



THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR M.A. IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES¹

- 1) **Awarding Institution:** University of Edinburgh
- 2) **Teaching Institution:** University of Edinburgh
- 3) **Programme accredited by:** N/A
- 4) **Final Award:** M.A. Honours
- 5) **Programme Title:** Religious Studies
- 6) **UCAS Code:** V627
Relevant QAA Subject Benchmarking Group(s): Theology and Religious Studies
- 7) **Postholder with overall responsibility for QA:** Head of School
- 8) **Date of production/revision:** February 2011
- 9) **External Summary**

The study of religions is concerned with all aspects of religion, with all religions and the integral part they play in human culture and with theories of “religion”. At Edinburgh, the study of religions proceeds from a non-confessional perspective, based on the principle that religions influence most human endeavours for good or ill. Working and learning with international scholars, students study the methodological approaches to the study of religions, along with developing an understanding of the main phenomena of religion, such as belief systems, rituals, mythology, iconography and ethics.

Studying religious studies at Edinburgh allows students to develop:

- knowledge and understanding of the histories, practices, social conditions and cultural expressions of transnational and indigenous religious traditions;
- skills in collecting and analysing materials from a wide range of sources such as those derived from field studies, texts, artefacts, oral traditions, archaeology and testimonies of adherents.;
- ability to evaluate and critique work with a range of Religious Studies methods and adjacent disciplines such as Anthropology, Sociology, Philosophy, etc ;
- ability to formulate research questions and develop arguments which represent different attitudes and positions fairly;
- ability to engage with views different from their own and express ideas and arguments clearly, both orally, in writing and using electronic media.
- ability to prepare written texts for a range of audiences – peer, semi-formal, academic, popular; skills in working with others, with a range of backgrounds and knowledge.

¹ The information contained in this Programme Specification should be used as a guide to the content of a degree programme and should not be interpreted as a contract.

10) Educational aims of programme:

The religious studies degree programme at the University of Edinburgh offers many options for exploring the religious traditions of the world. Questions about the nature of religion for those who study religion and for those who practise it are explored along with the many phenomena of religion, such as beliefs, myths, rituals, ethics and community structures.

The programme aims:

- To develop knowledge and understanding of the histories, practices, social conditions and cultural expressions of major and indigenous religious traditions.
- To enable the student to identify and analyse a variety of different forms of evidence derived from field studies, texts, artefacts, oral traditions, archaeology and testimonies of adherents.
- To provide the intellectual tools with which to apply such evidence to the investigation, understanding and critical evaluation of the phenomena of religion using both diachronic and synchronic approaches.
- To provide a solid methodological and cognitive foundation for further research in aspects of specific traditions or in approaches to the study of religions in general.
- To develop the general critical, analytical and communicative skills which prepare students for a wide variety of employment opportunities, for vocational training and for continued life-long learning.

11) Programme outcomes:

11a) Knowledge and understanding

By engaging with and completing the degree in Religious Studies, graduates will acquire knowledge and understanding of:

- Religious Studies as the comparative study of religions in diverse human societies;
- The importance of employing a variety of methods drawn from historical, phenomenological and social scientific approaches for gathering data and generating theories of religion;
- A good knowledge of at least one religious tradition;
- A realisation that theories of religions are contested and that the academic study of religions is dynamic, constantly generating new priorities and theories;
- Informed awareness of and sensitivity to religious diversity, an appreciation of religious complexity and difference.
- The theory and history of Religious Studies as a discipline, including the achievements associated with European and North American scholarship as well as newer theoretical works originating in different parts of the world;
- The values, ethics and traditions of different religious communities;

11b) Graduate attributes: Skills and abilities in Research and Enquiry

By engaging with and completing the degree in Religious Studies, graduates will be able to:

- Collect and synthesise evidence from a wide range of primary and secondary sources applicable to the study of religion;
- Evaluate and critique the work of scholars who have studied religions, both in the contemporary period and in the history of the discipline;
- Formulate questions emerging from the study of religions and structure an argument to express resolutions to the questions critically and analytically. This is brought together in an extended and complex piece of work in the final dissertation; and
- Read and interpret a range of different sources for the study of religions within their historical, social and theoretical contexts and be able to differentiate primary from secondary sources.

11c) Graduate Attributes: Skills and abilities in Personal and Intellectual Autonomy

By engaging with and completing the degree in Religious Studies, graduates will be able to:

- Organise complex and lengthy arguments and draw these together into a coherent conclusion;
- Summarise, interpret and critique the work of others by competent use of major theoretical perspectives and concepts in the academic study of religions including definitions of 'religion';
- Compare different sets of evidence to reach conclusions, using historical texts and documentation for a diachronic understanding of religion (that is the changes that religion has influenced over time) or by studying contemporary religious communities in various cultural settings reflecting a synchronic understanding (that is the influence of religion at a specified period of time);
- Analyse and explain how religious communities are shaped by and interact with their social, cultural and physical environments;
- Formulate, investigate and discuss questions informed by Religious Studies methodologies (these include anthropology, cognitive studies, cultural history, ethnography, phenomenology, post-colonial studies and sociology);
- Engage and draw on an understanding of religious traditions and cultures to inform the approach taken when dealing with views different from one's own;
- Analyse and explain how cultural assumptions impact on the interpretation of religions; and
- Reflect on the influence of religions and apply this to a variety of practical situations, public, personal and professional.

