

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

FACULTY OF MODERN AND MEDIEVAL LANGUAGES

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The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford
C/o Mrs Sally Powell, Assistant Registrar
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**External Examiner's Report for MPhil and MSt in General Linguistics and
Comparative Philology, 2012**

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

This is my third and final year in the role of 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 entered for the MPhil and the MSt degrees. The papers were set at an appropriate level and they were of a comparable standard to those that are set by the other institutions with which I am familiar (including the University of Cambridge where I have taught and examined the MPhil in Linguistics for sixteen years).

On the whole, I greatly appreciated the efficiency and clarity with which the examination process was organised at Oxford throughout the academic year but in particular during the examination period itself. I was advised at the beginning of the year as to the dates when I would need to be available; I was told when I would need to look at the papers that were set and when I needed to be in Oxford to look at the scripts and theses. During the marking process, I was alerted to specific cases that needed my judgment and I was able to look at the whole range of scripts for the MPhil and the MSt. The final examination board, chaired by Professor Andreas Willi, which I attended on 26 June, was efficiently organised and rigorously fair in accordance with the regulations and guidance to examiners.

Although I looked at all available scripts and most theses, much of my reading was devoted to borderline cases, both at individual paper level and in terms of overall individual student profile, and in particular MPhil candidates [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and

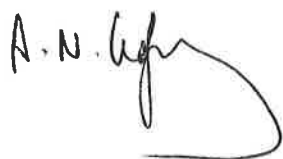
██████, and MSt candidates ██████, ██████ and ██████ I found this approach particularly helpful, since it allowed me to deal with runs of marks for an individual student in borderline cases, and to see student performance in its entirety in a way that permits finer discrimination of intellectual quality to be made. All cases in which I was called upon to adjudicate confirmed to me that the marking was internally consistent and rigorous, and that descriptors relating to eventual marks were clearly used.

I have been very impressed by the range and quality of the work that graduate students in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology at Oxford produce. In the written papers and theses students are variously required to show a broad and expert knowledge of general linguistic theory and/or its application to individual languages or language families; in almost all the papers and theses that I read students revealed an impressive level of engagement with a wide range of complex topics to produce work that demonstrated evidence of a high level of intelligence, independent enquiry, research skills and, in many cases, highly sophisticated writing. This level of performance provides a clear indication of the very high quality of teaching and supervision at Oxford and speaks well for the design of the curriculum, while the linking of in-depth study of individual languages and/or language families is a notable strength of the Faculty.

The spread of results for both the MPhil and the MSt was entirely appropriate, with all candidates passing except for one notably weaker MPhil candidate whose individual performances in both the dissertation and the obligatory Paper A were deemed so weak and disappointing that it would not be possible to offer this candidate the choice of being awarded an MSt or retaking the examinations next year. In light of this year's discussions regarding this candidate and the accepted centrality of Paper A in the Faculty's teaching and examining, which forms a core component of all MPhil and MSt students' courses, it would be advisable to reword the current regulations so that a pass in Paper A be made a requirement for all candidates.

I would like to thank again, and to signal the efficiency and courtesy of, the Faculty of Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics and, in particular, Kate Dobson, secretary of the Centre for Linguistics and Philology, and Professor Andres Willi, Chair of Examiners.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. N. Ledgeway', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Adam Ledgeway