

## **NST Part II HPS 2007**

### *Senior Examiner's Report*

Thirty-six NST candidates took the examination. (Two had withdrawn.) Five (13.9%) achieved First Class marks overall while thirty (83%) achieved Upper Second Class marks. The corresponding marks for the previous years were: 10 (23.8%) and 26 (61.9%) in 2004-5 and 5 (13.5%) and 30 (81%) in 2005-6. In 2006-7, one candidate received a Lower Second Class.

Three candidates from Classics Part II took Paper 1. Fifteen candidates from NST Part II BBS took Paper 7 and 9 candidates from NST Part II BBS took Paper 8.

### **Dissertations and Primary Source Essays**

Twelve candidates (33%) achieved First Class marks and 5 (14%) were awarded Lower Second Class marks on the dissertation. Seven (19%) candidates achieved First Class marks and 4 (11%) were awarded Lower Second Class marks for their Primary Source Essays. This indicates that, as noted by the Senior Examiner in 2005-6, performance on dissertations was not only often of a distinctly higher standard overall than in other parts of the Examination, but also that performance on the dissertation was significantly more variable; some performances were memorably fine and some revealingly poor.

One candidate submitted only one Primary Source Essay; the Examiners awarded a zero corresponding to the absent Primary Source Essay and the student's overall mark for this portion of the Examination was 30 (a Fail). The Board offers no guidelines concerning candidates who fail in one portion of the examination and the Examiners did not think it appropriate to treat the mark of 30 as exceptional, combining this with the rest of the candidate's other marks in the normal fashion.

### **Unseen Examinations**

Twenty-one First Class Marks were awarded overall in the written Examinations (19%); there were no First Class performances in Papers 2 and 5. Overall, 8 Lower Second Class marks were awarded in the written Examinations (7%), but none for Papers 1, 2, 3, 5 & 9. These figures suggest that the spread of marks on unseen examinations is narrower than for the Dissertations and Primary Source Essays. There are a number of comments one might venture concerning this: that Examiners are insufficiently adventurous in giving high (and low) marks for unseen examination scripts; that students are objectively well prepared for the unseen examinations (they are very well trained to be 'good at exams') in comparison with the less predictable (and 'higher risk') challenges of Essays and Dissertations.

Examiners for Papers 1 and 7 were concerned that some Section B questions were insufficiently focussed, deploying general and imprecise categories. Issues of chronology and period were also raised by both these Papers, of which the chronological coverage is

exceptionally large. Future Examiners should indicate unambiguously which cultural spheres and which time periods should or should not be considered relevant to the question.

### **Assigning Tasks to Examiners**

Assignment of Examiners to marking different parts of the examination with equal loads proved a challenge this year, in part because expertise needed to be stretched. The Examiners were concerned that in future the Board should pay considerable attention to the appointment of Examiners so as, on the one hand, to assure an appropriate balance of seniority and experience, as has been the case for some years, and also on the other to ensure sufficient and balanced coverage of the full range of topics now covered by the NST Part II HPS examinations.

### **History of Medicine and Biomedical Ethics**

A second challenge concerning the organization of marking stemmed from the unusual balance of numbers of candidates for the individual Papers. Three Papers had six or fewer candidates; three had 19 or more. Historically, the History of Medicine Papers 7 & 8 have always been popular with students and this was strikingly the case this year; but the addition of substantial numbers of BBS students (24 in total) entailed that 67 (49%) of a total of 138 scripts marked by the Examiners were for Papers 7 & 8. This bunching was also true for submitted work: of the 36 Dissertations, 22 (61%) were in the field of history of medicine broadly construed; in addition there were 4 HEM shorter dissertations (predominantly in ethics) and 1 BBS shorter dissertation (in the field of early modern medicine). Of the total of 71 Primary Source Essays submitted, 33 (46%) were on the Sources associated with Papers 7 & 8. Further numerical depiction of the state of affairs may be worth considering: with 24 BBS candidates taking single Papers offered by the Department within NST Part II HPS and 45 candidates taking HEM (which is offered as a specific course put on by the Department for NST Part II BBS and is examined entirely separately from NST Part II HPS), these are equivalent to 23 NST Part II HPS candidates taking the unseen Examination Paper component of the full HPS Part II as prescribed, i.e. an additional teaching and examining load focussed exclusively on history of medicine and ethics of medicine which is equivalent in FTE numbers to an additional 64% over and above those taking 3 papers from the 9 offered in NST Part II HPS. Or to put it another way, the candidates taking history of medicine (both HPS and BBS) and HEM within the Department this year constituted 61% of formal teaching and examining (setting aside in this figure Primary Source Seminars and Dissertations, where the above evidence makes clear that NST Part II HPS students are focussing heavily in this area). Taken together, these statistics indicate that this year's candidates were more heavily focussed on the history of medicine than any previous year's; this may well place some strain on teaching resources and certainly affected the task of examining. The Department may wish to consider implications both for teaching and examining in NST Part II HPS and NST Part II BBS of this shift of interest of students taking courses within the Department, since the Department's teaching for history of medicine and the ethics of medicine and its capacity to examine in these areas may be under some strain.

