



## Higher National Unit Specification

### General information

**Unit title:** Philosophy A: An Introduction to Philosophical Debate  
(SCQF level 7)

**Unit code:** FK81 34

**Superclass:** DE

**Publication date:** April 2018

**Source:** Scottish Qualifications Authority

**Version:** 01

### Unit purpose

This unit is designed to provide an introduction to philosophy and philosophical debate. The unit will allow learners to identify the key features of the philosophical approach through the examination of a key traditional debate in philosophy. The unit will explore the major positions that have been taken up in this debate which learners will then evaluate on the way to developing their own personal response. The unit is intended for learners who have a general interest in philosophical issues and will develop a range of philosophical skills necessary for further study in the subject.

### Outcomes

On successful completion of the unit the learner will be able to:

- 1 Explain the nature of philosophy and philosophical debate.
- 2 Evaluate the major positions in a philosophical debate.

### Credit points and level

1 Higher National Unit credit(s) at SCQF level 7: (8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7)

### Recommended entry to the unit

Learners should possess good communication skills. Other knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the unit would also be beneficial.

## **Higher National Unit Specification: General information (cont)**

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(SCQF level 7)

The previous study of Philosophy through units and National Qualifications at SCQF levels 5 or 6, or other similar qualifications, is desirable but not essential.

Ultimately, entry is at the discretion of the centre.

### **Core Skills**

Opportunities to develop aspects of Core Skills are highlighted in the support notes for this unit specification.

There is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skill components in this unit.

### **Context for delivery**

If this unit is delivered as part of a group award, it is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within the subject area of the group award to which it contributes.

This unit is in the optional section of the HNC/D Social Sciences awards. It can also be offered as a stand-alone unit.

### **Equality and inclusion**

This unit specification has been designed to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment. The individual needs of learners should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Further advice can be found on our website [www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements](http://www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements)

## Higher National Unit Specification: Statement of standards

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(SCQF level 7)

Acceptable performance in this unit will be the satisfactory achievement of the standards set out in this part of the unit specification. All sections of the statement of standards are mandatory and cannot be altered without reference to SQA.

### Outcome 1

Explain the nature of philosophy and philosophical debate.

#### Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Definitions of philosophy
- ◆ Major branches of philosophy
- ◆ The nature of philosophical debate: search for precise definitions; identifying the key arguments for and against an issue; evaluating arguments; drawing conclusions

Note: Areas of Philosophy include Epistemology; Metaphysics; Logic; Moral Philosophy; Political Philosophy

### Outcome 2

Evaluate the major positions in a philosophical debate.

#### Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Contextualising the debate within a branch of philosophy
- ◆ The major positions in the debate
- ◆ The possible strengths and weaknesses of the positions
- ◆ Drawing a personal conclusion on the debate

#### Evidence requirements for this unit

Learners will need to provide evidence to demonstrate their knowledge and/or skills across all outcomes by showing that they can:

- ◆ apply knowledge and skills to a philosophical debate (suggested debates can be found in the *Guidance on the Content and Context Section*)

The response to the task set should include:

- ◆ Defining what philosophy is by identifying the main branches of the subject and the chief aspects of a philosophical approach
- ◆ Exemplifying this approach by an examination of one traditional debate in philosophy
- ◆ Contextualising the debate within an appropriate branch of philosophy
- ◆ Using appropriate philosophical terminology relevant to the debate
- ◆ Explaining the major positions taken in the debate
- ◆ Evaluating these responses in terms of possible strengths and weaknesses
- ◆ Drawing a personal conclusion

## Higher National Unit Specification: Statement of standards

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This unit will be holistically assessed by a single open-book instrument of assessment covering all unit outcomes. Learners should be given the task at an appropriate point of delivery of the unit.

In response to the task set, learners must convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent form. A written response should be 1,500 words approximately; an oral response should be 10–12 minutes in duration. Regardless of the assessment method chosen, the learner must submit a bibliography presented in a standard referencing format, such as Harvard.



## Higher National Unit Support Notes

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(SCQF level 7)

Unit support notes are offered as guidance and are not mandatory.

While the exact time allocated to this unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 40 hours.

### Guidance on the content and context for this unit

This is one of a suite of units that covers Philosophy within HNC/D Social Sciences Group Awards. This unit prepares learners for *Philosophy B: Classic Texts in Philosophy*. The unit can be taught as a free-standing unit or as part of the HNC/D Social Sciences Group Awards.

