

History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine MPhil: Senior Examiner's Report 2018–19.

Overall results

The MPhil course was taken by 36 students this year. 7 achieved First Class with distinction (75-79), 22 first class, (70-74), 5 High performance (65-69), and 2 a pass (60-64). No one failed the course.

The gender distribution of performances is as follows:

Class	Female	Male	Total
Starred distinction (80+)	0	0	0
First class with distinction (75–79)	4	3	7
First class (70–74)	9	13	22
High performance (65–69)	1	4	5
Pass (60–64)	0	2	2
Total	14	22	36

It is difficult to draw strong conclusions from these numbers, but it is worth noting that male candidates were disproportionately represented at the bottom of the distribution. Only 1/14 women scored below 70, while 6/22 men (over a quarter) did so.

Prizes

The Jennifer Redhead prize for the best overall performance on the MPhil essays was awarded to Theresa Clark. The 16th Rausing Prize for the best MPhil dissertation was jointly awarded to Grace Field and Thomas Riley.

External examiner

Dr Staffan Müller-Wille (Exeter) continued for a third and final year as the external examiner the MPhil (as well as for the Pt III). Staffan has been an exceptionally valuable external examiner, and have put in extensive work in monitoring standards and consistency in examining practice. Once again, he praised the quality of students' work, especially dissertations. He suggested (for this degree as well as for the Pt III) that there may be signs that examiners were avoiding the mid-range of marks, preferring to use higher and lower marks. He also noted the consistency in application of marking criteria, as well as the detailed reports being written for each piece of work. Finally, he noted evidence of progression in the quality of students' work from the beginning of the course to the end.

Recommendations

In general the examination process worked smoothly, especially considering the considerable time pressure that some examiners were under. There was some evidence that examiners, having read that the a mark of 70 would normally be considered indicative of ability to continue to the PhD, were on occasion suggesting marks of 70 and above because they did not wish to stand in the way of a potentially promising student being able to continue. This way of thinking has the potential to distort the award of marks around the 70 boundary, and communication to examiners was revised in an effort to limit this effect.

Students should be reminded of the need to cite their own earlier work when appropriate, but not in a way that compromises anonymity.

Tim Lewens 10 October 2019