

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

Name, title and level of final qualification(s)	MA Contemporary Literature and Culture (2000-present) (Level 7)
Name and title of any exit qualification(s)	PG Dip Contemporary Literature and Culture (2000-present) PG Cert Contemporary Literature and Culture (2000-present)
Awarding Body	University of London
Teaching Institution(s)	Birkbeck, University of London
Home School/other teaching departments	Creative Arts, Culture and Communication
Location of delivery	Central London (on-campus)/ online-only study*/ flexible study* (on-campus with online study) *These routes are available to part-time students only
Language of delivery and assessment	English
Mode of study, length of study and normal start month	Full-time (1 year) Part-time (2 years) September
Professional, statutory or regulatory body	N/A
QAA subject benchmark group(s) Higher Education Credit Framework for England	N/A
Birkbeck Course Code	TMACLCIP_C: TMACLCIP_C – on-campus study TMACLCON_C – online study (part-time only) TMACLCMX_C – flexible study (part-time only)
HECoS Code	100320
Start date of programme	Autumn 2011
Date of programme approval	Summer 2011
Date of last programme amendment approval	November 2022
Valid for academic entry year	2023-24
Programme Director	Joseph Brooker
Date of last revision to document	20/09/23

Admissions requirements

Our standard postgraduate entry requirement is a second-class honours degree (2:2 or above) from a UK university, or an equivalent international qualification. Your first degree does not have to be in English Literature.

We will review every postgraduate application to Birkbeck on its individual merits and your professional qualifications and/or relevant work experience will be taken into consideration positively. We actively support and encourage applications from mature learners.

On your application form, please list all your relevant qualifications and experience, including those you expect to achieve.

We welcome applicants without traditional entry qualifications as we base decisions on our own assessment of qualifications, knowledge and previous work experience. We may waive formal entry requirements based on judgement of academic potential.

Course aims

Birkbeck's MA Contemporary Literature and Culture offers you the opportunity to specialise in 21st-century literature and culture, as well as exposing you to the most important literary and theoretical developments of the last few decades. From the legacy of modernism, postmodernism and avant garde experimentation to the contemporary reimagining of realism and authenticity, this course situates key formal and generic shifts in the context of literary and cultural production since the late 20th century into the second decade of the 21st century.

Informed by world-class research at Birkbeck in contemporary literary and cultural studies, this course aims to:

- bring the latest scholarship into the classroom, considering the effects of new technologies on narrative form, the aesthetic, spatial and political coordinates of writing produced in an increasingly networked and globalised world, and literature's role among a vibrant and diverse range of digital, visual, multimedia, and sonic texts.
- Develop your expertise in key topics, such as migrants' narratives and refugee film-making, precarity fiction and emergent pandemic storytelling, anti-gentrification zines and the low-fi aesthetics of resistance, nonhuman forms of agency, post-gender feminism, contemporary manifestos, the relationship of genres such as science fiction, horror, and the fantastic to literary fiction, trans aesthetics in film and TV, African American poetry and performance (including music videos), contemporary black aesthetics, hope and futurity in the 21st century
- give you the opportunity to pursue your own interests beyond these key concerns, whether they lie in contemporary poetics; in fiction from Britain, the US, Europe, or postcolonial nations; in African American culture, or indigenous futurisms; in literary and cultural responses to environmental crisis; in the changing forms of the book in a digital age; or in historical approaches to issues like nation, race, gender, and sexuality
- help shape the conversation of contemporary literary and cultural studies with your peers, at our campus in the heart of historic Bloomsbury, home to radical literary, artistic, and political ideas since the Bloomsbury Group
- Alternatively, allow you to enrol via our Flexible Study pathway in a combination of in-person and online remote learning available to those studying part-time.

Course structure

To complete the course, students do one core module, three optional modules, and a dissertation.

