

MPhil in African Studies Guidance For Examiners and Assessors

In addition to the guidance below, examiners and assessors are requested to familiarise themselves with the 'Guide to Examiners and Assessors for the Degree of MPhil and MRes' issued by the Board of Graduate Studies and available at:

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/students/studentregistry/staff/exams/examiners/mphil.html>

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 immediately. 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 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>

Procedures For Classification of Final Degrees

Examiners should not confer before reporting their marks. The coursework essay marks are reported to the first CAS Graduate Education Committee meeting of Easter Term, and then converted into average marks that are approved by the CAS Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners in late June/early July. Dissertation marks are reported to the CAS Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners in late June/early July. This meeting classes candidates for the final degree assessment approved by the Faculty of HSPS Degree Committee at its final meeting in early July.

Essays and dissertations of all borderline candidates (i.e. those on borders of Pass/High Pass and High Pass/Distinction) are sent to the External Examiner for moderation. On receipt of two pass marks where there is a discrepancy of 10 or more marks, a third mark will be sought from the External Examiner, except where both marks are 75 or above. If the

External Examiner is one of the regular examiners involved in such a case of manifest divergence, the Academic Secretary will ask an experienced Cambridge academic with relevant expertise to provide the third mark and report; the appointment of this examiners will be confirmed by the CAS Graduate Education Committee at the time the marks are confirmed. When a third examiner has to be appointed, he or she should reach an independent conclusion on the basis of the written work and should not see the marks or the reports of earlier examiners.

Where all the marks are pass marks, all three will be presented to the Examiners' meeting and recorded in the candidate's file. However, for the purposes of the scaled average, whichever two marks of the three are closest to each other will stand, the outlying mark being discarded. Where the three marks are equidistant from each other, the two marks most favourable to the candidate will stand.

In the case of one or more marks being a marginal fail or fail, all three marks are presented, with the third mark confirming whether that element is deemed to be a pass, marginal fail or fail. If the candidate is deemed to have passed, the marginal fail mark will be discarded.

Distinctions

Outstanding work in Part I and Part II of the MPhil should be rewarded with a mark of 75 or above. Examiners are encouraged to make full use of the range of marks above 75.

For outstanding performance on the MPhil as a whole, the Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners may place students in the category of Distinction. Students and their supervisors are informed if they achieve this level so that the information may be used for further academic applications. Distinction will be awarded normally only to those candidates achieving a final weighted average of 75 or above. In addition, students awarded Distinction will normally be expected to have a majority of marks of 70 or more in Part I.

Marginal fail marks in the core course and option course essays

The marks of 58 and 59 are marginal fail marks. All work receiving a marginal fail mark will be read by a third examiner (normally the External Examiner). The third reader will examine and award marks independently, without reference to the marks already awarded. Whenever possible, the third reader's mark should give a clear recommendation of Pass or Fail. If the External Examiner awards a mark of more than 60, the marginal fail mark or marks will be discarded. If confirmed by the External Examiner or other third marker, marginal fail marks on a single essay may be redeemed by the essay for the other course element where the mark for that essay does not fall under 63 (counting for this purpose only the third mark on an essay where one has been awarded).

If a confirmed marginal fail mark on an essay (with the other essay a clear pass) is not compensated by the evidence specified above, the candidate shall be deemed to be a case

of 'marginal failure'. MPhil candidates in this position will normally be advised to leave the course and not to proceed to Part II of the assessment. However, in exceptional circumstances, point 3(a) of the 'Guide to Examiners and Assessors for the degree of MPhil or MRes' may apply, giving the Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners discretion to allow a candidate to submit a dissertation. In such a case, if the dissertation achieves two marks of 63 or above (or a confirmed post-viva mark of 63 or above), the Board of Examiners has power by this regulation to take this into account as a compensatory mark in making its final recommendation to the Degree Committee of the HSPS Faculty.

Receipt of a marginal fail mark from any examiner, confirmed by the External Examiner or by another third marker, in both essays will constitute an outright failure of Part I of the course, see below.

Fail marks in the core course and option course essays

As a consequence of confirmed marginal fail marks in two essays, receipt of a marginal fail mark from any examiner, confirmed by a third marker, on more than one essay will constitute an outright failure of the course. Normally this would entail failure of the course as a whole. The Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners will make a recommendation to this effect to the Faculty of HSPS Degree Committee, which has the responsibility of confirming passes and fails in MPhil courses under its jurisdiction.

In the case of one or two fail marks (57 or below) the External Examiner is automatically asked by the Chair of Examiners to examine and enter a third mark for the essay. Fail marks submitted by the External Examiner acting as a regular essay examiner will be moderated by a third marker appointed by the Chair of Examiners and confirmed by the Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners. The third reader will examine and award marks independently, without reference to the marks already awarded. Whenever possible, the third reader's mark should give a clear recommendation of Pass or Fail. A third mark, which is a failing mark, cannot be compensated and constitutes grounds for failure of the course overall. The Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners will make a recommendation to this effect to the Faculty of HSPS Degree Committee. As noted above, the Board of Graduate Studies allows the Degree Committee discretion in the case of certain core course and option course failures to allow a candidate to submit a dissertation. In such a case, two marks of 63 or above (or a confirmed post-viva mark of 63 or above) for the dissertation would be required in order to compensate for the core course or option course failure. Referral of essays for further work and for re-examination at a later date is not allowed.

