

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

MPhil in Health, Medicine, and Society

Senior Examiner's Report 2018-19

Overall results

The MPhil course—which ran for the second time this year—was taken by 12 students. (One student from another degree also submitted one essay with approval of the course managers). Five students achieved overall First Class marks (70 or above) and two of these earned a First Class degree with distinction (75–79). Six candidates achieved overall High Performance marks (65–69) and one a Pass mark (60–64). No students failed the course (0–59).

In line with the departmental agreement to monitor gender-based trends in student performance, we should note the following breakdown of results. There are no particular concerns arising from this year's results, but we should continue monitoring.

Class	Female	Male	Total
First with distinction (75-79)	1	1	2
First (70-74)	3	0	3
Highperformance (65-69)	5	1	6
Pass (60-64)	1	0	1
Total	10	2	12

There are no significant trends that the Senior Examiner has detected on the basis of other demographic or disability categories.

Prizes

The Benjamin Habib Prize for the HMS MPhil candidate with the best overall performance in the MPhil essays was awarded to Michael Denham who also received the Forrester Prize for the HMS MPhil candidate with the best overall performance on the dissertation.

External examiner

Dr Andrew Webster served as External Examiner, in his second year of three serving in this role. He described the work of MPhil students as good quality, reflecting an extensive engagement with the state of art in the disciplines on which they focused, as well as tackling original and interesting topics. Essays that received lower marks were typically overly ambitious, insufficiently focused, or did not make a significant departure from the existing literature.

Interdisciplinary essays that draw novel connections between fields are valuable but sometimes harder to carry out and he recommended that essay prompts give students guidance on ways to do so. He also praised the high quality of students' writing, as well as the feedback they received, noting that there was in general a very good range and mix of assessors and that they offered fair assessment across the course.

Recommendations

1. The Degree Committee has stated that the only subject manager for the MPhil in HMS who should also be permitted to act as an Ordinary Examiner (but not Senior Examiner) for this course is the overall Course Manager, or the person who has responsibility for providing feedback to students. This change has been implemented in the HMS MPhil Examiners' Guidelines. It worked well this year and should be kept in mind when choosing Examiners for future years.
2. To continue to hold orientation sessions for new Assessors on an ad-hoc basis and to make sure that new Assessors understand how the HMS MPhil differs from other MPhil courses they may be teaching.
3. Seminar leaders and course managers should continue to give students realistic guidance regarding interdisciplinarity and review the essay prompts for whether they do so. The dissertation workshops may need to provide more specific disciplinary guidance and emphasise the crafting of the dissertations (for example, whether or not a methods section is needed). Inviting the teaching associates from, say, anthropology should be considered.
4. Dissertation length should be brought in line with other degrees and reduced from 15,000 words to 12,000 words, with the recommendation to students to aim at 10-12,000 words.
5. To consider the possibility of extending the dissertation deadline by 10 days into June to enable students who are engaged in fieldwork during the Easter vacation to write up their results.
6. To monitor staffing in anthropology which is undergoing change.

Finally I would like to thank James Livesey, the Graduate Secretary of the HMS MPhil, for his support of the work of examiners over the course of this academic year and in preparation of this report.

Anna Alexandrova

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