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20/7/06

To: The Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford

**External Examiner's report: MPhil and MSt in General Linguistics and
Comparative Philology, 2006.**

I report on the examination session of June 2006, for which the examiner's meeting was held on Thursday June 29th 2006.

From what I have seen, the academic standards set for candidates on these two degree programmes are appropriately high and consistent with the standards required at other institutions with postgraduate Linguistics programmes.

The examiners considered a relatively small cohort of candidates (4 Masters and 12 MPhil candidates). Both the sample of examination scripts and the dissertations which I read demonstrated that overall, the standards achieved by the students are very satisfactory, with some students producing some outstanding work, in particular in the dissertation component.

The assessment procedures were rigorous and based on well articulated descriptors. There was evidence of careful marking of examination scripts and dissertations and I was satisfied by the procedures adopted to deal with queries and disagreements amongst markers. Communication with the Department were unproblematic and the Departmental administrator was an extremely efficient and helpful point of contact.

While procedures inside Linguistics and Philology worked well, I have to say that the impression I formed of administration outside the Department was far less favourable. It struck me as extraordinary that students did not have a clear and correct timetable for their exams well in advance of the examination season – in the event it was June 9th before anything approaching a final timetable emerged, for examinations commencing on June 15th. This sort of uncertainty is likely to add unnecessarily to the stress of examinations for students and I think it should be avoided. The procedure of the publication of results was likewise attended by an unacceptable degree of administrative difficulty, with the Examinations Schools apparently being unable to “publish” a pass list delivered to them during the course of the morning by the time the students were due to convene at 2.30. It seems to me that the expectation of the Department and the examiners that they should be able to inform their postgraduate students, many of whom are overseas students returning home for the summer), about their results and about the possibilities for progression to the DPhil,

is entirely reasonable, and such individual feedback to students should be enabled rather than prevented by slow-moving University procedures.

Professor Louisa Sadler

University of Essex

External Examiner: MPhil and MSt General Linguistics and Comparative Philology

Report of Examiners for the MPhil and MSt in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology, 2006.

1. Examination Arrangements

There were 4 MSt and 12 MPhil candidates. The examines were held on the 15th, 16th and 17th June, and the final examiners' meeting was held on 29th June. Two candidates were permitted 10 mins extra time for medical reasons: one of these was allowed to use a word processor. One other candidate submitted evidence of a family bereavement shortly before the examinations. There is no evidence that any results were affected.

Examiners

Prof Stephen Pulman (Somerville)
Prof Andreas Willi (Wolfson)
Dr John Coleman (Wolfson)
Prof Louisa Sadler (Essex University: External)

Assessors

Dr David Cram (Jesus)
Dr Mary Dalrymple (Linacre)
Dr Philomen Probert (Wolfson)
Prof Martin Maiden (Trinity)
Dr Eleanor Lawson (Phonetics)
Prof Debbie Cameron (Worcester)
Prof Thomas Charles Edwards (Jesus)
Mr Chris Wells (SEH)
Mr J C Smith (St Catz)
Dr Heather O'Donoghue (Linacre)
Dr Stephen Clark (Keble)

Paper	MPhil/MSt
Paper A Linguistic Theory	12/4
B(i) Phonetics and Phonology	3/1
B(ii) Syntax (Essay)	3
B(iii) Semantics	3/(+1 Classics)
B(iv) Historical and Comparative Linguistics	1 (essay)
B(viii) Sociolinguistics	6/2
B(ix) Computational Linguistics	3
B(x) Morphology	2
B(x) Psycholinguistics	3
B(vi) Old Norse	1
C(i) Comparative Grammar of Germanic and Italic	1
C(ii) History of Germanic and Italic	1
C(iii) Texts in Germanic and Italic	1
C(i) Comparative Grammar of Italic and Old Irish	1
C(ii) History of Italic and Old Irish	1

C(iii) Texts in Italic and Old Irish	1
D(ii) Structure of Ancient Greek and Latin	0/1
D(ii) Structure of Classical Greek	0/1
D(iii) Texts in Classical Greek	0/1
D(i) History of Latin	1
D(ii) Structure of Latin	1
D(iii) Texts in Latin	1
D(i) History of Italian	1
D(ii) Structure of Italian	1

