

STUDENT HANDBOOK



PPE PRELIMS



PPE Prelims Handbook 2025-26

1. Foreword

1.1 Statement of Coverage

This Handbook applies to students starting the first year of PPE in Michaelmas Term 2025. The information in this Handbook may be different for students starting in other years.

1.2 Version

Version	Details	Date
Version 1.0	Handbook published	October 2025

1.3 Disclaimer

The Examination Regulations relating to this course are [the 'Preliminary Examination' regulations for PPE](#). If there is a conflict between information in this Handbook and the Examination Regulations then you should follow the Examination Regulations. If you have any concerns, please contact the PPE administrator (ppe.administrator@politics.ox.ac.uk).

The information in this Handbook is accurate as of October 2025. However it may be necessary for changes to be made in certain circumstances, as explained [here](#). If such changes are made the Departments will publish a new version of the Handbook together with a list of the changes and students will be informed.

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1.5 Welcome

As Chair of the PPE Committee, I'm pleased to be able to welcome you to PPE at Oxford. PPE is a strong and engaging multidisciplinary degree programme that has been in existence in Oxford for just over 100 years, and successful enough to have inspired many institutions all over the world to initiate similar programmes. We are very proud of our course here at Oxford which balances the empirical with the theoretical, and the practical with the abstract. Many students are drawn to one of the subjects when they apply only to find that it is another that ultimately interests them by the end of three years, although I hope you will find yourself drawing on elements of all three of the disciplines to which you will be exposed, both as you continue on with your studies, and in your chosen profession. PPE is unquestionably a challenging degree, but we believe strongly that the end result is a well-rounded intellect ready to face the future with an informed, critical and questioning mind. I very much hope you enjoy the next three years.

Professor Chris Bowdler
Chair of the PPE Committee
Associate Professor of Economics, Department of Economics
Macpherson Fellow and Tutor in Economics, Oriel College

1.5.1 Purpose of the Handbook

This Handbook contains useful information about the first year of PPE. Other useful sources of information are listed in the next section. The Handbook for the second and third year will be published at the beginning of your second year.

1.5.2 Other Key Sources of Information

On Department websites ([Philosophy](#), [Politics](#), [Economics](#)) you will find the contact details of academic and professional services staff. On Canvas you will find lecture lists, reading lists, and other course materials. You can access Canvas by clicking on 'current students' on the [PPE website](#).

In the [Examination Regulations](#) you will find the formal rules that govern your course choices and examinations for Prelims and Finals. The Examination Conventions set out how examined work will be marked and how the resulting marks will be used to arrive at a final result and classification of an award. You will be notified by email when the Conventions that apply to you become available, normally one term before the examination begins. Conventions from previous years are on PPE Canvas [here](#).

The Oxford Students website provides information about the services and resources available to you across the University, available [here](#). For general information and guidance and formal notification and explanation of the University's codes, regulations, policies and procedures, refer to the [University Student Handbook](#). For College regulations, refer to your College Handbook.

1.6 Useful Department Contacts

The Chair of the PPE committee or the PPE administrator can be contacted for questions about PPE as a whole. The Chair is Chris Bowdler (christopher.bowdler@economics.ox.ac.uk), the PPE Administrator is Laurence Boag-Matthews (ppe.administrator@politics.ox.ac.uk).

The Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) or the Undergraduate Studies Teams can be contacted for questions about each Department.

In Philosophy the DUS is Alex Kaiserman (alexander.kaiserman@philosophy.ox.ac.uk) and the Philosophy Undergraduate Studies Team can be reached at ug.admin@philosophy.ox.ac.uk.

In Politics the DUS is Paul Billingham (poldus@politics.ox.ac.uk) and the Politics Undergraduate Studies Team can be reached at ug.studies@politics.ox.ac.uk.

In Economics the DUS is Chris Bowdler (dus@economics.ox.ac.uk), the Undergraduate Operations Manager is Roya Stuart-Rees and the Academic Administrative Officer is Niamh Scully (both contactable via econundergrad@economics.ox.ac.uk).

The student representatives can be found on the Canvas site of each Department or by contacting the relevant undergraduate administrator. The disability contacts for each Department can be found [here](#).

1.7 Buildings, Locations, Maps and Access

Most of your lectures and classes will take place in the Examination Schools on the High Street. You are also likely to visit the Manor Road Building on Manor Road (which houses the Politics and Economics Departments and the Social Science Library) and the Stephen A. Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities in the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (which houses the Philosophy Faculty and Library). The [access guide](#) website provides interactive maps, floor plans, and access information for all University buildings.

1.8 Important Dates

The Oxford year is divided into three terms and three vacations. Within each term, a full term of eight weeks is the main teaching period. The dates of full term for this year are below.

Michaelmas Term 2025
Sunday 12 October – Saturday 6 December

Hilary Term 2026
Sunday 18 January – Saturday 14 March

Trinity Term 2026
Sunday 26 April – Saturday 20 June

[Future term dates.](#)

2. The Course Content and Structure

2.1 Overview

PPE seeks to bring together some of the most important approaches to understanding the social and human world. It fosters intellectual capacities that you can apply across all three disciplines and develops skills that you will find useful for a wide range of careers and activities after graduation. The degree is constructed on the belief that the parallel study of related disciplines significantly enhances your understanding of each discipline, bringing added dimensions of understanding and perspective.

The study of Philosophy develops analytical rigour and the ability to criticise and reason logically. It allows you to apply these skills to many contemporary and historical schools of

philosophical thought and to questions concerning how we acquire knowledge and how we make ethical recommendations.

The study of Politics gives you an understanding of the issues dividing societies and of the impact of political institutions on the form of social interest articulation and aggregation and on the character and effects of government policies. Among the big issues considered in Politics is why democracies emerge and may be consolidated or why states go to war or seek peace.

The study of Economics aims to give you an understanding of the workings of contemporary economies. This includes the study of decisions of households, the behaviour of firms, and the functioning of markets under competition and monopoly, as well as the role of government policies in many areas. The course also looks at the determination of national income and employment, monetary institutions, inflation and exchange rates, and considers issues in macroeconomic policy, focusing in part on the UK economy. The course also provides a thorough grounding in the statistical and econometric methods needed to understand empirical research.