## **Examining Practices**

### **1. *Dissertation Borderline Rule:***

The Board has for many years suggested to the Examiners the guideline that a fine performance in the Dissertation may raise a candidate's overall marks across a borderline. The Examiners considered the application of this guideline to a number of cases. Given the relatively large number of poor performances on the dissertation this year, the Examiners also discussed whether this rule might apply in the opposite direction, so that a poor performance might lower a candidate's overall marks across a borderline. The Examiners agreed that this was not a guideline they could commend to the Board.

### **2. *Final adjustment of marks***

As in previous years, the Examiners agreed to make final adjustments to overall marks for those candidates who had achieved First Class marks. There was some discussion concerning the appropriateness of this practice, with the External contributing significantly. The Examiners agreed to these adjustments so that the final mark book gives a clear rendition of the achievements of these students

### **3. *BBS Marking***

The Examiners considered the procedure for marking those scripts written by NST Part II BBS students (Papers 7 & 8), because each Paper in NST Part II HPS counts for 20% of the overall mark whereas in NST Part II BBS each Paper counts for 15%. They agreed that the raw marks produced by the Examiners marking scripts irrespective of whether the candidate was taking NST Part II HPS or Part II BBS should be transmitted as such to the Senior Examiner of NST Part II BBS. They noted with approval that a consultation exercise is taking place which will attempt to harmonise marking practices across the different component parts of NST Part II BBS. They also agreed that in future examinations, Examiners of one of the two Papers 7 & 8 should not be assigned solely to mark scripts written by BBS candidates, so that Examiners are always acquainted with the full range of performance in this examination.

## **External Examiner**

The External Examiner gave considerable feedback on the draft Examination Papers which he was sent in early March. In May he undertook a prodigious amount of work, reading 11 Primary Source Essays and 15 dissertations (of which 5 had received no agreed mark from the two internal examiners); no other Examiner marked more than 12 dissertations. In June, he also spent a full day reading examination scripts prior to the final Examiners' Meeting. His extensive and detailed remarks, comments and judgements on each of this large number of individual pieces of writing were of the greatest importance to the smooth and clear-cut running of the examination process. As in

previous years, it is worth remarking that the Department may not always be able to call upon such extensive support and constructive scrutiny from the External Examiner; it has been suggested in the past that some use be made of a third Internal Examiner's reading of dissertations and essays where no agreed mark had been arrived at. Third Examiners were not appointed in this year's Examination, but future Senior Examiners should consider whether doing so might not help lighten substantially the load on the External.

### **Plagiarism**

The Examiners were gratified to note that no issues concerning plagiarism were raised throughout the examination process. They urge that the strenuous highlighting of the seriousness of this issue be maintained and that students be made aware throughout their time in the Department during the teaching year of how seriously the Examiners take this issue and how students can avoid all suspicion of plagiarism by appropriate methods of research and preparation of submitted work.

### **Representations following the Exams**

The Senior Examiner was contacted by the Chair of NST Examiners after the Examination results had been published concerning a query submitted by a College Tutor on behalf of a candidate regarding the adequacy of dissertation supervision; he advised the Chairman to refer this question to the Head of Department, who is the appropriate person to respond to questions about the Department's teaching.

The Senior Examiner also received a letter from the Chairman of NST Part II Examiners concerning a query received from the Senior Tutor of another candidate concerning a clear disparity between a supervisor's estimate of the dissertation and the Examiners' agreed mark in the final mark book. In accordance with the Regulations, the Senior Examiner consulted with two other Examiners to ascertain if there had been any irregularities, in particular in transcription of marks, in relation to this mark; he responded to the request of the Chairman of NST Part II Examiners with details of the case within the period of time (one month) stipulated.

