University of York

Department of Philosophy

Guidance notes for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

(Revised August, 2022) Approved on 25 August 2022

These notes provide guidance for postgraduate tutors in the Department of Philosophy and will be updated periodically. Make sure you are familiar with this guidance. We have tried to make it fairly straightforward; however, it cannot cover every eventuality, so seek advice from the Director of First Year Programme (DFYP) – who this year is John Blechl – or your module leader if necessary.

These notes cover:

1. Roles and duties

- appointing post-graduate tutors
- duties
- training
- allocating teaching
- remuneration
- module mentoring
- representation

2. Teaching

- before the module starts
- support for module tutors
- seminar teaching
- preparing for seminars
- student attendance, and following up absences
- the office hour
- if you cannot take a class
- confidentiality and communication
- Covid-19

3. Marking

- collecting and checking scripts
- deadline extensions
- marking and moderation
- returning marks and scripts

4. Exams and invigilation

1. Roles and Duties

The Department of Philosophy appoints GTAs primarily to teach first year modules, although occasionally students approaching the final stages of their PhD may be invited to assist in teaching or leading more advanced undergraduate modules.

Teaching experience is a useful addition to any research student's CV, but it should not interfere with completing a good thesis. We try to ensure teaching duties do not impinge upon the student's own research, and the opportunity to teach will be offered only in consultation with the student's academic supervisor.

The person responsible for supporting and managing GTAs is the Department's Director of the First Year Programme (DFYP). Our aim is to make our policies and practices regarding GTAs as clear and transparent as possible. We work within the University Policy on Graduate Teaching Assistants, which is available here: https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/develop/graduate-teaching-assistants/university-policy-gta/

Tutors are entitled to join a trade union if they wish.

Appointing tutors

In selecting GTAs and allocating work, the Department follows the principles contained in the University's Policy on GTAs. We recruit GTAs in two ways:

- As vacancies arise, we advertise Graduate Teaching Scholarships, which typically offer remission of fees and a fixed salary in return for a certain amount of undergraduate teaching.
- Alternatively, any research student registered at York may apply to join the Department's GTA register. You can do this at any time, although as a general rule you will not be offered teaching work during suspension of study or during your first term, and only very exceptionally during the first year of registration. This opportunity will be periodically advertised, typically early in each academic year. Appointment to the register follows a successful interview and completion of the required training, but does not guarantee teaching work will be offered (see below).

In either case, the GTA will be given written details of their duties; an overview of these duties is given below.

Duties

The university's statement of policy on Graduate Teaching Assistants says that 'as trainee academics, GTAs take responsibility for acting in the best interests of the student experience' and states (§53) that 'in accepting a position, a GTA commits to:

—undertaking the required training and induction

—allowing sufficient time to prepare for allocated tasks

—undertaking their responsibilities in a professional manner and to the best of their abilities

—engaging with their GTA supervisor/mentor on an ongoing basis

—seeking support and guidance where necessary, particularly if they have any concerns about their performance

—participating in continuing professional development opportunities

—raising any concerns about the module, or students on the module, with an appropriate member of staff

—participating in programme and/or departmental quality assurance and enhancement activities as required

—acting in accordance with relevant University and departmental policies and procedures on learning and teaching, assessment, equality and diversity, student welfare, health and safety, and data protection.'

In Philosophy, you will be expected to undertake the following duties as a GTA, while maintaining satisfactory progress in your own research. This list provides only an overview and does not replace any detailed description given in letters of appointment. These brief descriptions are expanded in the pages that follow:

- Teaching seminars and holding feedback tutorials, normally for first-year undergraduates, and preparing appropriately for this teaching.

- Ensuring that you know what materials are to be addressed in module teaching, what general approach is to be taken to that material, what are the overall aims and learning outcomes for the module, and how that module is meant to fit into the programme.

- Leading work on seminars intended to help students to develop particular skills. In Autumn Term the focus is on discussion skills and close reading. In Spring Term, work focuses on writing skills 'from word to paragraph'. In Summer Term, the emphasis is on essay planning and writing. You should ensure you are familiar with the ideas behind these skills and the support materials used to guide it (e.g. the Word-to-Paragraph and the Essay Planning *Writing Excellence Guides*).

- Keeping a record of student attendance, following up absences with the student concerned, and reporting unexcused absences to the student's supervisor and the Director of the First Year Programme (DFYP).

- Notifying supervisors and the DFYP of any other concerns about individual students.

- Keeping an office hour every week during term-time to meet with students.

- Responding to email and other queries from students and staff in an appropriate and timely fashion (this means within two days or as appropriate).

- Marking work produced by students in accordance with the Department's grade descriptors, and passing those marks on to the Department Office by the specified deadlines.

- Providing timely written feedback on students' written work which identifies its strengths, addresses its philosophical content, and helps students to see what they should do to produce better work in the future. This feedback must be presented in an appropriate, polite tone.

- Attending confidential First Year Tutors' Meetings to discuss and monitor the academic progress of individual students if required.

- Attending GTA training and other meetings as required by the University and the Department.

Training

GTAs must undertake the *Introduction to Learning and Teaching: Facilitating Seminars and Discussion-Based Learning* course before they teach (or they must at least undertake it in their first term of teaching if it is not possible for them to complete it before teaching). You should be able to book this via Skills Forge (or via this link: https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/develop/introduction-teaching-learning/). You may be invited to shadow existing seminar leaders or co-lead a seminar before you are offered paid work. If you wish to invigilate exams (which is paid in addition to other duties), you must have received invigilation training. Training and other preparatory activities are generally not paid.

