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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>Any recommendations made are for the purposes of enhancement to the course and its assessment.</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>HOWEVER, there are some risks to the future assurance of the course and its assessment, as outlined in my recommendations.</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>These require immediate action on behalf of the University to prevent reoccurrence in the next set of examinations.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tick as appropriate:	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 by July 31st for undergraduate examinations, 1st October for Masters Degrees, and 12th October for resits.

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

Dr Emma Tobin
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University College London
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Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz
Vice Chancellor
University of Cambridge
The Old Schools, Cambridge, CB2 1TN

01/07/15

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

Dear Professor Borysiewicz,

I am writing as the 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. They show some really outstanding work across all areas of the department. There is some genuinely original research and some of it outstanding and publishable. 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 feedback provided to students is detailed and mostly constructive. The Department of History and Philosophy of Science Cambridge sets a very high standard and 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. The topics are novel and stimulating and show excellent standards of supervision and mentoring for the most part. 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 clearly executed. 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. I was also pleased to see that anonymous marking had been implemented and was being used for assessment in both programmes.

It remains to congratulate Dr Hasok Chang, Dr Marta Halina 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:

Recommendations:

1. Two of the dissertations that I read were said to be publishable, but still were only awarded 80% - I would like to see the criteria at the upper end of the first class mark more clearly laid out.
2. I think examiners need to be more familiar with the criteria of assessment for a low first 70-74% which clearly state at present that not all of the criteria for a first need to be exhibited and perhaps in general a bit more generosity is needed here. Either the criteria need to be changed so that what counts as a first class honors is more difficult or markers need to use the boundary point more generously.
3. In a couple of dissertations and essays, students were struggling to be awarded a first, because of (a) issues of depth and (b) insufficient critical analysis, perhaps supervisors could pay closer attention to this during the mentoring process.
4. An issue arose in relation to some students doing very well by focusing work on specific topics and research areas. The department should think about making students do a mix of assessments, not just in one area of expertise, thereby assessing the breadth of the course.
5. An issue arose about external supervisor, the department should ensure that standards for supervision are explained and met by external supervisors.

Yours Faithfully,

Dr Emma Tobin