

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

MPhil in History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine

Senior Examiner's Report 2017-18

Overall results

The MPhil was taken by 31 students this year. Twenty-two achieved distinctions (a mark of 70+) overall, with five of these achieving distinctions (75+) and one a starred distinction with a mark of 80. Nine candidates achieved a high performance (64-69), with none scoring in the lower bands.

The gender distribution of performances is as follows:

Class	Female	Male	Total
Starred distinction (80+)	0	1	1
First class with distinction (75-79)	1	4	5
First class (70-74)	8	8	16
High performance (65-69)	5	4	9
Pass (60-64)	0	0	0
Total	14	17	31

The numbers are too low to identify statistical trends, but it should be noted that the strongest performances were by male students.

Prizes

The Jennifer Redhead Prize for the best overall performance in the MPhil essays was awarded to Arthur Harris. The 15th Annual Rausing Prize for the best MPhil dissertation was awarded to Julian Menzel.

External examiner

Dr Staffan Müller-Wille (Exeter) continued for a second year as the external examiner for this MPhil and Part III. Once again, he found the quality of the student work 'very high'. He praised the 'exceptional detail and rigour' of our examiners' reports. He noted that the department took action to mitigate the effects of the strike on student performances. Overall, he described our examination process as 'sound and fairly conducted', expressed gratitude for our clear, meticulous and timely documentation, and concluded that our programme excels the standards of others in the UK.

Recommendations

Following a series of changes to the examination procedure in previous years (the use of core examiners and additional assessors, the process of nominating assessors, anonymous marking, the circulation of examiners reports to NUTO supervisors, the release of provisional marks to students, decreased reliance on the external to resolve disputed marks and to rank prize-winning essays and dissertations), the examination process is working smoothly and no changes are recommended.

Two rare occurrences are worth noting:

1. Having introduced the use of Turnitin software to identify plagiarized work in 2016-17, this year a dissertation generated a high score because the work matched an item in the Turnitin database that is not in the public domain. The student was invited to a non-disciplinary meeting to clarify whether this was a case of self-plagiarism, self-citation or neither. It was agreed that this was a case of poor practice. The Department has reviewed our plagiarism statement and updated the guidance about self-citation.
2. The metric that was used to mitigate the potential impact of industrial action in Lent Term on MPhil performances were fair and effective. In the event of future industrial action, the Department should be careful about assuming that this metric will work in the same way if the students know about it in advance rather than after the fact.

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