In consultation with their supervisor, GTAs are encouraged to take up further relevant training as part of the Department's postgraduate development programme, in particular the *York Learning and Teaching Award (YLTA)* and the *York Professional and Academic Development scheme (YPAD),* both of which are offered by the Academic Practice Team.

The Department offers in-house training: 'Away Days' for postgraduate tutors. All GTAs *must* attend this training; other PGRs are welcome to attend if they wish.

Before each module on which they will be teaching, GTAs should meet with the module leader to ensure they are familiar with the module aims and content, and the module leader's expectations. GTAs should ensure they are familiar with module content and are ***strongly*** encouraged to attend module lectures. Most first-year module lectures are now recorded, and these recordings should be used if attendance at the lectures is not possible (recordings are accessible via the module VLE).

It will be necessary to meet with, or at least receive, guidance from module leaders prior to marking summative work. Module leaders will moderate marks and approve mark lists, and module leaders are available to offer marking advice and topic guidance on module content.

The DFYP is available for general guidance, and new tutors in particular can ask them to sit in on their initial seminars and offer advice or guidance in a confidential debriefing afterwards. The DFYP is likely to attend at least one seminar run by each GTA during the year in an observational capacity.

Allocating teaching

GTAs who do not hold Graduate Teaching Scholarships are not guaranteed teaching work, although since teaching experience is valuable preparation for the academic job market, we try to ensure all who want to teach and are suitably qualified have the opportunity to do so during the course of their PhD. We allocate available work with this recognition in mind, though consideration must also be given to the suitability of potential tutors for particular courses.

Work is allocated to those on the GTA register on the basis of these principles, tutor availability and (where applicable) satisfactory previous performance. Given that accurate student numbers are usually not known until just before the start of term (particularly in Autumn), we cannot give notice of possible work much in advance; those GTAs hoping to teach in a particular term should ensure that they are available for the whole teaching period and for any examinations or marking at the end of that period, that they can meet teaching and marking deadlines, and that their supervisor agrees that teaching work will not hinder their PhD research.

GTAs may be asked to teach several different modules over the course of their PhD in order to gain varied experience. We try to achieve a reasonable teaching schedule for individuals, but in putting together the timetable, it is not always possible to meet individual GTA's preferences.

Remuneration

Payment for GTAs not holding Graduate Teaching Scholarships is in line with University rates, as follows. These rates are correct at August 2022; for a fuller explanation of these rates please see: https://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/pay-and-grading/hourly-rates/gta/ . We pay seminar tutors at the lower 'enhanced' rate, to reflect the preparation required for seminar teaching.

- Base rate £14.06 ph (ltd preparation): for office hour, marking, workshops, meetings, etc.

- **Enhanced rate 1 £24.61 ph (inc. prep.): for teaching hours**

- Invigilation: £8.53 ph

Holiday pay is added in line with the University rules. Because different assignments involve taking on different numbers of seminar groups, perhaps of different lengths, payment will vary a little from module to module.

GTS GTAs may find that they are asked to teach fewer seminar hours over the year than their scholarship specifies; if this occurs they should be ready to take on an appropriate amount of

extra marking (e.g. for Beginning Philosophy) and/or other duties (such as attendance at Project presentations in the Summer term).

If they agree to teach more hours than their scholarship specifies, they will be paid for any additional hours at the rates above.

Representation

GTAs are represented on the Board of Studies by the Graduate Student Representative. There is also a graduate student member on the Departmental Teaching Committee. You may raise issues about teaching and learning and practical arrangements to do with GTA work via your representatives or directly. For particular modules, your first contact should be the module lecturer/convener. If you want to make further or additional representations or address more general issues, you should consult with the DFYP. You may also speak to the Chair of Departmental Teaching Committee (DTC), and/or the Chair of Board of Studies (BoS), and/or the Head of Department.

2. Teaching

Before the module starts

If you are asked to teach on a module:

- Familiarise yourself with the most recent revision of the GTA Guidance Document.
- Meet the module leader for an initial briefing.
- Ensure you understand what content is to be covered, what general approach is to be taken, what the intended learning outcomes are for the module, and how the work of the module is meant to fit into the programme and support student development.
- Ensure you collect from the departmental office or access online:
    - A list of your seminar times and rooms
    - An attendance list for each seminar group, and an indication of which students have recognized disabilities
    - A list of supervisors for the students in your seminar groups
    - The module outline and, if there is one, reading pack
- If there is a set text for your module, make sure you have your own copy. (We will provide this requirement, if needed.)
- Make sure you have the module outline and reading list, the *First Year Programme Handbook,* access to the online module *Beginning Philosophy* (compulsory for all first year students), and that you are familiar with their contents. You should specifically refer to the advice given in *Beginning Philosophy* in your feedback on written work.
- If you do not have VLE access to *Beginning Philosophy*, contact the DFYP, who will arrange it for you.

Support from the module leader

At your first meeting, the module leader should explain the aims, content and structure of the module, and make clear her/his expectations of you as a tutor; in a second meeting, s/he should offer guidance on marking. You are welcome to seek further guidance from him/her during the course of the module in respect of the course material, the approach to be taken in teaching (e.g. whether emphasis is to be placed on understanding and interpretation of primary texts through close reading, or more emphasis is to be placed on evaluating theories through imaginative formulation of arguments and objections), the progress of the module, tricky marking decisions, or particular student cases. If you are uncertain about what you should be doing or the approach you should take, you should consult with the module leader in the first instance. If additional support is needed, you should consult the DFYP or the DTC Chair or BoS Chair.

The DFYP is available to help with any issues not related to the specific course material.