The aim of this unit is to provide an interesting and engaging introduction to philosophy that will serve 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?

Learners should be exposed to a variety of definitions of philosophy and identify key questions in a range of distinct branches of the subject. Areas of philosophy may include Epistemology; Metaphysics; Logic; Moral Philosophy; Political Philosophy; however, centres are at liberty to bring in others such as Aesthetics or the Philosophy of Religion depending on the interests of the class. Through group discussion and by examining various brief examples of philosophical problems, it should emerge that philosophy is concerned with dealing with fundamental questions about the world and our experience; defining terms clearly; drawing careful distinctions between similar terms; and arriving at a reasoned conclusion on an issue based on an analysis of the 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 generally in more detail.

Centres could choose debates from the following suggested areas:

#### **Epistemology: Is certain knowledge possible?**

Definitions of knowledge; sceptical arguments; rationalist responses; empiricist responses; 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.

## Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

**Unit title:** Philosophy A: An Introduction to Philosophical Debate  
(SCQF level 7)

### **The Philosophy of Science: How does science progress?**

Empirical verification; Problem of induction; Popper and falsificationism; Kuhn and paradigm shifts; strengths and weaknesses of the major positions.

### **Political Philosophy: Are liberty and equality compatible?**

Definitions of political liberty; definitions of equality; Rawls and fairness; Nozick and rights; strengths and weaknesses of the major positions.

Assessors can therefore play to their strengths, depending on their academic background and interests. These questions serve as a starting point for exploring well known philosophical debates which may give rise to further related questions. Centres should ensure that at least two opposing positions are taught in the unit to serve as a vehicle for demonstrating competence in the required knowledge and skills of the unit eg, Rawls and Nozick; Rationalism and Empiricism; Hard Determinism and Libertarianism, etc.

Some guidance on the background of the suggested topics is given below.

**‘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 while rationalists and empiricists have debated whether it can be gained from the mind alone (rationalism) or from sense experience (empiricism). This topic relates to contemporary debates in other social sciences like sociology and psychology, in particular the nature/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 freewill is incompatible with determinism but this has consequences for our conception of morality. Compatibilists argue however 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’. This topic is also of interest to psychologists 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 a number of 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 may be difficult to justify since the paradigm shifts that scientific revolutions require make modern science incommensurable with past practices. This topic explores the nature of science itself and forces us to question the extent to which contemporary social science practice is scientific.

## Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

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(SCQF level 7)

**‘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? Rawls and 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 the right and left wings ideologies which continue to the present day.

### Guidance on approaches to delivery of this unit

The delivery of this unit should be learner-centred, and the lecturer should ensure that teaching methods are employed that will fully engage all learners with the topic.

Centres should structure the teaching programme to allow time for development of Core Skills and other transferable skills and for assessment practice within the notional hours suggested.

### Guidance on approaches to assessment of this unit

Evidence can be generated using different types of assessment. The following are suggestions only. There may be other methods that would be more suitable to learners.

This assessment could take the form of an open-book essay *or* structured questions with an expected learner response of approximately 1,500 words *or* an individual oral presentation *or* a poster exhibition with expected learner’s response of 10–12 minutes in presentation *or* explanation of a poster *or* any other method that is appropriate to meet the evidence requirements. Learners could also provide evidence requirements in the form of an individual blog or creation of a website, with approximately 1,500 words.

NB: It is important that language used in the assessment instrument reflects SCQF level 7 in each type of task.

Centres are reminded that prior verification of centre-devised assessments would help to ensure that the national standard is being met. Where learners experience a range of assessment methods, this helps them to develop different skills that should be transferable to work or further and higher education.

Centres should design an appropriate assessment instrument based on a method that is suitable in allowing learners to meet the evidence requirements. This can be written or oral (depending on the needs of the learners and the organisational aspects for the centre in choosing particular methods). If an oral method is chosen, it is recommended that centres record this (either by DVD or digital recorder, etc) or provide assessor notes on the presentation for external verification purposes. Oral presentations (or poster exhibitions) must be done individually as each learner has to show evidence of meeting all evidence requirements, so a group presentation would not be suitable.

## Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

**Unit title:** Philosophy A: An Introduction to Philosophical Debate  
(SCQF level 7)

Tutors should make learners aware of the importance of the judicious selection of appropriate academic sources in researching the topics. They should be encouraged to choose academic sources rather than generic search engines, to enable them to be more confident of information and to be more equipped to progress to SCQF level 8 units or further study.

