

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

M PHIL SENIOR EXAMINER'S REPORT 2006-7

The M Phil course was taken by nineteen students, of whom twelve achieved distinctions (70 and above). The Jennifer Redhead prize (for best overall essay performance) was shared by Camilla Hrdy and Jeremy Kessler; the Rausing prize (for best dissertation performance) was shared by Jill Howard and Heather Brink-Roby.

One candidate failed the course. This candidate gained a Pass on the essays but failed the dissertation. After a viva with the internal examiners of the dissertation (held on 20 June 2007) the failing mark on the dissertation was confirmed. The external examiner (Prof Iliffe) agreed that the dissertation could not be awarded a passing mark.

One candidate was penalised marks for handing in essays late without permission. This resulted in one of the candidate's essays failing, and a bare pass mark of 60 for the overall essay performance. The candidate subsequently gained a distinction for the dissertation and a high pass overall.

The Examiners reaffirmed that one mark is to be deducted for each day's delay in submission where such delay had not previously been agreed. It is forbidden for students to delay submission unless explicitly permitted to do so in advance.

Examiners reaffirm their policy that all students receive non-confidential sections of examiners' reports, provisional class and feedback from the M Phil manager immediately after the final examiners' meeting. Examiners also reaffirmed that marks for especially good or consistent performance are awarded only in the final examiners' meeting, not at any earlier stage.

Examiners and the External Examiner considered the marking scheme with respect to the scope of Distinction. Some propose that the division between a first class Distinction (70-74) and a High First (75-79) be removed, since it is not clearly defined in the marking criteria and does not obviously have consequences for funding.

In response to discussion of the trend of essay and dissertation marks for each student during the course, Examiners requested a statistical analysis of candidates' performances since 2001-2. Data were produced on the number of students gaining highest and lowest mark on each of the three essays; on the differences in marks between first and second and second and third essays, and on the difference between overall essay mark and dissertation mark. The data show no significant positive or negative trend in marks during the course but do show a somewhat lower mark for the third essay.

Examiners propose that that the title and supervisor for the second essay be submitted on the last day of full Michaelmas Term. The aim is to encourage students to start work on the second essay during the Christmas vacation.

Examiners propose that a Departmental language supervisor be appointed to aid students with the quality of their written English.

The Examiners unanimously thank the External Examiner, Prof Iliffe, for his work during the past four years. This year he read seventeen essays and five dissertations. He read all work where the initial mark would imply a marginal or clear fail, where internal examiners differed by a class or could not agree a mark, and where the mark fell on a significant borderline. No work was passed to a third internal examiner.

Simon Schaffer