When preparing to mark summative work, the module leader should either meet with all of the GTAs on their module for a 'table marking' session, wherein standards are agreed, or else issue written guidance that makes clear how the marking standards are to be interpreted. The module leader will, in at least most cases, be the moderator for the module marks.

Seminar teaching

Most of your teaching will be in seminar groups of 10–15 students. First year modules are usually taught from Weeks 2–10 in the Autumn Term and Spring Term, and Weeks 1–4 in the Summer Term. Some modules may have seminar breaks to allow for student research and reading ('reading weeks'), or additional feedback tutorials; however, seminar breaks are unusual.

Seminar teaching is a particular skill, and you should not be worried if every session does not go as well as you might have hoped. Be prepared to take advice, to change your practice, and to learn what works for you. At the end of each term, you will receive a copy of the student feedback on your teaching; you are strongly encouraged to discuss this feedback with the DFYP and, if you wish, with your module leader. Do not be too discouraged if this feedback seems critical (or too complacent if it is laudatory); use the feedback as an opportunity to learn and improve your practice. If you do not receive this feedback, contact either the Feedback Co-ordinator or the DFYP, who will forward it to you.

Your students will be unfamiliar with seminar work and may expect you to act like a school or college teacher. But your job is to **lead** seminars, not to **address** or **lecture to** them. You should aim to create an atmosphere in which everyone can participate in a focused, relaxed discussion that helps everyone (including you) better understand the particular texts or problems in question. So, avoid lecturing and complicating things beyond what has been done in the lectures or readings: a module leader will often deliberately put aside some complexities that are liable to confuse novice students in their lectures. If you think that it is important to

introduce these possible complexities in seminar discussion, you should discuss this decision with the module leader.

We cannot cover all the skills involved in seminar leading in this guide, but here are some pointers:

- **Be prepared, but not over prepared.** More on this below.
- Emphasise the importance of **student preparation** by pointing out they cannot benefit from seminars without it, and coming prepared will make the seminars more enjoyable!
- **It is not all down to you.** Invite students to share their understanding, questions and concerns.
- Get students involved and talking by making appropriate use of **pair- and small-group-work.** This use has a wide range of benefits. It helps to get students actively engaged with the material and develops their skills to express themselves, investigate philosophical ideas, and work with others. It offers more reticent students an opportunity to talk in a less pressured context.
- New tutors sometimes worry about their authority, or think the entire success of the seminar depends on how much they know or how clever they are. It does not. You do not have to *show* that you are in charge; keep the discussion on track, but **do not try to control the group too rigidly.** Guide discussion; do not force it along.
- **Stay relaxed and friendly.** If you are relaxed and engaged, your students will feel more comfortable offering ideas. Each member of the group has a contribution to make; yours is to help them make *their* contribution, to offer positive challenges, and to generate a focused and illuminating discussion.
- **Start with simple questions:** What is this week's theme? What is the writer saying? How would you express the main ideas in your own words? Move on quickly by all means, but save the technical stuff until you are sure the group has the basics straight.
- **Do not just ask questions and wait for answers.** *Use* whatever answers you get to develop a discussion; get the group to think for themselves, to correct or improve each other's understanding. Acknowledge good answers that are different from those you expected.
- **Welcome contributions.** If students are wrong about something, it is not a disaster, provided you can ease them towards a correct understanding. If you are too quick to criticize or correct, discussion will dry up.
- **Be prepared to slow things down if a keen student seems to be getting ahead of the rest of the group in a discussion**: if they mention something in passing you think others might not be ready to understand, ask them to explain what they mean or briefly explain it yourself. Other students will switch off or feel silly if they think a conversation is developing between the tutor and one or two students that they cannot completely follow.

Preparing for seminars

You are a researcher as well as a teacher, and you must not allow your teaching work to squeeze out your research – although there will be periods during marking when you do not have time to make much progress with your own research. You should plan around these periods of time, in consultation with your supervisor. So, while you should be well-prepared for teaching, do not spend too much time in preparation.

Over-preparation is a threat to your own research and has pedagogical drawbacks. It takes a lot of experience *not* to talk about all the aspects of an issue which you know about. There is a danger that, if you go in having read everything there is to read about your week's topic, you will end up trying to force too much into the discussion and confuse the students by introducing complex issues before they have come to grips with the basics. This forcing of the conversation is something to be aware of when you are teaching topics in or close to the areas of your research: remember, you are teaching novices how to start thinking about these topics, and not having discussions with fellow graduate students or giving presentations to professional philosophers!

How much preparation is enough? Obviously, you must carefully read any set text, make your own notes, decide on the main themes and sketch out answers to any set questions or problems. Perhaps the most important thing is to have a sense of the *shape* that a profitable discussion might take, the main issues that will arise, and how they are connected.

If the module is new to you, there are a number of things you can do. First, you should read the lecture slides and handouts. Second, you should attend the lectures or listen to the recording because lecturers will say things that are not on the slides or handouts, and students may ask about these things. Third, you may want to check some of the secondary material, or the module convener may ask you to meet with them occasionally. But beyond these things, be prepared to think on your feet in the seminar itself, and do not regard yourself as the only source of wisdom in the group! Have a sense of:

- The key points that should be brought out

- The areas that are likely to cause students problems

- The general shape that you might expect discussion to take

Exactly how long you should spend in preparation is difficult to dictate and will vary depending on how familiar you are with the material. We emphatically *do not* want your teaching to squeeze out your research, and *do not* expect you to spend a very long time in preparation. At the same time, you will want to feel confident, and we do not want you to be underprepared. Traditionally, a successful rule for preparation for seminars is that preparation should take around half a day per week, and you should spend no longer in preparation than you would expect from a conscientious student.

