

**DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIOLOGY**

Wentworth College

Heslington

York

YO10 5DD

Tel (01904) 433044

Fax (01904) 433043

www.york.ac.uk/sociology



The Vice Chancellor's Office
University of Cambridge
The Old Schools, Cambridge, CB2 1TN.

July 9 2020

Dear Vice Chancellor,

External Examiner's Report: MPhil in History, Medicine and Society 2020

This is my final year/report as External Examiner for this degree, having taken on this role at the very beginning of the MPhil in History, Medicine and Society. Over the three years the degree has established itself as an innovative programme that brings together a number of core disciplines and which stretches students to explore important issues that cut across them. In completing the course students are able to demonstrate a sound and well-grounded empirical understanding of a particular domain underpinned by a strong analytical perspective. This is apparent in the essays and especially the dissertations: two among those I saw were exceptional in both regards, and could form the basis for future PhD work. Other than further scholarship at the doctoral level, students graduating here could go on to work in fields such as health policy, NGO programmes, the civil service at local or national levels (especially public health/epidemiology) and overseas development.

As I noted last year, students were able to combine their core subject with wider perspectives illustrated by the range of literature used for coursework and the final dissertation. Despite relatively tight timeframes for the dissertation, these were typically ambitious and well-structured. The option modules work well in introducing students to

issues beyond their core areas. It is good to see option modules introducing students to the political economy of biomedicine and to public health issues especially given current national/global circumstances, and dissertations and some of the essays drawing on these very well.

This year of course the staff have had to manage teaching and assessment in the context of the industrial action and then Covid-19. They have done so admirably, making some adjustments to how assessment would work and ensuring students were fully informed of the approach to be taken. As a result, it appeared that staff had dealt with CV-19 very effectively given the quality of the students work this year especially in respect to any fieldwork that had been planned. The revised assessment model that was brought into play was fair and transparent.

I suggested at the Board meeting that if the timeframe allowed it, it would be a useful and enjoyable exercise to hold an event where all students could be given the opportunity to present summaries of their final dissertation, perhaps a day workshop after the completion of the assessment process. This is seen elsewhere at other universities.

Finally, in my report to the University last year I recommended that the University should try to strengthen the medical anthropology staffing. While a post has been funded, I understand this is for one year only. I can only reiterate that there is a need for a permanent medical/social anthropology position as it seems likely that without this medical anthropology could not continue to be involved in the degree, which would be a major loss to the course.

I want to thank all academic and administrative staff for the efficient way in which assessment has been handled, often within very tight deadlines, and wish the programme every success in the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Webster', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Andrew Webster, External Examiner