Level	Module Code	Module Title	Credit	Comp Core/ Option	Likely teaching term(s)
Full-time – 1 year					
7	AREN095S7	Theorising the Contemporary, Contemporary Theorising	30	Compulsory	T1
7		Required Option (see below)	30	Option	T1
7		Free Option 1	30	Option	T2
7		Free Option 2	30	Option	T2
7	AREN295Z7	Dissertation Skills	0	Core	T3
7	AREN145D7	Dissertation	60	Core	T3 + summer
Part-time – 2 years					
Year 1					
7		Theorising the Contemporary, Contemporary Theorising	30	Compulsory	T1
7		Free Option 1	30	Option	T2
7	AREN295Z7	Dissertation Skills	0	Core	T3
Year 2					
7		Required Option (see below)	30	Option	T1
7		Free option 2	30	Option	Yr 2, T2
7	AREN145D7	Dissertation	60	Core	Yr 2, T3 + summer

Core: Module must be taken and passed by student

Compulsory: Module must be taken but can be considered for compensated credit (see CAS regulations paragraph 24)

Option: Student can choose to take this module

Option choices will include:

Required Options:

- ENHU053S7 Contemporary US Fiction, and
- AREN231S7 Being Human: Posthumanism and the 21st Century

Other options will vary annually, to maximize student choice. Please note there may be a restricted number of optional modules available for online-only study.

You may also choose **one option** from across the college, depending on compatibility and availability. Options outside the course may have prerequisites or limit numbers, but there are many cognate courses on our other MAs in literature, cultural studies, and, for instance, in film, history of art, and psychoanalysis.

How you will learn

Your learning and teaching is organised to help you meet the aims of the course. As a student, we expect you to be an active learner and to take responsibility for your learning, engaging with all of the material and sessions arranged for you.

Each course is divided into modules. Each module has a dedicated online virtual learning site (called a Moodle page) which will have a weekly breakdown of the course, including reading, video guides, and often reading resources. Each page will tell you what to expect, the work you need to prepare each week, links to reading lists, and all the information about how and when you will be assessed. The Moodle page is also where you submit your written work.

Teaching on this course is a combination of lectures (some pre-recorded and available on Moodle) and in-person seminars. Some courses may offer the chance of online seminars, meaning that you do not have to attend in person.

Lectures are designed to provide you with an outline or overview of the topic, to engage you with the material and direct you to other resources. They are a springboard for your own learning.

Seminars are group sessions where you will be asked to contribute to discussion or group work around the topic, with material set in advance for which you need to prepare.

We have designed the programme so full-time students are in classes twice a week in Autumn and Spring terms, and part-term students only once a week.

This MA programme is also available to part-time students via our Flexible Learning and Remote Study routes. If you are taking the programme on a part-time basis, you can choose to study in-person at our historic Bloomsbury campus, online-only via our online learning platform which has extensive digital resources and remote personal support, or a combination of the two that meets your needs.

How we will assess you

To introduce you to writing at Master's level, we use formative assessments in the first term of your studies, which include short written exercises, constructing critical bibliographies, and some courses also include student presentations.

The course is assessed through writing four essays of 5,000 words, one for the compulsory core module and three for your optional modules. These summative essays are handed in after the completion of the teaching of the module (usually in 2 windows: January and April).

The dissertation is 15,000 words and is completed in the summer term and over your final summer on the course, being handed in usually in mid-September.

Essay and dissertation preparation and supervision is programmed into the MA.

Assessment is designed to enhance your learning rather than simply to test it. We often allow students to develop their own critical questions, usually in consultation with academic staff, which allows for individually tailored research work to be produced.

Learning outcomes (what you can expect to achieve)

'Learning outcomes' indicate what you should be able to know or do at the end of your course. Providing them helps you to understand what your teachers will expect and also the learning

requirements upon which you will be assessed.

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

Knowledge

- evidence Master's level knowledge and critical understanding of literary and cultural studies as they currently stand in the field.
- discuss, analyse, and appraise literary, cultural and critical works since 2000.
- analyse theoretical texts and scholarly discourses, with attention to specific cultural forms, using concepts and terminology appropriate to the study of literature and culture.
- develop a conceptual understanding that allows you to evaluate some of the key cultural, historical, and critical frameworks in the study of literature and culture produced since 2000.

Skills

- Develop skills as a reflective, independent, lifelong learner that can be carried into professional contexts and personal development.
- Conduct detailed critical analysis of a research question, undertake independent research and come to critically informed and evidence-based conclusions in both written and verbal form.
- use critical and research resources to Master's level competency and be able to deal with complex cultural issues critically and creatively.

