

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

Name, title and level of final qualification(s)	MA Medical and Health Humanities (Level 7)
Name and title of any exit qualification(s)	PG Cert, PG Dip
Awarding Body	University of London
Teaching Institution(s)	Birkbeck, University of London
Home school/other teaching departments	Creative Arts, Culture and Communication (home) Historical Studies
Location of delivery	Central London, online
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
QAA subject benchmark group(s) Higher Education Credit Framework for England	N/A
Birkbeck Course Code	TMAHLHIP_C (in-person) TMAHLHON_C (online) TMAHLHMX_C (flexible)
HECoS Code	100314 101233
Start date of programme	Autumn 2019
Date of programme approval	Spring 2019
Date of last programme amendment approval	April 2025
Valid for academic entry year	2026-27
Programme Directors	Grace Halden
Date of last revision to document	27/08/2026

Admissions requirements

Normal entry requirement is a 2:2 at BA level in an Arts, Humanities or Social Sciences subject. We welcome informal enquiries from applicants with other relevant qualifications ahead of application as we base decisions on our own assessment of qualifications, knowledge and previous work experience.

Course aims

Our MA in Medical and Health Humanities offers a dynamic, interdisciplinary approach to the study of health, illness, and medicine through cultural, historical, and philosophical perspectives. Whether you are a healthcare professional seeking to deepen your understanding of the human experience in healthcare, or someone with cross-disciplinary interests medicine and health, you can explore the intersections of medicine, culture, and ethics on the MA in Medical and Health Humanities. This programme provides the flexibility to tailor your studies to your academic interests, career aspirations, or personal passions. With a wide range of modules spanning literature, social sciences, art history, cultural studies, history, philosophy, film, geography, etc, you can design a pathway that best suits your goals.

Taught by research-active scholars and professionals working in healthcare, policy reform, and activism, the programme is enriched by Birkbeck's Centre for Medical and Health Humanities, which hosts events, workshops, panel discussions, and provides funding for student-led initiatives. Our London location places students close to the British Library and Wellcome Collection, both major hubs for medical and health humanities research.

Students can apply for a museum and heritage work placement (30-credit optional module) during the summer term and take part in our Medicine and Health Humanities Film Festival during Arts Week, held in our in-house cinema. We also offer bursaries and funding opportunities to support postgraduate coursework and research expenses.

Our Flexible Masters teaching model using hyflex technology allows students across the UK to study flexibly, online or in person. The programme is also suitable for international students wanting to gain work experience during the day and study in the evening. You can choose to pursue a full MA, a PG Diploma, or a PG Certificate, ensuring a study route that fits your needs.

Level	Module Code	Module Title	Credit	Comp Core/ Option	Likely teaching term(s)
Full-time – 1 year					
7	SSHC483S7	Narrative Medicine	30	Core	T1
		Option Module	30	Option	T1
7	AREN231S7	Future Bodies: Medicine Culture and Technology	30	Core	T2
7		Option Module	30	Option	T2
7		Either 2 x 30 credit option modules OR	60	Options	T3
7	AREN145D7	Dissertation MA English and MA Medical Humanities	60	Option	T2-3

Part-time – 2 years					
Year 1					
7	SSHC483S7	Narrative Medicine	30	Core	T1
7	AREN231S7	Future Bodies: Medicine Culture and Technology	30	Core	T2
Year 2					
7		Option Module	30	Option	T1
7		Option Module	30	Option	T2
7		Either 2 x 30 credit option modules OR	60	Options	T2, 3
7	AREN145D7	Dissertation MA English and MA Medical Humanities	60	Option	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

Pathways:

Pathway 1 – Medical and Healthcare Professional: Pathway for Professional Development

Ideal for doctors, nurses, therapists, and all healthcare professionals, this pathway allows students to develop a deeper understanding of the patient experience, medical ethics, and cultural perceptions of health and illness. By engaging with literature, visual culture, history, and philosophy, medical practitioners will gain critical skills in communication and ethical decision-making, all of which are essential for leadership and innovation in healthcare.

Indicative options:

- Interrogating the Self
- Memory and History
- The Ethics of Technology and Artificial Intelligence*
- Philosophy of Mind & Cognition
- Ethics of Life & Death
- Fashioning the Body
- Museum and Heritage Work Placement
- Dissertation
 - And/OR any of the indicative modules listed for Pathway 2.

Pathway 2 – Cross-Disciplinary Pathway

Designed for students from a diverse range of disciplinary and professional backgrounds in the arts, humanities and social sciences, including (but not limited to), literature, history, theatre, philosophy, cultural studies and the wider Arts. Whether exploring the history of medical institutions, contemporary debates on AI and medicine, or the philosophical dimensions of

climate and health, this flexible pathway offers the opportunity to curate a truly interdisciplinary degree. You can choose any module from the broad offering across the Faculty but below are some possible pathways.

