

MST AND MPHIL 2023 LINGUISTICS EXAMINATION REPORT

Faculty of Linguistics, Philology, and Phonetics

Report on Master of Studies and Master of Philosophy examinations in Linguistics for the academic year 2022-2023

Part I

A. STATISTICS

(1) Numbers and percentages in each class/category

(a) Classified examinations

N/A

(b) Unclassified Examinations

Category	Number (total)			Percentage (%)		
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Distinction	3	6	5	9%	25%	20%
Merit	8	9	9	24%	38%	36%
Pass	15	7	11	45%	29%	44%
Fail	5	0	0	15%	0%	0%

2 students were classified incomplete

Category	Number (MPhil)			Percentage (%)		
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Distinction	2	4	2	12%	33%	22%
Merit	5	7	4	29%	58%	44%
Pass	8	1	3	47%	8%	33%
Fail	2	0	0	12%	0%	0%

No students were classified as incomplete

Category	Number (MSt)	Percentage (%)
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	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Distinction	1	2	3	6%	17%	19%
Merit	3	2	5	19%	17%	31%
Pass	7	6	8	44%	50%	50%
Fail	3	0	0	19%	0	0

2 students were classified incomplete

- Total number of MSt candidates = 16
- MSt candidates whose results were considered at the final examiners' meeting = 15
- MSt theses submitted = 5
- Total number of MPhil candidates = 32
- MPhil candidates whose results were considered at the final examiners' meeting = 28
- Total number of second-year MPhil candidates = 18
- Total number of first year MPhil candidates taking paper A = 15
- Total number of second year MPhil candidates taking paper A = none
- MPhil theses submitted = 17
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- (2) No Vivas were held.
- (3) All scripts were double-marked.

Scaling was not employed.

B. NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

There were no new methods and procedures operated for the first time in the current academic year.

C. RECOMMENDED CHANGES

It was felt that the statement in the Examination Conventions of the minimum conditions for a pass at the MPhil – “a mark of at least 50 on each unit of assessment (papers and thesis; please note that the thesis counts as much as one option paper) must ordinarily be attained, with no mark below 40; at the discretion of the examiners, marks above 40 but below 50 may be offset by a very good performance in the thesis.” - did not unambiguously convey the intention that a mark below 50 but above 40 might be ‘rescued’ specifically by a very good performance in the thesis. An appropriately revised form of words (including a precise definition of ‘very good’) has been formulated and will be proposed to the Graduate Studies Committee.

A very large number of extensions of submission deadlines were sought and granted this year. Despite the excellent cooperation of the assessors in marking the submissions affected, many of the marks arrived too late for consideration at the final Examiners' Meeting in July, and the Examiners were faced with a period of consultation (via a secure site on Sharepoint) about late marks, protracted over the entire summer. It may be useful to indicate very clearly to candidates that in applying for extensions they should take into account the substantial risk that it may not be possible to classify or release their results until October.

The Chair of Examiners found that the stipulation of penalties for late submission of assessed items in the existing Examination Conventions was impenetrable not to say self-contradictory. Although the Examiners found ways of dealing equitably with late submission penalties this year, there is an urgent need for clarification. A new, and far more transparent, specification has now been formulated and will be submitted to the Graduate Studies Committee.

There were some cases of unauthorized revisions to the titles of submitted items. It should be made clear to candidates that after the published deadline for submission of titles no revisions should normally be made. In exceptional circumstances if, after due consultation with the supervisor, a candidate feels that a revision is absolutely necessary, the revision must first be approved at a scheduled meeting of the Graduate Studies Committee.

There is a need for a more robust procedure for additional checking of examination scripts after their conversion to the final pdf. It is suggested that setters should be asked to supply a hard copy, as well as an electronic copy, when they submit draft examination papers, so that the final versions can be properly checked.

A clear policy on divulging assessors' and examiners' comments on individual examination scripts and submissions needs to be decided. The view taken by this year's Chair of Examiners was that such comments are part of the assessment process, not of the teaching process, that markers should write for their colleagues in the assessment process and not regard themselves as providing feedback for candidates, and that candidates should not automatically expect to be shown comments on their work. In the end candidates have a legal right to see those comments, but it needs to be decided whether they should expect to see them as a matter of course.

D. Candidates are made aware of the examination conventions to be followed by the examiners by means of an email sent to them individually, to which the conventions were attached. A copy of those conventions is attached.

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

All examination scripts, written submissions, and theses, were marked by two internal assessors. The External Examiner looked at all cases where the internal markers had agreed a mark below the pass mark, and at scripts and submissions receiving the single highest and lowest marks for the M.Phil. and for the M.St. In addition to reading these scripts and submissions, and relevant markers' comments, the External Examiner also read a considerable sample of other scripts and submissions. The Board had appointed a subcommittee (comprising Professors De Melo, Maiden, and Willi) to consider individual mitigating circumstances notices, as set out in the University's policy and guidance documents. The panel, which met on the day before the final Examiners' meeting, was tasked with banding the mitigating circumstances notices into three levels of seriousness. For the decisions taken, see attachment to Section E.

