

## Faculty of Philosophy

### **Student Representative Handover Document**

#### 1. Handover document overview

This document aims to shine some light on how the philosophy Faculty operates, and to clarify the role of the student representatives.

This document is available online at <http://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/curr-students/student-feedback-folder/student-representation>. As noted in what follows, it is hoped that student representatives will continue to update and expand this document over time as appropriate.

In addition to passing on this document, it is likely that outgoing student representatives have built up experience that would be valuable to share with incoming student representatives. Consequently, it is recommended that the outgoing and incoming student representatives have an initial meeting at the point of changeover.

With the representatives' permission, it would be helpful for the email addresses of previous representatives to be passed onto future representatives.

#### 2. Faculty Board governance

##### 2.1 Faculty Board

As a Faculty, the philosophy Faculty has an important degree of autonomy concerning teaching and research. Faculty governance primarily operates at Faculty Board. This institution is democratic insofar as official decisions are made at Faculty Board, where they are discussed and, if necessary, voted on. These are the only decisions that are in the Faculty's name, so until the Faculty has had a chance to meet and discuss an issue, it has not yet formed any view on it or decided upon a proposal for this issue . (Although of course Faculty members may have their own private views and plans). Faculty Board meets only twice a term, and so decision-making happens slowly.

All of the twelve permanent philosophy teaching staff (university teaching officers) are members of Faculty Board. There are also representatives from related Faculties (Psychology, History and Philosophy of Science

(HPS) and Classics). Two undergraduate student representatives and one graduate student representative are also members. The student representatives are elected in Michaelmas term.

There are two parts to Faculty Board meetings. First, in unreserved business, student representatives are present. The representatives leave for reserved business, in which confidential matters are discussed. The headings (but not the content of these headings) of the agenda for the reserved business part of the meeting are circulated to student representatives in advance. Because of the need for Faculty Board meetings to end in a timely manner, Faculty Board members aim to use their good judgment to balance brevity and depth of discussion, taking into account the relative importance of the issues to be discussed. The Faculty Chair may also intervene to move the discussion along to ensure the agenda is properly covered in the available time.

If there is a vote on an issue then, unless there is a conflict of interest, all members of Faculty Board vote (including student representatives and members of related Faculties), and proposals are typically accepted or rejected with a simple majority. Not all proposals are put to the vote. For example, discussion may make clear that it would be better to revisit a proposal at a later date, or drop it altogether.

Along with all members of Faculty Board, the student representatives receive an email inviting them to contribute to the agenda. Once the agenda is fixed, this is circulated to representatives ahead of the meeting, along with documents pertaining to the agenda. In the meeting, items on the agenda are discussed only if they are starred. Before the meeting, the Faculty Chair and Secretary will have judged that some items need to be discussed and so these will be starred on the agenda. At the beginning of the meeting, the Chair asks whether anyone wants to star any additional items, so that they can be discussed too.

For efficiency, a subset of the Faculty's members may be appointed to specific tasks. For example, they may perform certain official roles such as "chair of examiners"; similarly, they may be appointed to certain ad hoc or permanent committees e.g. an appointment committee for a specific job search; similarly, they may be part of a teaching caucus that concerns a particular part of Tripos e.g. the "ethics, political philosophy and aesthetics caucus".

Typically, these individuals or committees report back to Faculty Board as appropriate.

As well as contributing to discussions at Faculty Board, student representatives play an important role in communicating the contents of these meetings to other interested students. In particular, representatives can decide to raise issues at the Student-Staff Meetings (see below), in order to generate further student input.

## 2.2 Faculty Officers Relevant for Undergraduates

The Chair of the Faculty is responsible for general oversight of all the Faculty's activities. This includes chairing the Faculty Board meeting, engaging in strategic planning, overseeing appointments, liaising with other parts of the university, and so on.

The Undergraduate Coordinator is responsible for overseeing the Faculty's role (as opposed to colleges' roles) in undergraduate philosophy education. The coordinator is a key point of contact for student representatives regarding educational matters.

The Chair of Examiners is responsible for the Faculty's role in examinations, e.g. selecting examiners, overseeing the creation of exam scripts, overseeing marking, and so on.

We also have academic staff who have the following roles:

- Equality Working Group/Athena SWAN (academic lead) and Gender Champion
- Racial & Sexual Harassment Officer
- Responsible Officer for Complaints

A full list of the academic staff with administrative roles for the current year can be found on the Faculty webpage below:

<https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/people/Admin-roles/view>

## 2.3 Support staff

A list of support staff is available at

<https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/people/support-staff>

Support staff are closely involved in the administration of Faculty business, and their role complements that of academic staff. Student reps (and indeed, all students) should feel free to talk to support staff as well as academic staff about any concerns they have.

