

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR BA in PHILOSOPHY AND MODERN LANGUAGES

1.	Awarding institution/body	University of Oxford
2.	Teaching institution	University of Oxford
3.	Programme accredited by	n/a
4.	Final award	BA Hons (4-year course)
5.	Programme	Philosophy and Modern Languages
6.	UCAS code	VT59BA/PhML4
7.	Relevant QAA subject benchmarking groups	Philosophy, Modern Languages
8.	Date of production/revision	November 2008

9. Educational aims of the programme.

The programme aims to provide an education in two distinct but related disciplines, which will enable students:

- § to think independently, to develop their powers of critical analysis, of sustained argumentation and of clear and effective communication both orally and in writing;
- § to acquire a thorough understanding of a modern language, including an ability to read, write and speak in that language with fluency and due attention to nuance and idiom;
- § to gain first hand knowledge of the literature of that language, to appraise that literature with proper sensitivity to its context and cultural background, and to think more widely about general principles governing the appraisal of literary and other aesthetic works;
- § to appreciate the interest and importance of philosophical questions on a variety of topics, to contribute to the discussion of these questions, and more generally to develop a readiness to question widely held opinions or presuppositions in a cogent and decisive manner.

There is also an opportunity to acquire detailed knowledge of linguistic theory and many other specialised topics.

10. Programme outcomes

A.

Students will develop a knowledge and understanding of

- § The chosen modern language
- § Selected literature in that language and the concepts needed to appraise that literature effectively
- § Selected philosophical texts and central philosophical issues and the concepts needed to discuss those texts and issues in an effective manner.

Related teaching/learning methods and strategies

- § Students have language classes, usually conducted by native speakers, throughout the course. Their study of literature, in the original language, naturally reinforces their understanding of that language. They spend their third year abroad for maximum exposure to the language studied.
- § Other aspects of the course are taught mainly by lectures, by group discussions in classes and by tutorials in which the student presents an essay on a topic prescribed beforehand.

Lectures will 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.

Classes will encourage students to present their own views on a set topic, for discussion by their peers, under the general guidance of a tutor who is familiar with the topic.

Tutorial essays are the main focus of a student's work. In each week of term an essay topic will be set and appropriate reading for it. This essay will then be discussed by a tutor, who will aim 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. 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.

Assessment

From week to week students learn, from the discussion of their tutorial essays, how effective their work that week has been. Tutors also write a report on each of their pupils at the end of each term, assessing progress during that term, and will communicate the content of these reports to the pupils. In addition, it is standard practice for tutors to set mock examinations (called 'collections') at the start of each term, to test the student's grasp of work done in the previous term and consolidated over the intervening vacation. These assessments are at a College level and have no influence upon University examinations.

There are two University examinations, one taken at the end of the first year ('prelims') and one at the end of the final year ('finals'). The first is wholly a written examination and students must pass it as a condition of continuing their course. The second includes an oral test of linguistic proficiency, as well as a number of written papers. Students may opt to submit a short thesis or extended essay in lieu of one written paper. The class of degree obtained depends wholly on performance in the final examination.

BI *Intellectual skills*

Students learn how to think about a question, or group of questions, in two rather different areas, ie philosophy and literature. They learn how to digest and assess several diverging answers to these questions, how to make up their own minds on the issues, and how to argue for their own view in a clear and cogent fashion, pointing out where and why they disagree with other views and what considerations support their own views. They must therefore develop skills of analysis and argumentation, of independent and creative thinking, and of effective presentation. In addition, through the study of authors of different dates and cultures, they must learn how to understand and appreciate perspectives different from their own. These skills are relevant in thinking about almost any topic.

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

BII *Practical skills*

One of the first things students must learn is how to organise their time effectively, giving due attention to their academic work while at the same time leaving room for other interests of their own. Another is how to work to deadlines, for tutorial essays are frequently required and must not be late. 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'.)