Thesis titles	
Aspects of the pronominal system in Italo-Romance.	MPhil
The Syntax of Manner Adverbs	MPhil
Stress in English Compounds	MPhil
Demonstratives and Noun Phrase Antecedent accessibility in English	MPhil
A Philological Commentary on Caecilius Statius	MPhil
A study of Hipponym in Indo-European and Germanic	MPhil
Piscataway Morphology	MPhil
Antonyms and Opposites : a Study in the Semantics of Antynomy	MPhil
The Expression of Spatial, Temporal and Personal Deixis: A Comparison of Urdu and English	MPhil
The Perception of Affect	MPhil
Greek Nominal Compounds in the Gothic New Testament	MPhil
Dybo's Law in Old Irish	MPhil
Two Studies on the Syntax and Semantics of Greek Complement Clauses	MSt
Be + Like: a Pragmatic Approach to the Quotative	MSt

2. Results

All MSt candidates passed, two with distinctions. All except one of the MPhil candidates passed, four with distinctions. The failing candidate was given the choice between a pass at the MSt level, or a retake in 2007, and chose the latter.

Marking was fairly unproblematic. Only one script (Sociolinguistics) had to be third marked because the first two examiners were not in agreement. One case of duplication of material, also in the Sociolinguistics area (Paper A) was detected and marks were deducted from the paper in which the second appearance was found. The external examiner read the relevant scripts and agreed with the final decisions.

The external examiner read a sample of dissertations, and also during the meeting looked at a sample of scripts, including several which might have made the difference between a pass and a distinction, and found no reason to change the original marks. As in previous years, markers were provided with mark sheets for dissertations and papers, and their comments were available for the external and third

markers. No vivas were necessary. The current criterion for what is required to gain a distinction seemed to give the right results.

3. Examination Schools

Once again, our task was made more difficult by the poor performance of the Examination Schools. Despite having committed via the Proctors to a deadline of two weeks before the date of the examinations for the production of a timetable (already a risible level of performance, greeted with astonishment and incredulity by our external examiner), in the event it was not until the 9th of June that we had a full and accurate timetable for examinations beginning on 15th June (actually it was the 12th before we had a consistent timetable, but the extra delay was caused by a subtle clash that the Exam Schools could not have been aware of). As in previous years, this made the planning of examiners' meetings etc. very difficult.

The actual running of the exams was without incident, except that in the case of one 'special' candidate, the Examination Schools forwarded the scripts to Professor Cameron without removing the cover sheet containing the candidate's name, thus breaching anonymity.

One more incident should be noted. In previous years, it has usually been possible for us to deliver a pass list to the Exam Schools for publication later on the same day of the Examiners' meeting. This has been useful, since the examiners can then take the opportunity, as the students are all gathered together on that day for the last time, to convey their results in more detail to them individually, and in person, as well as letting them know whether they have achieved the standard necessary to continue to DPhil. It is difficult to do this later without a lot of organisation, as most of the overseas students have arranged to fly home as soon as possible after the viva. Having been warned that the previous year this had been a cause of difficulty, once it was clear (about midday) that there would be no vivas, the chairman called the Examination Schools to ask how long it would take to publish the results if a pass list was brought immediately and was told that they could not guarantee to do this until the following morning. On their advice he then called the Junior Proctor and asked for permission to give the students their results prior to publication (without detail: just pass/fail/distinction) and after a short delay this was granted. However, an hour or so later the chairman was called again by the Junior Proctor who in effect accused him of pulling the wool over her eyes and said that she felt 'bounced' into this decision. After some discussion the chairman began to suspect that the Exam Schools might have given her a rather different account of his conversation with them.

It is clear that we were naive in expecting the Exam Schools to perform the task of publishing a results list as quickly as they have in the past, given the current difficulties, a point well taken from the Junior Proctor. But this kind of difficulty, as with the timetabling, could easily be avoided if the Examination Schools signed up to a 'service level agreement' committing to publication of results within a certain number of hours of the list being delivered to them.

Prof. S. G. Pulman (Chair)
Prof. A. Willi
Dr. J. Coleman
Prof. L. Sadler (External)

30th June 2006