Next Generation Higher National Unit Specification

Philosophy A: Knowledge and Truth (SCQF level 7)

Unit code: J72S 47

SCQF level: 7 (8 SCQF credit points)

Valid from: session 2024–25

Prototype unit specification for use in pilot delivery only (version 2.0) August 2024

This unit specification provides detailed information about the unit to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year.

This unit specification is for teachers and lecturers and contains all the mandatory information required to deliver and assess the unit.

This edition: August 2024 (version 2.0)

Unit purpose

This unit develops learners' knowledge and understanding of philosophy and philosophical debate.

Learners identify the key features of the philosophical approach by examining a traditional debate in philosophy. They consider various brief examples of philosophical problems, with delivery emphasising that philosophy is concerned with dealing with fundamental questions about the world and our experience. Learners explore and evaluate established positions in the selected debate, developing their personal response.

The unit is aimed at learners who have a general interest in philosophy, as well as those who want to use it as the basis for further study.

Entry to the unit is at your centre's discretion. However, we recommend that learners have one or more of the following:

♦ good communication skills
♦ previous study of philosophy, for example National Qualifications at SCQF levels 5 or 6, or other similar qualifications
♦ other knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the unit

The unit works well alongside Philosophy B: Engaging Arguments.

Learners normally study the unit as part of HNC Social Sciences. They can also study it on a stand-alone basis.

If learners study the unit as part of HNC Social Sciences, they can progress to HND Social Sciences or a degree programme in a related subject.

Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

1   explain the nature of philosophy and philosophical debate
2   evaluate the established positions in a philosophical debate

Evidence requirements

Learners should provide written or oral evidence covering all unit outcomes, produced under open-book conditions. You should give the task at an appropriate point in the unit. Learners should submit their work for marking on a date that you have provided or agreed with them.

Written responses must consist of approximately 1,250 words, and oral responses must be 9 to 11 minutes in duration.

Learners' responses must include:

♦   a definition of what philosophy is, including identifying the main branches of the subject
♦   a brief explanation of the main tenets of the philosophical approach
♦   an examination of one traditional debate in philosophy, including:
  —   an explanation of established positions in the debate
  —   a contextualisation of the debate within an appropriate branch of philosophy
  —   an evaluation of the opposing positions by explaining strengths and weaknesses
  —   a valid and measured conclusion on the debate
♦   relevant, appropriate terminology

You can choose to use a mix of assessment methods across a group, depending on what is most suitable for each learner; for example, some could give a written response and others could give an oral response.

Learners must fully reference their assessment, using reliable sources appropriate for SCQF level 7. They must list all sources in a bibliography or reference list, in a recognised standard format, such as Harvard or APA.

The SCQF level of this unit provides additional context relating to the quality of evidence. Learners should:

♦   contribute information that is complex, accurate and relevant to its purpose and audience
♦   present ideas clearly and coherently
♦   use a structure that is appropriate to the purpose
♦   provide supporting evidence or references

Knowledge and skills

The following table shows the knowledge and skills covered by the unit outcomes:

Knowledge	Skills
Outcome 1 Learners should understand: ♦ the nature of philosophy and philosophical debate ♦ major branches of philosophy ♦ key arguments from established branches of philosophy	**Outcome 1** Learners can: ♦ identify and explain key arguments in established branches of philosophy and philosophical debate
Outcome 2 Learners should understand: ♦ how to contextualise a traditional debate within a branch of philosophy ♦ how to evaluate philosophical debates, with possible strengths and weaknesses of positions in a debate	**Outcome 2** Learners can: ♦ reach a valid and measured conclusion by evaluating the opposing positions in one debate

Meta-skills

Throughout the unit, learners develop meta-skills to enhance their employability in the social sciences sector.

The unit helps learners develop the meta-skills of self-management, social intelligence and innovation. Learners should develop meta-skills naturally throughout the unit. You should encourage learners to develop a minimum of one area in each of the three categories, but they do not need to cover all suggested subsections. The following suggestions may help shape delivery and assessment, and vary depending on the chosen topics and assessment method.