The UK Quality Assurance Agency is the independent body responsible for monitoring, and advising on, standards and quality in UK higher education. It publishes Subject Benchmark Statements which set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject. The statements for Philosophy, Politics, and Economics can be found [here](#).

After successfully completing the PPE programme, which lasts three years, you will be awarded a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (FHEQ Level 6).

2.2 Course Aims

The course aims to enable PPE students to:

- acquire a good knowledge and understanding of the academic disciplines of Philosophy, Politics and Economics;
- engage and enhance their critical and analytical skills, to look for underlying principles, and to identify and analyse key concepts;
- develop the skill of independent thinking, good writing skills, a facility for independent learning and investigation and effective organisational skills;
- develop their ability to present their own critical understanding of the issues studied to tutors and peers, and to engage in dialogue with them;
- develop the ability to analyse topics in Philosophy, Politics and Economics on the basis of directed and independent reading, and to produce good quality essays and class assignments to deadline;
- promote skills of relevance to the continued professional development of philosophical understanding, and political and economic analysis, and which are transferable to a wide range of employment contexts and life experiences.

2.3 Intended Learning Outcomes

You will develop knowledge and understanding of:

- **Philosophy:** selected philosophical texts and basic philosophical issues, concepts, theories and arguments, and the elementary techniques of formal logic.

- **Politics:** key areas of the discipline, including empirical politics and political theory, as well as sociology and international relations.
- **Economics:** the basic principles of modern Economics, including appropriate mathematical techniques.

You will also develop knowledge and understanding, at a higher level, of at least two of the following:

- **Philosophy:** a higher-level knowledge and understanding of central philosophical texts of different ages and/or traditions, and of the interpretative controversies that surround them, and a deeper knowledge and understanding of philosophical issues, concepts, theories and arguments, and their application to a wide variety of different problems.
- **Politics:** a higher-level knowledge and understanding of the philosophical, theoretical, institutional, issue-based and methodological approaches to Politics and International Relations based on comparative study of societies, and higher-level knowledge of some of the principal sub-areas of the discipline, different methods of data analysis, and the issues currently at the frontiers of debate and research.
- **Economics:** a higher-level knowledge and understanding of the principles of modern Economics, including appropriate mathematical and statistical techniques, a knowledge and appreciation of economic data and of the applications of economic principles and reasoning to a variety of applied topics.

In addition, you will acquire and develop a particular set of intellectual, practical and transferable skills:

- **Intellectual skills:** the ability to gather, organise and deploy evidence, data and information from a wide variety of secondary and some primary sources; interpret such material with sensitivity to context; identify precisely the underlying issues in a wide variety of academic debates, and to distinguish relevant and irrelevant considerations; recognise the logical structure of an argument, and assess its validity, to assess critically the arguments presented by others, and by oneself, and to identify methodological errors, rhetorical devices, unexamined conventional wisdom, unnoticed assumptions, vagueness and superficiality; construct and articulate sound arguments with clarity and precision; engage in debate with others, to formulate and consider the best arguments for different views and to identify the weakest elements of the most persuasive views.
- **Practical skills:** the ability to listen attentively to complex presentations and identify the structure of the arguments presented; read with care a wide variety of written academic literature, and reflect clearly and critically on what is read; marshal a complex body of information in the form of essays, and to write well for a variety of audiences and in a variety of contexts; engage in oral discussion and argument with others, in a way that advances understanding of the problems at issue and the appropriate approaches and solutions to them.
- **Transferable skills:** the ability to find information, organise and deploy it; draw on such information, and thinking creatively, self-critically and independently, to consider and solve complex problems; apply the techniques and skills of philosophical argument to practical questions, including those arising in ethics and political life; apply concepts, theories and methods used in the study of Politics to the analysis of political ideas, institutions practices and issues; make strategic decisions with a sophisticated appreciation of the importance of costs, opportunities, expectations, outcomes, information and motivation; motivate oneself, to work well independently, with a strong sense of initiative and self-direction, and also with the ability to work constructively in

co-operation with others; communicate effectively and fluently in speech and writing; plan and organise the use of time effectively; where relevant, make appropriate use of numerical, statistical and computing skills.

2.4 Course Structure

The PPE degree is divided into two parts. The first year is designed to give you a foundation in all three branches. You take three compulsory papers: Introduction to Philosophy, Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Politics, and Introductory Economics.

In Philosophy you have to answer at least one question from each of the three sections into which the paper is divided: that is, Logic, General Philosophy, and Moral Philosophy. In Politics, you are required to answer questions both on the empirical practice of Politics and Political Theory. The Economics paper has a range of questions covering Microeconomics, Macroeconomics and Quantitative Methods, and students are required to answer at least one question from each of those three areas. In none of these cases are you forbidden to range over the whole syllabus; and your tutors may expect you to study more than the examination minimum. But if they do not, then you have early choices to make within the Prelims syllabus, with the help of advice from your tutors.

After the first year the choices are greater. First you must decide whether to select two branches from Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, which will make you 'bipartite', or to keep going with the third as well, making you 'tripartite'. This choice may be easy for you, if you were originally attracted to PPE for the sake of one or two of its branches and have not changed your priorities during your first year; or it may be difficult. If it is difficult, go by what interests you, provided that your tutors think you are suited to it; do not be too much affected by your marks in Prelims, which can differ greatly from Finals marks. A few subjects are available under more than one branch. Refer to the Examination Regulations for lists of subjects and the combinations in which they can be taken. You may also find it helpful to refer to the [course choice guide](#) on PPE Canvas. Links to further guidance on the choice of individual subjects within the three disciplines are given in Appendix A. An outline of the course structure is given in the table at the end of this section.

You will be exposed to current, research-informed teaching via lectures, classes and tutorials. You will be provided with experience of a research environment when you prepare work for classes and tutorials, and if you choose to do a thesis, supervised dissertation or project.

