



**SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENT
IN
PHILOSOPHY**

**Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council
University Grants Commission
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FOREWORD

The work in connection with the development of Subject Benchmark Statements was begun in August 2003 as a part of the overall quality assurance framework that supports academic standards and the furtherance and dissemination of good practice in Universities in Sri Lanka. Subject Benchmark Statements will support and promote quality and standards by:

- Providing universities with a common and explicit reference point for internal and external programme approval and review;
- Guiding and promoting curriculum development, especially in new departments and new universities, and in other institutions of higher education;
- Evolving over time to take account of changes and innovations that reflect subject development and new expectations;
- Providing an authoritative and widely recognized statement of expectations of what is expected of a graduate in a specific (or designated) subject area in a form readily accessible to students, employers and others with a stake in higher education;
- Providing a clear and transparent reference point for External Examiners;
- Assisting international comparison and competitiveness of higher education awards and student achievement.

SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENT

PHILOSOPHY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Subject Benchmark Statement – Scope and Purpose

Benchmark is a standard defining component for quality assurance in the university system. Subject benchmarks are the benchmarks defined for subjects of courses in a degree programme, which provides a means for the academic community to describe the programs in a specific subject.

The Subject Benchmarks provide:

- Academic staff and institutions with a framework for developing and specifying the intended learning outcomes of programs;
- Institutions with a minimum standard for the award of a degree in a subject area;
- Peer reviewers with a point of reference, among others, for making judgments about the appropriateness of academic standards within institutions in a pursuit of internal quality assurance;
- Professional and statutory bodies with academic and practitioner standards that should be expected of graduates.

Benchmarking academic standards may also provide information for:

- Government, Students, Employers, Funding Organizations, Institutions of Higher education and Others about the range of provision in particular subject/discipline area, the qualities developed in graduates, and the standards that would be expected of graduates in those areas;
- The public at large about the nature of higher education awards.

Benchmark for Philosophy;

This Benchmark Statement represents the general academic standards of a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy or with philosophy as a subject in Sri Lanka and provides general guidelines to the academic community engaged in teaching philosophy. This gives:

- a) The expected nature and characteristics of degrees in philosophy.
- b) The expected standards for the award of the degrees at different levels.
- c) The expected attributes and capabilities that the philosophy graduates should possess and
- d) The current and future needs of the country.

It is expected that this subject benchmark statement would ensure maintaining high standards and quality of the degree programs in philosophy in all national universities.

1.2 Nature and Extent of the Subject

Philosophy (The term literally means “love of wisdom”) can help us thread our way through life’s minefields, drawing on the wisdom of the past and the present following its roots deeply into many cultures and learning what people at other times and in other places have thought and done when confronted with the same puzzles and possibilities. Philosophy began when human’s curiosity and wonder caused them to ask the questions what are the things realities like? And how can we explain the process of change in things?

Philosophy seeks to understand and critically to question, ideas concerning the nature of reality, value and experience that play a pervasive role in understanding the world and us. Problematic concepts such as existence, reason, truth, knowledge which occur in every sphere of human enquiry. Others belong to particular areas of thought and practice, such as art culture and politics.

The problems studied in philosophy are classified under five divisions for purposes of systematization. It is not intended to be complete or final. They are Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics (Axiology), Logic and Aesthetics. Truth about the metaphysical nature of the universe; nature of time, space and the universe around, the functions of the mind, etc. fall under metaphysics. The nature and worthiness of knowledge, methods of knowledge, cause and effect relationships, the philosophers ask what is knowledge?. What is fact? What is truth? Are there objective truth fundamental questions about the nature and source of knowledge? etc., fall under epistemology; the philosophers ask what is morality? Are there any objectivity correct ethical values or are they all relative? Which ethical principles are the correct ones? Values, types of values, the nature of value-judgment, method of value orientation, etc., are discussed under ethics; the philosopher studies how we ought to think if we are to be rational and seeks to clarify the reasons for holding a beliefs, nature of thought, methods of thought analysis of validity, etc., fall under logic; the theory of beauty, relation between truth and beauty, the nature of aesthetic judgment etc., are discussed under aesthetics.

