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14 December 2015

Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford
C/- Sally Powell, Assistant Registrar
University of Oxford
University Offices
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External Examiner's Report on MPhil and MSt in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology, 2015

Dear Vice-chancellor,

This is my third report as external examiner for the MPhil and MSt in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology for the Faculty of Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics. I was responsible for looking at all examination papers and theses for candidates undertaking the MPhil and MSt degrees. The papers were set at an appropriate level and they were of a comparable standard to those that are set by other institutions with which I am familiar (including SOAS, University of London where I have taught and examined on the MA programme for 12 years, and University of Manchester where I was external examiner for 4 years).

Overall the examination process at Oxford is efficiently and clearly organised, and the scrutiny of examination papers which I carried out in March and the examination meetings in July were very well run. I suggested some changes in the form and content of some of the examination papers and these were duly accepted. The one and a half days set aside for reviewing exam scripts and theses and the examiners board meeting itself, chaired by Professor Aditi Lahiri on 3rd July, were efficiently organised and rigorously fair in accordance with the regulations and guidance to examiners.

I reviewed all examination scripts but spent most of my time on a few problem cases. Following discussion with Professor Lahiri and the Linguistics examination board it was decided to viva three candidates. The students duly attended for a viva and we ascertained that papers should be remarked and all concerned candidates passed.

The overall quality of MPhil and MSt theses submitted by the 2014 cohort was high, with the thesis by one MPhil candidate being exceptionally good and of publishable quality. Other work was identified as publishable with revisions and I encouraged the Department to advise the particular students to submit their work for publication.

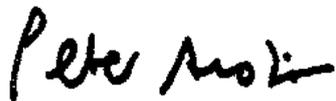
The overall spread of results for both the MPhil and MSt is narrower than last year, with all candidates passing, and 13 achieving Distinction results. I am impressed by the range and quality of work that postgraduate students in General Linguistics and Comparative

Philology at Oxford produce. Students are expected to demonstrate a broad and expert knowledge of general linguistics (tested by Paper A in particular) and/or its application to particular languages or language families. The examination papers and theses I read showed a high level of engagement with complex Linguistic topics, an ability to carry out independent research and to write in a sophisticated manner. The level of performance of the 2015 students suggests that they receive very high quality teaching and supervision at Oxford and is a strong recommendation for the breadth and depth of the curriculum and the individual subjects offered by the staff in the Faculty.

In closing let me thank for their courteous efficiency and assistance Jane Cuning, Secretary of the Centre for Linguistics and Philology and Professor Aditi Lahiri, Chair of Examiners.

If you have any questions about this letter please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Austin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Prof Peter K. Austin
Märit Rausing Chair in Field Linguistics
SOAS, University of London