Outline course structure

Year 1			
Introduction to Philosophy		Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Politics	Introductory Economics
Examination: PPE Prelims			
Years 2 and 3			
Philosophy and Politics	Philosophy and Economics	Politics and Economics	Philosophy, Politics and Economics
Compulsory Core Philosophy: 103 plus one of 101, 102, 115, 116	Compulsory Core Philosophy: 103 plus one of 101, 102, 115, 116	Compulsory Core Politics: two of 201, 202, 203, 214, 220 Economics: at least three subjects*	Compulsory Core Philosophy: 103 plus one of 101, 102, 115, 116

Politics: two of 201, 202, 203, 214, 220	Economics: at least three subjects*		Politics: two of 201, 202, 203, 214, 220 Economics: at least two subjects*
<i>Optional</i> Four subjects chosen from those listed under Philosophy and Politics. At least one must be a subject in Philosophy; at least one must be a subject in Politics (other than a thesis/supervised dissertation); one but only one may be a subject in Economics, selected from the following list: 300, 301, 302, 311; and certain combinations may not be offered.	<i>Optional</i> Three subjects chosen from those listed under Philosophy and Economics. At least one must be a subject in Philosophy; one but only one may be a subject in Politics (see permitted list in Examination Regulations); and certain combinations may not be offered.	<i>Optional</i> Three subjects chosen from those listed under Politics and Economics. At least one must be a further subject in Politics (other than a thesis/supervised dissertation); one but only one may be a subject in Philosophy; and certain combinations of subjects may not be offered.	<i>Optional</i> Two subjects. Certain combinations of subjects may not be offered.
Examination: PPE Finals			

*See the Options Fair page on [Economics Canvas](#) for further information on what those courses have to be.

2.5 Syllabus

Detailed syllabus information (for example, dates and times of lectures or classes and reading lists) is given on the Canvas site of each Department.

3. Teaching and Learning

3.1 Organisation of teaching and learning

You will learn through a mixture of lectures, classes, and tutorials, with the last playing a particularly important part. The syllabus is set by the University, which grants degrees and therefore examines for them; but most teaching, apart from lectures and some classes, is arranged by your College. Tutorials are what differentiates Oxford from most universities in the world. The following brief notes should help you understand the importance of tutors, tutorials, and University lectures and classes for the course. All of these learning experiences will enhance your knowledge of the subjects being studied and contribute to your performance in the final examinations in which your degree classification is determined. If you have any issues with teaching or supervision, please raise these as soon as possible so that they can be addressed promptly. Details of who to contact are provided in the complaints and appeals section.

3.1.1 Tutors

Anyone to whom you go for tutorials or College classes counts as one of your tutors. For PPE Prelims there will be at least three of them, and over the whole course there may well be eight or ten. Some will be tutorial fellows or lecturers of your own College; some may be tutorial fellows or lecturers of other Colleges, or research fellows, or graduate students. The overall responsibility for giving or arranging your tuition will lie with tutorial fellows or lecturers of your own College, probably one in each of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics. Behind them stands the Senior Tutor, who must see that proper arrangements are made if one of these people is absent through illness or on leave.

Tuition for a term is normally arranged at the end of the preceding term; so, before going down each term you should make sure that you have received reading guidance and the names of your tutors for all the work you will be doing in the following term. (In the occasional cases in which the name of the tutor is not yet known you should make sure you have received an explanation and that you are confident that arrangements will be in place by the beginning of term.) Some tutors like to see their pupils at the end of the preceding term to make detailed arrangements. Colleges have different rules about when term 'begins'. The official start is Sunday of First Week of Full Term, but you will almost certainly be required back before then, and you should try to ensure that by the Sunday at the very latest you know who your tutors for the term will be, have met or corresponded with them, and have been set work and assigned tutorial times by them.

If you would like to receive tuition from a particular person in Oxford, ask the in-College tutor concerned; do not approach the person yourself, who cannot take you on without a request from your College. If you would like a change of tutor, say so if it is not embarrassing; otherwise do not just do nothing, but take the problem to someone else in your College, such as your College Adviser, the Senior Tutor, or even the head of College, if your difficulty is serious. Most such problems arise from a personality clash that has proved intractable; but since in a university of Oxford's size there are almost certain to be alternative tutors for most of your subjects, there is no point in putting up with a relationship that is impeding your academic progress. In these circumstances you can usually expect a change, but not necessarily to the particular tutor whom you would prefer.

In Economics, the provision of classes and tutorials for courses other than Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, and Quantitative Economics is coordinated by the Department. The academic office will publish on Canvas an allocation of students to tutors for the forthcoming term.

3.1.2 Tutorials, Classes, Collections and Data Labs

What you are expected to bring to a tutorial is knowledge of the reading that was set for it (or a variant on your own initiative if some book or article proves really inaccessible) and any written work demanded. What you have a right to expect is your tutor's presence and scholarly attention throughout the hour agreed, plus guidance, e.g. a reading list, for next time. Beyond that, styles differ, depending on how many students are sharing the tutorial, the nature of the topic, and above all the habits and personality of your tutor. You must not expect uniformity, and you will gain most if you succeed in adapting to differences.

You will nearly always have more than one tutorial a week. You should not normally be expected to write more than twelve tutorial essays a term. All written work for a tutorial will receive either written or oral comments. Tutors submit written reports on the term's work as

a whole, and you are entitled to see these. Many Colleges have timetabled sessions at which College tutors discuss reports with their students.

Work on a tutorial essay involves library searches, reading, thinking, and writing. It should occupy a minimum of three days. Read attentively and thoughtfully. As your reading progresses, think up a structure for your essay (but do not write an elaborate plan which you will not have time to execute). Expect to have to sort out your thoughts, both during and after reading. Use essays to develop an argument, not as places to store information. You will learn a lot if you share ideas with fellow students, and if you try out ideas in tutorial discussion. Remember that tutorials are not designed as a substitute for lectures, or for accumulating information, but to develop coherent verbal arguments and the capacity to think on one's feet, and to tackle specific difficulties and misunderstandings. This means that note-taking, if it occurs in a tutorial at all, should be very much incidental to the overriding dialogue. You should, however, leave time after the tutorial to make a record on paper of the discussion. Some tuition is by means of classes, a system specially suited to subjects in which written work is exercises rather than essays, for example econometrics or statistics. You have a right to expect that written work for a class will be returned to you with written or oral comments.