For some modules, part of your preparation will consist in meeting with your fellow tutors. These meetings will be arranged by the module leader and are a chance to share ideas about difficult bits of the material, good teaching practice, and how to address any set questions for the seminars.

Student attendance, and following up absences

You will be given an online seminar register at the start of the term and must complete it for each seminar meeting. Learn students' names and make sure they know yours, how to contact you, and when and where your office hour is.

Students are expected to attend all classes or provide an acceptable explanation for non-attendance. Illness or some other compassionate grounds are the only acceptable explanations. It can be difficult to judge whether an explanation is legitimate; if you are uncertain, consult the DFYP. Students offering these explanations should be marked 'E' (for explained) on the register; in the case of absences due to illness lasting more than a week, the student should submit a medical certificate to the departmental office on their return.

Follow up any unexplained absences *immediately* after the seminar by email by following the standard form of words attached as Appendix 1, unless there is a particular reason not to use this form of words. *After the first such absence*, your emails should be copied to the student's supervisor and to the DFYP. If the student has more than two absences and even if these absences are explained, ensure you let their supervisor know in case these absences are a sign of more general academic or pastoral problems.

Try to create a positive atmosphere in which absences are rare. There is a departmental procedure requiring students who miss multiple seminars to discuss these absences with their supervisor and submit a written explanation for consideration by the Chair of Board of Studies, but this procedure will be implemented by the Attendance Co-ordinator. The most you should do is make students aware of this fact. Emphasise that absence from teaching will very probably lead to poor performance in the module and highlight that seminars are collaborative, so their value is diminished for those students who do turn up by poor attendance. You might also point out at the same time that turning up for seminars unprepared similarly diminishes the value of seminars for others.

It is very important that you keep an accurate register and submit the register online soon after each seminar. We need to know about attendance in order to pick up possible academic or welfare issues; in some cases, to avoid visa issues of a serious legal nature; and the DFYP or students' supervisors might ask for accurate and up to date reports at any time. Additionally, the University is increasingly concerned about monitoring student attendance, and you may be required to file reports for this purpose. So, please do keep and submit good records.

The GTA office

The Department provides an office in Grimston House for your teaching work (preparation, marking, communicating with students, your office hour, etc.). *This is not intended for your own research* and, given the number of tutors who will need access to the office, you should not expect to use it for this purpose. Please help each other by making rooms available during scheduled office hours.

The office hour

At the start of term, you will be asked to suggest a day and time for a weekly 'Feedback and Advice time' (formerly known as an 'Office Hour') when you will be available to meet students. You must ensure you attend every week during term time, whether there is teaching

that week or not. Office hours are often underused, so do encourage students to attend with any queries about the course material. If they fail to attend, you are free to do your own work.

If, for some exceptional reason, you cannot keep an office hour, please ensure all your students and the DFYP are aware, and make alternative arrangements.

You do not have to use the GTA office for your Feedback and Advice time. Some tutors have found that making themselves available to see students in public spaces, such as the foyer of Sally Baldwin or the cafe in the Library, encourages students to come and see them.

If you cannot take a class

If you are teaching in a particular term, we expect you to be available for all the classes allocated to you. If you cannot take a class or an office hour due to sickness or an emergency, please contact the departmental office and the DFYP *immediately*, so we can try to arrange cover. Note that it is usually best if you do *not* contact affected students directly in this kind of case. Experience shows that students will tend not to show up for a session if you do; rather, allow the administrators and the DFYP to try to arrange cover and contact the students if necessary.

If you want to miss a class in order to attend a conference or for some other good reason, you must consult the DFYP *before* making any commitments. If we agree to your absence, we will expect you to arrange to swap your classes with another tutor. Whilst we try to accommodate one research-related absence each term per GTA, multiple absences and stand-in seminar tutors are rather disruptive to students' seminar experience and are not encouraged.

Communication and confidentiality

If you need to let students know of any changes to the module or to your teaching, please email them promptly.

We hope students will want to talk to you about the module, about their own work, and sometimes about wider philosophical or academic issues. Please be open to these desires and encourage them by inviting students to attend your office hour. Aim to develop a dialogue with students about the course.

However, it is *not* your job to deal with personal or pastoral issues; do not get drawn into them. If students share these issues with you, be sympathetic but encourage them to speak to their supervisor, or the DFYP, or to the Student Support Hub, or the Open Door Team (see: www.york.ac.uk/student-support-services/). Note that, if a student approaches you and indicates they have problems and want to talk about them, you should listen carefully and patiently before directing them to appropriate sources of support.

Do not promise to keep matters from other members of staff, and if you are concerned about what you hear from a student, always speak to their supervisor and/or to the DFYP. The University's advice to its staff says: "Never promise confidentiality. When dealing with a student as an employee of the University, it is important to avoid offering absolute confidentiality. There may be circumstances that make this unrealistic or unwise." The same advice applies to you as GTAs. If you have reason to fear for the *safety* of one of your students, act ***immediately*** by notifying their supervisor and DFYP.

We have a strict duty of **restricted** confidentiality. If you are party to any information about a student, you must not pass this on to anyone other than their supervisor or other relevant person within the department without their express permission. In practice this means that if you receive enquiries from anyone – ***including a student's family or friends*** – you may not be able to say *anything at all* (even if the question seems innocuous – for instance, asking if you teach a particular student, if you have seen them recently, or whether they are attending classes). Enquiries from friends are unlikely to be pursued (a non-committal phrase such as 'I really can't say' can be), but enquiries from family or other external sources can be more persistent and must always be referred to the DFYP.