If the centre is using a blog or creation of a website as the way of gathering evidence, this should not be in the public domain. Rather it should be on an Intranet or private area of a VLE to reduce the likelihood of plagiarism. Authentication of the learner's work is essential. It would be helpful to collect notes or PPT presentation materials from the learner as further evidence of meeting SCQF level 7 in the presentation.

A centre can choose to use a mixture of methods across a cohort, as it may be more suitable for some learners to give a written response and for others to use an oral method or to create a blog, etc. It is possible to combine the poster exhibition with an oral presentation, where, for example, a learner may produce a detailed poster of the nature of philosophical debate and would cover the chosen debate in an oral presentation using PPT or a mind map as a visual aid. The time across all evidence requirements covered would be 10–12 minutes (not 10–12 minutes each for the poster and for the oral presentation, but rather combining both in the time). They should also be done on the same occasion. Whichever method is chosen the learners should be allowed access to notes, text books or other materials, as the assessment must be conducted open-book.

Centres should make sure they can authenticate a learner's work. This may be done by questioning a learner about their work, by seeing drafts of work under construction, by having partial write-up in presence of assessor or by using an anti-plagiarism tool, such as Turnitin or SafeAssign, which checks internet sites.

Remediation should be done by a review of the original work. Learners should be asked to hand in a complete piece of work, with amendments incorporated in the appropriate context, rather than a large add-on at the end, or asked to fully rewrite their work to a prescribed format if it did not meet requirements. Oral clarification could be used for minor omissions or to clarify minor detail. If it is thought appropriate that a learner tackle a different topic or question, then that new submission would count as a reassessment.

In oral work, learners can be questioned by the assessor at the end of their presentation or explanation, where minor omissions occur, or where clarity is required. This would help to reduce the need for reassessment. However, where more work is required to meet the evidence requirements (eg, where the quality of evidence is poor in a presentation) another presentation of the same duration, on the same topic or question as the original would be required. Only where a different topic or question is attempted would this be classed as reassessment.

## Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

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(SCQF level 7)

### Opportunities for e-assessment

E-assessment may be appropriate for some assessments in this unit. By e-assessment we mean assessment which is supported by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), such as e-testing or the use of e-portfolios or social software. Centres which wish to use e-assessment must ensure that the national standard is applied to all learner evidence and that conditions of assessment as specified in the evidence requirements are met, regardless of the mode of gathering evidence. The most up-to-date guidance on the use of e-assessment to support SQA's qualifications is available at [www.sqa.org.uk/e-assessment](http://www.sqa.org.uk/e-assessment).

### Opportunities for developing Core and other essential skills

The delivery and assessment of this unit may contribute towards the development of Core Skills of *Communication* at SCQF level 6 and *Information and Communication Technology* at SCQF level 5 in this unit. It can also support the development of other transferable skills, such as, essay writing, referencing, citation and bibliography skills and thinking, analytical and critical skills.

It is possible to develop **Communication at SCQF level 6** if the assessment takes the form of an essay or oral presentation. **For written communication at SCQF level 6 the skill is: produce well-structured written communication on complex topics.** To develop this skill learners can be encouraged in both formative and summative assessment to present all essential ideas/information and supporting detail in a logical and effective order; use a structure that is organised and use paragraphing to make distinctions between facts, opinions, arguments and conclusion, use a format, layout, and word choice which are appropriate to the content and context, and use spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and sentence structures which are consistently accurate.

The learners could be tasked with producing a written communication which presents, analyses, and evaluates a substantial body of information. These skills can be developed through formative activities, such as shorter essays on philosophical debates, without being formally assessed for certification of Core Skill. The topic of describing and evaluating a philosophical debate is complex, so should easily fit with SCQF level 6.

It is important to develop essay-writing skills for learners' future progression. In doing this, learners should also be encouraged to use an appropriate referencing method, such as Harvard, for any formative or summative essays. Referencing, citation and bibliography skills are best developed using the vehicle of formative essay writing.