Most Colleges will require you to sit College examinations, so-called 'collections', before the start of each term. Their object is to test your comprehension of work already covered, and to give you practice in sitting examinations. Make sure at the end of each term that you know the times and subjects of next term's collections.

Oxford trains you as a writer to deadlines; so equip yourself with a writer's tools – a dictionary, such as the Concise Oxford Dictionary, and, unless you are very confident, a thesaurus and Modern English Usage.

As mentioned in the intended learning outcomes section, you are expected to develop the ability to make appropriate use of numerical, statistical, and computing skills. This ability is provided for in both the economics and politics components of the course. In economics, opportunities to develop these skills are provided in the Prelims Quantitative Methods lectures and classes and in the optional Finals papers 300 (Quantitative Economics) and 314 (Econometrics). In politics, the quantitative methods component of the first-year course provides students with experience of data manipulation, data handling, and data analysis. Data labs are a core element of the course. The labs provide you with an introduction to statistical software packages like STATA and R.

3.1.3 Lectures

While tutorials and classes will be mainly organised by your College, lectures are provided centrally by the University Departments and Faculties. All three Departments also publish [lecture lists](#), as well as provisional programmes for lectures for the remainder of the academic year, which will help you to plan for the future. Take your copy of the lists to your meetings with tutors: all of them will have advice on which lectures to attend. Remember that printed lecture lists often go out of date and the most up-to-date versions will be online.

Do not expect lectures on a subject always to coincide with the term in which you are writing essays on that subject. Important lectures may come a term or two before or after your tutorials, and in the case of some less popular options they may come in your second year and not be repeated in your third year: consult your tutors early about this risk.

The importance of lectures varies from subject to subject within PPE. Some lectures give a personal analysis of a book or a set of books. Others provide an authoritative view on a fast-developing subject, or an overview on a subject whose boundaries are not well recognised in the literature. It is perilous to miss the 'core' lectures on your chosen options: although in Oxford's system lecturers do not necessarily set the University examinations, they may be consulted by those who do. In the case of Economics courses the lectures define the syllabus and serve as the basis for the examination, and attendance at lectures is extremely important.

3.1.3.1 Recorded lectures

Each Department will have a policy on lecture recording. Some Departments make recordings available to all students, others make recordings available to students with an SSP (information about SSPs can be found [here](#)). Advice on how to make use of lecture recordings can be found [here](#).

The University policy on recording lectures can be found [here](#).

3.1.4 Teaching patterns

The recommended patterns of teaching for the first year of PPE are below. Lectures, classes, and tutorials typically last an hour.

Paper	Term	Faculty		College		Comments
		Lectures	Classes	Tutorials	Classes	
Philosophy						
For the First Public Examination, the Philosophy paper Introduction to Philosophy covers logic, moral philosophy and general philosophy. Students are required to take all elements. College teaching for the Philosophy paper may consist of 8 tutorials and 4 classes, 6 tutorials and 6 classes, or a different configuration, as arranged by your tutor.						
Introduction to Logic	MT	8		12 sessions*	*College teaching for the Philosophy paper may consist of 8 tutorials and 4 classes, 6 tutorials and 6 classes, or a different configuration, as arranged by your tutor.	
	HT					
	TT					
Moral Philosophy: Mill, Utilitarianism	MT	8				
	HT					
	TT					
General Philosophy	MT	8				
	HT					
	TT					

Paper	Term	Faculty		College		Comments
		Lectures	Classes	Tutorials	Classes	
Politics						
All three Politics courses listed below are compulsory, but only the first two are assessed in the First Public Examination (one exam paper covering both theory and practice).						
Introduction to the Theory of Politics	MT	8		4-8		
	HT	8				
	TT					
Introduction to the Practice of Politics	MT	14-16		6-10		
	HT	14-16				
	TT					
Political Analysis	MT					
	HT	8	4			
	TT					
Economics						
Each of the Economics courses listed below are compulsory for the First Public Examination (one paper covering Microeconomics, Macroeconomics and Quantitative Methods).						
Introduction to Microeconomics	MT	20		7		Introductory Microeconomics and mathematics (20 lectures): An additional course of 8 hours of classes is provided for students who have not previously studied mathematics beyond GCSE level.
	HT					
	TT					
Introduction to Macroeconomics	MT					
	HT	18		6		
	TT					
Quantitative Methods	MT, HT	12		3		

3.2 Expectations of study and student workload

UK degree courses are among the shortest in the world. They hold their own in international competition only because they are full-time courses, covering vacation as well as term. This is perhaps particularly true of Oxford, where the eight-week terms (technically called Full Terms) occupy less than half the year.

Vacations have to include holiday time; and everyone recognises that for very many students they also have to include money-earning time. Please see [the University's guidance on paid](#)

[work](#). Nevertheless, vacation study is vital, and students are responsible for their own academic progress.

You are said to 'read' for an Oxford degree, and PPE is certainly a reading course: its 'study' is mainly the study of material obtained from books and other documents. In term you will mostly rush from one article or chapter to another, pick their bones, and write out your reactions. There are typically six to eight lectures, and two tutorials (or one tutorial and one class) a week.

Vacations are the time for less hectic attention to complete books. Tutorials break a subject up; vacations allow consolidation. They give depth and time for serious thought. They are also particularly important for reading set or core texts.

4. Assessment

4.1 Assessment Structure

There are two University examinations for PPE: The Preliminary Examination ('Prelims'), normally taken at the end of your first year; and The Final Honour School ('Finals'), normally taken at the end of your third year. Prelims consist of three subjects, Finals of eight. The structure, types and weighting of assessments are set out in the Examination Regulations and the Examination Conventions.