These are serious matters, but do not worry unduly about them. It is unlikely you will encounter any major problems. If you do, refer them to the student's supervisor or DFYP immediately.

Covid-19

Updated university guidance on teaching during present pandemic conditions can be found here. Of particular interest is this document that lists all up to date versions of all relevant university policies, including (for instance) the use of face coverings during teaching.

3. Marking

You are required to mark formative and summative work produced by your seminar groups (in the case of formative work) and produced by other students (in the case of summative work). Most of the following advice refers to summative work. If module leaders set formative work, arrangements may be rather less formal. I have tried to indicate any differences below.

Collecting and checking scripts

Make sure you remind students of the deadlines for submitting essays, and give clear advice about how to submit and when marks will be released. The University's regulations require all marks to be returned to students within twenty working days (excluding University closure days: 'customary leave' days between Christmas and New Year and public /statutory holidays). Generally, please try to return formative work within two weeks of submission. Assessed work has strict deadlines for marking and feedback to be completed, moderated and reported; you will be told what these deadlines are, and you must keep to them.

Students should submit assessed essays via the module VLE, and they should be aware of the rules for deadline extensions and exceptional circumstances (see below). The office keeps a register of assessed work submitted. Do **not** offer to accept assessed work yourself, and if any student sends such work to you directly, please let the administrators know immediately. Generally, do not agree to accept email or hard-copy submission for **any** work yourself; if you think there is some special case for doing so, speak to the DFYP.

As soon as possible after the submission deadline, the work will be processed by the exams administrator, and you will be notified when it is ready for marking. Essays submitted via the VLE will be available to you via the drive on the University network, which you can access from campus or via the VPN off-campus. Under ordinary circumstances, examination scripts should be collected from the Department office as soon as possible once they are ready for marking. You will be sent, or directed to, the module mark sheet that will inform you which essays or examination scripts you are expected to mark. You should check **immediately** to ensure you have access to all the examinations or scripts you are expected to mark. It is **absolutely crucial** you take care with the confidentiality of marks, feedback, essays and examination scripts: do not mislay them!

If assessed work is submitted late, ensure your final mark sheet records any penalties (see the *First Year Handbook*). Penalties usually will have been entered by the exams administrator, but it is important to check in order to know that something has come in late.

Before beginning to mark, check that work is within the word limit, and ensure any penalty for over-length work is shown on your final mark sheet. Our rules on word limits are contained in the *First Year Handbook*.

Deadline extensions and exceptional circumstances

Deadline extensions are the exception rather than the rule. They are given only in cases where the student is prevented from submitting work on time by 'exceptional circumstances', defined by the University as 'a problem which goes beyond the normal difficulties experienced in life and that has affected [the student's] academic performance adversely during an assessment period' (e.g. illness, accident, family troubles, significant personal crisis etcetera, **but not computer problems**; the policy gives further examples).

Students seeking an extension for assessed work must complete an exceptional circumstances form (available online via the department's webpage https://www.york.ac.uk/philosophy/current/exceptional-circumstances/, along with the relevant policy), and submit this form to the departmental office by the advertised date. Decisions on extensions rest with the Department's Exceptional Circumstances Committee, and you should be promptly advised of their decision.

You should advise students of this procedure, but you must not offer them an informal extension or an ad hoc revision of an existing extension. Check with the DFYP if you are unsure what to do in an individual case.

Students who fail to ask for an extension in time, and for this reason or any other feel that they have a case to appeal their mark on the grounds of exceptional circumstances, should be advised to complete and submit the exceptional circumstances form as soon as possible. Do not comment on whether or not they are likely to be successful.

We can afford to be more relaxed about extensions for formative work: students do not have to go through the exceptional circumstances procedure for formative work. However, the same caveats apply: treat these requests as exceptional and do not encourage applications; expect the student to have a clear reason for late submission; and be precise about the revised deadline. Please discuss any instances with the DFYP or module leader when you think an extension for procedural work may be justified.

Marking and moderation

All work must be marked with reference to the department's grade descriptors. In interpreting those descriptors, we apply ***norm-based*** marking; that is, work is marked against the standard that could be reasonably expected from a student at the appropriate level.

So, an answer is compared with the range of answers we might expect to get from students at a certain level: students towards the top of that range get marks in the 70s, students towards the bottom get marks in the 40s, students well above the range get marks >80, and students below the range get marks <40. Students are marked against what can reasonably be expected, ***not against how well their peers do***.

Two things to note:

1. Graduate tutors are often tougher markers than full-time academics. Maintain standards, but remember that you are dealing with inexperienced students: give credit for genuine attempts to do the right thing.

2. If a script is clearly within a grade, give a mark in the middle of that grade range; if it is very good example of the grade, give the higher mark in the range; if it just makes the grade, give the mark at the bottom of the range. This 'stepped-marking' is particularly important in the first class, where we can often be timid; work that is clearly first class should be marked 80, and the best first class work should be marked higher.

Summative work is always given a percentage mark in line with our grade descriptors. Please do ***not*** give a percentage mark to formative work; instead, make reference to the appropriate grade descriptor and include the grade descriptor in your feedback. E.g.:

'This work [easily, just about, clearly] satisfies the grade descriptor:

Good work that:

- demonstrates a good understanding of the relevant philosophical concepts, problems, theories, and arguments
- provides a good answer to the question that contains detailed argument

- contains material that is well selected and organised

- is well written'

Cutting and pasting these descriptors will save you time in feedback. You can broadly indicate where in the grade you think work falls by using the terms in brackets. The purpose is to avoid students focusing on a numerical mark as distinct from the qualities exhibited by, or lacking in, their work.