## 2.4 Other Faculty Bodies

There are subject caucuses for related areas in Tripos: “Ethics, Political Philosophy and Aesthetics,” “Logic and Philosophy of Science” “History of Philosophy” and “Metaphysics and Philosophy of Mind.” The caucuses meet once a term. In the Michaelmas term, each caucus discusses whether to propose changes to the structure of papers for the relevant parts of Tripos, e.g. whether to modify, add, subtract or move topics in papers.

These proposals are then raised at the subsequent Faculty Board meeting. In the other terms, the caucuses discuss how to plan lectures and other parts of undergraduate teaching to ensure that teaching across Tripos is appropriately coordinated.

There are also other standing groups, such as the Strategy Group, which engages in longer-term planning on issues that are typically separate from teaching, or the Workloads committee, which oversees the amount of work being undertaken by faculty members.

When appropriate, temporary committees may be created for a specific purpose, such as an appointment committee when the Faculty needs to hire temporary or permanent academic staff.

## 3. Student participation in Faculty governance

### 3.1 Informal conversation with Faculty members

As well as official channels of communication, students have an opportunity for input into Faculty life by informal conversation with Faculty members. These opportunities may be particularly helpful for discussing issues that are not ideally discussed in the limited time of the Committee or Faculty Board Meetings. Because Faculty Board is a democratic institution, individual Faculty members cannot represent the Faculty as a whole or make decisions in the Faculty’s name, although they can of course communicate any decisions the Faculty has collectively made, or propose matters for discussion at Faculty Board.

### 3.2 Student Representation at Faculty Board

As mentioned above, student representatives are members of Faculty Board, which meets twice each term. The representatives are students’ direct link to the official running of the Faculty. If students have any views or queries, they should discuss them with the representatives first: they can decide whether to take the matter further, either to the Student-Staff

Committee (see below) or to the Faculty Board itself. The representatives can be reached on [phil-studentreps@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:phil-studentreps@lists.cam.ac.uk)

### 3.3 Student-Staff Committee

The Student-Staff Committee usually meets once a term, between meetings of the Faculty Board, to consider matters referred to it by the Board, or raised by its members.

All philosophy students are automatically members of the Faculty's Student-Staff Committee, and are welcome to attend meetings. It is hoped that at least two representatives from each year group (including postgraduates) will regularly attend. The Committee usually meets once a term, between meetings of the Faculty Board, to consider matters referred to it by the Board, or raised by its members.

A list of Year Delegates is posted on the Faculty Notice-Board. These include the student representatives on the Faculty Board. Students may ask any Committee member or the Year Delegates to raise any matter they wish to be discussed

A list of the delegates is posted on the Faculty Notice-Board. These include the student representatives on the Faculty Board. Students not attending meetings may ask any other Committee member or the student representatives to raise any matter they wish to be discussed. Student-Staff Committee meeting minutes go to the Faculty Board, which will consider any relevant matter the Committee puts to it: e.g. Revision of the Tripos, lecturing arrangements. Items for discussion at Student-Staff Committee Meetings should be sent to the Faculty Office where minutes and other documents are available for reference. The minutes from previous meetings are also available online on the following Faculty webpage:

<https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/curr-students/student-feedback-folder/student-staff-minutes>

## 4. Yearly timeline

The Faculty Board discusses many issues on an ad hoc basis, as they arise. However, in addition, there are some issues that regularly arise around a fixed timeline.

### 4.1 Curriculum reform

Given the large number of supervisors across different colleges, there are pedagogical benefits to having a curriculum that is stable over time.

However, from time to time, it becomes appropriate to change the curriculum. All changes have to be in place by the end of Lent term, in order to comply with university requirements for changes to Tripos. Consequently, the process of curriculum reform operates along the following timeline.

At the end of Michaelmas term, there are caucus meetings in which reform of curriculum is discussed. The caucuses decide whether to propose any changes to the Faculty Board.

At the first Faculty Board meeting of Lent term, the Faculty Board learns of any changes proposed by the caucuses, and discusses the changes, if appropriate, and modifies them, if appropriate. The outcome of this meeting does not officially implement the changes, but instead passes on proposals to the Student-Staff Committee.

In the middle of Lent term is the second Student-Staff Committee meeting. This is an opportunity for students to discuss any proposed changes to syllabi. The minutes of this meeting are reported back to Faculty Board.

At the second Faculty Board meeting of Lent term, the Faculty Board considers student feedback, and discusses proposed changes to the curriculum. This meeting results in an official decision about what changes, if any, to make to the Tripos syllabi. The content of this decision is then passed onto other parts of the university that are responsible for validating tripos changes. The earliest that these changes can come into effect is the subsequent academic year, but sometimes a longer lead-time is needed for substantial changes.

