	Average mark of 68.5 or greater. At least two marks of 70 or above. No mark below 50.
Alternative Route to a First:	At least 50% of the papers must have a mark of 70 or above. The average mark must be 67.5 or greater. No mark below 50.
Upper Second:	Average mark of 59 or greater. At least two marks of 60 or above. No mark below 40.
Lower Second:	Average mark of 49.5 or greater. At least two marks of 50 or above. No mark below 30.
Third:	Average mark of 40 or greater. Not more than one mark below 30.
Pass:	Average mark of 30 or greater. Not more than two marks below 30.

For the purposes of establishing the average, the mark on the oral examination, if it is expressed out of 100, shall be halved. The total of marks on all papers shall then be divided by 9.5.

To attain a First by the above method, a candidate must obtain at least one mark of 70 or above in a content paper (i.e. a History or a literature paper).

To attain a First by the Alternative Route to a First, at least 50% of the papers must have a mark of 70 or above (discounting the mark on the oral examination), and the average mark must be 67.5 or greater.

Before finally confirming its classifications, the Examining Board may take such steps as it considers appropriate to reconsider the cases of candidates whose marks are very close to a borderline, or in some way anomalous, and to satisfy themselves that the candidates concerned are correctly classified in accordance with the criteria specified in these conventions.