

Humanities Divisional Board

Approved at the Faculty Board meeting of 3 June 2021

Approved by Division 16 July 2021

Title of Programme/ Name of Regulation

Bachelor of Philosophy

Brief note about nature of change:

Deadline to request an additional subject for the list of approved subjects for the BPhil

Location of change

In *Examination Regulations 2021* ([2020-21, Bachelor of Philosophy \(ox.ac.uk\)](#))

Effective date

For students starting from MT 2021. For first examination from 2021-22.

Detail of change

^{1.6}3. Topics for the essays will be chosen by the candidates. Candidates may offer up to two essays on at most one subject not included in the list of approved subjects in the Graduate Student Handbook, provided that the distribution requirement above is met. Candidates wishing to offer an essay or essays on a subject not on the prescribed list must seek approval for the proposed subject from the Graduate Studies Committee in Philosophy *as soon as they decide they would like to offer it*, and in any case no later than ~~Wednesday~~Friday of Week 5 of the Trinity Term of the first year of their studies for registration for essays 3 and 4, and ~~Wednesday~~Friday of Week 5 of Michaelmas Term of their second year of study for registration for essays 5 and 6. Any such application must be supported by the relevant B.Phil Course Coordinator. Where a subject is approved by the Graduate Studies Committee in Philosophy, the Committee will assign it to one of Groups 1-3.

^{1.10}7. Candidates who fail up to two essays will be permitted to resubmit those essays at ~~one any of the two~~ subsequent essay ~~or thesis~~ submission dates during the first or second year of their studies, ~~or at the thesis submission date in their second year.~~ [...]

Explanatory Notes

Change to 1.6: Request by students to add an additional subject to the list of Approved Subjects for the BPhil are to be considered by the Week 6 meeting of the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) in Trinity Term (for registration of essays 3 and 4) and in Michaelmas Term (for registration of essays 5 and 6). As the agenda for the Week 6 GSC meeting

needs to be distributed by Friday of Week 5, it is vital that requests for additional subjects are received by the preceding Wednesday thereby allowing the administrators two days to do the necessary preparatory work (including identifying and approaching suitable assessors to mark the essays in this new subject) so that the request can be added to the GSC agenda with all required information. The outcome of the GSC consideration of such requests need to be communicated to the students promptly as students will only have one or two weeks to register for this new subject (via ARO), the deadline for which is Friday Week 7 of Trinity Term and Friday Week 8 of Michaelmas Term.

Change to 1.10: This proposal was approved by the 3 June 2021 GSC considering it carries several advantages for the students:

- Lack of Thesis Disruption: Due to regulation change the majority of failed essays will be resubmitted before the candidate starts work on their thesis, or at least before they embark on their final term. This will allow the candidate to fully concentrate on producing a high-quality thesis, without having to commit a portion of their time to (re)writing an essay alongside their thesis research. For those who have middling marks on their essays (including (at least one) fail mark), having a good thesis mark is vital for securing a place on a PhD or DPhil programme, so deviating attention away from the thesis should be avoided at all cost.
- Availability of Supervision Feedback: The candidate who needs to resit an essay may be in a position to use one of their remaining supervisions on the resit essay (as provided for by the current examination conventions). Where the re-writing takes place earlier on in the course, however, it would ensure that this supervision time can be taken from their remaining essay allowance, rather than running the risk of not having any supervision time available anymore or adversely impacting their supervision allocation for the thesis. Also, of course, revising essays for resubmission when the topic is still fresh in their minds should be an advantage; doing this several terms or even a year later may make it more difficult to recall the material as thoroughly.

Reduced chance of failing the overall BPhil: The examination conventions state that if a candidate fails a resit essay, they will not be permitted to submit further work towards the BPhil, and as a result will fail the degree (with or without receiving an MSt exit award). The trend for students to leave submission of their resit essays to coincide with their thesis submission has, on a few occasions in the past few years, led students to fail their resit essay (as all their concentration and effort goes towards their thesis write-up and the resit is an afterthought) resulting in the overall award of the MSt. This is an undesirable outcome for the student, both from an academic and financial point of view. Not only have they spent two years on the BPhil course and two full terms on their masterpiece (the thesis) only to be forced to take the MSt, but also, they will not have found out they failed their essay before paying full tuition fees for the last two terms. In bringing the submission deadline for the resit essay(s) forward, candidates who fail the degree due to not passing a resit, would be made aware of this sooner, and could save themselves a full term (or even two) of unnecessary (thesis) stress and fee liability.