

History
Prelims 2023
Examiners' Report

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN HISTORY 2023

REPORT OF THE EXAMINERS

I: Statistical overview

Table 1: Performance of candidates by gender

Year	All HIST cand	No + % of Ds, all	No + % of Ps, all	F	No + % of Ds, F	No + % of Ps, F	M	No + % of Ds, M	No + % of Ps, M
2023	216	74 34.3%	142 incl 4 LVs 65.7%	129	48 37.2%	81 (inc 2 LV) 62.8%	87	26 29.9%	61 (inc 2 LV) 70.1%
2022	228	70 30.7%	158 69.3%	114	23 20.2%	91 79.8%	114	47 41.2%	67 58.8%
2021	252	71 30.5%	181 71.82%	146	37 25.34%	109 74.65%	106	34 32.07%	72 67.92%
2019	227	64 28.2%	163 71.81%	109	18 16.52%	91 83.49%	119	46 47.46%	73 61.34%

Table 2: Number of candidates for each paper in 2023

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
BIP 1 (History of the British Isles - c.300-1100)	42	6	48
BIP 2 (History of the British Isles – 1000-1330)	26	1	27
BIP 3 (History of the British Isles - 1330-1550)	27	4	31
BIP 4 (History of the British Isles – 1500-1700)	44	6	49
BIP 5 (History of the British Isles V– 1688-1848)	22	10	32
BIP 6 (History of the British Isles – 1830-1951)	56	10	66

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
EWP 1: The Transformation of the Ancient World, 370-900	50	19	69
EWP 2: Medieval Christendom & its Neighbours, 1000-1300 (<i>old syllabus</i>)	1		
EWP 2: Communities, Connections and Confrontations, 1000-1300 (<i>new syllabus</i>)	61	17	78
EWP 3: Renaissance, Recovery & Reform, 1400-1650	62	19	80
EWP 4: Society, Nation & Empire, 1815-1914	43	23	65
OS 1 – Theories of the State (Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx)	23	24	47
OS 2 – Alfred and the Vikings’	5	1	6
OS 3 – Early Gothic France c.1100-c.1150	5	5	10
OS 4. The Mongols	15	3	18
OS 5 – Conquest & Frontiers: England & the Celtic Peoples 1150-1220 (<i>suspended in 2023</i>)	-	-	-
OS 6 – English Chivalry & the French War c.1330-c.1400	8	2	10
OS 7 – Crime and Punishment in England c.1280-c.1450	9	1	10
OS 8 – Nature and Art in the Renaissance	5	4	9
OS 9– Witch-craft & Witch-hunting in early modern Europe	21	8	28
OS 10 – Making England Protestant 1558-1642 (<i>suspended in 2023</i>)	-	-	-
OS 11 – Conquest & Colonization: Spain & America in the 16 th Century	16	5	21
OS 12 – Revolution and Empire in France 1789-1815 (<i>suspended in 2023</i>)	-	-	-
OS 13 – Women, gender and the nation: Britain, 1789-1825	4	2	6
OS 14. The Romance of the People: The Folk Revival from 1760 to 1914	24	4	28
OS 15 – Haiti and Louisiana: The problem of Revolution in the Age of Slavery	18	2	19

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
OS 16 – Imperial Republic: The US and Global Imperialism, 1867-1914	7	4	11
OS 17. The New Women in Britain & Ireland, c.1880-1920	4	2	6
OS 18 - The Rise and Crises of European Socialisms: 1881-1921	8		8
OS 19. 1919: Remaking the World	12	3	15
OS 20 – Living with the Enemy: The Experience of the Second World War in Europe	9	3	12
OS 21 – Viewing Communism: Cinema and Everyday Life in Eastern Europe, 1944-89	8	-	8
OS 22 – Radicalism in Britain 1965-75 (suspended in 2023)	-	-	-
OS 23 – The World of Homer and Hesiod (AMH)	2	3	5
OS 24 – Augustan Rome (AMH)	4	5	9
OS [25] – Industrialization in Britain & France 1750-1870 (HECO only)	-	5	5
Approaches to History	126	35	160
Historiography: Tacitus to Weber	58	22	79
Herodotus	-	-	-
Einhard and Asser	4	1	5
Tocqueville	6	5	11
Meinecke and Kehr	4	5	9
Machiavelli (suspended in 2022-23)	-	-	-
Vicens Vives	4	1	5
Trotsky (no takers in 2022-23)	-	-	-
Quantification	15	1	16

History of the British Isles (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	47	21.8	17	19.5	30	23.3	63.8
60-69	153	70.8	66	77.67	87	67.4	56.9
<60	16	7.4	4	4.6	12	9.3	75%
Total	216	100	87	100	129	100	-

*Some candidates have their marks disregarded

European & World History (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	55	25.5	23	26.4	32	24.8	58.2
60-69	140	64.8	57	40.7	83	64.3	57.01
<60	21	9.7	7	8.1	14	10.9	66.7
Total	216	100	127	100	129	100	-

*Some candidates have their marks disregarded

Optional Subjects (Sex/paper by paper) – Still missing marks for Viewing Communism

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	61	28.2	24	27.6	37	28.7	60.7
60-69	150	69.4	59	67.8	81	62.7	54
<60	15	6.9	4	4.6	11	8.5	73.3
Total	216	100	87	100	129	100	-

Approaches to History (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	31	19.6	13	18.3	18	20.7	58.1
60-69	100	78.75	51	71.8	49	56.3	49
<60	27	0.62	7	9.9	20	23	74.1
Total	158	100	71	100	87	100	-

*Some candidates have their marks disregarded

Historiography (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	17	21	10	29.4	7	14.9	41.2
60-69	63	78.48	24	70.6	39	83	61.9
<60	1	1.2	0	0	1	2.1	100
Total	81	100	34	100	47	100	-

GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims 2023

87M 129F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avrg	M Avrg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60	M < 60
ALL	65.6	66	0.4								
BH	65.5	66	0.5	34	20	33	22	30 (23.3)	17 (19.5)	12 (9.3)	4 (4.6)
EWH	65.9	65.9	0	34	26	27	24	32 (24.8)	23 (26.4)	14 (10.9)	7 (8.1)
OS	66.1	66.5	0.4	34	28	27	18	37 (28.7)	24 (27.6)	11 (8.5)	4 (4.6)
IV	64.8	65.6	0.8	27	13	41	23	30 (23.3)	17 (19.5)	19 (14.7)	5 (5.8)

Distinctions

Women	48	37.2%
Men	26	29.9%

GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims 2022

114M 114F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avrg	M Avrg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60	M < 60
ALL	65.09	66.66	1.57					7 (6.3)	17 (14.9)	6 (5.4)	3 (2.6)
BH	65.33	67	1.67	33	28	27	24	21 (18.8)	35 (30.7)	8 (7.1)	4 (3.5)
EWH	64.2	65.6	1.4	19	14	44	33	14 (12.5)	29 (25.4)	16 (14.3)	9 (7.9)
OS	66.1	67.06	0.96	44	40	14	29	28 (25)	37 (32.5)	8 (7.1)	7 (6.1)
IV	64.68	66.7	2.02	25	31	32	27	21 (18.8)	37 (32.5)	14 (12.5)	12 (10.5)