Self-management

This meta-skill includes:

♦ focusing: identifying and explaining key aspects of branches of philosophy and philosophical debate

♦ adapting: acquiring new knowledge and skills, as well as using different technologies to communicate and complete assessments; working through a virtual learning environment (VLE); reflecting on their performance

♦ integrity: engaging with different philosophical arguments and identifying their value in content and in context; exploring ethics in the context of philosophical debate; taking part in class discussions on ethics to support good working relationships

♦ initiative: reading and thinking about philosophical issues; reaching a considered conclusion using intuition and careful thought

Social intelligence

This meta-skill includes:

♦ communicating: debating information on philosophical viewpoints; explaining ideas; using digital technology to complete written and/or oral assessments to convey understanding of topics

♦ feeling: giving and taking time to discuss key debates and to understand other perspectives; respecting other viewpoints in discussions

Innovation

This meta-skill includes:

♦ curiosity: engaging with different viewpoints or interpretations of philosophical debate; questioning ideas and information relevant to philosophical debate

♦ sense-making: drawing valid and measured conclusions based on evaluation of evidence

♦ critical thinking: identifying, explaining, and evaluating debates and philosophical issues; formulating responses; reaching judgements through discussion and debate, and drawing conclusions based on evidence

Learners could also develop other meta-skills in the unit, depending on the learning and teaching activities you carry out. These include:

♦ social intelligence: collaborating, leading

♦ innovation: creativity

Literacies

Learners develop core skills in the following literacies:

Communication

Learners develop communication skills in formative and summative assessment. It is part of the evidence requirements for this unit to ensure learners convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent way, with academic references where appropriate. You can give learners opportunities to carry out oral presentations and engage in discussions.

Digital

Learners develop digital skills and computer literacy by using digital packages to produce assessments, and internet sources to research information on philosophical concepts, debates and issues. You can give them guidance on appropriate sources. Using a VLE also supports digital skills.

Learning for Sustainability

Learning for Sustainability aims to build the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and confidence needed to develop practices and take decisions that are compatible with a sustainable and equitable society. In this unit, there are opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of social sustainability while studying moral philosophy or aesthetics and philosophical debates in general, which may link to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The unit fits with the following UN Sustainable Development Goals:

16 Peace, justice and strong institutions: through exploring how philosophical themes and debates are applied worldwide across areas such as education, politics, health, science and religion in the present day.

The unit could fit with other UN Sustainable Development Goals, depending on the subjects discussed during delivery, as philosophy is concerned with dealing with fundamental questions about the world and our experience.

Delivery of unit

This unit is in the 'named social sciences' section of HNC Social Sciences. You can deliver it as part of the group award or as a stand-alone unit.

It is one of two philosophy units within HNC Social Sciences. This unit works well alongside Philosophy B: Engaging Arguments.

The amount of time you allocate to each outcome is at your discretion; however, you should consider both outcomes together when you deliver this unit. The overall unit delivery time is a notional 40 hours of contact time for delivery and assessment. We expect learners to commit to a further 40 hours of self-directed study.

Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Content and context for this unit

The unit aims to provide an interesting and engaging introduction to philosophy that serves as a foundation for subsequent philosophy units. Before considering a debate in detail it would be useful for learners to consider questions such as: What is philosophy? What do philosophers do? What are the key characteristics of a philosophical approach to an issue? You should expose learners to a variety of definitions of philosophy and identify key questions in a range of distinct branches of the subject.

Branches of philosophy include, but are not restricted to:

♦ epistemology
♦ metaphysics
♦ logic
♦ moral philosophy
♦ political philosophy

You can bring in others, depending on the interests of the class, such as:

♦ aesthetics
♦ ontology
♦ philosophy of science
♦ ethics
♦ philosophy of religion

Through group discussion and by examining the various brief examples of philosophical problems, learners discover that philosophy is concerned with:

♦ dealing with fundamental questions about the world and our experience
♦ defining clear terms
♦ drawing distinctions between similar terms
♦ arriving at a reasoned conclusion based on an analysis of arguments for and against opposing positions

Learners can then get a flavour of philosophical debate by investigating a question of relevance to the social sciences in more detail. You could choose debates from the following suggested areas:

Epistemology: Is certain knowledge possible?
Definitions of knowledge; sceptical arguments; rationalist responses, René Descartes; empiricist responses, David Hume; strengths and weaknesses of the major positions.

Metaphysics: Can we ever act freely?
Definitions of free action; libertarianism; hard determinism; compatibilism; strengths and weaknesses of the major positions.

The philosophy of science: How does science progress?
Empirical verification; problem of induction; Karl Popper and falsification; Thomas Kuhn and paradigm shifts; strengths and weaknesses of the major positions.

Political philosophy: Are liberty and equality possible?
Definitions of political liberty; definitions of equality; John Rawls and fairness; Robert Nozick and rights; strengths and weaknesses of the major positions.

