

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

NST Part III History and Philosophy of Science

Senior Examiner's Report 2016-17

Overall Results

The Part III course was taken by 15 students, of whom eight achieved overall First Class marks [70 or above] and four High II.i Three candidates received marks of (lower) II.i (65–69) and none II.ii (50-59).

In line with the departmental agreement to monitor gender-based trends in student performance, we should note the following breakdown of results. Seven women and eight men completed this course. There are no particular concerns arising from this year's results, but we should continue monitoring.

Class	Female	Male	Total
First (70 or higher)	4	4	8
High II.i (67-69)	1	3	4
(lower) II.i (60-66)	2	1	3
II.ii (50-59)	0	0	0
Total	7	8	15

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

Prizes

The inaugural Forrester Prize, for the best overall performance on the first half of the course, was awarded to Shona Whatford. The 8th Lipton Prize for the best performance on the Part III was awarded to Joe Bonham-Carter.

External examiner

Dr Staffan Müller-Wille (Exeter) took over as External Examiner for the MPhil and Part III programme. This was his first year of three serving as external examiner. He described the work of MPhil and Part III students as reflecting “excellent training” in the field and praised the program’s stress on allowing students to pursue their own research interests while also enabling them to develop research skills. He praised the constructive nature of the “meticulous though easily navigated” marking system and the “great diversity in approaches” that the dissertations reflected. He had some further recommendations: notably, that supervisors ensure their students understand proper referencing procedures and that the department consider using Moodle more extensively in setting up spaces for students to interact.

Recommendations

1. The MPhil/Part III Senior and Ordinary Examiners, together with the Director of Graduate Studies, should continue to suggest two examiners per student before Degree Committee meetings.

2. The anonymization of marking for MPhil and Part III students continues to be effective. The Senior Examiner has found no evidence of inequality in gender attainment.

3. This year, the department began screening submitted essays and dissertations for plagiarism using Turnitin software. No issues of originality were raised and the Senior Examiner recommends continued use of the software.

4. To comply with Education and Student Policy, the department implemented a new model of MPhil and Part III examination with a fixed set of core examiners and additional assessors; following complaints by NUTOs who could no longer see assessors' reports, the Degree Committee agreed that the Graduate Secretary should email relevant assessors' reports to NUTO supervisors. The Senior Examiner recommends that this practice continue.

5. On 17 February 2017 the SHSS Graduate Committee notified departments that provisional marks may now be released to students. After consultation with the Chair of Examiners for NST Parts 1B, II and III and the Head of Records and Exams, the Examiners agreed to release provisional marks for Part III and MPhil coursework after the April examiners' meeting. The HPS Board and Degree Committee were informed of this procedure; it went without incident; and it has been incorporated into the Guidance for Examiners and student guides.

6. The examiners agreed that it should be rare for work to be referred to the external examiner because of failure to agree a mark, and that more should be done to resolve marks internally, by sending them to the Senior Examiner for review in the first instance. Furthermore, the Senior Examiner, not the external examiner, ought to look at the highest ranked dissertations to compare them and confirm which ought to be prize winners.