Distinctions

Women 23 20.54%
Men 47 41.23%

**GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims
2021**

108M 150F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avg	M Avg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60	M < 60
ALL	65.56	66.23	0.67					11 (7.3)	17 (15.7)	5 (3.3)	3 (2.8)
BH	64.91	65.36	0.45	44	19	54	48	33 (22)	21 (19.4)	19 (12.7)	10 (9.3)
EWH	65.59	66.57	0.98	42	32	39	26	31 (20.7)	32 (29.6)	19 (12.7)	8 (7.4)
OS	66.07	66.5	0.43	43	34	35	19	34 (22.7)	35 (32.4)	10 (6.7)	7 (6.5)
IV	65.63	66.44	0.81	46	34	41	31	31 (20.7)	34 (31.5)	10 (6.7)	12 (11.1)

Distinctions

Women 37 24.67%
Men 34 31.48%

II Marking & Classification

A. General Comments on the Examination

216 candidates sat the examination (129 F, 87 M) and of these 74 (48 F, 26 M) were awarded distinctions and 142 passes (81 F, 61 M). Several of those who passed in July were awarded distinctions in October following delays in marking; and 4 (2 F, 2 M) passed having sat between one and four papers in the Long Vacation examinations. Gender differentials evident in previous years were in part reversed.

Administration

The conduct of History Prelims in 2023 faced challenges, though by no means as drastic as those confronting FHS. Prelims remains a simpler operation thanks to its single-marking system (with re-readings on the board for those on classification borderlines) and less complex classification procedures. In general, the process of setting, reviewing, marking and classification worked well across the year. WFH by some examiners and office staff caused some stress particularly where board meetings were concerned, but Faculty IT staff were helpful, and these difficulties were successfully overcome. Throughout the process the examiners were grateful for the expertise, support, and agility under pressure of Andrea Hopkins, Isabelle Moriceau, Alex Vickers and Vicky Anderton. The chair and the board were also grateful for the calm and precise service of Conor O'Brien as secretary.

Almost all BIP and EWP papers and some Optional Subjects and Paper 4 options were set and marked by board members and as ever this made marking allocation more straightforward than in FHS. Each board member marked part of the run of Approaches to History and three other markers shared the remainder of the load. The Marking and Assessment Boycott made it necessary to seek replacement markers for five papers. In three cases replacements were found, but two Optional Subjects for which suitable replacement markers were not available remained unmarked until after the suspension of the Boycott.

The overlap in July between a delayed FHS classification process and Prelims classification made it harder for the office to support the Prelims board, but the classification process was completed to the agreed timetable. Some markers were very late in delivering marks, particularly where there seems to have been confusion between colleagues about who was meant to be marking some specialised papers. The result was that marks were still arriving during the classification meetings, but the Prelims timetable is always tight and perhaps such difficulties are inevitable. The office staff were extremely helpful in scanning scripts to enable colleagues who found themselves on the wrong continent to mark their scripts in time for final classification. More serious at that stage were problems with the classification software, which was deployed late in the day and generated some inaccurate marks and incorrect classifications. Fortunately, we ran the entire classification process in parallel in a spreadsheet, so we could check results against both that document and what the software generated to ensure accuracy.

Difficulties with marking were few. The recently revised mark band descriptors operated well and the board did not feel that candidates were achieving overall results inappropriate

to the quality of their work. Marking profiles were examined and scaling was applied to the marks of one marker with an anomalous marking profile on one paper for which scripts had also been marked by a range of other markers. Above 69 this marker's profile matched that of others, but below that it was increasingly divergent from the norm, with a concentration of marks at the lower end. Scripts marked by this marker from each mark-band were read by two different board members and it was agreed that the marker's marks diverged from those that others would have awarded to scripts with similar characteristics increasingly as marks went down the mark-scale. To correct for this, all scripts graded below 40 by that marker were re-marked and marks for scripts graded between 41 and 69 by that marker were scaled upwards by a calculation that added progressively more marks to the marker's original mark as the marks approached 40; the aim was to generate marks closer to those that the two examiners sampling the scripts judged that they would have awarded. For individual candidates this process had occasional effects on classification – for example by eliminating a mark below 60 which would have blocked the award of a distinction – but more often it resulted in a run of marks in which the mark for this paper was less out of line with those gained on other papers.

Medical Certificates and Mitigating Circumstances

MCE submissions were presented by 17 candidates. The details were considered by a sub-panel of three board members and the circumstances rated 1-3 for their likely impact on different elements of the candidate's performance. These ratings were presented to the board, which changed marks for individual papers or overall classifications in five cases. In other cases, the overall run of marks placed the candidate so clearly in the pass or distinction category that no change in classification appeared justifiable, or the marks achieved for papers severely affected were not out of line with those achieved on papers less severely affected. In many such cases candidates were to be congratulated on their triumph over distressingly adverse circumstances.

B. Equality and Diversity Issues and Breakdown of the Results by Gender

The gender balance of results showed a dramatic reversal from recent years. Among candidates able to be classified in July (thus not including those awaiting Optional Subject marks) one and a half times as many female candidates achieved distinctions as male. The reasons for this are unclear and the detailed statistics will merit further investigation. At first sight high-scoring female candidates, though not all female candidates, did particularly well on the History of the British Isles papers and on Approaches to History, but whether this relates to the subject matter and teaching of those papers, the timing of their study within the first year, specific features of their examining this year, or specific features of the recruitment and composition of this year's first year cohort is harder to say.

III Comments on Papers: General

BIP 1- History of the British Isles, c. 300-1100

47 students took History of the British Isles, Paper 1, for Prelims this year: six History and English students and the rest all Main School History. There were five first class marks, 24 marks between 65 and 69, 11 marks between 60 and 64 and seven marks in the 50s. The most popular question was by far Q.1 on the end of Roman Britain: it received a total of 27 takers. Other very popular questions were 7 (common experience of the 'Viking Age') with 17 takers, 9 (violence in political life) with 16 takers, 11 (on the Church's impact on gender) with 15 takers and 13 (archaeology) with 11 takers. Only three questions received no takers at all: Q.3 on post-Roman connections with the European continent, 10 on migration and/or long-distance travel and 15 on southern British Celtic regions. All other questions received at least two answers. Recognising that most responses to Q.1 considered Western Britain and the Britons, the picture here is not as bad for 'Welsh' history as it looks, but it's clear it's the odd nation out: both the Scottish/Pictish question and that on Ireland received at least five takers, which was a strong showing for Ireland in comparison to recent years. It is clear also that students are not particularly confident with questions about contacts between the British Isles and the wider world (if they are not about vikings!). This may change as the re-imagining of the paper gets bedded in.

As a first outing for the new vision of the paper this was a strong performance and a welcome broad spread of topics. While the number of distinction-level marks was a little lower than might be expected, there were lots of good scripts just knocking on the door of a first. The scripts as a whole were much less anglocentric than some years, with pleasantly strong performances on the common experience Q.7 being particularly notable. Most students still tend to turn gender questions into essays on noble women somewhat capping the opportunities for picking up marks on these topics. The types of questions set seem to have given the students the flexibility they required: those who wanted to talk about the Mercian Supremacy could do so via Q.9, but there were also students talking about popular culture and literary texts with enthusiasm. The only obvious warning sign might be that the overwhelming popularity of Q.1 clearly reflects its status as a safe, dependable question. While there clearly is room for creativity on the paper, and on the whole students did pretty well with questions like 9 and 13 which inevitably asked them to set the parameters of what they would look at, the desire for a 'dead cert' question is clearly strong. Q.1 attracted much solid, but rarely terribly exciting, work.