The choice of topics allows you to work within your area of expertise. It also gives learners the opportunity to explore philosophical issues and debates in an engaging and interesting format. You should teach at least two opposing positions in the unit to help learners demonstrate competence in the required knowledge and skills of the unit. Such opposing positions include John Rawls and Robert Nozick; rationalism and empiricism; hard determinism and libertarianism; and Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn.

Approaches to delivery

You should structure the learning and teaching programme to allow time for learners to develop meta-skills, and academic and other transferable skills. You should also allow for assessment practice within the notional hours suggested.

You can shape delivery and assessment to support learners to develop their academic skills, such as time management, multi-tasking ability, digital skills, essay-writing skills and questioning ability. You can design formative and summative activities and assessments that encourage learners to practise the skills they need to progress to the next level of study.

Learners can benefit from a varied and active learning approach, where they engage in supported, independent and collaborative learning. You should encourage learners to take a participative and practical approach. Delivery methods could include:

♦ demonstration
♦ tutorial question and answer sessions
♦ debate
♦ individual and group research tasks
♦ presenting findings
♦ VLE
♦ digital tools and social media
♦ film and visual images
♦ close reading of sources

It would be useful for learners to have access to a laptop or other digital device.

The section on meta-skills provides further guidance on incorporating different skills into delivery and evidence.

You should deliver the unit in a learner-centred manner and always encourage a questioning approach. In doing so, you engage learners and encourage them to think like social scientists and be analytical and enquiring, rather than passively accepting facts. Developing essential transferable skills also helps learners access further study and employment.

Guidance on the background and delivery of suggested topics

'Is certain knowledge possible?' — This question is the central focus of epistemology: the study of knowledge and how it is acquired. Philosophers have long argued over how we should define terms like 'knowledge' and 'certainty'. Sceptics have, since ancient times, doubted whether any knowledge can reach the levels required for certainty. Meanwhile rationalists and empiricists have debated whether we can gain knowledge from the mind alone (rationalism) or from sense experience (empiricism). You should relate this topic to contemporary debates in other social sciences, like sociology and psychology — in particular, the nature or nurture debate.

'Can we ever act freely?' — This question falls under the branch of philosophy known as metaphysics: the study of the ultimate nature of reality. Most humans have a psychological conviction that they can act freely, but the scientific law of determinism suggests that all events, including human actions, are caused. Hard determinists have taken this as evidence that free will is incompatible with determinism, but this has consequences for our conception of morality. Compatibilists argue, however, that it may be possible to be both free and determined at the same time, but only by redefining what we mean by a 'free act'. Psychologists are interested in this topic and recent neurological discoveries have further fuelled this debate.

'How does science progress?' — This question is one of a number in the philosophy of science. Most of us have several unexamined assumptions about the reliability of science and the nature of development and discovery in its various disciplines. Karl Popper, however, argued that science does not progress by a simple process of empirical verification and can never achieve certainty or arrive at the truth. Thomas Kuhn went even further by arguing that our long-held belief that modern science is superior to old science may be difficult to justify, since the paradigm shifts that scientific revolutions require make modern science incommensurable with past practices. Encourage learners to question the extent to which contemporary social science practice is scientific, as the topic explores the nature of science itself.

'Are liberty and equality compatible?' — This question is a long-standing dilemma in political philosophy. We all assume that that we are born free and equal, and the constitutions of many countries declare this fact. However, what is the nature of this political freedom and in what ways are we equal? Moreover, does the pursuit of equality mean we must sacrifice some freedoms? John Rawls and Robert Nozick have both written ground-breaking works investigating such questions, each from a different perspective. For Rawls, fairness is paramount but for Nozick, our individual liberty is sovereign. This debate strikes at the heart of the long-standing political antagonism between right and left wing ideologies which continues today.

Approaches to assessment

You can generate evidence using different types of assessment. The following are suggestions only. There may be other methods that would be more suitable for learners.

Learners can choose to submit their assessment evidence in any format that meets each outcome. We recommend that you assess the unit holistically, as that is best to reduce the learners' assessment burden. You can decide to use a portfolio approach with two or more assessment tasks issued at different times in the unit delivery, if that is better for your learners.

The assessment could take the form of an open-book essay question or a set of structured questions. Learners must provide a response of approximately 1,250 words, or an individual oral presentation or poster exhibition of 9 to 11 minutes in duration, or any other method that appropriately meets the evidence requirements. For example, learners could provide the evidence in the form of an individual blog or website, consisting of approximately 1,250 words.

