Theology and Religious Studies Benchmark Statement

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Theology and Religious Studies Benchmark Statement Summary

*Note: this summary does not attempt to summarise the specifications of levels of attainment, which are available in the full text.*

Introduction: Theology and Religious Studies in HE

[1] TRS is a very diverse subject, and different institutions have different approaches to teaching it. These range from the training of ordinands to the sociological study of religions.

[2] As disciplines, theology and religious studies have had different historical roles within the university system, and theology tends to be apologetic, whereas religious studies takes an objective stance. There is less tension between the disciplines in Britain than there is elsewhere. Because of the diversity, individual programme specifications will have to be more specific about learning outcomes.

[3] Students have a range of motivations for studying TRS; but whatever they are, the study usually has ‘a profound impact on the student's life and outlook.’

Although some religions are hostile to academic study, it is essential for cross-cultural understanding, and for the religious dimension of public life, that there should be a supply of TRS graduates in secular occupations.

The nature and extent of the subject

The nature of the discipline and its methodology are contested, a fact which is intellectually stimulating for students. Traditionally the approach was historico-critical; then the discipline was influenced by sociology and literary theory, [4] and more recently by postmodernism and hermeneutics.

TRS has close relations with a wide range of other disciplines.

No provider can cover everything that is included within TRS, but students should engage with at least some of the main movements in intellectual history which have had an impact on religion and its study. Critical dialogue is essential, and students must consider viewpoints other than their own or any declared stance of the institution where they are studying.

Subject knowledge and generic skills

[5] By the time of graduating, students should have attained most of a list of:
topics and methods;
skills and qualities of mind specific to TRS;
[6] generic skills.

Learning, teaching and assessment

Similar learning outcomes are expected of all students, whether single- or joint-honours, or elective; but students for whom it is a major subject will be offered more specialised modules, and will achieve greater intellectual maturity.

'TRS attracts considerable numbers of mature students, students from the ethnic minorities and non-traditional students', and it promotes life-long learning.

[7] 'Independent learning lies at the heart of studying TRS.' Some approaches involve fieldwork, group learning, or the 'action-reflection' model.

A wide range of teaching methods are appropriate.

[8] Progression 'requires the acquisition of greater facility and competence . . ., greater depth or sharpness of focus and deepening intellectual maturity.'

Students should be assessed by a mix of possible methods.

[9] 'Standards are expressed in terms of learning outcomes.' **Threshold** standards are the minimum required of a graduate; **focal** standards define the goal which students should be expected to reach. 'Excellent students transcend the tabulated learning outcomes and would display originality, insight and the ability to progress to research.' 'The stated learning outcomes are indicative, and do not form a checklist. It is not expected that all programmes will necessarily lead to the attainment of all the stated outcomes.'

'The Benchmarking Statement is not laying down a curriculum', but a single-honours programme should have both breadth and depth.

There follow tables listing threshold and focal standards for:

- [10] knowledge and understanding;
- [12] Key (transferable) skills

Appendix

[13-14] A list of headings which cover the modules/courses currently provided by TRS departments.