BIP 2 - History of the British Isles, 1000-1330

27 students took History of the British Isles, Paper 2, for Prelims this year: one History and Politics student and the rest all Main School History. There were two first class marks, 10 marks between 65 and 69, 12 marks between 60 and 64 and three marks in the 50s. The most popular question was Q.16 on the origins of Magna Carta; Q.11 on gender and social status attracted 11 takers and Q.15 on the treatment of Jews 10 takers. The other topics that received 5 or more takers were Q.1 on the two eleventh-century conquests, Q.2 on the Norman impact and Q.12 on the kingdom of the Scots. Only a single question received no takers: Q.14 on learning and scholarship. The result was quite a wide distribution of questions tried, but a heavy concentration of the majority of the essays written on a few very popular topics. Political history in general was very well represented, while cultural history and religion were strikingly unpopular. The three/four questions that might be deemed most directly focused on religion only received five takers between them. While the gender

question was popular, the answers rarely actually had anything to do with gender and were almost all focused on knowledge of a few case studies of royal and noble women. Visual sources only attracted a single essay and the writing of history only a mere two.

The overall impression was that generally levels of knowledge were good and that students were adequately prepared, but that there's a lot of 'playing it safe' at work. Students focus on a small number of regularly appearing topics and write solid, not very creative, essays about them. It would be nice occasionally to see a few more adventurous spirits.

BIP 3 - History of the British Isles, 1330-1550

32 students took this paper. The most popular questions were those on revolts, national identities, women, class and life-cycle, and royal ambition, while smaller but significant numbers tackled literacy and religious change. Most other questions attracted a few answers, only towns and justice commanding no interest at all, so in sum a large range of themes were addressed. Geographically interest was concentrated on England, though some candidates used Scotland to test the advantages and disadvantages of royal ambition, others explored the rich theme of national and ethnic identities in Ireland and several tackled social and cultural mixing in Wales. A few ranged widely across kingdoms in tackling the contrasting effects of epidemic disease or the aims of rebels. The question on determinants of women's social positions was generally better tackled than that on masculinity, where most answers were dominated by the manliness of a handful of kings. For women, candidates split roughly equally between those who judged class more important than life-cycle and those who thought the reverse, while an encouraging variety of examples was deployed, from celebrities such as Margery Kemp, Margaret Beaufort and the Paston women to peasant wives and London widows.

As ever, some answers were weakened by imprecision of focus on the precise terms of the question, or by apparently using the question to address a rather different topic. The idea that good kings were ambitious to fulfil contemporary expectations of kingship, for example, was used to justify extended explorations of those expectations, change in the possible routes to social mobility was narrowed down to the effects of plague on the peasantry, or the formation of national and ethnic identities was confined to the treatment of migrants within England. Detailed evidence when successfully deployed in support of arguments was impressive, but scrambled detail could be as little help in making a convincing case as no detail at all. Likewise, candidates keen to identify particular historians as the source of their ideas did not always succeed in linking the right idea with the right historian, or in reproducing the intended historian's name in a recognisable manner. Conversely, there were impressively subtly-conceptualised and well-supported answers on a pleasing range of topics, from epidemic disease and economic change to the role of political ideas in politics.

BIP 4 - History of the British Isles, 1500-1700

49 candidates took this paper, of which 8 achieved distinction. The overall performance was good, and the range of questions answered was broad, although candidates were slightly less inclined to answer questions on the later part of the seventeenth century. It was particularly encouraging to see a good awareness of the British dimension to many questions, and there was also some energetic engagement with gender and women's history. Candidates should exercise a little more care at times when discussing the historiography relevant to this paper. Some of the work referenced was quite outdated, and some of the views cited were mistakenly ascribed to different authors, or represented with

only partial accuracy. It is important that undergraduates are precise in their identification as well as their evaluation of different historical opinions. As ever, candidates are encouraged to answer the question set, and not respond on slightly different terms: the question about political and ambition and evangelical excitement as a spur to Reformation, for example, was recast by several candidates in terms of 'Reformation from above/below', which altered the terms under discussion. The scope of some questions was occasionally neglected: the question about Irish rebellions, for example, was answered by some with reference only to the sixteenth century. Overall, however, this was a very good batch of papers, with questions answered thoughtfully and conscientiously.

BIP 5 - History of the British Isles, 1688-1848

Thirty-two candidates sat this paper this year, a somewhat smaller group than in 2022 (39). The general performance was encouraging: ten candidates scored 70 or over, and a further eleven scored 67 or 68. Only two candidates scored below 60. These standards were achieved through good engagement with the set question, and a willingness to frame answers within broad, productive parameters. At the higher end of the scale, the best candidates were prepared to define key terms or concepts precisely, which served as a solid foundation for a disciplined, wide-ranging discussion. Conversely, weaker scripts did not provide such clarity, and their illustrations did not always support the arguments advanced convincingly. In all cases, the position advanced by candidates would have been strengthened by direct engagement with counter-arguments, and students should look to clarify the pace and scale of change over time. There was a good mix of topics in most scripts, and it is clear that the paper has provided students with a wide range of challenging themes with which to launch their early studies at Oxford.

BIP 6 - History of the British Isles, 1830-1951

65 candidates took this paper, 56 from the single honours school, 4 from History and English, 4 from History and Politics and 1 from History and Modern Languages. Overall, the standard of answers was high, with very few candidates receiving marks below 60: there were 17 marks of 70 or above (26.2%), 32 of 65 to 69 (49.2%), 12 of 60 to 64 (18.5%) and 2 below 60 (3.1%). A diverse range of questions was attempted, covering political, social and cultural topics, though as with last year the economic side of the paper remained under-discussed. The most popular questions were on empire (Qs 3 and 4), gender (Qs 7 and 9), and Conservative/Labour politics (Qs 18 and 20). The most effective answers were able to focus closely on the question set and to produce detailed evidence in support of a clear argument. Less effective answers tended to lack that in-depth evidence, or to offer more general arguments that did not engage specifically enough with the question asked. Overall, though, a very good run of scripts and congratulations are due to the candidates for all the work they put in this year.

EUROPEAN AND WORLD HISTORY PAPERS

EWP 1: 370-900 (The Transformation of the Ancient World)

Sixty-nine candidates took the paper in 2023, 19 of whom were Joint Schools students. These numbers are almost exactly equal to those of the previous year. There were 17 firsts,

5 lower seconds, with all other candidates receiving an upper second; of those, 34 received marks in the 65-69 range. In other words, marks were generally quite high and most candidates performed very well.

Every question received at least one answer, which was heartening to see, although there was clearly one question far ahead of all others in popularity: Q. 1 on the fall of Rome, which received 36 answers. Also very popular was Q. 10 on the Carolingian empire, while Qs 5 (the role of Islam in Arab expansion), 7 (imperial women) and 20 (How regionalised was the economy) performed strongly. Q. 16 on T'ang China was the least popular. There is clearly a core of solid knowledge on the Latin West and its imperial representatives, and a much wider and somewhat more diffuse pool of interest in other Eurasian empires: Byzantium, the Caliphate and China. On the latter topic, interest was wider than the low uptake of Q. 16 might suggest; Empress Wu regularly featured in responses to Q. 7. In fact, it is Sasanian Persia that probably received the least attention of any of the paper's 'big empires' – slightly odd considering the obvious synergies with so many candidates' Roman interests. Students seem to be more comfortable utilizing Asian material in comparative questions, which is perhaps unsurprising. The plentiful evidence that students enjoy and are happy to write comparative essays in fact is probably quite a good sign of the health of a paper like this.

