

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

Name, title and level of final qualification(s)	MA Modern Languages and Comparative Literatures (Level 7) <i>Pathway exit awards that are accessed by applying to the entry award above:</i> The default degree awarded will be MA Modern Languages and Comparative Literatures. However, students can choose to focus on a specific language-speaking area or areas and to be awarded a degree that reflects this specialisation. In order to be awarded one of the following degrees (or similar), assessment for at least 90 credits of the degree must be related to the language-speaking area reflected in the degree title. If two language-speaking areas are mentioned, students must do 60 credits-worth of assessment in each language-speaking area. List of degrees to be awarded: MA Spanish and Latin American Studies MA Portuguese and Brazilian Studies MA German Studies MA French Studies MA Japanese Studies MA Italian Studies MA French and German Studies MA French and Spanish and Latin American Studies MA French and Japanese Studies MA French and Portuguese and Brazilian Studies MA French and Italian Studies MA German and Spanish and Latin American Studies MA German and Portuguese and Brazilian Studies MA German and Italian Studies MA German and Japanese Studies MA Japanese and Spanish and Latin American Studies MA Japanese and Portuguese and Brazilian Studies MA Japanese and Italian Studies MA Italian and Spanish and Latin American Studies MA Italian and Portuguese and Brazilian Studies MA Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies
Name and title of any exit qualification(s)	PG Dip, PG Cert
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

Language of delivery and assessment	English
Mode of study, length of study and normal start month	Full-time (1 year) Part-time (2 years) October
Professional, statutory or regulatory body	N/A
<u>QAA subject benchmark group(s)</u> <u>Higher Education Credit Framework for</u> <u>England</u>	N/A
Birkbeck Course Code	TMAMOLCL_C
HECoS Code	100329 101037
Start date of programme	Autumn 2018
Date of programme approval	November 2017
Date of last programme amendment approval	June 2026
Valid for academic entry year	2026-27
Date of last revision to document	22/06/2026

Admissions requirements

Normally a 2.2 or above in an undergraduate degree in an arts or humanities subject.

We will also consider 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

MA Modern Languages and Comparative Literatures invites students to explore the cultures of the variety of language-speaking areas in which we specialize (French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish and Latin American Studies) while providing a thorough grounding in the theoretical basis of postgraduate studies in comparative literary and cultural studies in the context of Modern Languages.

The course is designed for students who are proceeding directly from their BA and who might intend to continue to an arts-related profession or to PhD study; those who would like to return to study following a break to develop their intellectual interests; and those (for example, teachers or journalists) who wish to enhance their professional profile by undertaking study at a higher level.

Students can choose whether they wish their focus on the programme to be broadly comparative or whether they wish to engage in more depth with one or more specific language-speaking areas. If they choose a language-specific point of focus their degree title will reflect this (see below). Students will be able to choose whether they study texts in the original language or in English translation. If desired, students may opt for 30 credits of language learning at our highest levels (incorporating workshops on advanced academic writing), providing the opportunity to enhance and perfect language skills in conjunction with multiple forms of cultural analysis.

The programme brings together the specialisms of our teaching team who are experts in a variety of different areas – comparative literatures and cultures, visual studies, cultural studies, history, thought – across the six language areas we teach and research, from the Enlightenment to the twenty-first century. Our research centres (Centre for French, Francophone and Comparative Studies; Centre for Iberian and Latin American Visual Studies and Birkbeck Eighteenth-Century Research Group) provide an exciting and dynamic environment for postgraduate study, with a variety of lectures, workshops and exhibitions that complement the formal study offered in the subject area. The MA is structured in a way which is flexible, responsive and adaptable to the interests of students, tapping into these multiple areas of expertise to offer interdisciplinary research-led teaching in small seminar groups, and allowing students to develop their interests in different directions.

We offer online pathways for greater flexibility – all modules are taught Hyflex (meaning that students can attend online or in person) other than the 30-credit language learning modules (students may opt to take one of these).

On the MA all students start the programme with a core module, Studying Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies in Modern Languages, taught over the autumn and spring terms. The first half of the module focuses on key theories, texts and methods to give students a thorough grounding in comparative literary and cultural studies in Modern Languages, drawing on the fields of literary studies, cultural, visual and comparative studies, history and thought. The second part of the core module allows students to focus on comparative literature and may be

split into different strands which allow students to pursue the ideas engaged with in the first half of the module in ways that speak to their specific interests. Shortly before the start of each academic year we will identify those (language-speaking and theoretical) areas in which the cohort is most interested with a view to establishing the precise content of the second part of the core for that year. In any given year, strands offered are likely to include French Studies and Comparative Literature.

We will also offer three option modules a year, one taught in each of the autumn, spring and summer terms. Each option module tackles a broad theme with both historical and contemporary relevance in order to allow for a variety of tutors to teach their different specialisms each year and in accordance with student interests. The following three option modules provide an indication of topics that may be covered (although this may change from year to year): 'Memory and History', 'Imagining the Nation' and 'Interrogating the Self'. Each of these comprises five weeks in which students explore theoretical issues related to the module topic before following two thematic strands in the second five weeks, allowing rich and exciting cross-cultural perspectives to emerge. This culminates in the writing of an essay on a subject chosen by the student, enabling them to follow their own specific interests and to develop their chosen pathway in a specific language area if desired. The assessment pattern is designed to develop the students' skills towards the writing of the dissertation or research project.

