

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR B.PHIL.

1. Awarding institution/body	University of Oxford
2. Teaching institution	University of Oxford
3. Programme accredited by	n/a
4. Final Award	BPhil (2-year course)
5. Programme	BPhil
6. UCAS code	n/a
7. Relevant subject benchmark statement	BPhil, QAA 2000
8. Date of programme specification	March 2011

9. Educational aims of the programme

The programme aims to provide a high quality graduate education in philosophy, which will enable students:

1. to command the knowledge and understanding of five areas of philosophy necessary for teaching them at University level;
2. to conduct independent research in philosophy in their chosen area;
3. to produce written work that displays sustained argument, independent thought and lucid structure and presentation;
4. to prepare students for doctoral study in philosophy.

10. Programme outcomes

A. Students will develop a knowledge and understanding of:

1. the background and current developments in their chosen areas of philosophy (five subject areas and a thesis, which may be in an additional subject area);
2. some other central philosophical issues, through attendance at the seminar on Research Training Methods in Philosophy;

Related teaching/learning methods and strategies

Students are taught mainly through dedicated graduate classes and individual supervisions.

Students have individual supervisions with specialists in two subject areas and the thesis. These take place twice a term for the subject areas and four times a term for the thesis, and focus upon a piece of work submitted beforehand which is then discussed with the supervisor. The supervisor aims to give constructive criticism of what has been written, to point out any important aspects of the topic that have been overlooked, and to open up further lines of thought. The tutor also gives feedback on the essay, so that the student knows how he or she is doing. Students learn both by being forced to set out their ideas in an orderly way, with appropriate supporting arguments, and from the criticism that they receive.

Graduate classes take place each year for the majority of BPhil subject areas. Graduate students are active participants in these classes and seminars and are encouraged to present their own views on a set topic, for discussion by their peers, under the general guidance of a teacher who is familiar with the topic.

Supervisions and graduate classes are supplemented by the undergraduate lectures provided by the Faculty on a full range of philosophical topics, any of which graduate students may attend. Lectures provide an overall perspective on the topic in question, will describe and exemplify suitable ways of thinking about it, and will provide a guide to the existing literature on this topic. They may also discuss current controversies.

Assessment

From discussion of their work in supervisions and graduate classes students learn how effective their work is. Supervisors write a report at the end of each term, assessing progress during that term, and communicate the content of the report to the student. The reports are also reviewed by the BPhil Course Director and the student's College Adviser.

Students are examined throughout the duration of the course by submitting a thesis (30,000 words) and seven essays (5,000 words each) on topics chosen by the students. The essays are written during their first four terms of study, and the thesis during the final two. Students must reach the pass mark in all parts of the examination i.e. in each of the seven essays and the thesis, in order to pass.

B. Skills and other attributes

Students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills during the course:

I. Intellectual skills

Students learn how to analyse and clarify an abstract question, to grasp and critically compare different approaches to answering it, and to develop an approach of their own. They learn how to put complex arguments together for and against a position and how to take them apart. Since at least two of their seven essay topics must involve the study of a philosophical authority, they develop skills in interpreting difficult historical texts produced within a historical context. They learn to construct extensive pieces of writing that provide a clear overview of a subject and a sustained independent argument about it, presented in a lucid, objective and scholarly manner. They also develop skills in oral presentation with similar qualities.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

For methods of teaching and assessment see **10A**.

II. Practical skills

Students learn effective time organisation since they must produce extensive pieces of written work at regular intervals. The examination period for the three subject groups (i.e. Theoretical Philosophy, Value-Theory, and the History of Philosophy) requires the ability to sustain intensive work to a deadline over an extended period. Such skills are needed in many types of career. (They are learnt by experience, are not usually 'taught', except insofar as it is insisted that academic work is of an adequate standard and is produced on time. But advice will be offered if someone is clearly in difficulty on these points. The acquisition of such skills is not something that needs separate 'assessment'.)