Indicative options:

Historical Approach:

- Memory and History*
- Victorian Masculinities
- Imagining the Nation
- Internationalism and International Organisations in twentieth-century Europe
- Global Histories of Feminism
- Death and Dying: The End of Life in Britain's Long Nineteenth Century
- Capitalism: Ideas, Systems, Practices
- Public History and Heritage: Theories, Issues and Practice*
- Theorising the Contemporary

Speculative Futures & Technology:

- Fashioning the Body
- AI and Ethics of Technology
- Philosophy of AI: Minds, Machines, and Meaning*
- Critical and Creative AI
- Digital Culture
- Theorising the Contemporary
- Screen Media: History, Technology and Culture

Climate, Environment & Health:

- Global Nature Conservation
- Living with Climate Change

Philosophical and Ethical Inquiry:

- Ethics of Life & Death
- Philosophy of Mind & Cognitive Science
- The Ethics of Technology and Artificial Intelligence

PLUS

- Dissertation
- Museum and Heritage Work Placement

Students will have the option of completing a 15,000-word dissertation. Part time students will need to decide their route in advance in order to do modules worth requisite credit over the course of their degree.

Note: Options available each year vary, and for those taking a fully online route through the programme are limited to those running online.

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.

The MA introduces students both to foundational and cutting-edge methods and ideas. Through an emphasis on the ways that understandings of health and illness are contingent and socially embedded, our students develop an understanding and appreciation of cultures and societies beyond their own. They are introduced to a range of visual and textual sources and are able to experiment with a diverse range of qualitative and quantitative methods in preparation for their dissertation research. In so doing, they learn to devise creative, manageable research questions, organise projects independently and craft arguments that are coherent, well-supported and persuasive.

The MA will be taught mainly through seminars, but student participation will also be encouraged through workshops, lectures, discussion groups and museum and archive visits. This hands-on component to cultural objects and practices will develop critical thinking and new multidisciplinary approaches to the close analysis of cultural forms in their archival locations and histories. Our small class sizes ensure students receive focused teaching that caters to their individual needs. They are able to test new ideas, discuss controversial issues and share their own experiences of healthcare and illness within a safe, supportive space.

Option modules are interdisciplinary and shared across schools and departments whose specialist focus overlaps. Through cross-listing and interdisciplinary collaborative teaching, students on the MA are able to debate, exchange ideas and contextualise their study. In developing their dissertation topics, students benefit from a wealth of world-leading research. Through the programme's thematic and disciplinary breadth, students are able to design projects that draw upon diverse themes to make original contributions to the medical humanities. The teaching and learning methods encourage the personal development of students because the assessment modes of close reading commentaries, assessed essays, research scrapbooks and the extended dissertation are all directed by the students' own interests. Individual tutorials enable them to relate their ideas cogently to the subject matter of the programme. Teaching and learning will also be supported by Moodle resources.

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.

Close reading commentaries, assessed essays, creative writing and, if chosen, an extended dissertation or work placement.

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 programme, you should be able to

Subject Specific:

1. Demonstrate an ability to historicise key developments in the ongoing emergence of the 'medical humanities' as a field.
2. Demonstrate a grounding in twentieth- and twenty-first-century cultural and critical theories relating both to the specific development of the medical humanities as a 'discipline' and to an understanding of the body, subjectivity, discourse and cultural identity.
3. Digest sophisticated theoretical texts and use them to examine literary and cultural examples.
4. Historicise the cultural contexts in which medical discourses have developed.
5. Consider the functions of writing about health, medicine, disability and other related cultural phenomena and the specific ways in which different genres and forms construct medicalised subjectivities and address their audiences.

Intellectual:

6. Develop a multidisciplinary, theoretical and historical approach to medical humanities.
7. Identify and develop appropriate case studies.
8. Identify and use techniques, methodologies, and approaches to the analysis of a range of medical-humanities texts, objects and other cultural materials.
9. Use theoretical materials to examine specific literary and cultural examples.
10. Read texts closely and critically and articulate arguments.
11. Consider topics from different critical and cultural, literary, historical and philosophical viewpoints.

Personal, social and practical:

12. Present work effectively to peers in seminar environments.
13. Reflect and debate in a productive manner and contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of open discussion.
14. Work independently in a reflexive, self-critical way with both theory and practice.
15. Demonstrate good bibliographic and research skills.
16. Demonstrate good writing and oral-communication skills.

Careers and further study

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

- Journalist
- Author
- Campaigner
- Advocate
- Policy Advisor
- Academic Researcher
- Medical Communications

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.

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](#).

Copyright, Birkbeck, University of London 2022 ©