Furthermore the study of general philosophy comprise enquiry into ideas of the widest scope. Traditional problems in philosophy such as problems in metaphysics (god and soul) epistemology (means of knowledge, nature of knowledge) and ethics (concept of good, nature of moral discourse) will be taken for critical analysis. It is clear in the development process of philosophy, different philosophers’ in different eras have taken different topics as their subjects of studies for they were dominant in such periods particularly, we can observe philosophical problems related to language in contemporary era.

There are many parts of Philosophy. Two of the main parts of Philosophy are Social Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion. Still, world religions play a large role in Social Philosophy. The aim of Social Philosophy is to inquire into social values and its theories based on the human social relationship. Generally, the faith - based religions gives explanations about the world and the peoples living in it. It can be said that religion gives priority to Humanitarianism. Hence, when these two parts namely, Social Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion are taken into account, explanation of pragmatics of concepts behind the generation of a perfect society is

the case. In this context, it is helpful not only to explore how Social Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion co - mingle with society but also how it is related to truth and knowledge.

Another important part is political philosophy. The philosopher studies about the concept of state and asks what makes a government legitimate? What is equality and individual freedom? What are the limits of governmental authority?

The study of philosophy's own history includes the investigation of diverse traditions In the Sri Lankan Universities; the main focus of study is western philosophy. It also includes study of texts and traditions from outside the Western world, such as Indian, Buddhist and Islamic Philosophy or Philosophy of Sri Lankan societies. However, philosophy deals with first principles and final conclusions of all branches of knowledge.

Philosophy is a view of life. It gives a direction to life, offers a design for living. When man is caught in ambiguous situation, his thinking about morality, duty, justice, right, goodness, world and its management etc, is subjective. Its objectivity is arrived by the way of philosophy. The reasons are (i). That philosophy is created out of life's experience. (ii). That philosophy is capable enough to make explicit the logical nature of concepts concerned.

Currently, philosophy is taught as one of the subjects in two levels in the universities in Sri Lanka, viz. in 3-year general degree programs and 4-year special degree programs. In most universities, the subject is offered as courses with compulsory core courses and electives. Students in social sciences frequently share some courses with students of philosophy and this should not be inhibited by the constraints of any benchmark.

Graduates who read philosophy at either general level or special degree level, have potential to obtain employment in various capacities such as Teachers, Divisional Secretaries, Administrative Officers, Planning Officers, Social Work Officers, Management Assistants, or Counseling Assistants in government sector. Some graduates who completed special degree courses in philosophy had been absorbed in secondary and tertiary level Institutes of Education, NGOs and INGOs.

2. SUBJECT AIMS

The broad aims of a degree programme in philosophy are:

- The primary aim of a degree of philosophy is to give the students the knowledge of "being" or reality and utilize the awareness of Philosophy in pragmatic life.
- To provide an in-depth knowledge of the core principles of philosophy appropriate to the degree concerned: special degree in philosophy or general degree with philosophy as one of the subject;
- To enable students to understand the nature, scope, objectives, concepts of philosophy and theories of philosophy and the application of philosophical concepts, theories and approaches to the contemporary issues.
- Understanding the nature of scientific knowledge and the logical base of scientific theories and the methodologies that were used by the philosopher to enunciate the conceptual base of scientific expressions.

- To provide student with basic knowledge in the main areas of philosophy.
- To improve student's critical thinking, analytical thinking towards problem solving.
- To develop the ability to use formal techniques.
- To develop the ability to undertake independent research.
- To increase student's awareness of ethical issues in medicine, science and information technology and how to emphasize the protection of human values in all the contemporary issues in the said fields.
- To enable the student to understand the Philosophy of their own areas and people.
- To develop in students a range of transferable skill that will be of value in employment and self-employment.

3. SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

To achieve these aims any degree programme in philosophy or including philosophy as a subject normally should comprise the following areas:

- The ideas and arguments of some of the major philosophers in the history of the subject, encountered in their own writings.
- Some central theories and arguments in the fields of logic, metaphysics, religion, epistemology, and philosophy of mind, broadly understood.
- Some central theories and arguments in the fields of moral, mental, political, or social philosophy broadly understood.
- Awareness of some major issues currently at the frontiers of philosophical debate and research.

