
Programme Title: PhD in Theology

Final Award: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Programme Distinctives:

- The PhD is an advanced research programme. From the outset, the student focuses on working towards the completion of the dissertation.
- The only coursework required will be project specific in order for students to enhance necessary skills, for example, in languages. Students need to be well-prepared from previous study and be able to demonstrate appropriate competence in special skills, such as languages.
- From the beginning of their programme students typically focus on a particular area of study. The college offers specialist supervision in Biblical studies, languages, history, historical theology, systematic theology, ethics, and practical theology. Cross-disciplinary work is strongly encouraged.
- In line with guidance from the UK Quality Code for Higher Education the PhD is a 'unique' qualification requiring original research from students and 'the creation of new knowledge or originality in the application of knowledge.'¹

Vocational Opportunities:

- The course is particularly tailored to providing further training and ongoing development for students wishing to engage in theological education and research
- The course is also suitable for Christian ministers seeking to engage in further theological research

Criteria for Admissions

Typically, a Master's degree, or equivalent qualification, in theology or a related discipline.

The Faculty can approve the admission of a student with lower or non-standard qualifications when there is demonstrable evidence that the applicant is capable of functioning at the required level for graduate research, for example, when the student has a previous doctoral award in a related field of research.

We typically require all applicants whose first language is not English to have one of the following qualifications as evidence of their English language ability:

¹ *The UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic* Part B: Chapter 11. See also the *QAA Characteristics Statements: Doctoral Degrees*.

- An undergraduate or master’s degree that was taught and assessed in English in a majority English-speaking country as defined by UK Visas and Immigration.²
- International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Academic module (not General Training): overall score of 7.0 with at least 6.5 in each category.³
- Pearson Test of English, Academic: PTE(A) total 67 (at least 61 in each of the ‘communicative skills’ sections).
- Cambridge Proficiency (CPE) or Cambridge Advanced (CAE): total 186 (at least 176 in each module).

Degrees taught and assessed in English must be no more than three years old at the beginning of the doctoral programme. Language tests must be no more than two years old at the beginning of the degree programme.

Successful applicants are enrolled as members of Union Theological College, Belfast.

Portfolio Required for Application:

Application information is available online. The application process is completed online. Please note that there is a non-refundable application fee.

Prospective students are required to complete the application and to supply the following as proof that they meet the entrance requirements for this programme:

- Curriculum vitae
- Letter of intent (300-400 words)
- Research proposal
- Sample of academic work (2,000 words)
- Two signed references (at least one of which must be an academic reference)
- Verified academic transcript(s) and a verified copy (or copies) of degree certificates (and, if necessary, an official English translation)
- English language requirement certificate (if applicable)
- A copy of the photo page of your passport (non-EU students)

Mode of Study	Full Time or Part Time
Type of Programme	Postgraduate Research (PGR)
Total Credits for Programme	Not typically credit rated
Length of Programme	Full time (3 years) or part time (5-6 years)
Awarding Institution/Body	The Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland (PTFI)
Teaching Institution	Union Theological College, Belfast
Framework for Higher Education Qualification	Level 8

² For the list of recognised countries visit <https://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa/knowledge-of-english>

³ The IELTS (International English Language Testing System) Academic test is our preferred test. Details can be obtained from local British Council Offices.

QAA Benchmark Group	Theology and Religious Studies (2014) https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/sbs-theology-religious-studies.pdf?sfvrsn=bd96f781_12
Programme Coordinator	Dr T Desmond Alexander
External Examiner	External Examiner(s) as appropriate

REGULATION INFORMATION

Students are admitted as Probationary Research Students (“PRS”) and are required to confirm doctoral status at the end of their first year of study. Confirmation of status normally requires the submission of a provisional thesis outline (maximum 1000 words), an annotated bibliography, and a sample of work (typically of around 8,000 words). These submissions will be assessed in an interview with one or more appointed examiners.

The criteria for the assessment are:

- Is the work presented by the student such as might reasonably be expected as a result of their having studied for the equivalent of around 12 months full-time for a PhD?
- Has the student shown that he / she is able to exercise independent critical judgement?
- Has the student demonstrated that he / she understands how his / her research topic is related to the wider body of scholarly literature?
- Has the student demonstrated the potential to produce an original contribution to knowledge?
- Is the student’s work, and his / her understanding of it, of a standard that indicates that it will lead to the successful submission of a PhD thesis within 3-4 years full-time registration (or part-time equivalent)?

