

**MPhil in History, Philosophy and Sociology of Science, Technology and
Medicine**

Senior Examiner's Report 2014–15

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Overall results

There was a large MPhil cohort this year. A total of 27 students began the course, and 25 completed on time. Of the remaining two, one student has taken an interruption of study and one has been given a long extension on the Dissertation, both for medical reasons.

Of the 25 students who have completed the degree, 15 achieved overall First Class marks (70 or above), 6 of them with Distinction (75–79). All of the remaining 10 achieved overall High Performance marks (65–69). On the whole this is a very impressive set of results, for which the students and the MPhil Manager are to be congratulated. In comparison to last year, we have increased student numbers more than twofold without lowering the quality at all; if anything, the proportion of students receiving Distinctions has increased noticeably, and no one from this large cohort achieved less than High Performance.

In addition, one student (Anaïs Rameau) from the 2010–11 cohort was allowed to return in order to submit her MPhil Dissertation. She received a first-class mark for the Dissertation, and achieved overall High Performance for the MPhil.

In line with the departmental agreement to monitor gender-based trends in student performance, we note the following breakdown of results. There are no strong concerns arising from this year's results, but it is notable that in both of the first-class bands the top marks were taken by male students: the 2 female students who achieved Distinction did so at just 75 (lower borderline for that band), and the 4 female students who achieved a First without distinction did so at just 70 or 71. We do not have a good explanation for this.

Class	Female	Male	Total
First with distinction (75–79)	2	4	6
First without distinction (70–74)	4	5	9
High performance (65–69)	6	4	10
Total	12	13	25

There are no significant trends that the Senior Examiner has detected on the basis of other demographic or disability categories. We will continue monitoring.

Prizes

The Jennifer Redhead Prize, for best overall essay performance, was awarded to Joshua Hunt. The Rausing Prize, for best dissertation performance, was awarded to Sebastian Kroupa.

External examiner

This was the second year in which Dr Emma Tobin (University College London) served as external examiner for the Part III course. At the examiners' meetings she commended the students for the high quality of their work, the examiners for the quality and quantity of feedback, and the departmental administration for the efficiency of the procedures. The internal examiners were very grateful for Dr Tobin's help with the process, as she examined a large amount of work under tight time-constraints and gave judicious and insightful verdicts in cases of internal disagreements. Dr Tobin will continue as external examiner next year.

Recommendations

1. We should continue the practice of having the Senior and Ordinary Examiners take a first pass at proposing examiners for essays and dissertations (which are then confirmed or amended by the Degree Committee). They should also continue to seek input in this process from the Director of Graduate Studies and the supervisors involved.
2. The Part III examination process was anonymised (in terms of the identity of students) for the first time in 2014-15. It was generally agreed that the anonymised process worked well, even though in many cases the anonymity broke down due to various circumstantial details being inevitably known to examiners, given the small number of students in the cohort and the close working relationships that teaching staff develop with the students in the department.
3. In line with comments from the external examiner, it seems clear that there is still more work to be done in using the full range of marks. Another review of the marking scheme might be in order, in case there are unrealistic expectations being conveyed in the descriptions of the mark bands.