

Name and Title: Dr Emma Tobin
Email: e.tobin@ucl.ac.uk
Home institution: University College London
Award or subject area examined: MPhil and Part III History & Philosophy of Science
Associated University of Cambridge Faculty/Department: History and Philosophy of Science

**Please tick the statement which most closely reflects your views of the examinations.**

TICK HERE

<p>The standards set for the award(s) or subject area(s) above were appropriate. The processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards were sound and fairly conducted.</p> <p><b>Any recommendations made are for the purposes of enhancement to the course and its assessment.</b></p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>The standards set for the award(s) or subject area(s) above were appropriate. The processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards were sound and fairly conducted.</p> <p><b>HOWEVER, there are some risks to the future assurance of the course and its assessment, as outlined in my recommendations.</b></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>There are immediate concerns or risks relating to the standards set for the awards or subject areas above and/or the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards.</p> <p><b>These require immediate action on behalf of the University to prevent reoccurrence in the next set of examinations.</b></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Please tick as appropriate:</b>	Yes	No	N/A
Are you satisfied that you received sufficient programme materials (programme handbooks, regulations, and marking criteria)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you satisfied that you were consulted adequately on draft examination papers, and that the level of questions was appropriate?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Were you given sufficient opportunity to scrutinise the general standard and consistency of marking of examination scripts and coursework?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have issues raised in previous report(s) been addressed to your satisfaction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**Please return this form, with your full report, to: [vcexternalexaminers@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:vcexternalexaminers@admin.cam.ac.uk) by July 31<sup>st</sup> for undergraduate examinations, 1<sup>st</sup> October for Masters Degrees, and 12<sup>th</sup> October for resits.**

**Or:** The Vice-Chancellor, University of Cambridge, The Old Schools, Cambridge, CB2 1TN.

Dr Emma Tobin  
The Department of Science and Technology Studies  
University College London  
Gower Street  
London WC1E 6BT

Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz  
Vice Chancellor  
University of Cambridge  
The Old Schools, Cambridge, CB2 1TN

30/06/14

**RE: External Examiner's Report for Department of History and Philosophy MPhil & Part III**

Dear Professor Borysiewicz,

This was my first year as external examiner for the MPhil and Part III Programmes in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge. The department is to be congratulated on the pedagogical strength of its programmes. The programmes are intellectually challenging and coherent, and highly distinctive in terms of both content and the breadth of assessment methods. The higher achieving students are performing at an extremely high level. All of the teaching staff in the department are highly motivated in their teaching activities and show a genuine duty of care to their students. The Department of History and Philosophy of Science Cambridge sets a very high standard and is certainly sets an inspiring example to the rest of the field.

It's a great pleasure to have the opportunity to see the outstanding work that is produced by the students at HPS Cambridge. Dissertations in general are of a very high calibre and are a great credit to this department, its teaching and teachers. They show some really outstanding work across all areas of the department. A very nice mix of history, philosophy, sociology and policy work with some excellent integration and synthesis of these different fields. There is some genuinely original research and some outstanding archival work. The topics are novel and stimulating. Standards are certainly appropriate for the examination and the qualification.

Feedback on student work was consistently of a very high standard and was very comprehensive going above and beyond the level of feedback I have seen at other U.K. institutions. This deserves special commendation, as it is truly exemplary. Marking and second marking was done in a commendable fashion. There is a consistency of marking across the two programmes. Any disagreements between markers were well explained in the confidential comments and justification for the proposed mark was provided. This made moderation very easy for me as external examiner.

It remains to congratulate Dr Helen Curry and Tamara Hug on the smoothly run examination process. The processes for assessment, and the determination of awards were sound and fairly conducted.

## Observations and recommendations:

- (1) *Word Length Policy*: I would recommend that the department introduce a policy for over length work. At present, over length work is returned to the student and the student is allowed to revise and resubmit. In the interest of fairness to other students and staff workload, I would recommend introducing a word length penalty for any essay submitted over length and advise against allowing re-submission after the deadline.
- (2) *Anonymous marking*: I would urge the Department to consider introducing anonymous marking across the board (except in cases where this is practically impossible – specifically the first-marking of dissertations by supervisors). This is institutional policy at many – perhaps most – UK universities, and in many cases has been for several years. There is some evidence that knowing the gender of a student affects the mark awarded, with female students tending to get marks within a narrower range than when anonymously marked, and male students getting marks within a wider range than when anonymously marked.
- (3) *Criteria for Assessment and Research Guidance*.  
An issue arose about a dissertation where there was a spread of marks. The dissertation though well written and research was not appropriately related to the field. Stronger guidance on relevance to the field of HPS should be given to students in their research preparation. This might be added to the criteria for assessment or made clearer in general research skills training. The criteria for assessment should also make clear the requirements for different kinds of assessments, e.g. there are 3 distinct kinds of assessment in PART III, Critical Literature Reviews, set essays and research papers. Stronger guidance might be given to both students and assessors on the criteria for assessment for each kind of assessment.

Yours Faithfully,

Dr Emma Tobin