When giving percentage marks for summative work, remember the department has adopted 'stepped marking': not all numbers between 1 and 100 are given as marks. The marks which can be awarded are:

Fail   Less than 40

3ʳᵈ Class   42, 45 or 48

Lower 2ⁿᵈ Class   52, 55 or 58

Upper 2ⁿᵈ Class   62, 65 or 68

1ˢᵗ Class   75, 80, 85, 90, 95 or 100

Note the different distribution of marks through the 1ˢᵗ class scale. Remember that if you are marking exams with multiple essay questions, each answer should be given one of these step mark grades; however, when averaging the marks to determine an overall mark for the examination script, you should *not* round up or down to the nearest step mark grade. So, for example, if you mark one answer 62 and the other 65, the overall mark should be 64 (rounded up to the nearest integer from the strict average of 63.5), *not* 65 to round up to the nearest step mark.

When completing feedback sheets, remember that the ticks given in the boxes for dimensions of assessment should relate in a sensible way to the mark awarded. Some combinations of ticks and marks are impermissible: for example, ticks in 'Adequate' for every dimension but a 2:i mark (i.e. a mark in the 60s. The way to think of the tick boxes is like this:

- 'Excellent' means that dimension is at 1ˢᵗ class (>70) standard
- 'Good' means that dimension is at 2:i (60s) standard
- 'Satisfactory' means that dimension is at 2:2 (50s) standard
- 'Adequate' means that dimension is at 3ʳᵈ class (40s) standard
- 'Inadequate' means a fail mark at that dimension (<40) standard

Note that the weighting of the four aspects (Understanding, Argument, Organization, and Writing) will vary depending on the task set, but Understanding and Argument will typically carry more weight than Organization and Writing. So, for instance, it would almost never be appropriate to give a first class mark where Organization and Writing were excellent but Understanding and Argument were not.

Be conscientious and careful, but do not spend too long on marking. As guidance, experienced academics will probably spend around 15 minutes marking and giving feedback on each short essay, though there will be some problematic scripts that take rather longer. You will almost certainly find that marking takes you longer to start with, but bear this sort of target in mind. If

you come across problematic scripts where you are unsure what mark to give, discuss these with the module leader. If a hand-written examination script is illegible, let the exams administrator know *as soon as possible* to allow time to have it transcribed.

If you suspect plagiarism or other academic misconduct, then do what you can to identify any unattributed sources and report the matter immediately to the module leader and DFYP. They will advise you on what further steps to take. Work that is suspected of plagiarism or other offences should not be returned to the student until the matter is resolved.

Otherwise you can return *formative* work to students as soon as you have marked it. Ensure that you meet whatever return date you have told them. Return all of a set of work at once; do not give some students' work back earlier than others. In ordinary circumstances, please attach the feedback sheet to each essay and fold it over so that the student name is visible but any comments are concealed. It is a good idea to staple the sheet closed. Make copies of the feedback sheets and give these copies to the departmental office for distribution to supervisors.

Enter marks for *assessed* work on the mark sheet provided, indicating any penalties applied for lateness or breaches of the word limit. For each set of assessed work, you will be assigned a moderator, which will usually be the module convenor.

The moderators are often under pressure to complete their work in a short space of time. Please help by passing on scripts or completing your online marking promptly and responding quickly to any queries. Pass all your scripts to the moderator or complete your online marking by the deadline they give you, indicating anywhere you are unsure of the mark.

The moderator's job is to check that our marking is broadly consistent and to offer advice where you are uncertain how a script relates to our grade bands. ***S/he will read all fails, all firsts and select around 10% of the remaining scripts for a module, representing a good spread of marks.*** The moderator will try to ensure different markers are giving similar marks to similar scripts, and s/he will check to see whether markers have a broadly similar distribution of marks across their allocated essays. S/he may need to discuss any issues that arise before completing a very short report. The moderator may recommend raising or lowering all your marks, but should not adjust the mark of an individual script unless you have indicated uncertainty.

All marks must be returned by the date given to students. It is important you do not report marks to students; they can read their marks off the 'e:Vision' record once it is released.

Feedback to students

You will give written feedback on each essay (assessed or procedural) and examination you mark. You will find feedback sheets for each student in the folder on the Marking drive. Limit marginal comments on formative essays, and keep them brief and specific. If you want to comment on a specific sentence or paragraph, it can be better to write a number in the margin and then comment on the feedback sheet. ***Do not write on summative work.***

Feedback should be realistic but encouraging, and should be aimed at helping the student to improve in the future. So, if you point out particular mistakes in an argument (for example), try to also point out the broader lesson, namely that they need to be more careful in formulating or developing their arguments. Students are often rather bad at picking up these more generally applicable lessons on their own from content-specific comments. Highlight what the student has done **right** as well as what they have done wrong, and offer focused and specific advice on how they can improve their work. Refer students to appropriate sections of the online *Beginning Philosophy* module for further guidance. Think carefully about the language you use: brusque, over-critical and non-specific comments are unhelpful. Consider how you would respond if you were the recipient of your own feedback.

Being able to write clear and accurate English is an essential skill for philosophy students, so identify deficiencies in spelling, grammar or punctuation. If these errors are widespread, mark the work down accordingly, explain why the work was marked down, and refer the student to *Beginning Philosophy* and other sources of advice (such as the *Writing Excellence Guides*) or invite them to your office hour. In writing feedback, be aware of students in your groups with specific learning difficulties (you should be notified); such students are expected to make use of the support that is available, but feedback should be sensitive and appropriate. The feedback sheet for their summative work and the mark sheet will carry a note directing that spelling and grammatical mistakes should not be penalised.

