

## DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

### M.Phil. in History, Sociology and Philosophy of Science, Technology and Medicine

#### M PHIL SENIOR EXAMINER'S REPORT 2007-8

The M Phil course was taken by seventeen students, of whom 7 achieved Distinction (First Class) (70 and above) and 7 High Pass (65-70). The Jennifer Redhead prize (for best overall essay performance) was awarded to Katie Taylor; the Rausing prize (for best dissertation performance) was awarded jointly to Jiri Hudecek and Katie Taylor. No candidate failed the course.

No candidate handed in work late this year without permission granted by the Degree Committee (which was sometimes granted by Chair's Action). 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.

Having considered cases of students who had submitted an essay that was longer than permitted, the Examiners agreed to recommend to the Degree Committee that, **in order to ensure the equitable enforcing of the word limit laid down for M.Phil. Essays and Dissertations, the candidates will be required to submit their work as now, to the specified deadline, stating the word-count in the essay/dissertation, together with an electronic version of the essay/dissertation. At this specified time, the M.Phil. Senior Examiner will inspect each essay/dissertation to ensure that the word limit has been respected. If it has not, the work will be returned to the candidate who will be asked to revise the work so that it does conform to the word limit. Given that the inspection will take place at the time of the deadline, the rule governing penalties for late submission will be applied.**

One essay was adjudged to be a clear Fail (a judgement endorsed by the External Examiner); the candidate achieved an overall High Performance on the Essays through strong performance on the other two essays.

Following a decision by the Degree Committee in 2006-7, the marking scheme for 2007-8 was altered so that the distinction between Distinction (First Class) 70-74 and Distinction (High First) 75-79 was removed. Individual examiners did not report any difficulties with the revised marking scheme, but the External Examiner did suggest in his concluding remarks at the final Examiners' meeting in June that it would be worthwhile adding guidelines to the very useful and important Marking Criteria in order to assist Examiners with calibrating marks in the range 70-79. It should be noted that one of the principal reasons for removing the distinction was the absence of marking criteria distinguishing a Distinction (First Class) from a Distinction (High First); **the Degree Committee may wish to consider introducing such marking criteria, whether or not it wishes to reassess the value of the classing distinction.**

Of the 51 M.Phil. Essays submitted, 22 were read by the External Examiner; of the 17 Dissertations, 6 were read by him. Normally 6 essays and 3 dissertations would be regarded as a high load for any one internal Examiner. As has been suggested in previous years, **the Degree Committee may wish to consider finding a reliable system for the appointment and regular use of third internal examiners to resolve disagreements** instead of relying on the broad shoulders of the External to the extent it has done in recent years. (In 2006-7 the External Examiner read 17 essays and five dissertations.) Neither in 2006-7 nor in 2007-8 was any work passed to a third internal examiner.

The Examiners unanimously thank the External Examiner, Dr Greg Radick, for the considerable amount of work he put in and for the judicious and helpful manner in which he participated in the Examiners' Meetings in April and June. 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. He read all the Essays of a candidate where one essay presented particular problems of adjudication; he also adjudicated on issues raised by infringements of word length rubric and participated in the discussions about putting in place the procedure to discourage as strongly as possible candidates from submitting work that is over the word-limit. He also endorsed the truly exceptional marks suggested by internal examiners for one candidate as being entirely appropriate.

John Forrester  
5<sup>th</sup> October 2008