Marginal fail marks in the dissertation

The marks of 58 and 59 are marginal fail marks, which are redeemable by evidence of more than borderline performance overall in the essays submitted in the core course and option course. In giving such a mark examiners would indicate that the dissertation alone is not evidence enough to pass the course, but that it is sufficiently close that evidence of reasonably strong performance elsewhere in the course would warrant the award of the MPhil degree.

In the case of one examiner awarding a Marginal Fail (59) and the other a Pass (60 or above), the dissertation will be marked by a third reader (normally the External Examiner). The third reader will examine and award marks independently, without reference to the marks already awarded. Whenever possible, the third reader's mark should give a clear recommendation of Pass or Fail. If the third mark is a Pass the candidate is deemed to have passed. If the third mark is a Marginal or an outright Fail, a *viva* will be held. In the case of both examiners awarding a Marginal Fail, a third reader (normally the External Examiner) is consulted. If the third mark is a Pass, a *viva* will be held. If the third mark is a Marginal or outright Fail, the candidate will be deemed to have failed. If the outcome of such a *viva* is itself a marginal fail mark of 59, this would constitute a 'marginal fail' of the dissertation, and point 3(b) of the 'Guide to Examiners and Assessors for the degree of MPhil or MRes' may apply, giving the Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners discretion to judge whether the essays in the core course and option course, taken as a whole had achieved what the Memorandum calls 'high performance' and to take this into account in recommending a pass to the Board of Graduate Studies. Such 'high performance' would for this course be constituted by a set of essay marks none of which falls under 63 (and excluding for this purpose any mark of 59 which was not confirmed by a third marker). If such compensation is judged to be available, the candidate may be deemed to have passed the MPhil as a whole. If compensation is not available, the candidate will be deemed to have failed.

Failure in the dissertation

In the case of one Passing and one Failing mark (i.e. 57 or below) from examiners, the dissertation is sent to a third marker (normally the External Examiner). If the third mark is a clear Pass, the dissertation will be deemed to have passed. If that marker awards a Fail mark (i.e. 57 or below), the candidate will be deemed to have failed. If the third mark is a Marginal Fail, a *viva* will be held.

The third reader will examine and award marks independently, without reference to the marks already awarded. Whenever possible, the third reader's mark should give a clear recommendation of Pass or Fail. In the event of two clear failing marks, the candidate will be deemed to have failed.

In each case where a candidate is deemed to have failed, a *viva* may be held, but only if the candidate wishes it. Candidates must be informed of their right to request a *viva* in such cases. In the event of two low failing marks, it is appropriate to advise the student that a conversion of the fail to a passing mark, though theoretically possible, is in practice highly unlikely.

Referral of the dissertation for further work and for re-examination at a later date is not permitted for MPhil dissertations. A fail mark (57 or below; or uncompensated marginal fail mark of 58 or 59) confirmed after the *viva* is grounds for failure of the MPhil course overall. The Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners will make a recommendation to this effect to the Faculty of HSPS Degree Committee.

Viva voce examinations

A *viva* will be required only for certain candidates who receive a failing mark (or a confirmed marginal fail) or in other special circumstances (e.g. suspected plagiarism) recommended by the examiners and/or determined by the Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners. *Viva voce* examinations (which normally last for thirty minutes) are held at a predetermined date (usually the day or the day before the Board of Examiners meet). All candidates are informed of this date well in advance. Unauthorised absence of a candidate from a *viva* implies a failure in the dissertation examination. Postponement of the *viva* will be allowed by the Board of Examiners only on the most serious (e.g. medical) grounds.

The Chair of Examiners' will call a *viva voce* examination by the two examiners of the dissertation jointly with the External Examiner acting as adjudicator. *Vivas* caused by a mark submitted by the External Examiner acting as a regular dissertation examiner are moderated by a member of the Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners. The *viva voce* examiners (including the External Examiner or additional member of the Graduate Education Committee) must submit a joint written report to the Graduate Education Committee sitting as Board of Examiners and may recommend the raising of dissertation examination marks to pass level or higher. If a joint report is not possible and the two original examiners remain in disagreement after the *viva*, the view of the External Examiner (who will be present at the *viva* and have read the dissertation) will prevail; should he or she be one of the two original examiners, the Examining Board, of which the External Examiner is a member, will decide the matter. It should be noted that the normal expectation is that marks will not be reduced as the result of a *viva*. Confidential minutes of the *viva* examination will be taken either by the Academic Secretary or another member of the Centre's staff appointed by the Academic Secretary. The officer attending in this capacity will be present at the *viva* only as an observer and will not participate in the discussion.