Outside politics (which clearly, indeed overwhelmingly, dominated), candidates were most comfortable writing about religion – again not a surprise. The popularity of the economics question was perhaps striking, but there was a small body of really engaged answers to Q. 18 on architecture also.

The strongest answers displayed knowledge not just of the history but also the historiography, struck a confident tone without becoming declaratory and were comfortable with nuance. The very weakest answers evidenced patchy knowledge of the historical detail. In general, the obvious area where students could improve their performance is in taking a more nuanced approach that engages closely with the specific question asked. Everybody answering Q. 1 knew they had to think about the interplay of internal and external factors but very few considered how to define those terms and whether this might be a complex distinction to make. Most answers to Q. 7 assumed a very simple binary distinction between imperial women being either active or passive. More comfort with grey areas would be welcome.

There clearly is a problem with time management for many candidates, where examiners saw a noticeable falling off of quality in the third essay. Students do need to remember to prepare for the form, and not just the content, of their exams.

EWP 2: 1000-1300 (Communities, Connections and Confrontations)

Seventy-nine candidates sat this paper (15 joint honours and 64 single honours). Of these, 19 achieved distinctions (70+), which as a proportion is in line with last year's results (16/72). The remainder of papers were graded at 60+ (of the 60, 47 graded at 65 and above). This is an impressive result, with no grade below 2:1 and the majority at high 2:1. Markers commented on the robustness of the examinations, and the strength of the cohort in their responses to a range of challenging questions.

While students attempted a broad spread of questions, there was a noticeable uptake for the Crusades (Q13) and Heresy (Q15). The strongest essays shared the same ambition in approach, willingness to not only define but to challenge the terms of the question, an

ability to construct a coherent argument grounded in well selected case studies, and, perhaps foremost, a willingness to attempt to draw wider conclusions from these. The least successful candidates likewise shared traits, noticeably a lack of detail and depth of analysis, a relatively uncritical interpretation of questions, and a limited ability to think in broader ways about case studies and their relevance. What is evident from all papers, again with none below 2:1 (one borderline 60), is that students were all able to apply learned knowledge and skills in insightful ways across a global array of contexts.

EWP 3: 1400-1650 (Renaissance, Recovery and Reform)

83 candidates took this paper and responded well to the challenges of writing about a wide range of themes in early modern European history. Every question was answered and answers were spread fairly evenly among the four sections of the paper, but some sections of the paper saw greater concentration on a few questions than others. In section A, gender relations and global trade led the way, with urbanisation in third place and little attention given to poor relief or peasants. Section B saw a more even spread, humanism and overseas encounters coming somewhat ahead of printing and the visual arts, with science trailing in last. In section C, the Catholic Reformation attracted most attention, though the Protestant Reformation, religious repression, church government and elite and popular piety all found good numbers of takers. In section D, revolts predominated and warfare followed some way behind, while aristocrats attracted some interest and bureaucracy and political ideas very little.

It was encouraging that different students could mount very different and equally well-thought-out and well-supported arguments about a range of issues. Often questions demanded some solution to the issue of how to fit unique sets of events or experiences into wider frameworks. This enabled some candidates to find gender relations largely determined by an overarching set of ideals and others to find variation and agency at every turn; some to find each revolt a reflection of universal social and political tensions and others to find each revolt the product of distinctive local circumstances; some to find the Catholic Reformation broadly a homogeneous movement driven by Tridentine priorities, papal coordination and globe-trotting Jesuits, others to find it a kaleidoscope of reforming aspirations and accommodations to, or appropriations of, reforming projects. Meanwhile Asia and America vied plausibly for the greatest impact on the economy of Europe and various credible balances were struck between Europeans changing their ways of thinking in response to global encounters, confirming their old ideas, or indeed not taking much notice. Of the questions about general patterns and local particularities, the one that candidates found hardest was that on warfare, where significant numbers explained why European polities in general changed their ways of waging war rather than why different polities did so in different ways. The questions on which candidates most often found themselves short of relevant detail or of useful analytical models were those on church government and elite and popular piety. The first was often tackled in terms of why rulers took control of the church; not all answers considered the conciliar movement and knowledge of the variety of structures in protestant churches was extremely rare. The only elites to feature in the second were usually rulers who wanted to take over the church or clergy who wanted to impose reform, while popular piety, when it was not a cover for class revolution, was generally mired in superstition; only the bottom-up Counter-Reformation enthusiasts of Speyer and a few kissers of devotional prints provided occasional relief from this dour

picture. Beyond these difficulties, it was, as ever, the candidates who could produce relevant evidence drawn from a range of European societies in support of thoughtfully analytical answers aimed effectively at the question who did best.

EWP 4: (Society, Nation, and Empire 1815-1914)

This remains a popular paper on the Prelims syllabus, sat by 66 candidates this year. This was a decline on the 85 candidates who sat it in 2022, but clearly gives confidence that it will remain a much-demanded element of the current syllabus.

The paper produced a range of achievement that was in line with the pattern of recent years. If one disregards two exceptionally low marks, the range of performance was between 50 and 75, with a median mark of 63. 12 candidates achieved a mark above 70, while 15 were awarded a mark below 60. This meant that a small majority of candidates were in the 60-69 range, which is probably what one would expect of candidates at this stage in their degree. The overall impression was therefore one of solid and good achievement, rather than of outstanding insight, but it is important not to underestimate the challenge of writing well across three different themes in the history of Europe in the era 1815-1914.

Perhaps as a consequence, there was a certain grouping of answers around the more readily identifiable and defined topics. The brightest stars in the EWP 4 sky remain, on the basis of the questions chosen by candidates this year, Religion, Liberalism, Nationalism, Socialism, Gender, Imperialism and the Bourgeoisie (often rendered in diverse inaccurate spellings). Conversely more cultural or niche topics attracted few answers. In common with previous reports for this paper, it is easy to regret the tendency of candidates to provide answers that had a certain pre-cooked flavour. Weaker candidates prefer to fall back on a way of writing about a topic that they had prepared in advance, rather than addressing in a direct and insightful way the question asked. In a similar spirit, one cannot help but note the tendency to present a Rhine-oriented definition of European history. France and Germany loomed large in many essays with some excursions to Russia and the Habsburg Empire. Iberia by contrast, was often almost entirely absent. It would be utopian to hope that candidates could encapsulate the diversity of Europe in a single essay; but it would be nice to see essays being written from more diverse geographical vantage points.

The largest issue raised by this paper is the unresolved tension between European and World History. Some of the topics on this paper have an unavoidable global dimension (migration, industrialisation, empire, colonialism, warfare) while others sit more comfortably within a European framework, broadly defined. But, in the absence of an explicitly global modern paper in the suite of EWP papers, the degree to which this paper should embrace the global remains a question that demands more exact resolution. Perhaps the questions could be divided into two sections, with a requirement to answer at least one from each section? But would that simply make the paper more difficult to study, and to teach?

