

Name	Charlotte Sleigh			
Home Institution	UCL			
Email Address				
Name(s) of course(s) examined <i>e.g. Tripos Part/ MPhil/ MRes</i>	HPS Part III and HPS MPhil			
Academic year of examination	2024-25			
Level (<i>Delete as appropriate</i>)	Postgraduate			
Year of Appointment	1 st	2 nd	3 rd x	4 th

	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:

n/a

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

Standards and quality of both courses are high.

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, with one possible exception: see below for comments on dealing with potential student use of AI in the exam board.

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)?

1. Last year I commented that the marks were about a little below what one might expect for comparable work at other universities (e.g. UCL). This year the mean was raised about two points, making the modal classification a first/distinction. This feels appropriate.

Recommendations for continuing good practice:

- a. Care should be taken to continue to review this data in future years
 - b. Markers should be reminded that a low first/distinction is a 72; only where they are really on the fence between grade boundaries should a 70 be awarded
 - c. Markers should avoid X9 marks where possible.
2. Last year I commented that 'PhD potential' was an inappropriate marking rubric. A mark cannot reflect potential; it can only reflect what the examiner sees in front of them. This has now been removed from Part III rubric, with a separate note added stating that 70+ is normally required for progression to doctoral work. The criterion of 'PhD potential' remained in place for MPhil marking this year but following discussion at the interim exam board, the department has agreed to update the guidance next year to match Part III.
 3. The MPhil guidance separates out the difference between work in the range 70-79 and 80+, but the Part III guidance does not. This should be remedied for the coming academic year.
 4. This year I raised the point that some confusion is present in the MPhil rubric:

70–74:

A **solid performance** which meets some of the criteria for distinction but not necessarily all.

65–69:

HIGH PERFORMANCE. Clearly proficient with a proper coverage of relevant material, and reasonably well presented. Work in this category **may be solid but unimaginative**.

It's confusing to have 65-9 labelled 'high performance' and 70-74 'solid performance'. It's also hard to tell how 'solid but unimaginative' at 65-9 is different from 'solid performance' description at the higher grade band; presumably originality might be one of the criteria not observed. We discussed this at the interim exam board and the department agreed to clarify for next year.

5. This year I raised the issue of why the short MPhil pieces are called essays while in Part III they are research papers. To me, a research paper requires a stronger element of original/primary research whereas an essay can be an overview of scholarship with some thoughts. If anything, the Part III title suggests something more taxing and ambitious than the MPhil. I would recommend 'research paper' for both. We discussed this at the exam board and the department decided to retain the titles.
6. As per previous years, I raise the comment that there is little logic in having a pass mark of 50 for Part III and 60 for the MPhil. (Marking spread seems to be better used in Part III where sub-60 is available as a passing mark.) This, however, appears to be beyond the department's control.
7. In the exam board, colleagues raised concerns that one of the markers had substantially changed their writing style from previous years, writing first and third paragraphs (of three) that were generic and effusive in style – the kind of thing that AI tends to produce. Whilst there was no concern that the marker had not read the work and critically assessed it (their comments in the second paragraph made this clear), there were two concerns about the *effects* of this writing: that its positive tone might shift the opinions of the other marker in the reconciliation of marks;

and that similarly it might shift the view of the external examiner. We discussed this at the exam board and agreed that markers should be given guidance:

- a. Do not use AI for evaluative purposes
- b. If AI is used in writing, the text should be reviewed to ensure that the tone and relative quantity of (positive) commentary reflects the quality of the work and is not likely to unbalance the opinion of a third party basing their opinion in whole or in part on the marker's commentary. In particular the review should check that adjectives used match descriptors in the grade bands, as AI tends to throw around high praise quite easily.

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

n/a

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

1. Policy around use of AI will need to continue to evolve as use of the technology normalises amongst students.
 - a. I was surprised that we effectively adjudicated on a case of AI in the exam board itself, making the decision about whether to refer to the university panel. At UCL investigatory work (including a viva, if necessary) is done prior to the exam board. As cases increase, it's likely Cambridge will need to devolve investigatory work to departments. If cases do not increase, then the university is probably not looking hard enough!
 - b. Departments need clarity on what it means to mark 'as if' work is original, prior to investigation. At what stage, and on what basis, should an academic (as opposed to a punitive) judgement of poor practice be 'priced in' as a low grade? Use of AI is of a qualitatively different nature to the types of poor practice and plagiarism that procedures are designed to deal with.
 - c. Guidance to students over what is and is not acceptable use of AI should be reviewed each year. The university could consider having students append a statement on use of AI to their submitted work.
2. The EQPO team has not been easy to deal with. Over the past three years I have had to chase and chase to receive payment. This year I was required to sign a contract with no hours and no pay specified - not something I have previously encountered during my working life.

Please describe here any recommendations for improvement.

See elsewhere on this form

Please highlight any good practice you encountered.

1. Excellent diversity of student work
2. Student work of a generally high standard – some extremely high indeed.
3. I was pleased to see that, except for a few cases, markers did a much better job than in previous years in explaining the reconciliation of their marks.

Have you seen any evidence of grade inflation?

No, grades are this year in line with national standards (having previously been a bit low).

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?

Yes, and yes (see elsewhere on this form).

Do you have any other comments?

Over the years, we have discussed whether historical work tends to score higher than philosophical work. This year, there was a difference of about 2 marks in favour of historians, but the data set is relatively small. The data should continue to be reviewed in future years to look out for possible trends.