**For Oral Communication at SCQF level 6 the skill is: produce and respond to oral communication on a complex topic.** In both formative and summative assessment, the learner could be encouraged to give a detailed oral presentation on a philosophical debate, which would be a complex topic. The specific skills of using an appropriate level of vocabulary, consistent spoken language structures and formality, conveying all essential information, opinions, or ideas with supporting detail accurately and coherently, and with varied emphasis as appropriate and responding to others, taking account of their contributions would be developed in an oral presentation or in an oral explanation of a poster exhibition. Although a summative assessment would require individual work and individual presentation, a formative assessment could be constructed that would encourage learners to work in a small group, with a few people contributing to the presentation. This may allow a learner to experience the demands of oral presentation before choosing this as an option for summative assessment of the unit (if centre is able to give a choice).

## Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

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(SCQF level 7)

**For the Core Skill of *Information and Communication Technology* at SCQF level 5 the skills are: 'Accessing Information, use ICT independently, effectively, and responsibly to access information within a range of tasks' and 'Providing/Creating Information, use ICT independently, effectively, and responsibly to carry out a range of processing tasks'.** This unit can help to develop such skills by the use of mini formative presentations using PowerPoint or other ICT presentation tool that will also support the development of oral communication. A summative assessment using ICT presentation methods is also possible. Specific areas of accessing information using internet searches or VLE use and providing and creating information can be developed in such tasks. Creating a blog or a website for the summative assessment is another way in which this Core Skill can be developed. This could be used where learners (and their lecturer) have particular skills and interest in ICT.

Thinking, analytical and critical skills could be developed by posing questions at appropriate points in the delivery, enabling discussion and promoting the need for learners to take responsibility for learning by encouraging the development of research skills via the internet or using text books.

### Curriculum for Excellence

The Curriculum for Excellence aspires to place learners at the centre of the curriculum and develop their capacities as Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors. All four capacities will be developed throughout this unit.

This unit will develop the literacy and communication skills of the learners by way of formative and summative assessments. Independent learning is required throughout this unit, whilst the opportunity is available for group learning through formative tasks. The subject of philosophy demands independent thinking, and through reasoned evaluation encourages learners to reach satisfactory conclusions. Further opportunity is offered to develop technological skills by way of researching via the internet, the production of word documents, PowerPoint presentations, blogs and/or the creation of a website. Collectively these skills contribute towards the creation of a **Successful Learner**.

Time management skills should improve during the delivery of this unit, as should the ability to relate to others through formative tasks. The topics in *Philosophy A* should allow the learner to develop their own thoughts of the world around them, and they will be given the opportunity to express these views within the classroom setting. This should lend to the emergence of a **Confident Individual**, particularly if they gain success in the achievement of the unit.

*Philosophy A* can also contribute to learners becoming **Responsible Citizens** by allowing the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of moral and political issues and giving learners the chance to formulate their own justifications for the views they hold.

Learners can become **Effective Contributors** to society by learning to work together effectively in teams within the class setting. This can be achieved through group-work where they can apply critical thinking within new contexts. In planning group tasks, evaluating arguments and presenting their findings, learners will also develop problem solving skills. Both Oral and Written Communication skills will also be developed. This can be achieved through written work, individual PowerPoint presentations, and the creation of blogs and websites.

All these skills can be developed within the unit.

## History of changes to unit

Version	Description of change	Date

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## General information for learners

### **Unit title:** Philosophy A: An Introduction to Philosophical Debate (SCQF level 7)

This section will help you decide whether this is the unit for you by explaining what the unit is about, what you should know or be able to do before you start, what you will need to do during the unit and opportunities for further learning and employment.

This unit aims to introduce you to the study of philosophy by examining the nature of philosophy itself and then examining one key philosophical debate in detail. Many philosophical debates are relevant to the study of the social sciences generally and connections will be made with other relevant subjects such as politics, psychology and sociology. You will study the major positions that have been taken up in response to these debates and the contribution of some key philosophers will be highlighted. You will be encouraged to develop an enquiring mind, with evaluative skills emphasised throughout.

At the end of the unit you will undertake an assessment that will focus on one of the debates you have studied. You will be given the task/question at an appropriate point in the delivery of the unit. The assessment may be a written essay of approximately 1,500 words or a set of structured questions with an expected response of approximately 1,500 words or an oral presentation of 10–12 minutes or a poster exhibition of 10–12 minutes' oral explanation or another method decided by your centre. Your centre will inform you of the chosen method, which will be *open-book*. This means that you will be allowed access to materials (eg, text books, notes, VLE).

As you progress through the unit material, you will be encouraged to develop the Core Skills of *Communication* at SCQF level 6; *Information and Communication Technology* at SCQF level 5 by the types of activities you will experience.

You will also be given opportunities throughout the unit to develop as a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor.