

History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine MPhil:
Senior Examiner's Report 2019-20.

Overall results

The MPhil course was taken by 32 students this year. Of these, 4 achieved First Class with distinction (75-79), 18 first class, (70-74), and 10 High performance (65-69). There were no passes (60-64) or fails.

The gender distribution of performances is as follows:

Class	Female	Male	Total
Starred distinction (80+)	0	0	0
First class with distinction (75-79)	2	2	4
First class (70-74)	8	10	18
High performance (65-69)	4	6	10
Pass (60-64)	0	0	0
Total	14	18	32

It is difficult to draw strong conclusions from these numbers, but they do suggest a relatively even distribution of marks across gender.

Prizes

The Jennifer Redhead prize for the best overall performance on the MPhil essays was awarded to Hugo Murphy. The Anita McConnell Prize for an outstanding performance on work using an object in the Whipple Museum collection was awarded to Francis Newman. The Annual 17th Rausing Prize for the best MPhil dissertation was awarded to Supriya Kamath.

External examiner

Dr Chiara Ambrosio began the first of three years as the external examiner for the MPhil (as well as for the Pt III). Chiara described the student work as "of the highest calibre." She also praised the assessors' reports, saying that they were "substantive, constructive, and shows that the students' work is taken extremely seriously by all members of staff." She noted that actions taken to provide support during the pandemic were effective, thanked us for efficient and clear documentation, and broadly praised the continued functioning of the examinations process despite unprecedented levels of disruption. We are very grateful to her for taking on so many challenges with aplomb in the first year of her tenure.

Recommendations

The examination process itself has proven robust enough to withstand unanticipated disruptions in every term of an academic year. The metrics that were used to mitigate the potential impact of industrial action in Michaelmas and Lent terms, and Covid-19 in Easter term, were fair and effective. In general, the Department should be careful about assuming or stating that any metric will be definitive before the end of the year.

The Royal Historical Society Report on “Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change” (2018) suggests that examination boards should take steps to gather data on BME (Black and minority ethnicity) student numbers and attainment (“Recommendations and advice,” p75), following the guidance set out at <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/using-data-and-evidence>.

A rare event is worth noting: one candidate’s dissertation received a failing mark. As a result, the candidate was invited to an oral examination with two Examiners and the Senior Examiner, giving the candidate an opportunity to defend the work and provide an account of any mitigating circumstances. As a consequence of that meeting, the examiners recommended that the dissertation mark be moved up by one point. The external examiner was kept informed and approved of this course of action.

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