For further guidance on providing written feedback, see Appendix 3.

Feedback Tutorials

You will probably be asked by your module leader to hold some feedback tutorials, where you discuss students' formative work and your feedback with them. These feedback tutorials should be short (usually 15 mins) sessions, which will be timetabled over a few days towards the end of term. You should encourage your students to make use of them; our undergraduates do not get a great deal of one-to-one contact with teaching staff to discuss their essays in person, so they should be made aware of how important it is to make the most of opportunities. These feedback tutorials are not a substitute for written feedback.

The feedback tutorials can be an opportunity for students to ask you about things you have said in your feedback and for you to emphasise and expand upon key points. You may find it hard to be enthusiastic about discussing every student's work by the end of a second day doing these sessions; but remember that for each student it is their first and only discussion of what they have written and what you thought of it with you, so try to be constructive and encouraging, pointing out ways of improving.

Module feedback from students

At the end of each module, students are asked to complete a short teaching feedback questionnaire. Response rates are often disappointingly low. It can help if you remind students

of the questionnaire and ask them to complete it. Feedback is designed to allow space for comments on seminar teaching, and your module leader should arrange for you to see the responses relevant to you. If you do not receive this feedback, feel free to ask. The DFYP may offer you the chance to discuss your feedback.

4. Exams and invigilation

If you are teaching on a module that involves examinations, remind students of when the examination will be held, but do not talk about what the content of the examination might be. Make it clear you do not know which questions might be asked in the examination.

You may give advice on examination technique, but *always* refer students to the relevant section of *Beginning Philosophy*.

At present, we do not require GTAs to invigilate exams; invigilators are provided by the Exams Office. If you would like to invigilate exams and earn a little extra money, you will need to apply and undergo invigilator training. Details of the job and how to apply are given here: www.york.ac.uk/about/departments/support-and-admin/registry-services/exams/invigilators/#tab-1

However, we may ask you to accompany a student taking an exam under special conditions (e.g. in a room on their own, or with an extended examination period, or with arrangements for a sensory disability), or to invigilate their exam. If so, it is extremely helpful to us and to the student if you are willing to do so; you will be paid at the invigilation rate and given clear instructions.

Appendix 1: Standard emails to be sent following student absence from seminars

To make it easier to find the emails in a computer folder, put in the subject line:

[Student's name] [module name] First [second, third, etc.] absence from seminar.

FIRST ABSENCE:

Dear [student's name],

According to my records you were not in the [module name] seminar on [exact date]. If there is an acceptable reason – such as illness or other compelling compassionate circumstances – for this absence, please let me know as soon as possible. If your reasons for absence relate to an ongoing problem, you should also contact your supervisor, so we can offer you any help and advice that might be needed.

As you will know from the student handbook, all classes are compulsory, and as a minimum you are expected to attend at least two thirds of the lectures and seminars for every module or provide an acceptable explanation for absence. Missing classes without good reason will have serious consequences for your performance in the module.

I hope to hear from you soon and to see you at the next seminar.

Best wishes,

[your name]

SECOND AND THIRD ABSENCES (Copied to student's supervisor and to DFYP)

Dear [student's name],

You have now missed 2 [or 3] seminars for [subject] without providing adequate explanations. These absences were on

[date 1]

[date 2]

[date 3]

Please remember that all classes are compulsory, and that missing seminars without adequate explanation (medical or other compelling compassionate circumstances) will have serious consequences for your performance in this module. Please contact me as soon as possible and provide explanations for these absences.

If your reasons for absence relate to an ongoing problem, you should also contact your supervisor, so we can offer you appropriate help and advice.

I look forward to hearing from you, and to seeing you at the next seminar.

Best wishes,

[your name]

Appendix 2: Accessing the marking drive

Below are the instructions for 'Mapping' your computer to the departmental shared drive set up specifically for marking essays. Once your computer is 'mapped', you should be able to access the drive every time you login to your PC or MAC.

Mapping the Drive:

I would recommend that you set up your connection via a University networked computer if you can. See below if you are connecting off-campus, or visit here.

To map to the shared drive on a PC:

- Login as normal to a networked computer
- Go to the Start icon and click Computer
- Click Map Network Drive
- In the drive box select an unused letter
- In the folder box type:

    \\storage.its.york.ac.uk\philosophy

- Make sure the Reconnect at Logon box is checked.
- Click Finish

You may or may not be asked to type in your York username and password again.

To map to the shared drive on a MAC or visit here:

- Open up 'Finder', this will bring up the 'Go' tab at the top of your screen (5 tabs along from your apple icon).
- Click 'Go' and scroll down and click 'Connect to Server'
- This will bring up a window, in the box named 'Server Address'. Type the following (substituting 'universityusername' for your actual username):

    smb://universityusername@flexfs.its.york.ac.uk/philosophy/essays

- It should launch. Look in 'Finder' that along the left hand side under 'Shared' there was a folder 'flexfs.it......' and you can scroll down to the 'Philosophy' drive where all the files with essays etc. are kept.

If you are at home and wish to mark, you will firstly need to connect to the University's Virtual Private Network - VPN:

https://www.york.ac.uk/it-services/services/vpn/

On this web page, there are different instructions for the VPN depending on whether you use a PC or a MAC.