Indicative options (subject to change each year):

- Imagining the Nation
- Memory and History
- Interrogating the Self

With the permission of the programme director, students may take up to 30 credits from a cognate programme in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

In addition to the core module and three 30-credit options, students will normally choose one of the following pathways for their remaining 60 credits:

- Dissertation of 15,000 words (60 credits).

OR

- 30-credit language-learning module in one of the European Languages we offer (subject to placement task) – if you have A Level+ or equivalent, you can take any of the languages we offer at Stages 4 or 5 (equivalent to CEFR C1-2), with a differential assessment scheme to reflect your higher-level learning outcomes as an MA student. You will perfect your language skills while undertaking an advanced academic writing task (3500 words) 'Research Project: Independent Literature Review' which will allow you to demonstrate mastery of a subject area and situate your Project as a piece of original research, in the language studied.

Together with

- 30-credit Research Project (up to 8500 words, excluding the bibliography). This may be a shorter version of the traditional Dissertation, or a more professionally oriented project,

for example, allowing you to explore how the theoretical paradigms/topics you have studied as part of the MA will inform your teaching practice.¹

Students will have a series of meetings with their supervisor for guidance on either the Dissertation or the Research Project.

Students also have the option of taking a 30-credit language-learning module in Japanese (Japanese 5 Level 7), subject to placement test. Japanese 5 is benchmarked approximately to the Japanese Language Proficiency Test N2, and aims to enable students to progress to an advanced level of language proficiency. Students opting for this module will complete a research portfolio of written work to demonstrate their skills, rather than a 'Research Project: Independent Literature Review', and will take the Dissertation module rather than Research Project. In this case, the Japanese language module simply replace one of the other 30-credit options on offer.

In addition, students attend a series of compulsory Research Skills workshops which are integrated into and taken alongside the 'Core course' and 'Dissertation'/'Research Project'. The first three workshops (in Term 1) form part of the Core course, and allow students to develop the key research skills needed for comparative literary and cultural studies in Modern Languages, with an opportunity for reflection on what it means to study at postgraduate level, how to write an essay at postgraduate level, and training in relation to library and digital resources. The remaining workshops take place over Terms 2 and 3 as part of the 'Dissertation'/'Research Project' modules and they provide students with support for the writing of an independent piece of research. They include zero-weighted assessments in the form of an annotated bibliography and presentation, which provide formative feedback alongside supervision. Students opting for a Research Project rather than Dissertation attend all of the Research Skills workshops, but they do not need to undertake the annotated bibliography, which is covered by their 'Independent Literature Review'.

The default degree awarded will be MA Modern Languages and Comparative Literatures. However, students can choose to focus on a specific language-speaking area or areas through their assignments and to be awarded a degree that reflects this specialisation. In order to be awarded one of the following degrees (or similar), assessment for at least 90 credits of the degree must be related to the language-speaking area reflected in the degree title. If two language-speaking areas are mentioned, students must do 60 credits-worth of assessment in each language-speaking area. Students with named language-speaking area(s) in their degree title will normally be expected to work with texts and cultural artefacts in the original language(s).

List of specialist degrees to be awarded:

MA Spanish and Latin American Studies
MA Portuguese and Brazilian Studies
MA German Studies
MA French Studies
MA Japanese Studies
MA Italian Studies

¹ Students opting for a European language module will normally take this in tandem with the Research Project. However, the full Dissertation module may be taken instead of the Research Project if a student has strong reasons for doing so, subject to the agreement of the Programme Director. In this case, the language module will be taken instead of one of the other 30-credit options on offer.

MA French and German Studies
 MA French and Spanish and Latin American Studies
 MA French and Japanese Studies
 MA French and Portuguese and Brazilian Studies
 MA French and Italian Studies
 MA German and Spanish and Latin American Studies
 MA German and Portuguese and Brazilian Studies
 MA German and Italian Studies
 MA German and Japanese Studies
 MA Japanese and Spanish and Latin American Studies
 MA Japanese and Portuguese and Brazilian Studies
 MA Japanese and Italian Studies
 MA Italian and Spanish and Latin American Studies
 MA Italian and Portuguese and Brazilian Studies
 MA Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies

Course structure

Level	Module Code	Module Title	Credit	Comp Core/ Option	Likely teaching term(s)
Full-time – 1 year					
7	ARCL059S7	Studying Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies in Modern Languages	30	Core	T1-2
7		Option Module 1	30	Option	T1
7		Option Module 2	30	Option	T2
7		Option Module 3 ²	30	Option	T3
AND either					
7	ARCL062D7	Dissertation	60	Core	T2-3
OR					
7		European Language module Stage 4 or 5 (French/German/Italian/Spanish)	30	Option	T1-2-3
7	ARLL014S7	Research Project (if a European language module has been taken) ³	30	Core	T2-3

² As noted above, the Japanese Stage 5 Level 7 language learning module may be taken in lieu of one of the three 30-credit options, if desired. The language module runs over Terms 1-2-3.

³ As previously noted, students opting for a European language module will normally take this in tandem with the Research Project. However, the full Dissertation module may be taken instead of the Research Project if a student has strong reasons for doing so, subject to the agreement of the Programme Director. In this case, the language module will be taken instead of one of the other 30-credit option modules on offer.

Part-time – 2 years					
Year 1					
7	ARCL059S7	Studying Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies in Modern Languages	30	Core	T1-2
7		Option Module 1	30	Option	T3
Year 2					
7		Option Module 2	30	Option	T1
7		Option Module 3 ⁴	30	Option	T2
AND either					
7	ARCL062D7	Dissertation	60	Core	T2-3
OR					
7		European Language module Stage 4 or 5 (French/German/Italian/Spanish)	30	Option	T1-2-3
7	ARLL014S7	Research Project (if a European language module has been taken) ⁵	30	Core	T2-3

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*

How you will learn

Your learning and teaching is organised to help you meet the learning outcomes (below) 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. You will find information on the virtual learning site (Moodle, see Academic Support below) about each of your modules, what to expect, the work you need to prepare, links to reading lists, information about how and when you will be assessed.

Your learning for this course will be organised around the activities outlined below.

Most teaching takes place in small teacher-led seminar groups which promote active student participation. As well as allowing students to gain subject specific knowledge, these sessions encourage the development of skills such as critical understanding, analysis and reasoning and the ability to consider and solve complex problems through exposition, dialogue and debate. Some seminars are student-led with one student preparing a presentation which is then discussed by the group. The presentation is the result of independent work by an individual student and encourages the development of planning and organizational skills, amongst others. The resulting discussion fosters communication skills and team work. Research skills sessions encourage the development of practical skills, such as using library and research internet facilities and learning correct referencing procedures.

If opted for, modules focused on language learning (French/German/Italian/Spanish/ Japanese) are taught entirely in the language, in seminar groups. Classes are centred on group discussion

⁴ The Japanese 5 (Level 7) language module may be taken in place of one of the other optional modules. (Language classes are over Terms 1-2-3 rather than in Term 1 or 2).

⁵ As previously noted, students opting for a European language module will normally take this in tandem with the Research Project. However, the full Dissertation module may be taken instead of the Research Project if a student has strong reasons for doing so, subject to the agreement of the Programme Director. In this case, the language module will be taken instead of one of the other 30-credit option modules on offer.

and the analysis of a wide variety of authentic texts, documents and audio-visual materials. You will also make use of off-air TV recordings and the internet both in class work, and through a large range of materials that are made available for independent study via Moodle.

How we will assess you

The course will use a variety of assessment methods. Assessment is used to enhance your learning rather than simply to test it. For most of the modules associated with this course, your assessment will be through the following types of assessment.

Your modules will largely be assessed via substantial written pieces - essays (2500 words, or 5000 words) and Research Project (8500 words) / Dissertation (15, 000 words).

Modules focused on language learning (French/German/Italian/Spanish/ Japanese) are assessed through various formative exercises (e.g. short written exercises, quizzes and multiple-choice questionnaires, practical assessments) and through in-class tests (written, aural, listening), and, in the case of European languages, a longer more sustained piece of advanced academic writing (3500 words) that connects to your Research Project.

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.

We have grouped these learning outcomes according to various categories.

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

Subject Specific:

1. demonstrate advanced level knowledge of key dimensions of the theoretical frameworks of comparative literary and cultural studies in the context of Modern Languages
2. work productively with these theories when cultural artefacts from a variety of cultural contexts
3. understand and work with concepts relevant to the comparative study of literature and cultural studies
4. demonstrate detailed knowledge of specific, paradigmatic dimensions of the cultures of one or more of the cultural areas being studied
5. demonstrate an understanding of what it means to study cultures from a comparative perspective
6. (If a language-learning module is opted for) demonstrate high levels of attainment in the spoken and written form of the chosen language, including academic writing appropriate to MA level.

Intellectual:

6. demonstrate skills of critical understanding, analysis and reasoning
7. evaluate and assess
8. consider and solve complex problems
9. formulate a coherent and developed argument both orally and in written form

Practical:

10. use IT skills
11. use the library and internet research resources
12. work with historical documents and other source materials
13. work with visual artefacts
14. demonstrate essay writing skills, including referencing and creating a bibliography
15. clearly communicate your ideas orally

Personal and Social:

15. work in teams
16. demonstrate communication skills
17. work independently
18. demonstrate self-awareness
19. show planning and organizational skills
20. demonstrate continuous learning skills
21. demonstrate presentational skills
22. show cultural awareness.

Careers and further study

You will find MA Modern Languages and Comparative Literatures graduates following career paths in international organisations or businesses, translating and teaching, research and journalism, publishing, law and the civil service. Possible professions include:

- teaching
- research
- publishing
- civil service
- journalism
- translation
- academic librarian
- arts administration
- advertising copywriter.

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.

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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