OPTIONAL SUBJECTS

Optional Subject 1: Theories of the State

46 candidates took this paper, 22 were single honours, 17 History and Politics, 3 Ancient and Modern History, 2 History and English, 1 History and Modern Languages and 1 History and

Economics. the answers were generally well-done, with only a few marks below 60: there were 10 marks of 70 and above (21.7%), 25 marks of 65 to 69 (54.4%), 9 marks of 60 to 64 (19.6%), and 2 of below 60 (4.4%). The most effective answers were those that showed a close acquaintance with the primary texts and engaged with the detail of the set authors' arguments. There were also some well-done answers that delved into the intellectual and political contexts of the authors. Weaker answers were less well-informed about the detail of the texts and tended to give more schematic outlines of the authors' positions. But overall a very good run of answers and the candidates are to be congratulated on their hard work this year.

Optional Subject 2: Alfred and the Vikings

This paper was examined for the second time in 2023. Six candidates sat the paper: one achieved a distinction and the other five marks were all strong upper second performance. Answers were a little bit bunched with three answers each for Q.7 on the archaeology of winter camps, Q.10 on Æthelflæd and Q.14 on how insecure Alfred's grip on power was. In general the level of performance was very high, with some notably reflective and thoughtful responses to some questions. The only notable room for substantial improvement was a tendency for some essays to not really get stuck into the nitty-gritty of details about the sources when the opportunity emerged; I was surprised how neither of the answers to Q.8 (on the Alfred Jewel) said anything really about the iconography or physical appearance of the jewel. When people show their ability to work with the detail of the sources that really impresses and can make a big difference to marks.

Optional Subject 3: Early Gothic France

Early Gothic France continues to attract a very high calibre of main-school and joint-school students, even though this was only partially reflected in the quality of scripts in the timed examination. There were 10 candidates this year, four of whom wrote impressively wide-ranging and incisive essays. As ever, the best of the scripts managed to strike the optimum balance, combining a detailed commentary on the set-texts themselves with broader analytical and historical contextualization. The less successful scripts, on the other hand, whilst not demonstrating the sort of close reading that this sort of Option Paper is designed to elicit, still showed a welcome engagement with the wider historiographical debates that this subject has prompted in the modern scholarly literature.

Optional Subject 4: The Mongols

The paper was taken by 18 candidates, including 3 Joint School candidates. This year saw another batch of impressive exam scripts, with 6 Firsts and again no candidate awarded a mark below 60%. All candidates demonstrated sound knowledge of the set texts and of the key issues, while stronger essays also evaluated the perspective of the different primary sources. Three questions were not attempted (6, 13 and 14). Candidates clustered around q. 4 (How far was the empire shaped by the distinctive roles of Mongol women) and q. 5 (why did Mongol leaders keep representatives of different religions in their ordo [camp]), each with 12 answers. Next most popular was q. 7 on foreign merchants (7 responses). The best answers on q. 4 considered the terms 'shaped by' and 'distinctive' carefully in formulating their argument; other candidates would have strengthened their essays by setting up definitions; this also applied to q. 7 (How essential were foreign merchants to the functioning of the Mongol empire), where the stronger answers established criteria to help

determine what might be 'essential ... to the functioning' of the Mongol empire. Pleasingly, slightly more candidates this year braved the source questions 1 and 2 (5 and 2 answers respectively), though no-one risked question 6, comparing the perspective of different sources, or q. 13 on Pegolotti and Ibn Battuta. Some excellent work on other set texts including John of Piano Carpini, Kirakos, Marco Polo, Master Roger and Pegolotti was nevertheless to be found in responses to other questions, for example q. 9 on European responses to the Mongols. The remaining questions attracted 2-3 responses each, with 4 answers on Mongol uses of violence (q. 8).

The period of the unified empire tended to dominate, with essays demonstrating consistently good understanding of the key features of Mongol rule, gender roles, religion and steppe society. Individual essays also ranged into China, the Ilkhanate, the Chaghatayids, the Rus and Western Europe to good effect, demonstrating excellent knowledge of developments across time and space. While almost all candidates drew on central historiographic reference works such as Broadbridge on women, a pleasing number of candidates had also clearly thought carefully about the anthropological concepts drawn on in the course to explore immanentist religion and the social roles of reciprocity and gift-giving, and used these effectively to enrich their answers on religion, politics and trade. While most candidates managed their time well, unhappily a few candidates' marks were drawn down by shorter, weaker third essays. Candidates achieving solid 2.1 marks could often improve by exploring the impact of the set text author's time and place on their perspective on events and by thinking further about limits to their argument (for example, integrating discussion of change over time or exceptions), to help integrate a greater variety of views into their work. Overall, the candidates had put in much hard work to master a complex period and a fascinating but demanding body of set texts, demonstrating consistently good engagement with the material covered and producing some highly impressive work at the top end.

Optional Subject 6: English Chivalry and the French War

Ten candidates sat the paper in 2023, eight from the main school and two from AMH. Overall some interesting and thoughtful responses but to a narrow range of questions: Froissart and the Black Prince were the most popular with eight responses each, closely followed by questions on Gascony (six) and Christine de Pisan (four); then Religion (two), Naval matters (one) and Chivalry (one). It's disappointing that no-one chose to engage with questions on the part women played in the war, the historical value of fiction, interaction of crown and parliament, visual sources, who benefited from the war, the failure of the English war effort, or the effect of the war on the English economy or national identity. Still candidates wrote well; two gained first class marks, five in the upper 60s, only two below 65, and none below 60. A tendency was noted on the part of some candidates to plunge straight into argument without pausing to write a brief introduction or defining their understanding of terms.

Optional Subject 7: Crime and Punishment in England

Nine candidates took the paper this year, eight main school and one joint school. Two of these achieved first class marks, seven marks in the sixties. The candidates answered on a good range of topics, deploying their knowledge of different categories of evidence to good effect across their three answers. The candidates who did best were able to combine

discussion of judicial records, chronicles, letters, and literary texts within individual answers, using insights from one genre to question the conclusions we might draw from another. The answers that received lower marks tended to simplify the evidence a little too much, or failed to support their arguments with evidence from the source texts. Many of the exam questions contained evaluative terms or propositions that were open to interpretation, and invited discussion. Candidates who justified their interpretations of questions on the basis of knowledge of the sources, or of the secondary literature, or of a theoretical debate in criminology or gender theory (for example) were able to create sharp tools for analysis; those who did not engage with these ideas did less well. One or two candidates wrote very long rambling essays that were not focussed on responding to the question – students should take time to think and plan their essays before starting to write.

Optional Subject 8: Nature and Art in the Renaissance

The Optional Subject Nature and Art in the Renaissance had 9 students this academic year (2022-2023). The marks included one first class and seven passes (40-69).

A range of questions were attempted, with the most popular being question no. 4 ‘Why did so many objects in Renaissance collections blur the boundary between art and nature?’ (5 students attempted this one). On the second spot were four questions, each receiving 3 answers: Q2, ‘In the *Novum Organum* (aphorism 129), Francis Bacon stated that the worthiest discoveries unknown to the ancients were printing, gunpowder and the compass. How would you expect Polydore Vergil to respond to this statement a century earlier?’, Q3 ‘To what extent was the art of cartography involved in the humanist movement?’, Q6 ‘Why did Vasari promote Michelangelo over all other painters, sculptors and architects?’ and Q7 ‘Why was alchemy so widely practiced, despite widespread criticism of it on many different grounds?’

