Changes in special regulations governing the Master of Studies in Philosophy of Physics: communication from the Board of the Faculty of Philosophy

Subject to the approval of the Humanities Divisional Board, which is now sought, and Education Committee, the following changes in special regulations are proposed:

Humanities Divisional Board

Master of Studies in Philosophy of Physics

Nature of the change
Introduction of a rule to allow students to pass the overall degree if they narrowly fail one examination element.

With effect from 1 October 2013 (for first examination in 2014)

In Examination Regulations, 2012, p. 654, delete ll. 1-5 and substitute:

‘10. A candidate will be deemed to have passed the examination if they obtain a passing mark on all four essays. In addition, a mark for the Philosophy of Science or elective paper (but not both) judged to be narrowly below passing quality may be compensated for by strong performance on the Philosophy of Physics papers, provided that the candidate’s average performance remains above the level judged sufficient for a pass by the Examiners.

11. A candidate who fails one element of the examination (i.e. one of the four essays), which has not been compensated in line with the provisions made under paragraph 10., may apply to retake that element in the September immediately following the examination. A candidate who fails two or more elements may retake the examination in the year immediately following the failed examination. It is necessary for a candidate to retake only the failed elements of the examination.’

Explanatory Note

(i) Following the External Examiner’s advice in his External Examiners Reports of 2011 and 2012, and discussion in and agreement by the Philosophy Graduate Studies Committee in Hilary Term 2013, a ‘compensation rule’ is introduced allowing one fail mark to be compensated by excellence elsewhere in the MSt in Philosophy of Physics examinations.

(ii) It is requested that this examination regulations change is effective from the current academic year onwards, so as to allow the current cohort of students to benefit from it. It is expected that this ‘retrospective’ change is allowable due to the following reasons: (a) the current Examinations Regulations (Examination regulations 2012) are silent on the requirement for a pass mark; (b) the proposed change has been recommended in two successive External Examiners’ reports; (c) the change unambiguously does not disadvantage any current student; (d) the current Chairman of Examiners was in agreement that the Examiners for this year would adopt the new policy for the current cohort and (e) the current cohort of students has been consulted on this proposed change and agreed to its introduction.

(iii) This change should have a positive effect on university resources as fewer students should have to resit examinations.