# Subject Benchmark Statement: Philosophy

## The Basics

This summary is designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Philosophy for students, employers and academics. It is not intended to replace or alter the Statement, which should be referred to in the design and approval of courses and when any further detail is required.

Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the benchmark academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their course or programme.

Subject Benchmark Statements are presented in four sections. Section 1 outlines the contextual information - providing the operational landscape, and boundaries, of the subject discipline. This includes consideration of the ways in which the discipline addresses wider social goals, specifically in relation to: equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI); accessibility and the needs of disabled students; education for sustainable development (ESD); enterprise and entrepreneurship; and the impact of generative artificial intelligence on the subject practice.

Section 2 covers distinctive features of the course, including curriculum design, partnership arrangements, flexibility of delivery, progression and ongoing monitoring processes. Section 3 explains any features relevant to teaching, learning and assessment activities for the subject. Section 4 describes the benchmark standards of achievement reached by all graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours in the subject, with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.

# Why study a degree in Philosophy?

Philosophy is concerned with how we can best make sense of the world, ourselves, and our relations to the world and each other. Because of this sense-making role, Philosophy can be seen as underpinning every other discipline. Since philosophical enquiry operates at a fundamental level, it often focuses on questions and topics that other fields take for granted without detailed examination. Philosophy is not only a discrete discipline but also part of all other forms of human knowledge, from biology to business studies, psychology to computer science, mathematics to politics, history to physics, and social justice to the law. Philosophy lies at the intersection of the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences.

Studying Philosophy provides many benefits, including the ability to:

- produce sophisticated analyses of ideas by rigorously identifying, explaining, and evaluating arguments, positions and views
- articulate new, thought-provoking arguments, positions and views
- engage attentively with the ideas of others, and make sense of their views in the context in which they are held
- cultivate advanced writing skills through the practices of reconstructing arguments from primary texts, presenting ideas in argument form, and engaging in reflective learning exercises
- develop proficiencies in reading texts
- make sense of complex philosophical ideas, and situate these in a wide range of
- social, cultural and political contexts
- use principles of formal and informal logic to make sense of arguments and positions
- grow as citizens and persons through reading, writing and discussing philosophical ideas
- cultivate advanced research skills through sourcing and consulting academic literature, producing research proposals and conducting literature reviews
- develop a more global cultural sensibility, by engaging with a range of philosophical perspectives
- bridge the sciences (natural and social) and the humanities
- apply philosophical knowledge, including to other disciplines
- communicate philosophical ideas to academic as well as non-academic audiences
- apply philosophical knowledge beyond academic domains, such as policy and governance.

# What are the main teaching and learning approaches in Philosophy?

Given the nature of Philosophy, the provision in any module includes a substantial element of learning through:

- the student's own thoughtful reading, starting from an appropriate reading list
- discussion, whether in tutorials, seminars, or in some other format, including live presentations by students
- considered verbal or non-verbal presentation by students of their understanding and critical appraisal of material they have studied, with provision of feedback.

Teaching and learning methods on Philosophy programmes typically include:

- lectures
- tutorials (group learning)
- seminars, including those in which students are responsible in turn for introducing topics
- student-led research/self-directed study
- guided reading coupled with submission of essays for discussion with a tutor

- the completion of a substantial dissertation, under a greater or lesser degree of supervision
- online teaching and learning resources (including virtual learning environments), including the employment of message boards and online discussion forums, live or recorded audio-graphic tutorials or lectures, video conferencing and wikis
- other discussion groups, including those led by students.

## How are students assessed?

Philosophy courses will typically employ different styles of assessment to test different learning outcomes. Methods may include, but are not limited to:

- essays
- dissertations
- verbal and non-verbal examinations
- literature reviews
- collaborative work
- peer assessment
- presentations
- blog posts
- curation of philosophical events
- exercises, especially for formal logic and philosophical mathematics
- reflective pieces.

Some forms of assessment raise issues of accessibility for some students and alternatives are offered in such instances, in accordance with the principles of Accessibility discussed on **page 6** of the Statement. Students may be given the opportunity to suggest a different type of assessment that would address the learning outcomes, propose their own questions and titles, or respond to set questions drawing on their own research.

**Read the full Subject Benchmark Statement**

The full Subject Benchmark Statement is available on the QAA website.

Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as a membership organisation on behalf of the higher education sector.

## Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold, typical and excellent standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Philosophy are outlined on **pages 18-21** of the Subject Benchmark Statement. The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to Annex D in The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies. This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours - 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd.

The full statement was developed by subject experts drawn from across the sector. Details of the Advisory Group can be found on **page 23** of the Statement.

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