At the other end no one attempted questions 9 ‘Why was the origin of syphilis so hotly debated in the Renaissance?’, Q10, ‘How did painting draw inspiration from architecture during the Renaissance?’ and Q11 ‘How did the Biblical view that man was made in the ‘image of God’ impact on the theory and practice of the arts in the Renaissance?’.

In comparing the exams this year to last year, the students’ answers continue to display vivid interest in cabinets of curiosities/collections, cartography and alchemy. More modest interest continues to be paid to catalogues of discovery (2 students), voyages of discovery (2 students), definitions of art (2 students) and mathematics (2 students); the specific art history question (on Calumny of Apelles) also drew 2 responses. The popularity of the question on Vasari/Michelangelo was interesting, particularly in comparison to the lack of answers on the link between painting/architecture. Speculatively, students’ interest seems to be piqued by certain quite specific questions (e.g. Q2 and Q6), though other specific questions on syphilis and the Bible did not provoke a similar reaction.

Optional Subject 9: Witch-craft and Witch-hunting in Early Modern Europe

Twenty-eight candidates sat the paper. Overall, seven distinctions were awarded. There was one mark below 60, and the rest of the marks ranged across the 60s.

Candidates tackled all but one question - Q.9 (dramatists). The most popular question was Q.4 (demonologists), followed by Q.13 (torture), Q.3 (male witches) and, jointly, Q.1 (possession) and Q.5 (visual images). Stronger work on this paper was adept at handling concepts, particularly when discussing gender. Such scripts thought critically about the prescribed sources and genres, and engaged imaginatively with the question. Weaker scripts

were not so well organised and did not have so secure a grasp of the content of prescribed sources, or only referred to a limited number of them. Candidates are encouraged to explore case-studies outside of western Europe and to have an understanding of the broader themes of early modern European history.

Optional Subject 10: Making England Protestant, 1558-1642

(suspended in 2022-23)

Optional Subject 11: Conquest and Colonization: Spain and America in the 16th Century

22 students sat this Prelims paper and generally produced very good results: the majority of responses fell in the mid-60s. A few outstanding responses were awarded marks in the low 70s. The most popular questions were Q4 (factors in conquest of Mexico and Q7 (Las Casas and attitudes towards Indigenous peoples), which attracted 14 and 12 responses respectively. Only one candidate chose to answer Q8 (role of women in colonial society) and there were no responses to Q12.

In terms of references to the set texts on Mexico, candidates showed a preference for Las Casas, Bernal Diaz and Cortes, with fewer answers citing the Florentine Codex. Answers on Peru favoured Betanzos and Cieza de Leon about equally. The strongest answers tended to reflect on the authorship and motivations of the set texts, considering why the text presented a certain version of history without getting caught up in whether the text was 'true' or 'accurate'. Such answers also showed familiarity with the set texts that allowed them to make reference to specific details and thereby strengthened their analysis. Overall, candidates demonstrated good awareness of historiographical interpretations; ability to cite historians by name and/or contrast their interpretations was rewarded

Candidates on the whole showed good understanding of key terms such as *encomienda* and *mita*, which students often struggle to define correctly. Where the question specified a comparative element (e.g. Q12), candidates generally responded to this and drew some convincing comparisons. On the whole, candidates showed good knowledge of pre-contact Mexican and Andean societies which set them in good stead to draw conclusions about the extent of change under Spanish rule. Outstanding answers in this respect interrogated the idea of Indigenous agency and the advantages/limitations of using certain texts to access Indigenous voices. Some misunderstandings that future tutors may wish to address included:

- Perception that the Mexica never fought to kill: 'flower wars'- ceremonial warfare where opponents were captured- existed alongside traditional warfare where the aim was to kill enemy combatants
- More of a terminology issue, but candidates should avoid using the term 'Indian', 'Indigenous' is now standard (I realise this was probably copied from older texts in the reading list that do utilise the term but it is now largely considered offensive unless directly translating contemporary Spanish quotes that use the term *indio*)
- One candidate misconstrued the 'pacification' campaign and took the term literally when it actually refers to a violent series of campaigns carried out against Indigenous peoples (mainly in Guatemala and Yucatan)
- Ideas about 'technological superiority' continue to be an issue for Q4, probably due to inclusion of some now outdated sources on the reading list.

Optional Subject 12: Revolution and Empire in France, 1789-1815

(suspended in 2022-23)

Optional Subject 13: Women, Gender and the Nation: Britain 1789-1825

Six students sat this paper at the end of Trinity term 2023. There was a fair amount of grouping with respect to questions this year. Five candidates answered question three—on how far gender shaped men’s and women’s involvement in the antislavery movement—and four candidates answered question 11—on how portrayals of domestic life in Austen’s *Persuasion* and Edgeworth’s *Ennui* illustrated the novels’ broader themes. The questions on sexuality, working-class reform and imperialism were also relatively popular. Six questions (respectively on: radicals’ use of the language of ‘slavery’, anonymity/pseudonymity, the family as ‘most public sphere of all’, the portrayal of motherhood and mothers, the relationship between the state and Irish people, and the impact of Evangelicalism on masculinities) were not attempted. Nonetheless, most candidates brought in a range of set texts from across the whole course to answer the questions they selected.

Across all scripts, the candidates generally laid out clear, independent arguments that engaged with the set question. The best answers, additionally, ranged widely and drew imaginatively upon the set texts; engaged with historians’ arguments and historiographical debate; laid out sophisticated and nuanced arguments; and brought in detailed evidence. The weakest answers were short, took a narrow approach to answer the question, discussed historical evidence in general rather than detailed terms and had vague arguments.

In general this year, most of the answers had some first-class elements. Most answers, for example, had sophisticated arguments, and all answers included some close engagement with the paper’s set texts/sources. However, such answers tended to be accompanied by much weaker sections, which brought down the overall mark. The most common issues here were thin analysis, unfocused discussion and an inflexible argument that showed an unwillingness to acknowledge and probe historical complexity.

Optional Subject 14: The Romance of the People: the Folk Revival, 1760-1814

28 students took this paper in 2023. Of these, 7 received a first-class mark, 16 obtained a 2:1, and 5 got a 2:2. Candidates chose quite widely from the questions available (every candidate has to answer three questions). No one chose question 13. Only one candidate chose questions 3, 8 and 14. Questions 9 (16 candidates), 5 (13 candidates), 10 (12 candidates) and 11 (10 candidates) are the most popular choices.

The best answers were wide-ranging yet precise, and demonstrates strong knowledge, analytical skills and judgement indicating a highly able undergraduate historian. These answers also made effective use of source texts, incorporated primary sources into their answers and actively engaged with historiography. Among the slightly less successful but still good answers, some made valid general points, but provided little concrete evidence, some reached conclusions too quickly without analysing the examples carefully and others wrote in a very narrative manner. The weaker answers advanced wrong or irrelevant facts, were ineffectively organised, did not answer the question and made little attempt at signposting.

Just two minor observations: i) some candidates' handwriting borders on totally illegible; and ii) the third essay is generally of a lower standard than the first two, possibly due to students running out of time at the end of the examination.