11d) Graduate Attributes: Skills and abilities in Communication

By engaging with and completing the degree in Religious Studies, graduates will be able to:

- Formulate a coherent written, electronic or oral presentation on the basis of material gathered and organised independently on a given topic;
- Express clearly ideas and arguments, both orally and in writing and in electronic media;
- Use group discussions and joint seminar presentations to research and present work collaboratively; and
- Develop oral presentation and participation skills during seminars and group-work, and in written form through online blogs and other e- learning tools, dissertations and essays.

11e) Graduate Attributes: Skills and abilities in Personal Effectiveness

By engaging with and completing the degree in Religious Studies, graduates will be able to:

- Collaborate efficiently and productively with others in the process of learning and presenting conclusions – this includes those with a range of backgrounds and knowledge bases about religion, such as fellow-students, tutors and supervisors;
- Organise their own learning, manage workload and work to a timetable;
- Effectively plan, and possess the confidence to undertake and to present scholarly work that demonstrates an understanding of the aims, methods and theoretical considerations relevant to Religious Studies; and
- Work independently on the creation of essays and research based dissertations using the standards current in the academic field of Religious Studies.

11f) Technical/practical skills

Not applicable

12 Programme structure and features

Full details of course structures are given in the Divinity section of the Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study.

The MA (RS) degree is an Honours degree taken over four years. It consists of two years of pre-Honours courses totalling 240 credits at SQCF level 8 and two years of Honours courses also totalling 240 credits at SQCF level 10.

Courses within Divinity are taught for a total of eleven weeks (worth 20 credits). In years one and two teaching is largely lecture-based, augmented by small group tutorials. Honours teaching is largely seminar based in small group classes of usually two hour duration. Assessment is variable but is normally one in course essay and other course work (blogs, tutorial sheets, presentations etc), making up 40% of the final mark and one two hour exam at the end of the course, making up 60% of the final mark.

In the first year, all students attend a course in contemporary religious traditions (40 credits). In addition, students take further courses (80 credits). These include at least one further course related to a particular religious tradition (40 credits). (In addition to the School of Divinity, these may be taught by colleagues in Asian Studies and Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies). The final third of the course may comprise a further religious tradition, or a variety of other courses (including languages). There is also a Combined Studies option, which commits a student to studying courses in another subject for one third of each of the four years of the course. (The list of such subjects may vary, see DRPS C-28.) In addition, students must complete a one year, non-credit course on Academic Skills for Divinity students providing all students with the basic skills they require for their studies.

In the second year, all students attend a course on theories and methods associated with the study of religions (40 credits), and further courses (80 credits). These include at least one course on a particular religious tradition (see above), (40 credits). Students following the Combined Studies option continue with their chosen subject (40 credits).

Honours students may follow a variety of paths. They may specialise in one or two particular religious traditions. Alternatively they may retain a broader focus on a variety of religious traditions, issues, methodologies and/or associated languages. Students following the Combined Studies option continue with their chosen subject (80 credits over the 2 years).

Final year Honours students undertake a research project supervised by a member of staff. The resulting 10,000 word dissertation comprises 40 credits (one third) of their final year's assessment.

Further information on the content and rationale of individual courses is contained in the First, Second and Honours Handbooks of the School of Divinity, see <http://www.ed.ac.uk/divinity>. Through the School's quality assurance and enhancement procedures the teaching and learning processes are closely monitored, this includes feedback from students through staff/student liaison meetings and course monitoring forms.

The School has adopted a policy on Equality, Diversity and Respect in the School of Divinity covering all students and staff in the School.

13 Other Items

The Religious Studies programme offers a variety of specialisations: in theory and method of religion(s), as well as in a variety of religious traditions: Indigenous, New Age, Jewish, Indic (especially 'Hindu' and 'Buddhist'), Christian, New Religious Movements and Islamic.

Opportunities for studying abroad for one semester in the 3rd year of study are available to students, for example to Dartmouth College (U.S.A.), Bayreuth (Germany) and Nijmegen (The Netherlands). Students in the programme have access to the School of Divinity's excellent computing facilities. Their studies are supported by a dedicated site Library at New College which has extensive holdings in Religious Studies, and the wider collections in the Main Library. More information about the School can be found at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/divinity>.