4.2 Feedback on learning and assessment

The mechanisms for providing you with feedback on your learning and assessment exist mostly at the College level. Each PPE undergraduate has at least two and sometimes more meetings each week with a College tutor. At least one of these meetings will be a tutorial focused on either the discussion of the student's reading and of an essay completed by the student before the tutorial, or on the student's answers to worksheet exercises. Feedback is given both in written comments on the essay or worksheet and verbally in the tutorial. In addition, students normally sit practice examinations (known as 'collections') in each paper at the start of the term following the tutorials which are marked and returned with comments.

Feedback on your progress is also given termly through individual reports provided through the College reporting system, TMS. The reports are discussed in a termly meeting with your College tutors and/or academic officers of your College. Problems that arise at other times are dealt with by College tutors and other College officers. Most Colleges have special procedures to deal with academic under-performance or issues concerning fitness to study.

Feedback on your Prelims and Finals is given via marks and generic feedback on cohort performance through examiners' reports.

4.3 Examination Conventions

Examination Conventions are the formal record of the specific assessment standards for the course or courses to which they apply. They set out how your examined work will be marked and how the resulting marks will be used to arrive at a final result and classification of your award. They include information on: marking scales, marking and classification criteria, scaling of marks, progression, resits, use of viva voce examinations, penalties for late submission, and penalties for over-length work.

Examination Conventions are published at least one term before the examination takes place, on the exams page of PPE Canvas. You will be notified by email when they are available. The Examination Conventions from previous years are also on the exams page of PPE Canvas.

4.4 Good academic practice and avoiding plagiarism

Please see the University website's [guidance on plagiarism](#) and on how to develop [academic good practice](#).

4.5 Entering for University examinations

You are entered for Prelims automatically, but must enter yourself for Finals during Michaelmas Term of your third year. This [examinations entry page](#) explains what you need to do and when.

If you need exam adjustments (for example, extra time or rest time), you must apply for exam adjustments after matriculation and no later than Friday of Week 4 of the term before the exam is due to take place. It is your responsibility to request exam adjustments and provide any supporting evidence required. Requests may, for urgent reasons, be considered nearer to the date of your exam. Further information is available on the [examination adjustments page](#).

Further information on the examinations and assessments process at the University, from entering for examinations through to accessing your results, is available [here](#).

4.6 Examination dates

Your exam timetable will be published on the [University's timetable page](#) as early as possible and no later than five weeks before the start of the examination. Prelims are normally in Week 9, and Finals are normally from Week 5 to Week 7 in Trinity Term.

4.7 Sitting your in-person examination

The majority of papers in PPE are assessed by an in-person examination. Practical information and support for sitting in-person exams is provided on the [University's in-person exams page](#).

When planning your examination strategy, it is sensible to keep in mind the nature of the examination method which the University uses (the conventional method in UK higher education over the past two centuries). If the examiners allowed you to set the questions, you could prepare good answers in a few months; by setting the questions themselves, they ensure that a candidate cannot be adequately prepared without study over a broad area. They will therefore not be interested in answers which are in any way off the point, and they will severely penalise 'short weight' – too few properly written out answers. The examiners are looking for you to make arguments (i.e. supply reasons in support of answers to the questions asked), not merely to provide reports of other people's arguments, although such reports may form part of the larger argument that you make, as when it is important to explain to your reader what one author thinks in order to critique it. When you have selected a question, work out what it means and decide what you think is the answer to it. Then, putting pen to paper, state the answer and defend it; or, if you think there is no answer, explain why not. Abstain from presenting background material. Do not write too much: most of those who run out of time have themselves to blame for being distracted into irrelevance. Good examinees emerge from the exam with most of their knowledge un-displayed. Examiners' reports can be helpful in identifying the characteristics of good and bad answers in the various papers.

4.8 Sitting your online examination

Some papers in PPE may be assessed by an online examination. Online exams are taken in Inspira. You must familiarise yourself with the system prior to taking an online exam. There are a wide range of resources to help you on the [University's online exams page](#).

Online exams require you to adhere to the [University's Honour Code](#) and you should read this in advance of any online exams.

4.9 Submitted work

Some papers in PPE are assessed partly or wholly by coursework submission. For theses, the submission deadlines are in the PPE or Philosophy Examination Regulations. For papers which are assessed partly or wholly by submission, you should follow the guidance sent to you by the relevant Department.

These assessments are normally submitted online via Inspira. Ensure you are familiar with the [University's online submission process](#) in advance of any deadline.

4.10 Managing submission deadlines

Throughout your degree programme you will encounter a series of deadlines which will include formative assessments (work submitted to test and develop your understanding of material and on which you will receive feedback), and summative assessments (those which contribute towards progression and/or your final degree outcome and on which you may receive feedback) such as coursework assignments and/or your final dissertation/thesis or project.

Deadlines are carefully set and optimised to ensure the timely provision of feedback (to support your continued learning) and to help to balance your workload across the degree programme. In particular, care will have been taken as far as possible not to cluster submission deadlines or for these to fall close other modes of assessment such as written examinations. Meeting these your deadlines will enable you to progress through the course with the optimum workload balance, and will ensure your performance on future assessments isn't negatively impacted.

Plan ahead

You are strongly encouraged to implement the following steps, which will help you to manage your workload and be able to meet deadlines:

- Always plan ahead and ensure you know the key deadlines for your programme throughout the year.
- When taking on any additional responsibilities, consider the workload of these in relation to your assessment schedule. Don't take on responsibilities which will take significant time away from preparing for assessment.
- Make sure you know both when work will be set and due for submission so you know how much time you have to complete of each task – it may be helpful to map this out in your diary/calendar.
- Carefully check your understanding of the work required, the resources you may need to access and their availability, and familiarise yourself with the assessment criteria set out in the examination conventions for your programme.
- If in doubt, always discuss requirements with your supervisor and/or Course Director.
- You may also find it helpful to seek informal peer support by talking to current DPhil students who have recently completed your programme.

- Making a start is often the hardest part so try to break down work into smaller sections and set yourself key milestones along the way, build in some contingency time, and always avoid leaving things to the last few weeks or days.
- If preparing written work for assessment (such as a dissertation), start writing as early as possible, don't wait until the reading and thinking is 'done'. Social scientists often write to think, and you need to make sure you leave plenty of time for the thinking, as this is where your original insights will occur.
- Try to also be conscious of when to stop - there will always be something which could be further researched, redrafted or refined, but try to understand when something is good enough.