##### 5. The role of the student representatives

The main task of the student representatives is to represent the students in the Faculty Board meetings and the Student-Staff Committee meetings. In order to do this task, the representatives should engage in a dialogue with the student body. Since there are only two representatives, there will be one year group for which there is no representative; consequently, special efforts may be needed to communicate with this year group (e.g. by electing a student in this year group to liaise with). It is advisable that the representatives discuss matters relating to the Tripos and the Faculty with other students and encourage the students to contact the representatives about relevant issues. In case the students raise relevant concerns to the

representatives, they should find the appropriate channel to communicate these concerns to the Faculty, whether this is the Faculty Board, the Staff-Student Committee or a discussion with an individual Faculty member. The contact details of the Faculty members can be found here:

<https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/people>

Once the Faculty Board meeting agenda is circulated, it is recommended that the representative reads through the agenda carefully and in case there are points in the agenda that concern students, the representatives may wish discuss the issue with the students before the meeting. Similarly, the representatives may wish to discuss the agenda with the students before the Student-Staff Committee meeting.

It is important that the student representatives attend the Faculty Board meetings and the Student-Staff Committee meetings. The primary duty of the student representative is not to communicate their own views, but to represent the students to the best of their ability. In order to do this, effective communication between the representatives and the student body is vital. If some students bring up concerns that have to do with Tripos or the Faculty (and these concerns are not entirely trivial or inappropriate), it is the obligation of the representatives to find the appropriate way to bring up these concerns to the Faculty. This may be in the Faculty Board meeting, the Student-Staff Committee meeting, or a discussion with an individual Faculty member.

The student representatives might wish to contribute to other matters relevant for students in the Faculty. For example, they may wish to contribute to the Philosophy student Handbooks, communicate student wishes on book purchases to the Philosophy Library staff, and so on.

Student representatives are invited to attend the annual Library Committee meeting. By doing so, they can ensure that students are represented at this meeting.

At the end of their tenure, student representatives should propose any helpful updates to this document to Clare Dickinson. They should hand over the most recent version of this document to the incoming student representatives, and meet with them to answer questions and pass on any helpful advice that they have.

As time goes on, it may be helpful to add to this section of the handover document examples of ways in which student representatives have contributed to governance.

## 6. Cambridge Students' Union

Cambridge SU arranges multiple forms of support for the student representatives, and arrange the elections. The Education Officer can help answer questions relating to the role of the student representative, and there are other officers as well. Cambridge SU arranges training for new Faculty student representatives. Cambridge SU should contact newly elected representative about this, but in case that does not happen the representatives can contact the Education Officer. Cambridge SU also arranges regular meetings of the Academic Representative Forum where student representatives get a chance to discuss issues relating to their role with other representatives. The Faculty student representatives are also welcome to attend the Cambridge SU council meetings, which are usually held four times per academic year. The Cambridge SU Education Officer for 2020-21 is **Esme Cavendish**. You can find a full list of officers and contact details and other useful information on the following webpage:

<https://www.cambridgesu.co.uk/yourunion/about/>

## 7. Communication between student representatives and other students

The student representatives can reach the philosophy student through email lists: the representatives can either email the Principal Secretary of the Faculty Clare Dickinson (cll30@cam.ac.uk) or directly email the lists, and the email will be sent out once the secretary approves it. There exists a separate email list for each year group. At the moment, the relevant email lists contain the year of matriculation as follows:

[Phil-students20@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:Phil-students20@lists.cam.ac.uk) for Part IA students

[Phil-students19@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:Phil-students19@lists.cam.ac.uk) for Part IB students

[Phil-students18@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:Phil-students18@lists.cam.ac.uk) for Part II students

Some year groups also wish to set up Facebook groups, and posting these groups can be an effective means of communication. The representative should keep in mind, however, that not all students necessarily are members of the Facebook groups. The best way to find out about these groups is to ask students from different years about them and ask to be



added to the groups. The representatives may also wish to arrange informal meetings with students, for example before Faculty Board meetings, to have a chat with the students and hear their views. The student representative may also wish to make online polls and surveys to gather student views if that form of communication seems relevant.

#### 8. Complaints or concerns raised by students to the representatives

If representatives receive complaints or concerns from students, then there is a variety of fora in which they can pass on these complaints, including communication with the Undergraduate Co-ordinator, the Student-Staff Meetings and Faculty Board. The appropriate forum depends on the nature and seriousness of the issue.

Where a student is dissatisfied with any provision, action or inaction by the University, students are able to raise a complaint. Students are expected to initially raise a complaint with a suitable member of staff within the Faculty, in the first instance Prof Rae Langton (for 2020-21). However, where the matter is serious or where students remain dissatisfied, a complaint can be raised with the central University. Complaints need to be raised in a timely way and within 28 days to ensure an effective remedy can be put in place. Find further information here:

<https://www.studentcomplaints.admin.cam.ac.uk/>

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