You can choose to use a mix of methods across a group, as it may be more suitable for some learners to give a written response, and for others to use an oral method. Whichever method learners choose, they must be able to access notes, textbooks and other materials, as it is an open-book assessment.

If learners choose an oral method, we recommend that you record this in some form or provide assessor notes on the presentation for external verification purposes. Learners must show evidence of meeting all evidence requirements. Ideally, they would complete oral presentations or poster exhibitions individually. If a group presentation is used, individual learners must show coverage of all evidence requirements. To do this, they may need to provide an essay or additional responses to structured questions. Learners should submit their work for marking on a date that you have provided or agreed with them.

Learners can combine a poster exhibition with an oral presentation. The time across all evidence requirements covered would be 9 to 11 minutes in total. For example, if using a poster and an oral presentation, it would be 9 to 11 minutes for both together, not 9 to 11 minutes each.

You could combine this unit with Philosophy B: Engaging Arguments in an enhanced project combined assessment.

You should make learners aware of the importance of good judgement in selecting appropriate academic sources. You should encourage them to choose academic sources rather than generic search engines, to enable them to be more confident of information and better equipped to progress to SCQF level 8 units.

If learners are creating a blog or website for their assessment, it should not be in the public domain. Rather, it should be on an intranet or private area of your VLE to reduce the likelihood of plagiarism.

Authenticating learners' work is essential. You could collect notes or visual presentation materials from learners as further evidence of meeting SCQF level 7 in the presentation. You

should monitor learners' progress throughout to authenticate submitted work. Where possible, you should use plagiarism-detection software.

It is important that learners' responses to the assessment are at SCQF level 7.

Opportunities for e-assessment

Assessment that is supported by ICT, such as e-testing or the use of e-portfolios or social software, may be appropriate for some assessments in this unit.

If your centre wants to use e-assessment, you must ensure that you apply the national standard to all evidence and that conditions of assessment (as specified in the evidence requirements) are met, regardless of the mode of gathering evidence.

Equality and inclusion

This unit is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

You should take into account the needs of individual learners when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and/or those with additional support needs is available on the assessment arrangements web page: www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements.

Information for learners

Philosophy A: Knowledge and Truth (SCQF level 7)

This information explains:

♦ what the unit is about
♦ what you should know or be able to do before you start
♦ what you need to do during the unit
♦ opportunities for further learning and employment

Unit information

This unit introduces you to the study of philosophy by presenting the key features of the philosophical approach, the main branches of philosophy, some key arguments and philosophical debates. You learn that philosophy is concerned with fundamental questions about the world and our experience. Before you start the unit, you should have good communication skills and an interest in philosophy. It would also be helpful to have some basic digital skills.

During the unit, you learn to define and explain philosophical arguments by studying a variety of philosophical areas and focusing on one traditional philosophical debate.

You also learn how to put the debate into context by examining opposing viewpoints and then drawing a conclusion based on your evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the positions.

On completing the unit, you are able to:

1 explain the nature of philosophy and philosophical debate
2 evaluate the established positions in a philosophical debate

You are assessed using an open-book assessment covering both unit outcomes. This means that you have access to materials such as textbooks, notes and your VLE. You can give your response in writing or orally. If your response is written, it must be approximately 1,250 words, and if it is oral, it must be between 9 and 11 minutes long.

During the unit, you develop academic skills such as time management, multi-tasking ability, digital skills, essay-writing skills and questioning ability.

You also develop key literacies such as communication. You learn to convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent way, with references where appropriate. Your lecturer may also use oral presentations and discussions to help you improve your communication skills. You develop digital skills and computer literacy by using digital packages to complete assessments, and internet sources to research information on branches of philosophy, philosophers and philosophical debates.

The unit can support learning in other related units, such as Philosophy B: Engaging Arguments. You may be able to study HND Social Sciences or a degree programme in a related subject if you study the unit as part of HNC Social Sciences.

Meta-skills

Throughout the unit, you develop meta-skills to enhance your employability in the social sciences sector.

Meta-skills include self-management, social intelligence and innovation.

You develop these naturally as you take part in the learning and teaching activities and produce assessment responses. Improving meta-skills, such as organising your time (self-management) and communicating ideas clearly (social intelligence), is useful for current and future study, and employment.

Administrative information

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Superclass: DE

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	♦ Removed reference to the requirement to use holistic assessment in 'Evidence requirements', and in 'Information for learners'. ♦ In 'Approaches to assessment' additional words that a holistic or portfolio approach can be used were added. Also, additional information allowing group presentations was added.	May 2024

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