

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

MPhil in Health, Medicine, and Society

Senior Examiner's Report 2023-24

Overall results

Nineteen students completed the MPhil in Health, Medicine, and Society (HMS) this year. Of these, fifteen students achieved a Distinction mark (70-79). Three students attained High Performance marks (65-69), and one student achieved a Pass mark (60-64). All students passed the course (60 or above), with the highest mark falling within the Distinction range (70-79). The marking scheme was revised effective October 2023. Previously, marks between 70 and 74 were designated as 'First Class'. Under the revised scheme, a 'Distinction' is awarded for any mark between 70 and 79. While the MPhil is formally a pass/fail degree, official transcripts provide further granularity by distinguishing between a *pass* (60%) and a *pass with distinction* (70%).

The department maintains a policy of monitoring gender-based trends in student performance. No concerns arise from this year's results; however, continued monitoring is recommended, particularly as the small sample size of students makes inferences regarding broader trends difficult to assess. Consistent with the trend observed in the previous two years, the cohort was predominantly female (with 89% of students identifying as female).

Prizes

Two prizes are awarded annually to recognize outstanding HMS MPhil student performance: The Habib Prize, endowed by Benyamin Habib, is awarded to the student with the best overall performance in the formally assessed essays. The Forrester Prize, endowed by the family of John Forrester, is awarded to the student with the best performance in the dissertation. This year, the Benyamin Habib Prize was awarded to Aya Kanan (Girton) and the Forrester Prize was awarded to Dandy Doherty (Lucy Cavendish).

Comments

The examination process followed established procedures. Two assessors, at least one of whom was typically a member of core staff (excluding the supervisor), were appointed to mark each piece of submitted work. Prior to the Examiners' meeting, assessors provided independent reports, individual marks, and, where possible, an agreed mark. Assessors provided comments for the Board of Examiners, ensuring their comments were balanced, aligned with the proposed mark, evaluative rather than simply descriptive, and, for early essays, included guidance for improvement. The Board of Examiners considered both confidential and non-confidential portions of the assessor reports.

The Board of Examiners was impressed by the consistently high quality of submitted coursework, including some exceptional student performances. Notably, this year saw an increased number of submissions that crossed disciplinary boundaries. Assessor reports were also of a high quality, demonstrating close engagement with the work and providing detailed, insightful feedback. The feedback generally highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in a clear and encouraging manner, reflecting a commitment to thorough and constructive assessment.

The External Examiner commended the HMS MPhil course for its effectiveness in exposing students to diverse perspectives. Professor Sarah Franklin further praised the course, characterising it as an unusually successful MPhil, due in part to the significant efforts of the staff. She noted that the course attracts highly ambitious students and expressed her hope for its continued growth and potential to become a flagship inter-school programme, contributing to the University's distinctive identity as a leader in this area. Professor Franklin emphasised that the course's success is particularly noteworthy given its launch with minimal staffing and strongly recommended further investment in the form of additional appointments.

External Examiner

Professor Monica Greco (University of Bath) served as External Examiner for this academic year, marking her fourth year in this role. While External Examiners typically serve a three-year term, the General Board may grant a fourth year in exceptional circumstances. Due to the Marking and Assessment Boycott in Easter Term 2023, no HMS Examiners' meetings were held, and consequently, no External Examiner was recommended for the 2023-2024 academic year. In light of this, Professor Greco was approached in Michaelmas Term and kindly agreed to serve a fourth term.

As External Examiner, Professor Greco was primarily responsible for monitoring the examination process. Following the marking of each piece of work by two assessors, a selection was sent to Professor Greco for moderation. This selection included work that received particularly high or low marks, showed a significant discrepancy between assessor marks, or fell near a grade boundary with the agreed mark on the lower side. Additionally, Professor Greco was available to moderate cases where assessors disagreed on a mark, or any other work deemed anomalous. Throughout the year, Professor Greco had access to all individual and agreed marks, as well as all assessor reports. To ensure the integrity of the marking process, when there was a discrepancy in the individual marks, Professor Greco reviewed the justification for how assessors reached a final agreed mark. As External Examiner, Professor Greco attended the third and fourth Examiners' meetings.

Professor Greco has been an invaluable asset to this programme, consistently demonstrating exceptional dedication and commitment to maintaining rigorous academic standards. Her contributions have included expert guidance, thorough assessment, and constructive feedback. Her extensive expertise and experience have been highly valued by her fellow examiners, and her insights have greatly benefited the

programme and the institution as a whole. We are deeply grateful for her exemplary service as External Examiner over the past four years, and I would like to formally express my sincere thanks for her contributions in this role.

Recommendations

- The Board of Examiners strongly recommends increased investment in this MPhil course, specifically through the addition of faculty and administrative capacity, to ensure its continued excellence and support its strategic development as a key interdisciplinary program.
- To address the persistent shortage of assessors, a challenge consistent with previous years, ongoing monitoring of assessor availability is crucial, particularly in sociology. This shortage should inform strategic faculty recruitment efforts to ensure adequate coverage for future academic years.
- To ensure consistency and manage examiner workload, assessors should adhere to the established word-count guidelines for reports.
- The current practice of offering specialised orientation sessions for new assessors should be maintained to ensure continued familiarity with the unique aspects of this course.

Marta Halina

1 October 2024