Dealing with the unexpected

Even with the best planning occasionally something unexpected may happen which disrupts your progress. Always be ready to re-prioritise and if you are unsure how to proceed, discuss with your supervisor and/or Course Directors and they will be able to help you re-plan and decide how best to prioritise – for example, they may be able to offer greater flexibility on formative deadlines to enable you to meet summative deadlines. They may also be able to give further guidance on readings and co-curricular activities to prioritise.

In exceptional circumstances however, it is possible to apply for an extension to summative deadlines, and your college will be able to support you with the process, but always consider this the last resort. While an extension may be necessary in some cases where you have genuinely lost sufficient time that you are unable to complete a piece of work, be cognisant of the potential knock-on effects of extension also. There may include:

- Delays in receiving feedback which will support your further studies.
- Reduced time to complete other work due to clustering of deadlines.
- Delays in receiving marks, and in particular at the end of your programme extensions to the deadline for your dissertation/thesis may mean you receive your degree outcome later.
- Delayed completion of your programme could impact on being able to progress to further study or take up offers of employment and may delay your graduation so you cannot attend a Degree Ceremony with your peers.

If you do think you will need an extension, do consider discussing this with your supervisor and/or Course Director as well as with your college, as they will be well placed to help you to consider the academic impacts, and as noted above, may be able to provide alternative suggestions for how to reprioritise your work to enable you to meet the original deadline.

4.11 Problems completing your assessment

There are a number of University processes in place to help you if you find that illness or other personal circumstances are affecting your assessments or if you experience technical difficulties with an online exam or submission. Full information is available on the [University's problems completing your assessment page](#).

4.12 External examiner and examiners' reports

Internal and external examiners' reports for Prelims and Finals can be found on the exams page of PPE Canvas. The name, position and institution of the external examiners for PPE can be found in the Examination Conventions, also on PPE Canvas. Students are strictly prohibited from contacting external examiners directly. If you are unhappy with an aspect of your

assessment you may make a complaint or appeal (see the complaints and appeals section of this Handbook).

4.13 Prizes

After your first year you will be eligible for a scholarship or exhibition from your College, on academic criteria which the College decides and applies. Other prizes for which you may be eligible include the various PPE examination prizes which are listed on PPE Canvas. There is also [central list of all prizes](#).

5. Skills and learning development

5.1 Academic progress

Your academic progress will be monitored mostly at College level. Feedback will be given via TMS, via termly meetings with your College tutors and/or academic officers of your College, via collections, and in tutorials. Refer to your College Handbook for further information.

5.2 Learning development and skills

The skills you are expected to develop through the course are summarised in section 2.3.

5.3 Induction

First year students are invited to a Department induction in Week 0 of Michaelmas Term. The session is led by the Directors of Undergraduate Studies for Philosophy, Politics and Economics.

5.4 Opportunities for skills training and development

A wide range of information and training materials are available to help you develop your academic skills – including time management, research and library skills, referencing, revision skills and academic writing – on the [study skills and training page](#).

5.5 Employability and careers information and advice

The academic and College environment at Oxford University is rich with opportunities for you to develop many transferable skills that are eagerly sought by employers. Undertaking an intellectually demanding academic course (often incorporating professional body requirements) will equip you for the demands of many jobs. Your course will enable you to research, summarise, present and defend an argument with some of the best scholars in their subject. Under the direction of an experienced researcher, you will extend your skills and experiences through practical or project work, placements or fieldwork, writing extended essays or dissertations. In College and University sports teams, clubs and societies you will have the chance to take the lead and play an active part within and outside the University.

Surveys of employers report that they find Oxford students better or much better than the average UK student at key employability skills such as problem solving, leadership, and communication. Hundreds of recruiters visit the University each year, demonstrating their demand for Oxford undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Comprehensive careers advice and guidance is available from the Oxford University Careers Service, and not just while you are here: our careers support is for life. We offer tailored individual advice, job fairs and workshops to inform your job search and application process, whether your next steps are within academia or beyond. You will also have access to thousands of UK-based and international internships, work experience and job vacancies

available on the [Careers Service website](#). Further information can be found on the [skills and work experience page](#).

6. Student representation, evaluation and feedback

Consultation of students takes a number of forms. It is important that you give us your views and feel free to do so, in order that we may deal with problems that arise both relating to you personally and to the course. Confidentiality is preserved when we seek feedback and will be maintained if you wish it when you discuss issues of concern to you. Both the College and the Departments will seek and welcome your feedback in various ways.

6.1 Department representation

Each Department has an Undergraduate Joint Consultative Committee (UJCC). Typical agenda items for UJCC meetings include course developments, lecture arrangements, library provision, and IT. The Department will look to UJCC student members for comments and suggestions which may bring beneficial changes. The UJCC is also the forum in which you should raise any matters of concern to you relating to the organisation, content, and delivery of the course.

The Politics UJCC comprises the Director of Undergraduate Studies, the Undergraduate Studies Coordinator or Academic Administrator, and an undergraduate representative from each College. Politics Canvas has a page with the committee membership, meeting times and further information.

The Economics UJCC has several Department members, including the Director of Undergraduate Studies, and a student member from each College. The student representatives must be reading for one of the Honour Schools involving Economics. The UJCC meets once per term. It elects one of its student representatives as chair. Economics Canvas has a page with the meeting times and further information.

The Philosophy UJCC normally meets once a term and is chaired by a Philosophy undergraduate. The Chair is elected by the other undergraduates on the committee and sits on the Faculty's Undergraduate Studies Committee (the main Faculty committee at which undergraduate matters are discussed). The Chair is also invited to Faculty meetings. Philosophy undergraduates with any interest in contributing to Faculty thinking and administration on undergraduate matters are warmly encouraged to come along. The Philosophy Undergraduate Administrator will send out details of meetings during term.

If you need further information about one of the UJCCs please approach the undergraduate administrator for the Department.