I would like to thank my Fellow Examiners for their attentiveness, care, thoroughness and objectivity throughout the examination process. This was probably the 'cleanest' and most trouble-free Part II process I can recall in 11 years as a Part II Examiner and my sixth as Senior Examiner; this was in large part due to the collective commitment and devotion of the Examiners.

Prof John Forrester  
Senior Examiner, NST Part II HPS

12th July 2007

## **Appendix: Reports by Examiners on Individual Papers**

### **Paper 1 (JF & RR)**

Nine candidates wrote Primary Source Essays (Plutarch, *Dialogue on the Face of the Moon*). For the written Paper, there were 11 Candidates from NST Part II HPS and 3 candidates from Classics Part II. Answers to the twelve questions were reasonably evenly distributed; no question remained unanswered. Of Section A Questions, Q1 ('Under what conditions, and within what limits, is it possible to make meaningful comparisons between the sciences of different ancient cultures?') was answered by 8 out of the 14 candidates; Q12 ('Are 'science' and 'religion' useful categories for understanding natural philosophy in medieval and early modern Europe?'; 11 candidates) and Q5a ('Why would an ancient author writing about a scientific topic choose to write a poem rather than a prose text?'; 7 candidates) were the most popular Section B Questions.

Confusion over the legitimacy and semantics of the term 'science' continues, as in previous years, to cause concern. Candidates were led by these problems into writing such idiocies as: "The word science was not used in any ancient culture."; from an otherwise First Class answer: "'Science' as a term was coined in the nineteenth-century AD by William Whewell as a derogatory term." Or: "The word science is a nineteenth century, European, word." In attempting to emphasize the hegemony and breadth of scope of "natural philosophy", some candidates asserted that the word "science" was not used in the Early Modern Period either – and then blithely discussed in the very next sentence the constitution of the *Académie des Sciences*. Many students were blissfully unaware of even the titles of key works from the period (Galileo, Bacon) in which the term 'Sciences' is prominent. The Examiners are seriously concerned that students are being led into assertions of crass factual errors by the teaching concerning the history of the use of terms such as 'episteme', 'scientia', 'scienza', 'science'. The general alarm and confusion engendered in the students sometimes induces them to do themselves a grave disservice; in Q6 'How trustworthy are ancient biographies of scientists?' some candidates spent valuable time and space (up to 20% of their essay) addressing the legitimacy of the usage of the term 'scientist' with reference to the ancient world.

### **Paper 2 (AC & MK)**

Seven candidates wrote Primary Source Essays (Fontenelle, tr. Aphra Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds*). Four students sat the exam. The quality of answers was generally good. In Section B two students answered question 3, and one student each questions 1 and 2. In Section B all students answered question 6 (on instruments), and questions 4(a), 7(a), 7(b), and 12 were not tackled by any student.

### **Paper 3 (AC & MK)**

Three candidates wrote Primary Sources Essays (Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*). Six students sat the Paper 3 exam. The quality of answers was impressive with two students

achieving Firsts overall. In Section A the most popular question was 1, in Section B 4 and 9. 7(a) and (b), and 8(a) and (b) were not taken up.

#### **Paper 4 (TL & MS)**

Eleven candidates wrote Primary Source Essays (van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image*). Candidates performed solidly on this paper. Most answers gave competent summaries of material covered in lectures. There were very few efforts to go beyond the lecture material or to demonstrate reading outside the confines of recommended reading lists. This accounted for the low number of Firsts and the high proportion of 2:is. Answers to section A questions, which have let candidates down in the past, were not significantly worse than Section B answers this year.

Two questions were not answered, question 8 (on space-time) and question 10 (on logical positivism). Otherwise there was a fairly good spread of answers. The breakdown was as follows: Q1—2, Q2—5, Q3—6, Q4a—2, Q4b—4, Q5—7, Q6—6, Q7—6, Q9—2, Q11—2, Q12a—6, Q12b—4. Of the Section A questions Q2 (on the consequences of realism and antirealism for scientific practice) received the best responses. Q12 (a) (on knowledge of the reliability of induction) was perhaps phrased too broadly to attract focused answers.

#### **Paper 5 (AC & MK)**

Two candidates submitted Primary Source Essays (Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*). Six students sat the Paper 5 exam. There were no particularly impressive scripts. In Section A question 1 (on training scientists in the sociology of knowledge) was most popular, attracting four answers. In Section B the most popular question was 4 (“If all others contribute to the accumulation of environmental harm it makes no difference whether or not I do so.” Discuss.) which was answered five times. No student attempted to answer question 8 (“It is scarcely possible to think of the practicability of artificially fertilizing domestic animals, without extending in imagination its application to humanity” (FRANCIS GALTON). Discuss.).

