FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF HISTORY AND MODERN LANGUAGES EXAMINERS' REPORT 2021 FINAL

Part I

A. Statistics

All candidates

Class	No						%					
	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
I	10	17	11	11	9	5	40	77.2	64.7	47.8	60	35.7
II.1	14	5	6	12	6	9	56	22.8	35.3	52.2	40	64.3
II.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DDH	1	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-

All candidates, divided by male and female

Class	Number										Percentage (%) of gender									
	2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2021		2020		2019		2018		2017	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
I	4	6	9	8	9	2	4	7	5	4	36.4	42.9	100	61.5	66.7	28.6	66.7	41.2	83.3	44.4
II.1	6	8	0	5	1	5	2	10	1	5	54.5	57.1	0	38.5	33.3	71.4	33.3	58.8	16.7	55.6
II.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DDH	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

B. NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This year the classification rules returned to what they had been pre-pandemic, except that the Oral examination was conducted on a Pass/Fail basis and the candidates classified on 9 papers weighted at 1 each (instead of 9.5 as in previous years). Because the HML candidates had submitted their British History papers in 2019, they were unaffected by the cancellation of those papers in 2020, and therefore the mitigations in place for candidates who had not been able to submit British History essays in their second year did not apply to them.

C. INFORMING CANDIDATES OF EXAMINATION CONVENTIONS

Candidates were informed of the changes to the Examination Conventions through direct email correspondence to individual candidates at various dates in Hilary Term; the final version of the HML Examining Conventions was circulated on 18 May 2021.

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

The examination process for History & Modern Languages candidates was again complicated by the circumstances of the pandemic, but ran successfully thanks to the continued

resilience of the candidates and the herculean efforts of the administrative staff of both faculties and all those marking papers and sitting on the board. 25 candidates took this Joint School, surpassing the previous peak year of 23 in 2018. Of the 25 candidates classified 10 gained a First Class degree, 14 Upper Seconds and 1 candidate was Declared to have Deserved Honours (DDH). The percentage of Firsts (40%) was low compared with previous years but the distribution of Firsts by gender was noticeably more equal this year (see the discussion below).

The Chair and the Modern Languages Coordinator held a preliminary meeting in advance of the Final Marks Meeting to consider MCE applications (the Mitigating Circumstances Panel, or MCP) and to identify borderline candidates' papers which needed to be scrutinized/re-read, in accordance with the established procedures.

All Mitigating Circumstances submissions (13 in total) were discussed individually and, in accordance with the University's Examination and Assessment Framework, banded according to seriousness on a scale of 1-3 with 1 indicating minor impact, 2 indicating moderate impact, and 3 indicating very serious impact. A measure of the seriousness of the circumstances faced by students is that 10 of the 13 notifications were graded at level 2 and/ or level 3. As a result of this assessment recommendations were made to the full Board meeting that in several cases marks should be disregarded, or automatic penalties waived, on the basis of the MCE notifications. At the Final Marks Meeting itself the MCE banding and the decision of the MCP was noted for each student.

Two issues arose from this process which deserve to be noted. Classifying a range of complex mitigating circumstances into three broad categories is clearly a blunt instrument, and arguably one that academic staff are not best placed or qualified to address. A better approach might be to refer MCE applications to more specialist Mitigating Circumstances Panels, as happens in other universities. Such an approach might also help to avoid the second issue, which was that discussion of the individual MCE applications revealed differences in Departmental approaches to mitigation (for example the circumstances under which papers might be disregarded). Clearly these differences present particular procedural challenges for Joint Boards which could be eased by clearer University guidance to ensure greater consistency of decision-making between Boards.

The Final Marks Meeting followed the procedures laid out in the Examination and Assessment Framework, and in particular the provisions of the Assessment Support Package, which this year specified checks to be carried out to ensure that students are not disadvantaged in comparison to prior cohorts. Many of these checks and adjustments were carried out at single subject level (for example issues of group disruption, and adjustments for SpLD and medical conditions), but the Board was required to consider the newly introduced mark safeguard with regard to the Bridge Essay component (not monitored elsewhere) and in addition to consider whether it would be appropriate to apply any measures under the outcomes safeguard.

The mark safeguard procedure required the Board to compare the median Bridge Essay mark (67) with the average of the median marks for the previous three pre-pandemic years of available data (67.8). Given that the difference was less than 3 marks the Board was not required to make any adjustment. The outcomes safeguard procedure asks Boards to consider the percentage of first class results against the pre-pandemic three year average. Here there was a difference that required discussion: the percentage of Firsts (40%) was lower than the three-year average (56%). In large cohorts this might constitute a case for

adjustment, but as the Examination and Assessment Framework makes clear, automatically applying an adjustment to small programmes (defined as less than 30 students) is more problematic as such programmes are likely to experience greater swings in the proportion of firsts awarded. Historically this has been the case with History & Modern Languages, where the percentage of firsts between 2015 and 2020 has varied between 35.7% (2016) and 77.2% (2020), the latter figure significantly increasing the three-year average. Boards for small programmes are therefore not obliged to make adjustments. Although the percentage of firsts was lower than the percentage in History (52%), it was nevertheless higher than the percentage of firsts in Medieval & Modern Languages (35.4%). After full consideration of these issues the Board took the view that the class distribution was acceptable and reflected the standard of the work examined.

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

It is striking that this year's results show a far more equal distribution of results by gender than previous years. 36.4% of men secured Firsts, compared with 42.9% of women, the first time that women have outperformed men on this measure. The relatively small numbers make it difficult to draw firm conclusions from these outcomes, but it would be worth examining them alongside single-subject results to see if there are features of the 2021 assessment regime which seem to be having similar effects.

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

The variety of papers taken by the relatively small HML cohort precludes much meaningful analysis of the component parts of the examination. That said, some observations might be made about the Bridge Paper, the unique component of the HML degree. This used to be one of the weaker areas of performance with only 26% of candidates achieving first class marks in 2018, and 24% in 2019. This went up to 36% in 2020, a figure matched in 2021. The paper is also becoming more prominent in terms of generating candidates' highest mark: in 2020 14% achieved their highest mark on the Bridge Paper, this increased to 24% of candidates in 2021.

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

E. Members of the Board of Examiners

Dr Jon Parkin (Chair)
Dr Dominic Moran (Modern Languages Coordinator)
Prof. Patricia Clavin
Prof. Christina de Bellaigue
Dr Maria Blanco
Prof. Philip Bullock
Dr Nicola Gardini
Prof. Simon Kemp
Prof. Karen Leeder
Prof. Trevor Burnard (External Examiner for History)
Dr Mark Chinca (External Examiner for Modern Languages)