Values

- Understand how literary and cultural study can enhance nuanced reflection on complex issues in a diverse, global context.
- Appreciate the diversity of literary and cultural forms and respond empathetically to cultural difference.
- Develop the importance of research and evidence for working in an area of study where synthesis of research, opinion and argument are central to reaching sound conclusions.

Careers and further study

English graduates are trained to be effective researchers with good communication skills and an ability to sift and critically assess a wide range of textual and other cultural materials. Graduates emerge from the degree with an enhanced range of subject-specific skills and wider transferable and employability skills.

You will find graduates of this MA in the following kinds of roles:

- Journalism
- Professional Writing (including creative writing careers)
- Arts administration or research
- Civil Service
- Law and business professions
- Publishing roles
- Political advisor roles
- Social media management
- Film & TV production
- Teaching in schools or as lecturers in further and higher education
- Museum and Cultural Heritage work
- Curation
- Cultural education or information officers

A number of our Master's students go on to study at PhD level following the course. We provide structured support and guidance to MA students interested in continuing their studies to the next post-graduate level, including programmed advice sessions.

We also have many MA students already in professional work who are taking the degree to enhance their skills at work, or even just to follow a passion for reading but take the chance to study in a structured way.

Birkbeck offers a range of careers support to its students. You can find out more on [the careers pages of our website](#).

Academic regulations and course management

Birkbeck's academic regulations are contained in its [Common Award Scheme Regulations](#) and Policies published by year of application on the Birkbeck website.

You will have access to a course handbook on Moodle and this will outline how your course is managed, including who to contact if you have any questions about your module or course.

Support for your study

Your learning at Birkbeck is supported by your teaching team and other resources and people in the College there to help you with your study. Birkbeck uses a virtual learning environment called Moodle and each course has a dedicated Moodle page and there are further Moodle sites for each of your modules. This will include your course handbook.

Birkbeck will introduce you to the Library and IT support, how to access materials online, including using Moodle, and provide you with an orientation which includes an online Moodle module to guide you through all of the support available. You will also be allocated a personal tutor and provided with information about learning support offered within your School and by the College.

[Please check our website for more information about student support services](#). This covers the whole of your time as a student with us including learning support and support for your wellbeing.

In addition to your specific student support needs, you will also be joining a large postgraduate research community in the Department of English, Theatre & Creative Writing. We organise a rich programme of regular events through the Centre for Contemporary Literature, the Contemporary Poetics Research Centre, the Birkbeck Centre for Contemporary Theatre, the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, the Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image, Birkbeck Gender and Sexuality, and the Birkbeck Institute for the Study of Antisemitism.

Quality and standards at Birkbeck

Birkbeck's courses are subject to our quality assurance procedures. This means that new courses must follow our design principles and meet the requirements of our academic regulations. Each new course or module is subject to a course approval process where the proposal is scrutinised by subject specialists, quality professionals and external representatives to ensure that it will offer an excellent student experience and meet the expectation of regulatory and other professional bodies.

You will be invited to participate in an online survey for each module you take. We take these surveys seriously and they are considered by the course team to develop both modules and the overall courses. Please take the time to complete any surveys you are sent as a student.

We conduct an annual process of reviewing our portfolio of courses which analyses student achievement, equality data and includes an action plan for each department to identify ongoing enhancements to our education, including changes made as a result of student feedback.

Our periodic review process is a regular check (usually every four years) on the courses by department with a specialist team including students.

Each course will have an external examiner associated with it who produces an annual report and any recommendations. Students can read the most recent external examiner reports on the course Moodle pages. Our courses are all subject to Birkbeck Baseline Standards for our Moodle module information. This supports the accessibility of our education including expectations of what information is provided online for students.

The information in this programme specification has been approved by the College's Academic Board and every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information it contains.

Programme specifications are reviewed periodically. If any changes are made to courses, including core and/or compulsory modules, the relevant department is required to provide a revised programme specification. Students will be notified of any changes via Moodle.

Further information about specifications and an archive of programme specifications for the College's courses is [available online](#).

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