#### **Paper 6 (JF & MS)**

Five candidates submitted Primary Source Essays (Freud, ‘From the history of an infantile neurosis’). There were 19 candidates. Answers were generally well distributed, with a high proportion of students giving answers from across the complete range of the paper, from highly technical philosophical answers to broad historical analyses. Answers to the most popular Section A Question (3. Is the mind a machine?), with 10 answers, were somewhat disappointing, many students assuming that asserting that the mind is a machine and taking up a physicalist position were equivalent. Students also found it difficult to use historical materials constructively in answering this question. Many candidates unreflectively equated physicalist, functionalist, computational and biological views of the mind, ignoring important differences between the views. In general, candidates gave little thought to what it might mean to be a machine.

### **Paper 7 (RR & NH, JF, MK)**

Twelve candidates submitted Primary Source Essays (Brugis, *The Marrow of Physick*). The paper was taken by 35 candidates (of whom 15 were BBS students). All of the questions were attempted. Of the Section A questions, that on the interactions between medicine and religion attracted the most attention (20 candidates). The question about institutions highlighted confusion for some candidates about what counted as an institution. In Section B, only one candidate answered question 4b, on modern approaches to Mesopotamian medicine, and four answered question 5 ('What role did rulers play in the acquisition of medical knowledge during the Hellenistic period?'); question 6 ("The main difference between the naturalist and the supernaturalist medical traditions in Greek antiquity lies in the greater readiness in some of the naturalists to admit their own helplessness in the face of acute disease." Discuss. - 18 candidates) and question 10 ("Medical ideas changed, medical practices stayed the same." Evaluate this statement with reference to healthcare in early modern Europe. - 21 candidates) were most often chosen. Question 8 (Is it useful to distinguish between magic and medicine when studying medieval medicine?) was not well answered, revealing general problems with defining magic: students demonstrated insufficient familiarity with the concepts addressed by the question to produce adequate responses.

### **Paper 8 report (NH & AC, TL)**

Twenty-one candidates submitted Primary Source Essays ('The Visible Human Project®'). The paper was taken by 22 HPS and 9 BBS students. It was in general very well answered, with many solid responses and several outstanding performances, but several BBS students were seriously under-prepared. As usual, the most common failing was regurgitating prepared material instead of answering the specific question asked. In Section A, question 3 ("People create their own diseases." Does the history of modern medicine support this claim?) was most popular. It produced some very good answers and some unfocused ones, not helped by the generality of the term 'People' in the quotation. In Section B, questions 12 (Explain how, and with what consequences, the reporting of medical news has been transformed in the last 50 years.), 4 (Have medical historians exaggerated the general significance of early nineteenth-century innovations in the Paris hospitals?), 8 (How did the making of penicillin during World War II both build on and differ from the earlier production of Salvarsan and insulin?) and 10 (What is 'post' about post-colonial medicine?) were most popular. Some responses were excellent, but too many consisted of standardized lists of points, especially in response to question 12. Questions 9 ("The victory of biological psychiatry in the second half of the twentieth century proved that the anti-psychiatrists were right to argue that the concept of a 'mental illness' is a contradiction in terms." Discuss.) and 11 ("Any inquiry into the sexual lives of subjects under observation is incompatible with scientific objectivity" (GEORGES BATAILLE on the Kinsey report). Discuss.) were chosen by few students, and it was perhaps not clear enough to what extent a good answer to question 11 had to reflect both historically and philosophically; we accepted answers of either kind or both. In detail, questions were answered as follows: Q1 6 (HPS alone, 6), Q2 10 (5), Q3 15 (11), Q4 15

(13), Q5 8 (6), Q6 8 (5), Q7 9 (6), Q8 13 (10), Q9 4 (1), Q10 13 (10), Q11 6 (4), Q12 17 (11).

**Paper 9 (AC & MK)**

Six candidates submitted Primary Source Essays (Snow and Leavis on 'The Two Cultures'). Seven students sat the Paper 9 exam. The quality of answers was generally good with no particularly memorable achievements. In Section A six students answered question 2 ('Can science ever be freed of politics?') and one student question 3 ('How has the philosophy of science been affected by developments in the sciences?'). In Section B the most popular questions were 4(a) and 9 (on Butterfield and Hessen respectively). Question 7 (on Foucault's theory of power) was not tackled by any student.