III. Transferable skills

As already noted, all the skills mentioned in **BI** and **BII** are transferable skills. As a means to acquiring them, students also learn how to make effective use of libraries, information technology and other sources of information. This too is a transferable skill. It is taught right at the start of the student's career, at what are called 'induction sessions' at the beginning of the first year. It is not assessed, except insofar as the work that results from it is assessed, as already explained.

11. Programme Structures and Features

Learning Year 1

Subjects

During their first four terms, students are offered four one-to-one supervisions on each of two of their chosen subjects: two supervisions per term. BPhil students are also expected to attend two graduate classes per term (not including the seminar on Research Training Methods which runs during the first two terms of the first year). Students are also expected to begin preparatory work on their thesis and to submit a proposed title to the Philosophy Graduate Studies Committee in their third term.

The seminar on Research Training Methods held in Michaelmas Term and Hilary Term of the first year covers classic papers in metaphysics and epistemology (broadly construed) and value theory. The seminar runs for two hours each week, and is convened by the first-year BPhil Course Coordinator or the Director of Graduate Studies, with expert postholders invited to lead around four sessions each. Typically, each session will begin with a presentation on the relevant topic given by one of the first year students.

Assessment

Candidates are required to submit five out of the seven essays by the end of their third term (one at the end of their first term and two at the end of each of their second and third terms). Students will be informed of their first essay mark towards the end of Hilary Term. Students also begin preparatory work on their thesis and submit a proposed title to the Philosophy Graduate Studies Committee in their third term.

Year 2

Subjects

Students submit the final two essays at the end of the second Michaelmas Term. Students spend the remaining part of the second year working on their thesis, which is submitted in the final week of their final term of study.

Assessment

Students submit two further essays by the beginning of Hilary Term. Students will be informed of their six essay marks (two each from Hilary and Trinity of the previous year, and two from the Michaelmas term of their second year) by the end of their second Hilary Term. Students are awarded a mark for each part of the examination i.e. the seven essays and the thesis. Students must achieve the pass mark in all parts of the examination in order to pass. In certain cases, a Distinction may be awarded for the whole examination.

Candidates who fail up to two essays will be permitted to resubmit those essays at any of the subsequent essay submission dates during the first or second year of their degree or at the thesis submission date in their second year; a resubmitted essay may be on a new topic, and may be on a new subject, provided that the distribution requirement is met. Candidates who fail the thesis but who receive passing marks on all their essays will be allowed to resubmit an amended or different thesis by 10 a.m. on Wednesday of 0th week of the Hilary Term of the year following the whole examination. Candidates who choose to resubmit one or two failed essays or a failed thesis will not be entitled to additional supervision.

Candidates who fail three or more essays or two or more essays and the thesis will be permitted to resubmit work for the failed elements of the examination in the following academic year (or over four terms for candidates who fail more than five essays or more than four essays and the thesis). The timetable for submission of essays by candidates re-sitting the examination will be published in the Course Handbook. Candidates need only resubmit those elements of the Examination that they failed.

No resubmitted essay or thesis can receive a mark of more than 60.

~~Candidates who fail to satisfy the examiners a second time in any part of the examination may not re-submit work for any part of the examination on any subsequent occasion. Candidates who fail up to two essays will be permitted to resubmit those essays at any of the subsequent essay submission dates during the first or second year of their degree or the thesis submission date in their second year; a resubmitted essay may be on a new topic, and may be on a new subject, provided that the distribution requirement is met. Candidates who fail the thesis will be allowed to resubmit an amended or different thesis by 10 a.m. on Wednesday of 0th week of the Hilary Term of the year following the whole examination. Candidates who fail three or more essays or two or more essays and the thesis will be permitted to retake the examination in the following academic year (or over four terms for candidates who fail more than five essays or more than four essays and the thesis). The timetable for submission of essays by candidates re-sitting the examination will be published in the Course Handbook. Candidates need only retake those elements of the Examination that they failed. Candidates who are re-examined and fail to satisfy the examiners a second time in any part of the examination may not retake any part of the examination on any subsequent occasion.~~

12. Support for Students and their learning

A. Libraries

Library provision in Oxford is threefold, at college, faculty and University level.

