

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

MPhil in Health, Medicine, and Society

Senior Examiner's Report 2024-25

**Overall results**

Seventeen students completed the MPhil in Health, Medicine, and Society (HMS) this year. Of these, twelve students achieved a Distinction mark (70-79). Five students attained High Performance marks (65-69). No students achieved marks that fell within the Pass (60-64), Fail (0-59), or Starred Distinction (80+) classification bands. 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 previous years, the cohort was predominantly female, with 64.7% of students identifying as female, 17.6% identifying as male, and 17.6% identifying as other.

**Prizes**

Two prizes are awarded annually to honour exceptional academic achievement among HMS MPhil students. The Habib Prize, endowed by Benyamin Habib, recognises 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 Habib Prize was awarded to Syd Haupt for her essays 'Through the Looking Glass: An Examination of Kinship Structures and ART' and 'A History of Psychological Follow-Up for IVF Children'. The Forrester Prize was awarded to Amy Wu for her dissertation, 'Caring for Axolotls: Restoration Ecology and the Sociotechnical Imaginaries of the Chinampa-Refuge'.

**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 an agreed mark. Assessors provided comments for the Board of Examiners. The Board of Examiners ensured assessor 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 commended the consistently high quality of the student coursework, noting several exceptional performances. This high standard was matched

by the assessors' reports, which demonstrated close engagement with the work. The feedback generally offered clear, detailed, and constructive comments that highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in an encouraging manner.

### **External Examiner**

Professor Mark Jackson, Professor of the History of Medicine and Founding Director of the Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health, served as the External Examiner this year. This was his first year serving in this capacity.

As External Examiner, Professor Jackson's primary role was to monitor the integrity of the assessment process. Following the marking of each piece of work by two assessors, he moderated a representative sample. This selection focused on work that received particularly high or low marks, fell near a grade boundary, or showed a significant discrepancy between assessors. Additionally, Professor Jackson was available to moderate cases where assessors disagreed on a mark or any other work deemed anomalous. Throughout the year, Professor Jackson had access to all coursework, individual and agreed marks, as well as all assessor reports. His duties also included attending the third and fourth Examiners' meetings.

### **Recommendations**

- The Board of Examiners recommends continued investment in this MPhil to ensure its sustained excellence and strategic development. It is important that sufficient academic staffing levels are maintained to adequately support the quality of teaching and supervision required for this interdisciplinary programme. The Board also wishes to formally acknowledge the invaluable administrative contribution of Sophia Syddall. The course has benefited greatly from her dedicated support.
- 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.
- Student Support Documents (SSDs) should be regularly reviewed to ensure any required assessment adjustments are communicated to examiners and assessors as needed.
- The Board of Examiners recommends piloting a revised assessment procedure for the first formative essay of the HMS MPhil. While the principle of double-blind marking would be retained, the proposed change would task Assessor 1 with producing a single, consolidated report that synthesises feedback from both assessors.

Marta Halina

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