

# Why study theology or religious studies?

A brief guide for year 12 and 13 students thinking about taking theology or religious studies at university

## Would I enjoy Theology and Religious Studies (TRS)?

*Do you have an inquiring mind?  
Are you fascinated by different cultures and religions?*

*Do you want to know why people believe what they believe?*

*Do you enjoy studying controversial topics and learning how to approach them in constructive ways?*

*Do you enjoy tackling complex, and sometimes sensitive, issues?*

*Do you like solving problems creatively?*

*Do you relish the idea of discussing the things that really matter to you and trying to bring people round to your way of thinking?*

*Are you interested in the relationships between religion, society, politics law, ethics and the media?*

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then you would probably find studying TRS extremely enjoyable and rewarding.

## Why is TRS valuable?

- You will learn how to think logically, to analyse critically, to reason and to debate.
- You will be taught to make up your own mind and to become an independent learner.
- You will gain a detailed knowledge of diverse world views and issues, which you will be able to communicate

effectively to others.

- You will develop cultural and religious sensitivity, more essential than ever in today's world.
- You will receive a grounding in a broad range of subjects, including history, languages, literature, anthropology, sociology, politics and textual analysis.
- You will gain time and priority management skills.

## What do I need to study TRS?

Any A/AS levels or Scottish Highers will be considered. Many TRS undergraduates have arts A-levels such as History, English and Religious Studies, but it is perfectly possible to study TRS if you have a background in science or maths. It is not necessary to have done Religious Studies at school.

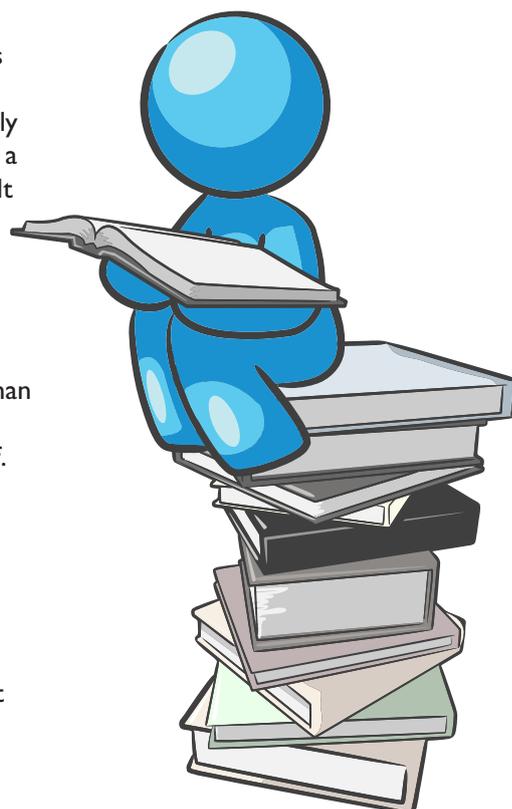
The key requirements are:

- An enquiring mind and an interest in viewpoints other than your own.
- An ability to think for yourself.
- A keen interest in ideas and arguments.

## What will I study?

Content varies hugely between different departments, so find out what is on offer and think about which areas interest you most

before you decide where to apply. You will want to bear in mind that there is a difference between Theology and Religious Studies, in terms of the focus and methods used, such that some institutions teach one and not the other, and others offer courses in both, considering each a subject in its own right.



Theology is the systematic study of the divine (so, this would be God if the focus is on Christian theology), and of the nature and implications of belief about the divine. Theology involves rational enquiry into religious questions, religious doctrines and the nature of faith. In higher education in the UK, the teaching of Theology is predominantly Christian in focus, with other religious traditions usually studied under the discipline heading of Religious Studies.

Theology courses will include some, or all, of the following

- Systematic Theology
- Languages
- Philosophy of Religion
- Practical Theology
- Ethics, Morality and Values
- Church History

Religious Studies generally looks at all religions, often in a comparative sense. The religions which are covered will usually be what are known as 'the major world faiths': Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism; but may also include other religions, including newer religious movements. Religious Studies employs a number of different approaches that will enable you to explore the nature of belief, the sociological and philosophical aspects of religions, and the people who follow them. Traditionally, Religious Studies has followed an approach that has sought to understand people of faith from their own perspectives, although more recent developments have seen much more objective and analytical approaches to the study of religious phenomena.

Many Religious Studies courses will include some, or all of the following:

- The study of religious texts other than the Bible
- The study of religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam; Zoroastrianism, Bahai; Hinduism,

Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism; Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto; 'Primal', indigenous religions, shamanism; Prehistoric, ancient religions in Greece, Rome, Egypt, near East; New religious movements, Paganism, New Age, folk and popular religions)

- Theories and methods in the study of religion (for example, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, anthropology of religion)
- Religion in contemporary society (for example, religion in the media, politics and religion, religion and literature)

Some institutions offer courses in Theology and Religious Studies, but in others, Religious Studies, Theology or Divinity are taught as separate subjects. Others specify Biblical Studies, for example, or Buddhist Studies, Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, and so on.

### What will I do at university?

Courses also vary hugely in terms of delivery – so research your chosen departments carefully and think about the learning and teaching methods on offer that might suit you best.

In both Theology and Religious Studies, most teaching will consist of lectures, seminars and tutorials. You may also attend language classes and reading classes, and take part in fieldwork activities and placements.

In addition to contact time with tutors, TRS degrees require a lot of individual study. About three quarters of your study time will be on your own or with your fellow students, researching, reading, writing, discussing and working out what you think about the topics you are studying. So TRS is great for putting you in control of your own workload, deciding what you study, and when.

TRS courses are most commonly assessed through essays, either as

coursework or exams, but other forms of assessment include presentations, learning journals, dissertations, fieldwork / placement reports and language tests.

### What kind of job will I get?

The transferable skills you have developed during your degree will open doors to many different occupations for you. In an increasingly global economy, the skills of vision, creativity and religious sensitivity, which are developed through the study of TRS, will be at a premium.

TRS graduates go on to become lawyers, teachers, academics, civil servants, business people, politicians, social workers, charity workers, journalists, politicians and religious ministers, to name but a few.

### Where can I find out more?

For further information on the study of TRS at university, you may like to read the article, 'Why study Theology and Religious Studies', on our website:

<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/PrsDocuments/557>

For more information on the uses of a TRS degree in your future career, our employability guide, 'Where Next? Unlocking the Potential of your TRS Degree' can be accessed online on our website: [http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/emp\\_guides.html](http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/emp_guides.html).

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