

Name	Professor Mark Jackson		
Home Institution	University of Exeter		
Name(s) of course(s) examined <i>e.g. Tripos Part/ MPhil/ MRes</i>	MPhil Health, Medicine and Society		
Academic year of examination	2024/25		
Level (<i>Delete as appropriate</i>)		Postgraduate	
Year of Appointment	1st		

	Yes	No	N/A
1. Are the academic standards set for the award appropriate for the qualification, and comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions?	x		
2. Are you satisfied that you received sufficient programme materials (handbooks, regulations, marking and classing criteria) in a timely manner?	x		
3. Are you satisfied that you were consulted adequately on draft examination papers, and that your comments and suggestions were taken into consideration?			x
4. Are you satisfied that the assessment was pitched at the appropriate level?	x		
5. Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	x		
6. Do the assessment processes measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme?	x		
7. Are you satisfied that issues raised on your previous report form have been properly considered and, where applicable, acted upon?			x
8. Did you receive a written response from the Department to your previous report form?			x

If you replied No to any of the questions above, please expand here:

Do you have any concerns about the course, including standards and quality?

No. The standards and quality of the course are appropriate and clear.

Are you satisfied that the procedures associated with the assessment are efficient (e.g. timeframes, draft papers, questions, design and conduct of exam, meetings, vivas)?

Yes. The processes relating to assessments (and my role as external examiner in these respects) were clear and efficient throughout the year.

Do you have any comments on marking and classing (e.g. range of marks, action around borderline marks, penalties, moderation, double marking, reconciliation of marks)?

Through the year, I assessed a selection of formative and summative essays, as well as dissertations. In particular, I reviewed assessments that were awarded low or high marks, those where internal assessors awarded widely different marks or were unable to agree, and those where marks crossed a grade boundary. I submitted written comments on the selection of essays that I received and attended the third and fourth examination board meetings, when final classifications were confirmed and prizes awarded.

Internal marking was consistent, conscientious and fair, providing robust (indeed exemplary) assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of essays and dissertations. Justification for the marks was clear and the distribution of marks was consistent with previous years. Assessors provided a clear rationale for the final agreed mark when necessary – for example, when they disagreed on the original mark, when marks straddled a boundary, or when one of the internal assessors awarded a mark in the fail range.

In addition, throughout the year, we discussed and incorporated:

- clearer justification for distinguishing between distinction and starred distinction on a small number of occasions;
- the need to recognize and reward interdisciplinary endeavour (see below).

Do you have any comments on the student experience of the course and/or their experience of the assessment process?

I have not seen any student feedback to comment.

Do you have any comments on University policies (e.g. the role of the external examiner, policies around plagiarism, script annotation)?

The university policies, including the plagiarism policy and the role of external examiners, are for the most part accessible and clear. The university's approach to the use of generative AI by students is evolving and it will be increasingly important for this to be clarified further in future years. We discussed this at the final Board of Examiners and stressed the need for clearer guidance for students and assessors on acceptable use, especially in the absence of reliable generative AI detection tools.

Please describe here any recommendations for improvement.

This was my first year as external examiner and, in some respects, I was finding my way in relation to the aims and contours of the programme, the mechanisms and policies for assessment and the rhythm of the work. I have been supported admirably throughout by the Senior Examiner, Professor Marta Halina, and the HMS MPhil Administrator, Sophia Syddall, and have no recommendations for improvements in those respects.

The practice of sharing reports between the external examiner and the Senior Examiner was deeply appreciated, as was the very clear outline of the scheduling of marking and meetings. These changes, instituted by the Senior Examiner and the previous External Examiner, were welcome.

The challenges for improvement in future years include:

1. Clarifying the guidance to students on interdisciplinary research. This was discussed at the final Exam Board and further guidance has been drafted and is being added to the website for next year, which will be invaluable for the external examiner as well as students. Interdisciplinarity constitutes the intellectual heart of this MPhil programme and additional guidance to students and staff on the aspirations, opportunities and expectations created by a commitment to working across, as well as within, disciplines would be welcome.
2. Clearer guidance on the use of generative AI, which will depend to some extent on university policies as they are developed. This is an emerging challenge within the sector and it will be important to address it over the next few months.

Please highlight any good practice you encountered.

There are a number of outstanding elements of the programme, its coordination and the assessment practices.

1. The essays and dissertations demonstrate not only the quality of the students, but also the excellent supervision provided by staff.
2. The clarity of internal assessment is outstanding. All assessors engaged fully with the students' work and provided excellent feedback, with full justification of the marks.
3. The commitment to interdisciplinarity is a distinctive feature of the programme. There are few institutions where such diverse disciplines come together in a single, coherent postgraduate programme. The model here is ambitious, but exemplary in its delivery. It has been a pleasure to read such a wide range of essays and dissertations, in terms of both subject and approach.
4. Organisation of the programme, management of the assessment process and coordination of the Exam Boards has been exemplary.

Have you seen any evidence of grade inflation?

This is my first year and so I am unable to comment directly on grade inflation, but I discussed this with the Senior Examiner at the end of the year and the distribution of the grades appears to be broadly comparable with previous years and accurately reflects the quality of the students. If anything, I felt that the assessors had been slightly cautious at the top end of the marking scheme, particularly in relation to starred distinctions, but we addressed this fully at the Exam Board to ensure consistent and equitable application of the criteria.

If this is your final year as external examiner? If so, have you seen improvements over your tenure? Has the Department acted on your advice?

N/A

Do you have any other comments?

My involvement this year has been rewarding. I have learned much from the students' work. The HMS MPhil programme is a leader in the field of interdisciplinary humanities scholarship and teaching. The administrative processes are clear. The leadership and assessment team – especially Professor Marta Halina and Sophia Syddall – have been welcoming and generous in their support for a new External Examiner. I look forward to working with them again next year.