Fluency in a language which is not one's native language is presumably a 'practical skill' (and **10A** explains how it is taught and assessed). Moreover, the language is learned not simply by exposure to it (as a native language is), but also by explicit instruction in matters of grammar, syntax, vocabulary and so on. This means that students should have the background which would enable them to acquire further languages as needed.

BIII *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

Year 1. Subjects

In philosophy students study a course which covers two or three areas: General Philosophy (which covers

such topics as the mind-body problem, free will, and induction); and one or both of a text in moral philosophy (J.S. Mill's *Utilitarianism*) and the elements of modern logic. In studying *Utilitarianism* they are expected to form their own views on the issues that the text addresses, and therefore need to read not only secondary literature that is directly on the text, but also contemporary treatments of the issues involved. Students sit two examination papers in Philosophy in the preliminary examination; one paper sets questions on General Philosophy, and in the other students may answer on Mill, on logic, or on both.

In the modern language students divide their time between language work (eg translation from and into the language in question) and selected texts in the literature of that language. They learn how to comment in detail upon short passages of those texts and how to write more synoptic essays on more general issues. For both of these purposes, the study of suitably chosen secondary material is again essential.

Year 1. Assessment

For assessment at the College level, see **10A**. The University examinations at the end of the first year comprise two 3-hour papers on the philosophy subjects (one on general philosophy and one covering both logic and moral philosophy), two 3-hour papers on language work in the modern language, and two 3-hour papers on the prescribed literature. The results of this examination are not classified, except insofar as candidates may be awarded a distinction (which recognises first class work) in philosophy or in the language or in both. Otherwise candidates either pass or fail, and must pass if they are to be permitted to proceed to work for the final examination. But the precise marks obtained on each paper are made known to the candidate in question and to his or her tutor, and may guide them in choosing how to structure the remainder of their course.

Years 2 and 4. Subjects.

Students work for their final examination, which consists of 8 subjects. They must take three subjects on each side of the school and may distribute the remaining two as they wish.

In philosophy students must take one paper on the history of Philosophy, either *History of Philosophy from Descartes to Kant* or *Plato's Republic* or *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*; otherwise they have a free choice from among twenty other philosophical subjects that are available. A student who is taking at least three other subjects in philosophy may choose as one subject to submit a short thesis on a topic of their choosing.

In the modern language, students must take two language papers, and must take the oral examination in that language. They must also take one of three papers set on suitable periods of literature in their language, and at least one further subject from a list of six. A student who is taking at least three other subjects in the modern language may choose as one subject to submit an extended essay on a topic of their own choosing. But no student is permitted to submit *both* a thesis in philosophy *and* an extended essay on a topic in their language.

Year 3. Subjects

Students spend this year abroad, in a country where the language they are studying is spoken. (In many cases they will be employed by a school to teach English to the pupils of that school, but this is not a requirement of the course.) The principal purpose of this year abroad is to improve their fluency in the language in question, but the time is also used for further work on the other subjects in which they will be examined at the end of their course.

Years 2 and 4. Assessment

While students are working in Oxford, they are continuously assessed at the College level as described in **10A**, but further University assessment takes place only in the final examination at the end of the final

year. The structure of the examination (ie 8 subjects etc) has already been described. The results of the examination are classified and students may be awarded either first class honours, or upper second class honours, or lower second class honours, or third class honours, or a pass degree (ie not deserving honours). In extreme cases (which are very rare) a student may simply be failed, so that no degree of any kind is awarded.

12. Support for students and their learning

A. Libraries

Undergraduates at Oxford have access to a wide range of libraries. First and foremost is the Bodleian Library, which together with its associated central libraries caters for all academic subjects. But also for Modern Languages there is the Taylor Institution Library, which is the largest research library in Britain devoted to Modern Languages. These resources are supplemented by Faculty Libraries for the two Faculties involved in this course, ie the Philosophy Faculty Library and the Modern Languages Faculty Library. These keep on open shelves most of the books that undergraduates in this course will need, and they are lending libraries with multiple copies of the books that are most used. In addition each college will have its own college library, with holdings geared to the needs of undergraduates. The OLIS cataloguing system incorporates the holdings of all major University libraries and Faculty libraries, and of most college libraries. Students should have no difficulty in obtaining access to the books that they need.