Where previous experience in research is deemed satisfactory by the Faculty, the prescribed period of study may be reduced to two academic years for applicants for full-time PhD study and three academic years for applicants to part-time PhD study.

Students will be subject to annual review of progress. Students will receive clear guidance on maintaining integrity in their work, including the importance of referencing and giving appropriate acknowledgement of the work of other scholars.

Final Assessment

Students are required to submit a thesis, the length of which should not normally be fewer than 75,000 or greater than 90,000 words. Footnotes are included in this total, the bibliography is not. The assessment includes a thorough review of the submitted thesis followed by a *viva voce* oral examination, normally conducted by two examiners. Supervisors have no role in the examination of doctoral awards that they have supervised. At least one of these examiners will be external.

RESEARCH ETHICS

UTC is committed to maintaining the highest ethical standards in all research undertaken under its auspices. All research undertaken by faculty or students at UTC that involves human participants should be scrutinised by Faculty or its representatives to ensure that everyone involved in the research is treated with respect, that their rights are safeguarded and their privacy protected and that their wellbeing is not compromised. Particular care must be taken with all research involving children or vulnerable adults.

All research involving human participants must receive formal written approval before commencing.

AIMS OF PROGRAMME

The programme aims to:

- enable students to build upon prior knowledge and experience in order to engage in original research and advanced scholarship which will result in the creation and interpretation of new knowledge;
- provide an opportunity for sustained reflection upon and engagement with an appropriate topic through a research-based dissertation;
- provide the guidance of one or more supervisors, within a wider institutional, research community;
- strengthen and sharpen students' intellectual and research skills in order that they should be more effective in scholarship and ministry;
- equip students to pursue research at an advanced level and make substantial contributions to the development of new ideas or methodologies;
- enable students to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data; and
- enable students to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

TEACHING METHODS

1. The programme is research-based, with regular input to the student's work from one or more supervisors. The precise supervisory arrangement must be approved by the faculty in light of the particular research project.
2. Students should have regular one-to-one sessions with their supervisor. These should be at least 8 times per year (FT) in person or by video conferencing. More frequent communication by email is commonplace.
3. The course has no fieldwork, industrial placement or year abroad element, but students are encouraged to attend conferences, workshops or research training as appropriate.
4. Video conferencing and online forums enable students to engage with a wider research community.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By completion of the PhD, students should be able to demonstrate that they are competent as an independent researcher in their discipline and have the capacity to undertake continuing research at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new ideas, techniques or approaches.

As part of this, they should have gained:

- An ability to evaluate critically the existing literature relevant to their thesis topic
- An ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of significant new knowledge and / or understanding
- An ability to relate theory and concepts to evidence in a systematic way and to draw appropriate conclusions based on evidence
- An understanding of the place of the student's research in the context of the relevant field of study
- Awareness of research integrity and of relevant ethical and professional considerations
- An ability effectively to manage a project, identify research questions, plan interim milestones within a timescale, prioritise activities and manage research resources through to timely completion
- An appreciation of the impact, construed in the broadest sense, of their research and how to exploit this

They should also be able to demonstrate that they can:

- Write clearly and in a style appropriate to the academic purpose and audience
- Construct coherent arguments and articulate and defend ideas clearly to a range of audiences, through a variety of techniques
- Develop and maintain working relationships and co-operative networks with supervisors, colleagues, peers and the wider research community
- Exhibit self-awareness and the ability to identify their own training needs in relation to their current position and future career development

In addition, many students will have attained additional skills relating to areas such as teaching, mentoring, public engagement, exploitation and commercialisation of research, and leadership.

Reference Points

- The UK Quality Code for Higher Education
 - The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
 - Subject Benchmark Statement for Theology & Religious Studies
 - Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Characteristics Statements: Doctoral Degrees
 - UTC Quality Action Plan
 - Draft of the UTC Teaching and Learning Strategy
 - UTC Assessment policy
 - Student, Staff, and External Examiner feedback and comments
-