

## **MPhil in African Studies Examining and Marking Scheme**

In judging essays and dissertations, examiners are asked to bear in mind that candidates are at the beginning of their careers in research. At this stage, particularly in an interdisciplinary field such as African Studies, many MPhil candidates may well be writing about topics, or operating in whole fields or disciplines, which they are encountering for the first time.

Examiners should begin by attending to the academic content of submitted work. They should consider **scope** (i.e. the appropriateness of the topic and its larger context, and in current debate), **research content** (i.e. identification and study of appropriate sources and/or academic literature/historiography), **quality of argument** (i.e. analysis of academic literature/sources, development of analytical arguments, or reconsideration of existing accounts), and **awareness of limits of knowledge**. While originality might be possible even in an MPhil essay, it is not required at this stage. But examiners are asked to bear in mind that the African Studies MPhil is interdisciplinary, and students should be given credit for showing breadth of knowledge and a willingness to engage with more than one disciplinary approach.

Work at MPhil level, particularly the dissertation, should reveal high standards of intellectual enquiry, research skills and analytical sophistication. A mark of 67 or above should be awarded only if the candidate might reasonably be expected to go on to complete a successful PhD. Note that 'leave to continue' to the PhD is judged primarily on the basis of dissertation performance, although essay performance may be taken into account in marginal cases.

Candidates are also expected to present work which is clearly and correctly written and which has an adequate (though not necessarily full and complete) scholarly apparatus; they have been issued guidelines on these matters, which suggest either traditional or author-date style footnotes, while stating that any clear and consistent system may be used. Inadequacies on these criteria can be weighed against the standards attained on the criteria relating to academic content. The decision to balance judgment on content and presentation in marking MPhil essays, on how to mark relatively for weaknesses either of argument or of prose and presentation must rest with the examiner. High quality argument can be presented sloppily and meticulous presentational skills can hide shallow and undeveloped arguments. Examiners should consider the **organisation of the narrative** and the argument; **capacity to summarise** findings; **style and clarity** of prose and **precision in documentation** (including footnotes and bibliography). Many candidates are not

native English speakers and examiners should acknowledge this, while commenting on shortcomings of linguistic skills if appropriate. Candidates are expected to make use of all available resources to ensure that their submitted work is written in correct English; such shortcomings can be penalised if their effect is to make the work unintelligible.

## **Essays**

### *Distinction: 75 and above*

Tackles a topic not widely covered in the literature or approaches a topic covered in the literature from a new angle; shows an excellent grasp of a wide range of relevant academic literature, historiography and/or sources and utilises this material in a scholarly fashion; shows superior understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological issues; provides a well-argued and referenced answer, with indications of insight and/or originality.

### *High Pass: 70 and above*

Shows a firm grasp of a good range of relevant academic literature and/or sources and utilises this material in a scholarly fashion; provides a clear, well-organised and suitably referenced answer, showing understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological issues.

### *Pass: 60 and above*

Shows knowledge of a good range of academic literature and/or sources and utilises this material in a scholarly manner; provides a clear, well organised answer but has some theoretical and/or methodological weaknesses and/or displays some weaknesses in written expression or argument. Marks at the upper end of the range will have minor and less serious weaknesses: those at the lower end will have more substantial weaknesses.

### *Fail: below 60*

Shows an inadequate grasp of relevant academic literature and/or utilises sources in a casual manner; fails to provide a coherent answer; shows inadequate understanding of theory and/or methodology; displays significant weaknesses in written expression and/or argument.

### **Submitting Marks and Examiner's Reports**

The Graduate Education Committee will not defer students' submission deadlines, except where there are serious grounds for an extension to be granted. If this occurs, examiners will be notified. Normally, the MPhil Office will dispatch essays and dissertations to examiners the day after their receipt and examiners will have at least 7 days to submit their reports and marks. It is essential that examiners should regard their deadline for submission as unmovable and respond as early as they can. If an examiner, for whatever reason, anticipates any difficulty in meeting the deadline, the MPhil Office should be warned as soon as possible. In the case of dissertation examinations there is an unusually tight schedule, dictated by a need for a firm decision in late June so that candidates can receive their MPhil degree from the Vice-Chancellor at the customary Congregation in late July. Before final approval is given, the examiners' marks must be submitted to the Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners, then to the Faculty of HSPS Degree Committee, and finally to the Board of Graduate Studies. Failure to meet the entirely inflexible deadlines set by these Committees, to which the MPhil's own deadline is linked, will delay the approval of the degree and may do harm to the candidate's career ambitions or plans for future study.

Examiners *should not write specific comments or corrections on the texts of essays or dissertations* (all submissions are returned to their authors after the completion of the examination process). The space provided on the second page of the report form should be used to complete the report, which should be at least 250 words long in order to provide sufficient feedback to students. The reports should give a brief account of the main claims and features of the work, including any particular achievements or flaws, and should explain the mark awarded according to the marking scheme and criteria set out above.

Reports and marks can be submitted in person to the MPhil Office on the forms provided, or sent to [mphil@african.cam.ac.uk](mailto:mphil@african.cam.ac.uk) as an e-mail attachment, so long as a hard copy with signature is submitted by the deadline. All essays and dissertations should be returned to the MPhil office at the same time as the hard copy reports.

### **The Role of the External Examiner**

For essay examinations in Part I of the MPhil the External Examiner is not required to attend the meetings of the Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners, but coursework essays and reports should be made available to the

External Examiner for moderation (or examination, if appropriate). The External Examiner attends the Board of Examiners' meeting in late June/early July. More information about the role of the External Examiner is available here:

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/examiners/external.pdf>

### **Concerns about Plagiarism, Footnotes And/Or Word Count**

If an examiner suspects that submitted work contains unattributed work from other sources, or infringes the guidelines in respect of use of footnotes or word count, he or she should report this on the marksheet provided. Examiners are asked specifically not to mark down work in a punitive way on suspicion of wrongdoing, but are asked to provide an assessment of the academic merit of the work of the candidate; this will provide a basis for the final result and for any possible disciplinary action. Such cases will usually be discussed at the Easter Term meetings of the CAS Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners, and normally also referred to the External Examiner.

### **Payment of Examiners**

Each Examiner and Assessor who is not an officer of the University of Cambridge is entitled to payment. For details, see point 14 of the 'Guide to Examiners and Assessors for the degree of MPhil or MRes'. Payment claim forms and other useful information are available here:

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/examiners/index.html>