College Libraries

The college libraries provide at least lending copies of set texts and core secondary works; many have more extensive collections in philosophy. They offer a good working environment, with extensive opening hours including evening and weekend access. College libraries also provide computer access and photocopying facilities, with some variation in provision. Over £40,000 p.a. is spent on philosophy acquisitions by college libraries.

Faculty Libraries

The Philosophy Library, the main central provider for loans to Philosophy students, makes c.65,000 loans p.a. from a book-stock of 22,000 volumes. It takes 68 journals, and holds reference material. Acquisitions

spending averages £24,500 p.a. (£16,000 books, £8,000 journals). It offers a good working environment, with 67 desk spaces, 13 computers for reader use, 2 self-service photocopiers and a printer. Specialist staff are always available, supporting a wide range of enquiries and database assistance and training. Its location in the Philosophy Centre allows readers to combine library visits with attendance at lectures and seminars.

Other faculty libraries used by Philosophy students are: Classics Lending Library (Ancient Philosophy), Hooke Lending Library (Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Mathematics), Social Studies Faculty library (theory of politics and Philosophy of Social Sciences), Theology Faculty Library (Ethics and Philosophy of Religion). All these subjects are also fully covered in the Philosophy Library.

Bodleian Library

The Bodleian Library is the University's largest library, holding the legal deposit collection of all UK copyright books and journals. It also purchases extensively from outside the UK. Spending on non-British philosophy books and journals averages £24,000 (excluding Philosophy of Science). Its staff liaise closely with the Philosophy Librarian and with the academic community, through the Sub-committee for Collection Development in Philosophy.

The most frequently-used philosophy books are housed on open access in the PPE Reading Room of the Old Bodleian. (There is currently a plan to relocate some of these collections, and in particular to move the philosophy section of the PPE Reading Room to the Lower Reading Room of the Old Bodleian, close to the books on ancient philosophy that are held there.) Bodleian books on philosophy of science and mathematics are housed in the separate Radcliffe Science Library, open shelf books on philosophy of religion are housed in the Lower Camera and open shelf books on ancient philosophy are housed in the Lower Reading Room in the New Bodleian. Extensive stacks house less-commonly-used books for order to any desired reading-room. The current PPE Reading Room has extensive computer facilities, including reader printers and self-service photocopying.

Collection Development Policy

In the Philosophy Library, the primary focus is on material required for undergraduate and graduate taught courses, with supplementary material complementing these teaching areas, and research-level material to serve graduate needs and the wider academic community. Loan statistics demonstrate a 90% overlap on books borrowed by both graduates and undergraduates. The video collection provides live philosophical debate between eminent philosophers.

The tripartite provision of multiple lending copies in college and faculty libraries and reference copies in the Bodleian Library ensures widespread availability and comprehensive coverage, so that well-organised students may be confident of obtaining most prescribed items and should also find most other books that are cited for additional reading or identified via the excellent bibliographical reference resources. Students also benefit from the good working environment of the various libraries, and, in the Bodleian and the Philosophy Library, from the presence of specialist staff. College libraries generally offer long opening hours and weekend access.

The Philosophy Librarian's role is provide and co-ordinate philosophy provision throughout the University, and to ensure responsiveness to reader needs from a base in the Philosophy Library, which ensures accessibility to library users. As a member of the Faculty of Philosophy, and with the advice of the academic Committee for Library Provision in Philosophy, she is well-placed to encourage co-ordination between teaching needs and resources.

B. IT Resources

The use of IT within the graduate degree course is significant and growing. Learning materials and past examination papers can be downloaded from the web and graduates are encouraged to develop their IT skills. There is an extensive network of IT resources and support in Oxford.

The *University Computing Service* provides facilities and classes at a variety of levels, from those suitable for beginners through to those aimed at students who wish to learn to use very sophisticated programmes and computing languages. Several of these are specifically geared to students in the Humanities.

The *Philosophy Centre* has a graduate computing room with 4 PCs and one Mac, a laser printer and a scanner. The *Philosophy Library* has 14 computers for reader use. These computers have access to the University's extensive network of electronic resources and a variety of software. There is a wireless network installed in the Philosophy Centre.