B. IT Resources

There is an extensive network of IT resources and support within Oxford. The Colleges provide good IT resources and Support Officers prepared to train and assist students. In addition there is the University Computing Service, which provide facilities and classes for undergraduates at a variety of levels, from those suitable to complete 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 use of IT within the undergraduate degree course is significant and growing. Course bibliographies, learning materials and past examination papers can be downloaded from the Web and undergraduates are encouraged to develop their IT skills.

The Philosophy Centre provides computing facilities for students studying formal logic (namely, *Logic Works*, *Tarski's World*, and *TABLEAU*; an online *Logic Manual* is also available through the Philosophy website).

The Language Centre offers state-of-the-art language teaching and learning facilities, with IT, video and audio facilities, satellite television, a well-stocked library and extensive video, audio and computer-assisted language learning materials. Practice materials for the Modern Languages oral examination are available for finalists.

C. Academic Support

At the start of their course students will attend induction programmes given by their College, by their Faculty and by the Bodleian Library. These provide an initial orientation and essential information in a user-friendly form.

Students are provided with relevant parts of the University's *Examination Regulations*, which specifies the overall structure of their course and gives the syllabuses of the various examination papers available in it. They are also given a *Course Handbook*, which repeats this information in a more digestible form, includes further relevant information (eg 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 libraries and on the web and which contain some advice on good and bad ways of answering an examination question. The Philosophy Faculty Library will in the future contain some specimen undergraduate theses in philosophy, with an indication of the mark that they received, so that those who are contemplating writing a thesis may gain some idea of the standard expected.

College tutors 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 readily available for consultation on any topic, including pastoral matters.

D. Pastoral, Welfare and Financial Support

The Colleges have many ways of providing support and guidance on pastoral, welfare and financial matters. Each undergraduate will have a College tutor assigned to him or her, who is primarily responsible for offering such assistance. (This may be one of his or her subject tutors, or may be another person, often called a 'moral' tutor.) This tutor is usually the undergraduate's first recourse in cases of academic or personal or financial difficulty. But others available in such a case usually include the head of the College, the Senior Tutor, the Dean (or Assistant or Sub-Dean), JCR 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, on Hardship 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 (eg because they cannot sit papers on the Jewish Sabbath). Information about these services is contained in College Handbooks and in Course Handbooks.

The University Careers Service is very active, and very successful, in helping to find employment for those soon to finish an undergraduate degree.

13. Criteria for Admissions

Admissions are the responsibility of the Colleges, which aim to select, from among the many who apply, those who have the greatest potential to benefit from the intensive course that we offer. Colleges take into account the applicant's school record, the recommendations of their teachers, the specimens of school written work that they have submitted, their performance on the short written tests that they sit in Oxford at the time of their interview and their interviews. Where, as is usual, candidates have not yet completed their A level examinations (or equivalent), the offer of a place is made conditional upon subsequent performance in these examinations. It is usual to require a result of at least AAA in A levels, or the equivalent in other systems (eg Scottish Highers or IB). In practice the majority of successful candidates achieve results better than AAA.

School/College leavers must show evidence of an appropriate educational background and good standards of literacy and numeracy. It is usual to require a result of at least AAA in A levels, or the equivalent in

other systems (eg Scottish Highers or IB). In practice the majority of successful candidates achieve a minimum result of AAA. Applicants must apply both through UCAS and the Oxford Colleges Admissions Office (OCAO).