The Board also considered the distribution of overall outcomes in relation to those of other recent years, and concluded that there were no major discrepancies with results obtained in previous years on individual papers, where comparison was possible or meaningful.

This year's results show several fails (2 in the MPhil. and 3 in the MSt.). These are, respectively, failure rates of 12% and 19%. In the previous two years there were none. The deeper reasons for this outcome cannot be easily determined directly from the examination performance of the failing candidates, and may have more to do with individual circumstances than with any systematic or structural problem, but the Faculty may need to give the matter thought.

B. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES AND BREAKDOWN OF THE RESULTS BY GENDER

Category	Number (M)			Percentage (%)		
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Distinction	1	1	2	6%	5%	29%
Merit	3	5	1	19%	23%	14%
Pass	6	4	4	38%	18%	57%
Fail	4	0	0	25%	0%	0%

1 student was classified incomplete

Category	Number (F)			Percentage (%)		
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Distinction	2	5	3	11%	23%	12%
Merit	5	4	8	28%	18%	32%
Pass	9	3	7	50%	14%	28%
Fail	1	0	0	6%	0%	0%

1 student was classified incomplete

It was not felt that differences in the modes of assessment revealed any major or significant differences in candidates' overall or individual performance.

C. DETAILED NUMBERS ON CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE IN EACH PART OF THE EXAMINATION

Papers	Marks					
	Papers taken	70% +	65% - 69%	50% - 64%	Fail	Incomplete
Paper A	24	3	7	11	2	
B(i): Phonetics and Phonology	5		2	3		
B(ii): Syntax	6	2	1	3		
B(iii): Semantics	3			3		
B(iv): Historical and Comparative Linguistics	2		2			
B(ix) Computational Linguistics ⁱ	2	1				1
B(v): Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics	5	1	2	1		1
B(vi): History and Structure of a Language	3		1	2		
B(vii): Experimental Phonetics	4	1		3		1
B(viii): Sociolinguistics	6	1	1	2	2	
B(x): Corpus Linguistics	1					1
B(x): Special Subject in Phonology	1	1				
B(x): Special Subject Morphology	1				1	
B(x): Special Subject/ Historical Pragmatics	1			1		
C(i): The comparative grammar of two Indo-European languages or language groups	2	1	1			
C(ii): The historical grammar of the two languages or language groups selected	2	1	1			
C(iii): Translation from, and linguistic comment upon, texts in the languages selected	2		1	1		
D(i) History of English	1			1		
D(i): History of Czech and Russian	1		1			
D(ii) Structure of English	1			1		
D(ii): Structure of Czech and Russian	1		1			
MSt Thesis	5	1	1	2		1
MPhil Thesis	17	4	3	7	3	

i. One candidate for the MSc. in Digital Scholarship sat the examination in Computational Linguistics.

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

See separate attachment.

E. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTIFIABLE INDIVIDUALS AND OTHER MATERIAL WHICH WOULD USUALLY BE TREATED AS RESERVED BUSINESS

See separate attachment.

F. NAMES OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Professor Kathryn Allan (University College London, External Examiner)

Professor Wolfgang De Melo

Professor Martin Maiden (Chair)

Professor Andreas Willi

MST AND MPHIL 2023 LINGUISTICS EXAMINATION REPORT SECTION D

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

In general, individual papers or examination questions raised few specific problems this year, which is testimony to the efficiency and professionalism of our setters.

The External Examiner felt that the marking of the general paper, Paper A, while consistent, could afford to be a little more generous.

The Chair took care to examine particularly the marking of papers (and parts of Paper A) for which one or more of the 'usual' assessors was unavailable because of the marking boycott, and where other colleagues, possibly less immediately familiar with teaching for the subject, had kindly stepped in. His clear impression was that there were no significant discrepancies for individual candidates in the marks that they obtained for these papers and for other papers that they had offered, except that the marking appeared to him a little low on Paper B(iii) Semantics, and also on semantics questions in the general paper, Paper A, marked by the same colleagues. However, in no case was it judged that these marks were so severely out of line as to be considered unfair or as to disadvantage individual candidates' final outcomes.

A18386W1 B (vi) History and Structure of a Language: Hittite – Due to a production error, one font related to small capitals was affected when the file converted to final pdf for the Exam Schools.

A16204W1 C (ii) The Historical Grammar of Slavonic – Due to a production error, the last question in the Slavonic section was missing from the final script. The student was given three questions on West Slavonic, but only two on South Slavonic, not three on each as planned.

These problems, while we do not believe that they disadvantaged the candidates, indicate the need for a procedure for additional checking of examination scripts after their conversion to the final pdf. Setters might be asked to supply a hard copy, as well as an electronic copy, when they submit draft examination papers, so that the final versions can be properly checked.