Optional Subject 15: Haiti and Louisiana: the Problem of Revolution in an Age of Slavery

Nineteen candidates sat this paper. Four scripts were awarded marks of 70 or above, and one script marks under 60. Candidates offered answers to a wide range of questions on the paper, covering all aspects of a broad syllabus, though in general candidates had focused more on 'Haiti' than 'Louisiana', and sometimes detailed knowledge of developments in the United States and its territories lagged behind knowledge shown elsewhere on the paper. Some candidates were able to integrate a sound knowledge of recent historical writing with their understanding of the primary source material, and offered substantive and convincing answers. Candidates that did not have this historiographical depth, or who had only a superficial understanding of the source material, struggled to offer convincing answers across all three questions. Relatively few candidates engaged with the set texts in depth, preferring to make more general observations, but the very best candidates impressed with their knowledge of detail.

Optional Subject 16: Imperial Republic: The United States and Global Imperialism, 1867-1914

11 candidates sat Imperial Republic this year. Of these there were four Firsts (36%), five 2.1s (46%), and two 2.2s (18%). All but two questions were answered, demonstrating the breadth of students' engagement with the paper, though there was a strong preference for questions on visual culture – questions 8 and 9 being answered often. This reflects the interest in the material in class and its spread across the paper as a whole. That being said, the evidence analysed for Q8 on the utility of cartoons as evidence concentrated on a very narrow range of images and often the candidates did not engage with the question, falling back on analysing what the images revealed for different thematic weeks rather than considering cartoons as a category of evidence.

The examiner was impressed with the quality of historiographical engagement in the best answers, with the top answers using the set texts to critique existing scholarship or to widen the discussion of key works into new areas. Students were especially strong this year on anti-colonial activism (though the weakest answers on Q5 elided anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism). Candidates often made their arguments with an admirable degree of qualification and nuance, seeing the flexibility of the U.S. imperial formation and so refrained from making too many generalisations about the nature of U.S. power.

Optional Subject 17: The New Woman in Britain and Ireland, c. 1880-1920

Five students took this paper in 2022-23. There was one Distinction and a range of marks between 66-68 for the other candidates. The overall standard was impressive this year as candidates attempted a wide range of questions and engaged well with the set texts. There was more discussion than usual of literary texts, especially *Heavenly Twins*, a key text which is often neglected. It was used to excellent effect in several essays, especially on the sexual double standard. The best answers displayed a thorough knowledge of the secondary literature, engaged effectively with the main historiographical debates and linked these to the set texts. Candidates seemed happy to write on a good range of social, political and cultural topics and to demonstrate how they overlapped in the period and in the set texts. I was delighted to see some candidates engaging with class relationships in their answers, and understanding the impact of these on political and social reform campaigns. Some candidates did not have as firm a grip on detail as they should have, especially when writing

about legislative change. But most candidates displayed an impressive range of knowledge about wider social and political movements across the whole period. The very best understood that ideas created by and about the New Woman changed over the period and were able to link these changes to broader cultural and political forces.

Optional Subject 18: The Rise and Crises of European Socialisms, 1883-1921

Eight candidates took this paper, three achieving Distinction marks, no mark falling below 60. All candidates paid due attention to Set Texts and strove to notice difference between counties and regions. As a rule, each essay should aim to specify at least three national and/or regional particularities. A good paper overall will specify six or more national / regional particularities over the three essays, and will draw from different 'zones' of Europe (north, east, west, south) at least one extra-European example as a comparator. (Note that essays will be marked individually, but geographical range across the three essays benefits each essay individually as it develops acuteness of distinction). Candidates are reminded of the dual helpfulness of the Max Beer and Julius Braunthal Set Texts in particular: they offer breadth of narrative across the period, interesting commonalities (both authors talented Jewish intellectuals) and points of contrast (Beer a Communist, Braunthal a 'centrist' Social-Democrat). It is useful to consider these two as 'spinal' Set Texts, useful for the paper as a whole, while the other Set Texts are more relevantly divisible into sub-topics. Candidates are reminded that Set Texts must feature in every essay, and a certain attention to author and audience for the Set Text will often be an important consideration.

Optional Subject 19: 1919: Remaking the World

This year, 15 candidates sat the examination for the Optional Subject '1919: Remaking the World' (including 12 Main School and 3 Joint Schools). Of them, 3 candidates achieved a Distinction and 12 candidates awarded a Pass, with 4 students in the lower II.1 category (60-64) and 8 students in the II.1 category (65-69). Based on the mark scheme, the overall percentage of Distinctions and Passes awarded is 20% (Distinctions) and 80% (Passes), while 53% of the candidates produced work in the higher II.1 category (65-69).

Candidates engaged with various topics and themes of the paper, addressing a wide range of questions. Specifically, the most frequently appearing topics were: self-determination and imperialism and question 13 'Did the Mandates System undermine or strengthen the legitimacy of imperialism?' (8 answers); the practice of diplomacy in 1919 and question 3 'How did the experience of war shape the diplomacy of the peace?' (7 answers); disarmament and arbitration and question 12 'Why did the League of Nations struggle to organize collective action in the quest for disarmament?' (5 answers). Of the 14 questions, 4 questions were not answered (questions: 5, 8, 11, 14).

The examiner differentiated between work of different quality based on the marking criteria (engagement, argument, evidence, organisation & presentation). Stronger answers illustrated above average quality across all criteria, while weaker responses did not adequately cover all the required criteria. Specifically, for first-class quality work candidates presented directness of engagement with the questions, addressing a range of issues and demonstrating depth, complexity, and sophistication of comprehension of issues and implications of the questions. The responses included nuanced and effectively structured arguments. The answers sustained force and coherence, and they were well-focused. They demonstrate breadth and depth of reading, drawing on a wide range of examples, primary sources, and non-standard insights, while showing awareness of critical analysis of the material (with careful references to the prescribed authorities). Answers of below average

quality presented generally well-informed work, demonstrating good knowledge of the topic. However, these answers could have been enhanced by nuanced arguments, coherence of structure, and critical engagement with primary and secondary sources. Overall, 15 candidates successfully completed Preliminary examinations in History and its Associate Joint Schools in 2022-23.

Optional Subject 20: Living with the Enemy: the Experience of the Second World War in Europe

This paper continues to be a popular choice for students seeking an Option that engages with the complexities of the mid-century experiences of Europeans. The marks profile was relatively high, ranging from 59 to 71. Of the twelve candidates, four achieved marks of 70 or above. Students in that category engaged in a sophisticated way with the challenges presented by a range of subjective sources, which explore issues of experience, identity and memory. The most popular questions were those on the experience of battle, on women, and on the moment of liberation. Conversely, there were no answers to two questions on Delbo and family letters.

This does not seem to be a paper which requires any substantial change, though some of the sources, such as Delbo, appear to be less successful than others. One issue which the students raised this year was how far the paper presents an exclusively European account of a war that, even within Europe, was not solely European in its participants. Some thought might therefore be given to the inclusion of a source which gives voice to the experiences of colonial troops and diaspora populations.

Optional Subject 21: Global USSR: Empires, Borders and Identities (New)

Twelve candidates attempted the examination for the 'Global USSR' option in Trinity Term 2023. The marks varied from 61% to 76%. Both the mean and the median marks were 70%. Candidates attempted all questions except 11, 12, and 13 (see the full list of questions below). These questions (along with question 14) invited candidates to reflect on broad methodological and conceptual questions arising out of the paper. These issues will be tackled more extensively and more explicitly in future iterations of the paper.

