

Name	Sabina Leonelli		
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Name(s) of course(s) examined <i>e.g. Tripos Part/ MPhil/ MRes</i>	NST2HP Natural Sciences Tripos Part 2 History and Philosophy of Science		
Academic year of examination	2022-2023		
Level (<i>Delete as appropriate</i>)	Undergraduate		
Year of Appointment		2 nd	

	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?	n/a		

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.

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 procedures for marking and assessment were appropriate and consistently applied. As external examiner, I reviewed a sample of dissertations and notes containing a spread of top, bottom and borderline marks, which I am satisfied to be representative of the overall assessment. I also reviewed a sample of exam scripts for each paper, and had access to the overall results for each paper and piece of coursework.

Exams, essays and dissertations were double-blind marked, which is excellent practice to ensure fair and well-considered assessment. Examiners recorded their comments and subsequent discussions in ways that were well-substantiated and I could easily follow.

I was happy to see some healthy disagreement between markers, which is understandable given different readings of the material, and helps ensure that a good compromise is reached with fair marks for the students in question.

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)?

Marking is done conscientiously and fairly, with high expectations from students which are reflected in outstanding achievement from some of them (some exam responses are truly memorable. The department continues in the tradition of keeping high marks under 80 even in the case of strong performances: I don't see this as a problem since it is done consistently across modules, I just mention this because I remember a discussion last year around whether this was the right thing to do for students. In my view, there would be arguments for pushing the range of marking towards 90, given the quality of some of these scripts.

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

I remember we had a discussion last year about whether students receive the useful feedback put together by markers as a rationale for their decisions; I hope that they do, since it is precious for their continuing development beyond the degree.

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

No.

Please describe here any recommendations for improvement.

The format of exams may deserve some reflection. Judging from the sample I was sent, while some students are certainly making the best out of the opportunity to do an open-book exam and finding ways to express sophisticated thoughts, there is also a number of students who stick to rather pedestrian renditions of what was covered in class and in the readings. I wonder whether the very format of the exam makes sense given those outcomes. While I understand that going back to a closed-book, synchronous exam may not be feasible, perhaps switching more of these modules to a research essay or other more original piece of writing may be beneficial to the students as well as the teaching staff. It seems that quite a few students perform better in the research-based pieces than in the open-book exams anyhow.

There were a couple of cases (e.g. Paper 4) where examiners seemed unsure about whether a given student had mitigating circumstances (such as dyslexia). After discussion during the exam board, I realised that this is due to information about mitigating circumstances not being disseminated consistently by the university, with the department struggling to keep track of such information (and to do this in ways that respect individual students' right to privacy). This does not seem to be an issue to do with department management, but rather a systemic issue around information management within the institution, and I want to flag this as a matter of urgency as it seems crucial that the University of Cambridge and the Colleges find a way to coordinate information sharing about the students that may be relevant to their evaluation in a safe, effective and reliable way.

Please highlight any good practice you encountered.

The topic and content of the exams and research pieces are excellent, evidencing a broad syllabus with the right emphasis on novel, cutting-edge topics versus seminal background knowledge. New issues, such as those relating to COVID-19 research, found their way naturally in this corpus, which clearly shows the ways in which teaching has incorporated the latest literature and related it to current affairs. Students formed in this way certainly acquired a command of HPS scholarship and, more importantly, the ability to apply it reflexively to a wide range of questions.

Have you seen any evidence of grade inflation?

No.

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?

No.

Thank you for completing the External Examiner Report form.

Please now forward to vcexternalexaminers@admin.cam.ac.uk by July 31st for undergraduate examinations, 1st October for Masters Degrees, and 12th October for resits.

Please also forward a copy to your Chair of Examiners.