Once you have connected to the VPN, map to the drive using the PC or MAC instructions above. As you are logging in off-campus, you may be asked to provide a username and password at the end of the process. If this happens, please type:

- itsyork\...your username
- your password

Seeing the essays etc.:

Once connected to the shared drive, it will appear as a new drive in your Computer as: Essays \\flexfs\philosophy

- In this drive click on relevant Undergraduate folder
- Click the Essays folder
- Click the folder with the appropriate name (e.g. Autumn 2015)
- Click in the relevant Module folder to access the essays (in candidate number order)
- Click in the Feedback Forms folder to access the forms (in candidate number order) Very Important! : Do not alter the name of the files or the version of the feedback forms. They must be .docx files to enable upload on to eVision.
- Please do not penalise candidates for spelling and grammar where they have a Disability sticker on their feedback form.
- Open the Marksheet in Excel and record your marks here please (I have marked any Extensions/LOA etc).

Appendix 3: Notes on completing feedback forms

These notes are intended to assist postgraduate tutors and moderators when completing the feedback forms for assessed essays or examinations. If you have any questions or queries about the forms please contact the DFYP or Karen Norris (Feedback Administrator).

- The Feedback Administrator produces the feedback forms in candidate/examination number order, so they correspond with the scripts/essays. The forms are available to markers on the network drive.

- It is important that neither file names of feedback documents nor candidate numbers are altered by the markers.

- Tutors should complete the tick box grid relating to the 'Dimensions of Evaluation' on each feedback form and add additional comments as appropriate. The 'Dimensions' are outlined on the second page of the form.

- Additional comments are presented in three boxes: 'What you did well'; 'How this piece of work could have been improved'; 'How to improve future work'. The 'What you did well' comments should highlight positive aspects of the student's work, which builds confidence and identifies features that students should try to maintain in their work. In 'How this piece of work could have been improved', identify specific points and features where there was room for improvement. Give clear examples and engage with the student's discussion of the philosophy, rather than just speaking at a general or abstract level: this practice engages with the student as a philosopher and helps to provide vivid examples of particular lessons. In 'How to improve future work', you can give more general guidance on the main ways the student should seek to improve their work. It is helpful to pick up on points from 'How this piece of work …' and generalize them. *Aim at around 200 words of feedback*: try to fit comments into the text area on the *first page* of the feedback form. Please ensure forms do not run over more than one page; if they do, the forms are more complicated to print and take longer for the administrator to process.

- Essay or examination scripts are normally divided between the postgraduate tutors to spread the marking load, and you are usually asked to mark a selection or block of scripts for a module. Therefore, there will be a number of feedback forms in the folder that you will not need.

- Marked examination scripts should be passed to the moderator **via the departmental office** by the date requested.

Please comply with the marking deadlines. There is no leeway in the University deadlines for the issue of marks and feedback, so time is very limited.

Appendix 4: Feedback Form

Department of Philosophy: Formative/Summative Feedback Form

EXAM NUMBER:	YEAR OF STUDY:
Disability Sticker: Yes – Do not penalise for spelling and grammar errors No – No disability declared	TERM ASSESSMENT TAKEN:
MODULE TITLE:	
MODULE TUTOR(s):	ASSESSMENT TYPE:

- This purpose of this table is to indicate the strengths and weaknesses of your work.
- Your work is evaluated along four dimensions: understanding, argument, organisation, and writing. To see the marking criteria, go to the Philosophy Department's website. Note that the dimensions of evaluation can be weighted differently depending on the assessment task, and so this is not a strict marking scheme.
- If you would like help understanding your feedback, you can speak to the person who provided it or your supervisor during their Feedback and Advice Hour.

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Adequate	Inadequate
Understanding					
Argument					
Organisation					
Writing					

Is the referencing adequate: YES NO N/A

What you did well:
How this piece of work could have been improved:

How to improve future work:

Appendix 5: First Year Marking and Feedback Tasks

Autumn

Early Modern Philosophy

1. Formative due end of Week 4 (needs turning around in about 2 weeks, so you will have formative marking to do in Weeks 4-6).
2. Feedback handback sessions/tutorials in Weeks 6 and 7 (meeting seminar members to discuss their feedback—takes 2 or 3 days, blocked out).
3. EMP A (20 credit): Summative essay (1500 words) due Week 10 to be marked over Christmas break.
4. Examination (for both 10 and 20 credit) Week 1 Spring Term.

R&A

1. Coursework for R&A A (only) due Week 10 to be marked over Christmas break.

2. Examination (for both 10 and 20 credit) Week 1 Spring Term.

Spring

Ethics

1. Formative due start of Week 6 (needs turning around in about 2 weeks, so you will have formative marking to do in Weeks 6-8).

2. Examination in Summer Term Week 5-7 (needs turning around quickly, by Week 8).

K&P

1. Formative due start of Week 5 or 6 (needs turning around in about 2 weeks, so you will have formative marking to do in Weeks 6-8).

2. Summative essay submitted Week 1 of Summer Term, to be marked in first four weeks of Summer Term.

['Optional' **Beginning Philosophy** marking over Easter] *

Summer

Ancient Philosophy:

1. Formative work (totalling 750 words) submitted at start of Week 4 of Summer Term (quick turnaround!).

2. Essay (≤1,000 words), submitted in Week 6 of Summer Term (marks by Week 8).

Introduction to Metaphysics:

1. Some formative task in Week 2 or 3 (to be quickly turned around in one or two weeks).

2. Examination in Week 5-7 (needs turning around quickly, by Week 8).

* Those who are otherwise under their GTS stint for the year should be prepared to take on some *Beginning Philosophy* marking. Casual register teachers will be paid for marking *Beginning Philosophy* essays, as will GTS holders whose *Beginning Philosophy* marking takes them over their stint.