

History and Philosophy of Science Part III:
Senior Examiner's Report 2019-20.

Overall results

The Part III course was taken by 9 students this year. Because of disruptions due to Covid-19, a “safety net” was applied to this course, as with other NST Part III courses, so that students could not achieve a final class lower than the class they had received at Part II. Before application of the safety net, 6 achieved First Class marks (70+) overall, 2 a High II.i (67-69), and 1 a lower II.i (60-66). There were no lower seconds, thirds or fails. Following this intervention, seven students received first-class degrees and two students received II.i degrees; of these, one student received a first-class mark who would have otherwise received a II.i.

The gender distribution of performances **before** application of the safety net is as follows:

Class	Female	Male	Total
First (70+)	4	2	6
High II.i (67-69)	1	1	2
Lower II.i (60-66)	1	0	1
II.ii	0	0	0
Total	6	3	9

The gender distribution of performances **after** application of the safety net is as follows:

Class	Female	Male	Total
First (70+)	5	2	7
II.i (60-69)	1	1	2
II.ii	0	0	0
Total	6	3	9

It is difficult to draw strong conclusions, given that the numbers are small.

Prizes

The 11th Lipton prize for the best overall performance on Part III was awarded to Jessica Sharpe. The Bronowski Prize for the best overall performance in the first half of the Part III was awarded to Kim Alexander.

External examiner

Dr Chiara Ambrosio began the first of three years as the external examiner for the Part III and MPhil. Chiara described the student work as “of the highest calibre.” She also praised the assessors’ reports, saying that they were “substantive, constructive, and shows that the students’ work is taken extremely seriously by all members of staff.” She noted that actions taken to provide support during the pandemic were effective, thanked us for efficient and clear documentation, and broadly praised the continued functioning of the examinations process despite unprecedented levels of disruption. We are very

grateful to her for taking on so many challenges with aplomb in the first year of her tenure.

Recommendations

The examination process itself has proven robust enough to withstand unanticipated disruptions in every term of an academic year. The metrics that were used to mitigate the potential impact of industrial action in Michaelmas and Lent terms, and Covid-19 in Easter term, were fair and effective. In general, the Department should be careful about assuming or stating that any metric will be definitive before the end of the year.

The Royal Historical Society Report on “Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change” (2018) suggests that examination boards should take steps to gather data on BME (Black and minority ethnicity) student numbers and attainment (“Recommendations and advice,” p75), following the guidance set out at <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/using-data-and-evidence>.

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