This may constitute the core curriculum, which provides the essential knowledge and the course development units of respective universities taking into account the nature and objectives of the degree programme should decide understanding and the depth of the subject matter.

Students are expected to achieve the following:

- Knowledge and understanding of fundamentals, /major concepts, principle and theories of philosophy.
- Clarity and rigour in the critical assessment of arguments presented in such texts.
- The ability to use and criticize specialize philosophical terminology.
- The ability to abstract and analyze arguments and to identify flaws in them, such as false premises and invalids reasoning.
- Methods of acquiring, interpreting and analyzing information related to philosophy.
- The ability to apply core philosophy theories to actual problems and issues.
- The ability to consider unfamiliar ideas and ways of thinking, and to examine critically pre- suppositions and method within the discipline itself.
- The ability to adopt philosophical fundamentals to accommodate legal requirements.

4. SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

There is a range of skills and attitudes which a philosophy graduate will have acquired during the programme of study. These are:

- Generic Skills
- Graduate or Key Skills
- Attitudes

4.1 Generic Skills

- The ability to listen attentively to complex presentations.
- The ability to read carefully and use appropriate literature on the subject with a full and critical understanding.
- The ability to use libraries effectively.
- Capacity to give a clear and accurate account of the subject.
- Critical and analytical skills.
- Ability to critical thinking and problem solving.
- Ability to apply a variety of methods of study in investigational recording and analyzing material.
- The ability to present in oral form and written form, a clear and well structured assessment of relevant considerations.

4.2 Graduate or Key Skills

- Intellectual skills to analytical interpretation of data, information and texts, abstracting and synthesizing information, critical evaluation of evidence and decision making development of reasoned arguments, problem solving, and assessment of contrasting theories, explanations and concepts.
- Practical skills – write reports effectively and apply information and communication technology.
- A flexibility, adaptability, and creativity mind to study and work.
- Motivation to work and investigate.
- Ability to work independently and as well as with others.
- Intellectual integrity and interest in lifelong learning.
- Awareness of responsibility as a local, national, and international citizen.

4.3 Attitudes

The attitudes gained in the study of Applied Philosophy is the view of ethical and psychological issues in various practices, such as issues in legal practices, media and communication, decoding advertisement, suicide, violence and terrorism, sex and sexual harassments, child rights and child abuses, abortion etc.

5. TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

Teaching and learning strategies in philosophy should enable the students to acquire subject knowledge and skills systematically and encouraging them to change study methods of a teacher -centered to student-centered so that students become increasingly responsible for their own learning as the programs advance.

The teaching and learning strategies in philosophy should also provide guidance and direction to the student towards developing the ability to conduct research and report the findings in a scientific manner.

The teaching and learning strategies in philosophy is to guide the student to a way of life, offers a design for living and gives a comprehensive picture of the universe. In order to achieve the above objectives, a wide variety of teaching and learning methods can be adopted:

- Lectures.
- At the end of lectures list of reference is given to student.
- Tutorials and assignments.
- Seminars/discussion/workshops
- Problem- based learning
- Projects/ field work
- The writing of a substantial dissertation, under a greater or lesser degree of supervision.
- Self- directed study and set assignments.
- Distance learning approaches to include print material, electronic multimedia, videos, broadcasting.
- Email discussion groups.
- Other student – led discussion groups.

The above list is not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive. These methods will differ from programme to programme and should be appropriate to the institution, the course, the students and availability of resources.

6. ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Assessment of philosophy aims to test both the following:

- Knowledge and understanding of corpus of material.
- The ability to reason rigorously, critically, creatively and autonomously.
- Various methods and combination of methods can be used for this purpose, the principal ones being:
 - Formal examination: closed and /or open book;
 - Continuous assessment;
 - Portfolios of coursework;
 - Seminar presentation;
 - Dissertation, essays;
 - Viva voce examination;
 - Case studies;
 - Tutorials/classroom test;
 - Written work (critical textbook reviews)

7. MAINTAINING STANDARDS

The standards of student achievement reflect the knowledge and understanding of philosophy and its various techniques and methods together with a profile of skills, which students should attain. The achievement of the knowledge and understanding described in this statement is monitored by such measures as:

- Moderation of question papers
- Second marking of answer scripts
- Assessment by external examiners
- Periodic subject review
- Interaction between the course teachers and professional societies

8. STUDENTS ATTAINMENT AND BENCHMARK LEVEL (STANDARD)

The achievement expected of graduates in philosophy relate to generic and subject's specific knowledge, understanding and skills. The two levels of achievements identified are as follows:

Threshold level: This is the minimum acceptable standard or benchmark, which is expected to be achieved by a graduate who obtains a second-class lower division or pass.

Good level: This level describes the standard or benchmark which is expected to be achieved by a graduate who obtains a second – class upper division or first class.

The benchmark levels proposed below are both a special degree and general degree where philosophy is one of the subjects.

(a) Threshold Level

Knowledge and Understanding

- Familiarity with the writing of some major philosophers.
- Familiarity with some central theories and arguments in the fields of logic, metaphysics, epistemology, arts and aesthetics or philosophy of mind, broadly understood.
- Familiarity with some central theories and arguments in the field of moral, political or social philosophy, broadly understood.
- Demonstrate basic understanding of the central concepts and themes in Indian philosophy.
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of methodology of natural sciences.
- Some appreciation of the wide range of techniques and methods of philosophical reasoning.
- Know how philosophy helps to understand each other, by providing conceptual tools and encouraging listening, through exchange of views.
- Know how to relate philosophy to one's daily life and social issues.

General Philosophical Skills:-

- Ability to identify underlying issues in various philosophical debates.
- To grasp some philosophical problems arisen in history of philosophy (mentioning arguments for or against proposed solutions)
- Ability to understand the validity of standard arguments.
- Familiarity with the specialized philosophical terminology.
- Understanding of the importance of interpretations of various texts.
- Awareness of the nature of sound argument and logical fallacies.
- Appreciation of how generalization can be supported or weakened by detailed discussion.

(b) Good Level

Knowledge and Understanding

- Knowledge of the theories and arguments of some of the major philosophers, encountered in their own writings and awareness of important areas of interpretative controversy concerning the major philosophers.
- A clear grasp of some central theories and arguments in the fields of logic, metaphysics, epistemology, arts and aesthetic or philosophy of mind, (in-depth understanding).
- A clear grasp of some central theories and arguments in the fields of moral, political or social philosophy, understood in-depth.
- Demonstrate in-depth understanding of the central concepts and themes in Indian philosophy.
- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge in methodologies of natural sciences.
- Demonstrate ability in a range of appropriate techniques and methods relevant to research in philosophy.
- Know how to apply philosophy to one's daily life and social issues in a critical manner; and understand values and modern trends of Philosophy.

General Philosophical Skills

- Be able to identify the underlying issues in different kinds of philosophical debates.
- Be able to analyze the structure of complex and controversial problems, with an understanding of major strategies of reasoning designed to resolve such problems.
- Be able to judge the validity of standard arguments.
- Have the ability to use and understand specialized philosophical terminology.
- The ability to read and interpret texts in contexts.
- The ability to abstract, analyze and construct logical argument, employing the techniques of formal and informal methods of reasoning as appropriate, together with an ability to recognize any relevant fallacies.
- The ability to employ detailed argument to support or criticize generalizations in the light of specific implications.

9. ANNEX1. MEMBERS OF THE BENCHMARK GROUP

Dr. P. M. Jamahir	University of Peradeniya
Mr. M. Ravi	Eastern University of Sri Lanka
Ven. Prof. Kandegoda Wimaladhamma	University of Kelaniya
Prof. Daya Edirisinghe	University of Kelaniya
Prof. V. G. Kulasena	University of Kelaniya
Prof. Naganathan Gnanakumaran	University of Jaffna