Mature and Overseas students must show evidence of an appropriate educational background and good standards of literacy and numeracy. Application forms are available from the Oxford University Website. Apart from School leaving qualifications, a pass in other relevant programmes of study may be considered e.g. an Open University Foundation Course Credit.

Those applicants who already possess a degree may be considered on an individual basis as senior status students. Normally those students may proceed directly to the Final Honour School without passing the Preliminary Examination. Application Forms are available from the Oxford University Website.

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

Colleges have their own systems for obtaining feedback from students on the College tuition that they are offered. The Faculties similarly obtain student feedback on lectures and University classes. In addition, examiners write detailed reports on the examinations that they have conducted (both 'prelims' and 'finals'), 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. Faculties pay due attention to these reports and respond to any issues that they raise. (The reports are further considered at the Divisional level.) Faculties regularly review the student feedback on lectures and University classes. There are also in each Faculty Joint Consultative Committees with Undergraduates, containing some senior and many junior members, and any recommendations arising from these committees are again seriously considered by the Faculties. In these ways several different forms of feedback are regularly taken into account. In addition, those who teach the subject will quite frequently make proposals for syllabus reform at general meetings of the Faculty or (for Modern Languages) the Sub-Faculties. As a result, some changes in regulations are made almost every year and the results incorporated in revised versions of the *Course Handbook* and *Examination Decrees and Regulations*.

New academic staff are expected to attend courses to train them in how to teach. These are organised by the Learning Institute, 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. 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

The final assessment of a student, ie the class of degree that they are awarded, depends only on their performance in the final examination. This is conducted by a board of examiners, appointed partly by the Faculty of Philosophy and partly by the Faculty of Modern Languages, but also including an external examiner for Philosophy, and one or more for Modern Languages. The external examiners are appointed by the Vice Chancellor. The Board of Examiners determines what class should be awarded to each candidate, having regard to guidelines agreed beforehand by the Joint Standing Committee for Philosophy and Modern Languages. These guidelines are published in the *Course Handbook* 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 Joint Standing Committee, by the Undergraduate Studies Committee of the Philosophy Faculty and the Academic Policy Committee of the Modern Languages Faculty. The report is also discussed at Faculty meetings open to all members of each Faculty and by the two Faculty Boards, 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 examiners play a special role. During the examination they act as impartial advisers, providing informed comment on two major issues:

- (i) To verify that standards are appropriate to the class of degree awarded, 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;
- (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 examiners sign the final Class 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 class of degree awarded;
- § the design, structure and marking of examination papers;
- § the appropriateness of the procedures used in the examination, in this case including not only procedures for the examination papers but also for the oral examination and for the short theses or extended essays, if offered;
- § 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 external examiners and their consonance with the explicit role required of them;
- § 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 before the final stage of consideration is reached.

16. Indicators of quality and standards

The Faculty of Philosophy was most recently assessed for its teaching in a QAA review of Autumn 2000 and it was awarded the highest available mark, ie 24 out of 24. The Faculty of Modern Languages has not been similarly assessed since a TQA review in early 1996. On that occasion it scored full marks in 4 of the 6 headings of assessment, but lost marks in 2 others (Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation; Quality Assurance and Enhancement), so that it ended with a score of 21 out of 24. Since then the

curriculum has been comprehensively reviewed and a number of changes have been made in response to criticisms then raised. There have also been changes in methods of quality assurance. As a result the criticisms that were made in 1996 have now been fully addressed.

The Humanities Division intends to institute a regular pattern of reviews of its constituent Faculties and the Education Committee will do the same. No doubt there will be further reviews instituted by HEFCE (TQA, QAA or their successors).

The Humanities Divisional Board and the Educational Standards and Policy Committee, with external representation conducted a review of Modern Languages in Trinity Term 2008.

Each of the two Faculties has its own Advisory Panel, whose members are relevant experts from other universities (including universities in other countries) and from industry and from government. These Panels meet from time to time to offer advice on how best to meet changing situations both within and outside this University. Their advice is taken very seriously.