Colleges provide for the use of their graduate students computer rooms with access to the University network, the internet, e-mail, standard software packages, and software for logic teaching. 60% of the student rooms in college accommodation currently permit internet access.

The Philosophy Centre, colleges and OUCS all have IT Support Officers available to train and assist students.

Networked resources within the University domain include:

1. OLIS (Oxford Libraries Information System), the University's union library catalogue, networked throughout the University and showing library holdings of 5.5 million books in 80 Oxford libraries including the Bodleian, the faculty libraries and many college libraries;
2. the University's extensive network of databases, including the Philosopher's Index, the Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy;
3. many on-line Philosophy journals, and an expanding collection of full-text CD-Roms of philosophical writings (Past Masters Series).

C. Academic Support

At the start of their course students attend induction programmes run by the Faculty and by their college. These provide an initial orientation and essential information in a user-friendly form.

Students are provided with the relevant parts of the University's *Examination Regulations*, which specifies the overall structure of their course and details the examination arrangements. They are also given the Faculty's Handbook for Taught Courses, which repeats this information in a more digestible form, includes further relevant information (e.g. on assessment criteria) and offers advice on how to set about organising one's work and choosing one's options. Students may also consult past examiners' reports, which are available in the Philosophy Library and on the web and which contain some advice on good and bad ways of writing an examined essay. The Philosophy Faculty Library contains some specimen BPhil exam essays to give some idea of the standard expected from a passing script.

Graduate supervisors on the student's options or thesis, the relevant BPhil Course Director and the Director of Graduate Studies provide academic guidance throughout the student's course. They make it clear to the student how he or she is progressing and they assist in making decisions on how best to structure the course overall and what particular options to choose within that structure. They arrange all the student's tuition and expect to be available for consultation without delay on any topic, including pastoral matters. The student's College Adviser (normally a philosopher) is also available for consultation.

D. Pastoral, Welfare and Financial Support

The colleges have many ways of providing support and guidance on pastoral, welfare and financial matters. Each graduate will have a college tutor assigned to him or her as their 'college adviser', who is responsible for offering such assistance. But others available in such a case usually include the head of the College, the Tutor for Graduates, the Dean (or Assistant or Sub-Dean), MCR Welfare Officers, the College Chaplain, the Adviser to Women, the College Nurse or the College Doctor. All Colleges also have harassment advisers and many have funds to alleviate genuine cases of financial hardship.

The University provides a Counselling Service for those in need of professional advice and there are also University Committees on Student health and on Disabilities, which are responsible for special provision in appropriate cases. Special arrangements are made for candidates in University examinations who are dyslexic or disabled or in some other way unable to conform to the behaviour expected of most candidates (e.g. because they cannot sit papers on the Jewish Sabbath). Information about these services is contained in college handbooks and in the Faculty's Handbook for Taught Courses. On the Faculty side, students are encouraged to approach their supervisor, the BPhil Course Director, the Director of Graduate Studies, or the Graduate Studies Administrator for assistance on any matter. The Faculty also has two harassment advisers and provides some funds in cases of financial hardship.

The Faculty has an active Placement Service and a dedicated Placement Officer to provide information and advice on careers within philosophy to all graduate students. The University Careers Service is also very active, and very successful, in helping to find employment for those finishing their degree.

13. Criteria for Admission

The rigorous admissions process, conducted by the Graduate Studies Committee (and operated as a gathered field exercise between January and March each year), involves careful reading and discussion of applicants' dossiers by at least two members of the Faculty (the Director of Graduate Studies and the Director of Graduate Admissions initially assess every application for graduate study in philosophy at Oxford). Dossiers include three references, academic history, a personal statement, and written work of a prescribed length. Since many candidates are from abroad, none are interviewed. A strong university-level background in philosophy is required and the aim of the committee is to admit suitably qualified candidates well-matched and committed to the course and wishing to study subjects for which the Faculty has the relevant facilities and teaching resources. Because the amount of available supervision is limited, it is not possible to offer all well-qualified candidates each year a place.

14. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of learning

The Faculty obtains student feedback on lectures, classes and seminars each term, which is considered by, amongst others, the Graduate Studies Committee and the Graduate Joint Consultative Committees. Any recommendations arising from these committees are considered seriously by the Faculty Board. Each BPhil student is also asked to complete an overall course questionnaire at the end of the course: returns are considered in the first instance by the Graduate Studies Committee which reports to the Faculty Board and raises key issues for discussion at meetings of the Graduate Joint Consultative Committee. The Faculty also conducts an end-of-year review session with all the BPhil students. At this meeting students are asked to provide feedback on the course and are provided with an opportunity to ask questions to the Course Coordinators and Director of Graduate Studies.

Examiners write detailed reports on the examinations that they have conducted, which indicate (inter alia) the standards that the students are actually achieving. External examiners also submit their separate reports, which add (inter alia) some consideration of the appropriateness of the syllabuses for particular papers and of the way in which they are taught, and some comparison of the standards achieved at this University with the standards achieved elsewhere. The Graduate Studies Committee considers these reports and any recommendations it makes are considered seriously by the Faculty Board. (The reports are further considered at the Divisional level and by the Education Committee of the University.) In addition, those who

undertake teaching for the BPhil may make proposals for reform at general meetings of the Faculty. As a result, changes in regulations are often made. The results are incorporated in revised versions of the Handbook for Taught Courses and the Examination Regulations.

New academic staff attend courses to train them in how to teach. These are organised by the Institute for the Advancement of University Learning (IAUL), which has been set up within the University to carry out research into the training of university teachers as well as to supplement that research by employing the most effective methods of training. The Institute also runs courses to train graduate students who undertake some undergraduate teaching and this is supplemented by one or more courses organised by the Faculty each year. In addition, each new member of staff is assigned some more experienced member as 'mentor', who is responsible for giving advice and guidance on both teaching and research, especially during the first two years. Appointments are standardly made for five years in the first instance and a more formal review of the performance of new members of staff is conducted during the fifth year, with a view to determining whether re-appointment to the retiring age is appropriate.

All academic staff are subject to annual appraisal by a nominated peer appraiser, with an interview every five years (or more frequently, if requested by appraiser or appraisee). The emphasis of the appraisal scheme is on reflection and self-assessment, but it should bring to light any problems that need to be addressed at either college or Faculty level.

15. Regulation of assessment

Final Examination

The final assessment of a student, i.e. whether they pass or fail the BPhil, depends only on their performance in examination. This is conducted by a board of examiners, appointed by the Faculty of Philosophy, but also including one external examiner appointed by the Vice-Chancellor. The Board of Examiners determines whether each candidate passes or fails, having regard to guidelines agreed beforehand by the Philosophy Graduate Studies Committee. These guidelines are published in the Handbook for Taught Courses and therefore known to the candidates. When the examination is completed, the examiners submit a report on what they have done, which is scrutinised both by the Philosophy Graduate Studies Committee and the Faculty Board. The report is also discussed at Faculty meetings open to all members of each Faculty, before being forwarded to the Humanities Division and eventually to the Education Committee of the University. But if the report reveals any problems that need to be addressed, suitable action will have been taken before that final stage is reached.

In all of this the external examiner plays a special role. During the examination he or she acts as an impartial adviser, providing informed comment on two major issues:

- (i) to verify that standards are appropriate, in part by comparison with the standards of comparable institutions, and to ensure that the assessment procedures and the regulations governing them are fair and otherwise appropriate; and
- (ii) to ensure that the examination has been fairly conducted and that individual student performance has been properly judged in accordance with the regulations and conventions of the examining board.

The external examiner signs the final pass list, along with the internal examiners, as an endorsement that the processes of examination and classification have been fairly conducted.

