

NST Part III History and Philosophy of Science: Senior Examiner's Report 2018–19.

Overall results

The Part III course was taken by 21 students this year, a marked increase compared with the 10 students who took the course in 17-18. 8 achieved First Class marks (70+) overall, 8 a High II.i (67-69), and 5 a lower II.i (60-66). There were no lower seconds, thirds or fails.

The gender distribution of performances is as follows:

Class	Female	Male	Total
First (70+)	5	3	8
High II.i (67–69)	5	3	8
Lower II.i (60–66)	3	2	5
II.ii	0	0	0
Total	13	8	21

These data do not appear to indicate any trends worthy of concern, but the numbers are small.

Prizes

The 10th Lipton prize for the best overall performance on the Part III was awarded to Gabriel Cradden and Elizabeth Greenwood. The Bronowski prize for the best overall performance in the first half of the Part III was awarded to Nadya Kelly and Hamish Evans.

External examiner

Dr Staffan Müller-Wille (Exeter) continued for a third and final year as the external examiner the Part III (as well as for the MPhil). Staffan has been an exceptionally valuable external examiner, and have put in extensive work in monitoring standards and consistency in examining practice. Once again, he praised the quality of students' work, especially dissertations. He suggested (for this degree as well as for the MPhil) that there may be signs that examiners were avoiding the mid-range of marks, preferring to use higher and lower marks. He also noted the consistency in application of marking criteria, as well as the detailed reports being written for each piece of work. In the case of this specific degree he noted that the removal of the CLR (Critical Literature Review) in favour of an additional research essay had been a positive change. Finally, he noted evidence of progression in the quality of students' work from the beginning of the course to the end.

Recommendations

In general the examination process worked smoothly, especially considering the considerable time pressure that some examiners were under. It was agreed that in future the 2nd Pt III research paper should be given a simple upper word limit of 5,000 words, rather than a range as was the case in 18-19. There was some evidence that examiners, having read that the a mark of 70 would normally be considered indicative of ability to continue to the PhD, were on occasion suggesting marks of 70 and above because they did not wish to stand in the way of a potentially promising student being able to continue. This way of thinking has the potential to distort the award of marks around the 70 boundary, and communication to examiners was revised in an effort to limit this effect. Students

should be reminded of the need to cite their own earlier work when appropriate, but not in a way that compromises anonymity.

Tim Lewens 10 October 2019