Question 7 proved most popular – it was attempted by 8 candidates. This probably reflects the fact that issues pertinent to question 7 underpinned class and tutorial discussion across several themes. Questions 1, 8, 10, and 14 were each attempted by one candidate. These topics will be explored in more depth in future iterations of the paper.

The key strength of many answers was the candidates' engagement with the global scope of the paper and/or critical analysis of Eurocentric accounts of Soviet history. Multiple candidates based their analysis on the non-European parts of the USSR and examined Soviet relations with countries of the Global South. For example, questions 3 (attempted by 5 candidates) yielded some very strong and diverse answers.

All answers engaged with the set primary texts. At the lower end of the marking scale, the candidates did not introduce the sources with sufficient care and/or made factual errors when introducing the context in which the sources were produced. At the upper end of the marking scale, candidates engaged diverse primary sources in dialogue and placed arguments developed on the basis of primary material in historiographical context. Some outstanding answers showed evidence of independent research beyond the required reading list.

Optional Subject 22: Viewing Communism: Cinema and Everyday Life in Eastern Europe, 1944-89

9 students sat the exam, with three getting marks of 70 or above (71, 72, 77) and one below 60 (59). Overall, candidates showed a good ability to articulate the value of films as historical sources and all essays referenced one or more films along with other set texts from the reading list. All but one of the essays showed a good to excellent grasp of key historical events, problems, and interpretations related to the topic. Scripts in the 70s were outstanding in their effective combination of these two elements.

PAPER IV

Approaches to History

This, the largest of the 'Paper IV' options, was taken by 163 candidates. The most popular section was that dealing with Women, Sex and Gender, followed by those on Anthropology, Art, Race, and Sociology, with Archaeology and Economics bringing up the rear; but no section garnered fewer than 26 responses and only one of the 35 questions (that on inflationary episodes) secured no answers at all. Answers in some sections clustered heavily around one question, for example on rituals and politics or on burial practices. In other sections, several questions shared the main load: unfree labour and resource constraints on growth; art patronage, propaganda, and museums; race and economics, anti-racism, intersectionality and the voices of the enslaved; gender and labour, politics, religion and imperialism.

The best answers combined understanding of the key issues posed by the question, familiarity with relevant theoretical approaches to those issues, and knowledge of specific examples that might be explored to show how those theoretical approaches could be applied. Competent but less successful answers might include these elements, but not relate them effectively to one another. Harder to mark were those that could produce the names of many relevant authors without quite explaining what their ideas were or exactly how they could be applied to the specific issues central to the question and those that answered the question with an impressive range of examples – often, encouragingly, drawn from reflection on a candidate's other papers – but without much sign of understanding that different methodologies might be invoked in interpreting those examples. Weaker answers seemed either not to understand a key term in the question – 'subsistence strategies', 'rational, optimising behaviour', 'the ideology of imperialism', 'historical consciousness', 'status', 'liberal' – or to be short of material against which to measure a single line of argument: methods of political history that might not involve gender, non-propagandist motivations for elite interest in art, non-economic factors that might contribute to legal definitions of race. Some candidates also disadvantaged themselves by using significant amounts of similar material to answer two questions in the same section. Despite – or perhaps because of – its being in a constant state of re-invention, the Approaches paper remains on this year's evidence a stimulating exercise for a large part of the first-year cohort in History and Joint Schools. For many it provides an opportunity to investigate major trends in recent historical scholarship, most obviously where gender, sexuality and race are concerned, but also in visual and material culture and other areas, and for some it clearly generates deep and detailed reflection on the making and meaning of history.

Historiography: Tacitus to Weber

79 candidates took this paper, of which 17 achieved marks over 70; 43 achieved marks in the 65-69 range; 18 achieved marks in the 60-64 range, and 1 candidate got a mark below 60. The range of questions answered was on the whole good, although there were only a small number of answers on Ranke. Stronger answers showed a detailed knowledge of the text and had a solid grasp of the context in which these works were written; less convincing answers were less adept at achieving a balanced consideration of both text and context. Some candidates seemed to be rehashing tutorial essays rather than responding directly to the question but in general there was a commendable effort to respond directly to the questions set, and there were some thoughtful arguments advanced. Candidates should make an effort to state their line of argument clearly from the outset and sustain it consistently throughout the essay; the less successful answers were the ones where the argument wavered, prevaricated or disappeared from view. Overall this paper produced some high quality essays, and the examiners were impressed by the insight and analysis advanced by the majority of the candidates. That 76% of candidates achieved marks over 65 is testimony to the excellence engendered by this course.

Quantification in History

In 2023 sixteen students sat Quantification in History, all of them from main school History. As for the last two years, History and Economics students were excluded from the course because of overlap with their Economics curriculum. The results were generally good, with five students achieving distinction grades, four awarded 65-69, six awarded 60-64 and one mark below 60. The average was 64.5 and the median was 66 which is a fairly good overall performance. One student had a weaker performance but still passed. Attendance at classes was very consistent. Students were able to ask questions and contribute to discussion more easily than during the online teaching years. As in previous years, the exam paper included a mixture of definitional questions, practical application of statistical tests to historical data and short essays on sources and methods. There was a substantial appendix with the required formulae.

As always, there were some arithmetic errors but most students had a very good grasp of how to organise the data into a format that allowed the application of a range of statistical tests. They were also asked to interpret regression results from journal articles and SPSS output and this was generally well done. The weaker performances on individual questions usually arose from too brief interpretation, not showing all the steps in the work (so that arithmetic errors could not be distinguished and they didn't demonstrate understanding of the nature of the test) or errors in accepting/rejecting the null hypothesis. The strongest answers demonstrated a deep understanding of the nature of the test and its significance, the strengths and weaknesses of particular sources of quantified historical evidence and were able to interpret the results and suggest extensions to further research.

I marked the exams for the course and found overall the student performance very satisfactory. Apart from a couple of low scores that mainly resulted from missing a couple of questions or sub-questions, the majority of students did well and revealed clear competence in the course and subject. About a third of the students did particularly well usually in the clarity of thoughts, conceptualization and step by step derivation of all the calculations. Some answers by a couple of students are really well-written.

Foreign Texts: Einhard and Asser

The paper had five takers this year, of whom one achieved a distinction and the rest upper second results. On the whole the quality was very strong. Candidates obviously knew the two texts and could speak about the basic issues with clarity and confidence. The best gobbet answers were those that could identify the context and background to the given quotation, but also work with the specific details in the quotation. For instance, many for instance made valid comments on the opening line of Asser's work, but the best answers were clear about how the grammar directs the work to Alfred himself and why that is important to note. A striking four out of the five candidates chose to answer the essay on how secular was Einhard's *Vita Karoli*, suggesting a preference for the earlier work (or was a question on Asser's use of annals just too dull?).

Foreign Texts: Machiavelli

(suspended in 2022-23)

Foreign Texts: Meinecke and Kehr

(No report submitted)

Foreign Texts: Tocqueville: *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*.

(No report submitted)

Foreign Texts: Trotsky

(suspended in 2022-23)

Foreign Texts: Vicens Vives

(No report submitted)

Examiners:

Dr. F. Bessard

Prof. C. O'Brien (Secretary)

Prof. A. Lifschitz

Prof. S. Gunn (Chair)

Prof. B Jackson

Prof. L. Wooding