After the examination each external examiner submits a separate report (officially addressed to the Vice-Chancellor), which is expected to cover all the following points:

- the standards demonstrated by the students;
- the extent to which standards are appropriate to the degree awarded;
- the design, structure and marking of examination papers;
- the appropriateness of the procedures used in the examination papers and theses;
- whether or not external examiners have had sufficient access to, and the power to call upon, any material necessary to make the required judgements;
- students' performance in relation to their peers in comparable courses;
- the coherence of the policies and procedures relating to the external examiner and their consonance with the explicit role required of him/her;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort;
- the quality of teaching and learning which may be indicated by student performance.

These reports are considered by all the same bodies as consider the reports of internal examiners, and again any action required is taken long before the final stage of consideration is reached.

Marking Scale

Each element (i.e., each essay and thesis) will be marked on the following numerical scale in the range 0 – 100 (please note, the conventions below are not the final version, this will be handed out to students at the start of the examination):

85-100	Highest Distinction Outstanding work of publishable quality demonstrating most of the following: exceptional originality, critical acumen, and depth of understanding; highly intelligent use of the relevant literature and excellent clarity of structure.
75-84	High Distinction Excellent work with publishable elements showing many of the following qualities: originality, critical acumen, and depth of understanding; highly intelligent use of the relevant literature and excellent clarity of structure.
70-74	Distinction Work displaying significant independence of thought, excellent understanding of the relevant literature, commendable clarity of structure and content.
68-69	High Pass Work displaying very good understanding of the problems, intelligent use of the literature, commendable clarity of structure and content, and independence of thought.
63-67	Middle Pass Work displaying good understanding of the problems, intelligent use of the relevant literature, and clarity of structure and content.

60-62	Lower Pass Work showing reasonable understanding of the problems, limited use of the relevant literature and adequate clarity of structure and content.
50-59	Fail Work showing inadequate awareness of the problems and literature, or otherwise muddled in structure and content.
0-49	Low fail Work showing seriously inadequate awareness of the problems and literature or otherwise seriously muddled in structure and content.

Pass: A pass requires a mark of 60 or above in all parts of the examination.

Distinction: A candidate for the BPhil will be awarded a distinction if and only if he or she receives an overall average mark of at least 70 in six out of the seven essays (the lowest essay mark will be discounted when awarding distinctions), and a mark of 70 or above on the thesis.

Marking conventions: In marking essays and theses, examiners will always attach particular weight to clarity of thought and expression. Evidence of it to some degree in all parts of the examination is a condition of satisfactory performance; evidence of it to some significant degree is a condition of a mark of 70 or above. Failure to focus on the question asked will be severely penalised.

Late submission of essays or thesis, or any excess of the word limit, however small, is subject to a penalty. This could result in a candidate failing one or more essays or the thesis.

At least two examiners (or assessors) will mark each essay. They will be marked by a third marker in case of unresolved disagreement or if the agreed mark is below 60. (The marks and comments of the third marker will be regarded as advisory rather than as determining the outcome.)

There will be no *viva voce* examinations.

16. Indicators of quality and standards

The Faculty of Philosophy at Oxford is internationally renowned for its excellence in teaching and research.

The Faculty was most recently assessed for its teaching in a QAA review of Autumn 2000 and it was awarded the highest available mark, i.e. 24 out of 24. It consistently ranks at the top of the world's Philosophy departments in The Philosophical Gourmet Report, the most respected ranking of Philosophy departments; it was given the top rating of 5* in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, and the results of the 2008 RAE show that in Philosophy Oxford had more than twice as much research activity at the highest quality level (4*) as any other department in the UK.

The report of the 2009 Humanities Division / Education Committee Review of the Faculty remarked that the BPhil remains a prestigious course with a high reputation, and was "very impressed by the work being done, and by the ambition as well as the capability of its students, more than half of whom go on to do research degrees, either in Oxford or elsewhere."

The course consistently receives praise from external examiners. In 2009 the External Examiner reported that "It cannot be repeated too often that the B.Phil. is an almost uniquely demanding taught postgraduate degree which provides the best possible preparation for doctoral study and an academic career." The current External Examiner stated in his most recent report that "Student performance is excellent. This is the world's premier pre-doctoral programme in philosophy and performance is correspondingly high."