6.2 Division and University representation

Student representatives sitting on the Divisional Board are selected through a process organised by the Oxford University Student Union (Oxford SU). Details can be found on the [SU website](#) along with information about student representation at the University level.

6.3 Opportunities to provide evaluation and feedback

The feedback which you provide to lecturers and tutors is valued and is taken seriously. It has an important contribution toward maintaining the quality of the education you receive at Oxford.

You will be asked to comment on each set of lectures via questionnaires, which will be distributed either electronically or as paper copies. Paper copies will be handed out by the lecturer towards the middle or end of their set of lectures, and further copies will be available from the Department. Completed forms may either be given to the lecturer at the end of the lecture or sent to the Department office. The results of the questionnaire are seen by the lecturer and also by the Director of Undergraduate Studies or Teaching/Lectures Committee or panel. The DUS and/or committee or panel are responsible for ensuring that any problems reported through the questionnaires are addressed. These are reported on to the UJCC and the Department.

You will also be asked to provide feedback on tutorial teaching to your College, and although Colleges may differ in the exact ways in which they provide for this, in general they will ask your views on the amount and quality of teaching, reading materials, timeliness of comments on essays and tutorial performance, and feedback on your progress on the course. Colleges also arrange for you to hear or read reports written by your tutor and to make comments on them, and also for you to submit your own self-assessment of your progress to date and your academic goals.

Students on full-time and part-time matriculated courses are surveyed once per year on all aspects of their course (learning, living, pastoral support, College) through the Student Barometer. Final year undergraduate students are surveyed through the National Student Survey. You can find further details on the [University's student surveys page](#). Results from the NSS and the Student Barometer are monitored by the PPE Committee and the Undergraduate Studies Committees in the three Departments.

7. Student life and support

7.1 Whom to contact for help

If illness, or other personal issues such as bereavement, seriously affect your academic work, make sure that your tutors know this. Help may involve: excusing you from tutorials for a while; sending you home; asking the University to grant you dispensation from that term's residence; or permitting you to go out of residence for a number of terms, with consequent negotiations with your funding body as appropriate. If illness or other issues have interfered with preparation for a University examination, or have affected you during the exam itself, you can apply for [alternative examination arrangements](#) or make the examiners aware of any mitigating circumstances.

The University has a range of support and advice to help you manage your finances during your studies. Please see the [financial assistance and support page](#) for further information, including on hardship funding for students who experience financial difficulties.

Every College has their own systems of academic and pastoral support for students. Please refer to your College Handbook or website for more information on who to contact and what support is available through your College.

Details of the wide range of sources of support available more widely in the University are available from the [University's welfare page](#), including in relation to mental and physical health and disability.

7.2 Complaints and appeals

The University, the Divisions and the three Departments all hope that provision made for students at all stages of their course of study will make the need for complaints (about that provision) or appeals (against the outcomes of any form of assessment) infrequent.

Where such a need arises, an informal discussion with the person immediately responsible for the issue that you wish to complain about (and who may not be one of the individuals identified below) is often the simplest way to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

Many sources of advice are available from Colleges, Faculties/Departments and bodies like the Counselling Service or the Oxford SU Student Advice Service, which have extensive experience in advising students. You may wish to take advice from one of these sources before pursuing your complaint.

General areas of concern about provision affecting students as a whole should be raised through Joint Consultative Committees or via student representation on the Faculty/Department's committees.

Complaints

If your concern or complaint relates to teaching or other provision made by the Faculty/Department, then you should raise it with Director of Undergraduate Studies or with the Director of Graduate Studies as appropriate. If your concern relates to the course as a whole, rather than to teaching or provision made by one of the Departments/Faculties, you should raise it with the Chair of the PPE Committee. Complaints about Departmental facilities should be made to the Departmental Administrator. If you feel unable to approach one of those individuals, you may contact the Head of Department/Faculty. The officer concerned will attempt to resolve your concern/complaint informally. The names and contact details of these officers can be found on Department websites, or by contacting the relevant undergraduate administrator.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you may take your concern further by making a formal complaint to the Proctors under the University Student Complaints Procedure set out [here](#).

If your concern or complaint relates to teaching or other provision made by your College, you should raise it either with your tutor or with one of the College officers, Senior Tutor, Tutor for Graduates (as appropriate). Your College will also be able to explain how to take your complaint further if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of its consideration.

Academic appeals

An academic appeal is an appeal against the decision of an academic body (e.g. boards of examiners, transfer and confirmation decisions etc.), on grounds such as procedural error or evidence of bias. There is no right of appeal against academic judgement.

If you have any concerns about your assessment process or outcome it is advisable to discuss these first with your subject or College tutor, Senior Tutor, course director, director of studies, supervisor or college or departmental administrator as appropriate. They will be able to explain the assessment process that was undertaken and may be able to address your concerns. Queries must not be raised directly with the examiners.

If you still have concerns you can make a formal appeal to the Proctors who will consider appeals under the University Academic Appeals Procedure set out [here](#).

7.3 Policies and regulations

The University has a wide range of policies and regulations that apply to students. These are easily accessible through the [A-Z of University regulations, codes of conduct and policies](#).

7.4 Equality and Diversity at Oxford

"The University of Oxford is committed to fostering an inclusive culture which promotes equality, values diversity and maintains a working, learning and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all its staff and students are respected. We recognise that the broad range of experiences that a diverse staff and student body brings strengthens our research and enhances our teaching, and that in order for Oxford to remain a world-leading institution we must continue to provide a diverse, inclusive, fair and open environment that allows everyone to grow and flourish." University of Oxford Equality Policy.

As a member of the University you contribute towards making it an inclusive environment and we ask that you treat other members of the University community with respect, courtesy and consideration. The University does not tolerate any form of unlawful discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation.

The Equality and Diversity Unit works with all parts of the collegiate University to develop and promote an understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion, and ensure that this is reflected in all University processes. The Unit also supports the University in meeting the legal requirements of the Equality Act 2010, including eliminating unlawful discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between people with and without the 'protected characteristics' of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and/or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Equality and Diversity Unit also supports a broad network of harassment advisors in departments/faculties and colleges as part of the Harassment Advisory Service. For more information on the University's Harassment and Bullying policy and the support available for students visit the [University's advice on bullying and harassment page](#).

Oxford is home to a wide range of faith societies, belief groups, and religious centres that are open to students. Learn more at: [University's religion and belief page](#).

For further details or advice, visit the [EDU website](#) at or contact: equality@admin.ox.ac.uk

Student Welfare and Support Services

The University's unique and close-knit collegiate system provides a wealth of pastoral and welfare services for students to support engagement with studies and University life, promoting student wellbeing by providing opportunities for social interaction and sport and arts. Additionally, the central Student Welfare and Support Services department offers professional support that complements provision in colleges and departments. More detail can be found in the University's [Common Approach to Support Student Mental Health](#).

The [Disability Advisory Service \(DAS\)](#) can provide information, advice and guidance on reasonable adjustments to teaching and assessment, and assist with organising disability-related study support.

The [Counselling Service](#) is here to help you address personal or emotional problems that get in the way of having a good experience at Oxford and realising your full academic and personal

potential. They offer a free and confidential service and the counselling team are committed to providing culturally sensitive and appropriate psychological services. Students can request to see a male or female therapist, a Counsellor of Colour, or to attend a specialist group such as the LGBTQ+ or Students of Colour Groups. All support is free and confidential.

The [Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service](#) provides a safe and confidential space for any student, of any gender, sexuality or sexual orientation, who has been impacted by sexual harassment or violence, domestic or relationship abuse, coercive control or stalking, whenever or wherever this took place. More information is available from.

A range of [services led by students](#) are available to help provide support to other students, including the peer supporter network, the Oxford SU's Student Advice Service and Nightline.

Oxford SU also runs a [series of campaigns](#) to raise awareness and promote causes that matter to students.

There is a wide range of [student clubs and societies](#) to get involved in.

7.5 Freedom of speech

Free speech is the lifeblood of a university.

It enables the pursuit of knowledge. It helps us approach truth. It allows students, teachers and researchers to become better acquainted with the variety of beliefs, theories and opinions in the world. Recognising the vital importance of free expression for the life of the mind, a university may make rules concerning the conduct of debate but should never prevent speech that is lawful.

Inevitably, this will mean that members of the University are confronted with views that some find unsettling, extreme or offensive. The University must therefore foster freedom of expression within a framework of robust civility. Not all theories deserve equal respect. A university values expertise and intellectual achievement as well as openness. But, within the bounds set by law, all voices or views which any member of our community considers relevant should be given the chance of a hearing. Wherever possible, they should also be exposed to evidence, questioning and argument. As an integral part of this commitment to freedom of expression, we will take steps to ensure that all such exchanges happen peacefully. With appropriate regulation of the time, place and manner of events, neither speakers nor listeners should have any reasonable grounds to feel intimidated or censored.

It is this understanding of the central importance and specific roles of free speech in a university that underlies the detailed procedures of the University of Oxford.

8. Facilities

8.1 Libraries and museums

There is a [list of museums](#) that you may wish to visit while you are here. Please also see this comprehensive [list of all libraries](#) associated with the University of Oxford. Their locations, subject areas, and opening hours is available on the Bodleian website [here](#). Your blue University Card provides you with access to the libraries. If your card is lost, stolen, or damaged, inform your College. They will advise you on how to replace it.

8.2 IT

A wide range of [IT facilities and training](#) is available to Oxford students.

9. The Future

9.1 Taking your Degree

University of Oxford degrees are conferred at degree ceremonies, held in the Sheldonian Theatre. You may graduate in person or in absence, either straight after you've finished your degree, or many years later. If you choose to graduate in person, you will be presented by your College, hall or society. Once your degree has been conferred at a degree ceremony either in person or in absentia, you will automatically receive a degree certificate. This will be either presented to you by your College on the day of the graduation ceremony, or posted to you after the event. You will automatically receive one paper copy of your final transcript (an official summary of your academic performance, including final marks) upon completing your degree. This will be sent to the 'home address' listed in Student Self Service. Further information on your degree ceremony, certificate, transcript, and preparing to leave the University is found on the [graduation page](#) of the University's website.

9.2 Proceeding to Further Study

If you are considering graduate study, the beginning of your final year is the latest time by which you should research the various degrees on offer and choose the ones that appeal to you. At that time, you might also discuss the options with your tutors. Most applications for graduate study, particularly to institutions in the northern hemisphere, must be submitted by December or January. Deadlines are often strictly enforced and the competition for a place on a particular degree may be intensive. Your initiatives are likely to fail if they are not completed in good time. Further advice on proceeding from undergraduate to postgraduate study is available at the [University's continuing your studies page](#).

Every year a number of PPE finalists apply to continue their studies at Oxford. Please see the [graduate applications page](#) for a comprehensive list of courses and application deadlines. Graduate students must secure their own funding to cover fees and maintenance, both of which can be costly. The closing dates for some fellowships and scholarships, especially those overseas, may fall in advance of the application deadline for your chosen degree programme, and the competition for funding can also be fierce, so it is important to research the deadlines for these opportunities and to plan your applications in a timely manner. Further information and advice is available on the [fees and funding page](#).

Appendix A: Information about Papers

A.1 The Preliminary Examination

You may access information about the content of Preliminary Examinations papers through each Department's Canvas, which you can access via the [PPE Canvas site](#).

A.2 The Final Honour School

For your second and third years you may continue with all three subjects or pursue only two of them. This is a matter you should discuss with your College tutors. There are various requirements to take particular papers and restrictions on the option papers you can take. These are listed in detail in the Examination Regulations. You may also find it helpful to refer to the course choice guide on the PPE Canvas [Course Listings page](#). Course outlines, teaching arrangements, and reading lists are on the Canvas sites for each Department, which you can access via the [PPE Canvas site](#).

You may find an outline of what the papers in each of the three branches involve on each Department's Canvas. You may well find it helpful to look at recent examination papers on SOLO to build up a picture of these papers. If you find the examination questions interesting, you are more likely to find working on the paper engaging. For a list of the options currently available, see the latest versions provided by each Department on their Canvas site.

PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS
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