Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in
THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES
Tuning Educational Structures in Europe

The name *Tuning* was chosen for the project to reflect the idea that universities do not look for uniformity in their degree programmes or any sort of unified, prescriptive or definitive European curricula but simply for points of reference, convergence and common understanding. The protection of the rich diversity of European education has been paramount in the Tuning Project from the start and the project in no way seeks to restrict the independence of academic and subject specialists, or undermine local and national academic authority.
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INTRODUCTION

The field of Theology and Religious Studies in general has traditionally been organized along denominational lines, each programme being delivered in accordance with the beliefs and concerns of a specific faith. In the Europe of today this essential aspect of the human experience has become the object of comparative and multidisciplinary studies. There are many reasons for this, among which the most evident are related to current changes in European society and values. On the one hand, widespread secularisation has stimulated interest in the social functions of religion (for example in building social cohesion) and in religious culture. On the other, immigration and globalisation have brought people of many religious backgrounds into close and sometime conflictual contact, showing the importance of anchoring norms and practices to the principles expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in fact promoting a multicultural society including individuals and groups of different religious faiths.

The co-existence of many religions in the European social and political milieu, their interaction with political and economic institutions, recent population movements, the growing reality of a multicultural society in multinational Europe, the search for paths for dialogue between religions, the growth of fundamentalist movements, and the experience of conflicts in which religious background plays a role are only some factors that favour a global approach to Theology and Religious Studies. This means that the subject area must be addressed with reference not only to the past, but also to the present and the future.

The discussion about the relationship between religion and cultural diversity concerns all Europe. The EU consists of states and societies - each having a long history and rich cultural tradition - which share some common principles and values and at the same time have specific consolidated cultural characteristics. We live in an era of cultural pluralism, although this may not be recognised by all. Democracy can provide the appropriate framework for the operation of religions by guaranteeing freedom of thought and conscience, and respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

An interdisciplinary approach to religious phenomena has come prevalent in recent years. The traditional mono-dimensional approach is not adequate to understand the different ways people perceive the supernatural and organise their devotional practices and beliefs in a multicultural setting. In many countries, specific academic institutions deal with this issue. These institutions conduct research, organize conferences, and publish magazines and books. In some cases Theology and Religious Studies may be linked to other subject areas as Law, Political Sciences, Pedagogy, History, Sociology or Oriental Studies.
1. THE FIELD OF THE SUBJECT AREA EXPLAINED

Theology and religious studies in Europe constitute a mosaic. The broad area of theological, social and cultural studies is addressed, with regard to research and higher education, by universities, various faculties, research centres, associations, non-governmental organizations, governmental institutions and religious communities. These institutions have different legal and academic status. For example there are confessional or non-confessional faculties, founded by the state or the religious communities, controlled by government or by the churches. Graduates of theological faculties, like graduates in other areas of the humanities, go onto a wide range of graduate-level occupations. Many plan or hope for employment in schools or religious communities. Many however end up unemployed or employed in roles unrelated to their studies.

A distinction is made between theology and religious studies, although some departments combine the study of both, and the theology of religions other than Christianity is also studied. Students (men and women) are admitted to higher education programmes usually after completion of upper secondary school completion. The faculties function either on a non-confessional or on a denominational basis. Universities that are state founded and supervised are normally non-confessional, although in some cases a few professorial posts are partly funded by churches. BA/MA and PhD degree programmes are also offered in denominational seminaries or independent theological colleges. In these cases there is denominational control as far as funding and curriculum design are concerned.

2. OVERVIEW OF TYPICAL DEGREES

Most commonly institutions offer first cycle degrees in Theology or Religious Studies after 3 years. Some institutions use modular courses. Often an outcomes approach is employed, and in some cases there are national level descriptors and subject benchmarks.

Second Cycle degree programmes usually last 2 years. In most cases students are required to do course work, attend seminars, prepare and defend a final dissertation and/or sit a final exam. Main specific thematic areas are Biblical Theology, Church History, Patrology, Dogmatics, Church Law, Ecumenism, Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Philosophy of Religion, Religious Education, Pastoral Theology, Religious Art, Archaeology.

Doctorates in Theology or Religious Studies require the elaboration and defence of a dissertation. Third cycle or doctoral studies usually last 3 or 4 years, and in some cases include a taught part.
3. OVERVIEW OF TYPICAL OCCUPATIONS OF GRADUATES

The principal aim of all theological faculties is to prepare future religious personnel, such as priests, ministers and teachers of religious education. But to be more flexible, faculties often modify their study programmes to meet other demands of society. Graduates of theological faculties who do not find or desire employment in religious structures, may work in the social services (for example in offices that provide the first contact with recent immigrants), in the spheres of culture and media. They may also be employed in schools, clubs or centres which provide religious training or organise activities linked to religious communities as teachers’ assistants or organisers of community activities. University graduates in the discipline, however, like graduates in other areas of the humanities, find employment in a wide range of occupations.

4. GENERIC COMPETENCES

One of the key tasks undertaken by the Theology and Religious Studies Subject Area Group was to consider the extent to which the generic competences identified during the earlier stages of the Tuning project applied to the academic discipline of Theology and Religious Studies. The process consisted of three stages.

In the first instance, the members of the group familiarised themselves with the 31 generic competences, considered them in relation to their relevance to the discipline of Theology and Religious Studies and discussed the parameters of the process through which those competences could be tested vis-à-vis the perceptions and expectations of the stakeholders of the discipline, as well as in the context of the actual academic practice of the subject area across Europe.

Secondly, the members of the group identified, in their respective countries, respondents belonging to the four target groups of stakeholders (graduates of Theology and Religious Studies, potential and/or actual employers of graduates, academics working in the area of Theology and Religious Studies, and current students of Theology and Religious Studies), and invited them to participate in a questionnaire involving three tasks:

1. Estimating the importance of the specific skill/competence for work in professional areas related to the academic discipline of Theology and Religious Studies;
2. Estimating the level to which each specific skill/competence was developed by degree programmes at their university;
3. Ranking the five skills/competences deemed by them to be the most important in the context of Theology and Religious Studies.
The complete list of Generic competences that has been used throughout various Tuning projects is:

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<tr>
<th>GENERIC COMPETENCES</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Ability to communicate in a second language</td>
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<td>2. Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning</td>
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<td>3. Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word in first language</td>
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<td>4. Ability to be critical and self-critical</td>
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<td>5. Ability to plan and manage time</td>
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<td>6. Ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning</td>
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<td>7. Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity)</td>
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<td>8. Ability to search for, process and analyse information from a variety of sources</td>
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<td>9. Ability to work autonomously</td>
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<td>10. Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems</td>
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<td>11. Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations</td>
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<td>12. Ability to make reasoned decisions</td>
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<td>13. Ability to undertake research at an appropriate level</td>
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<td>14. Ability to work in a team</td>
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<td>15. Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding of the profession</td>
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<td>16. Ability to motivate people and move toward common goals</td>
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<td>17. Commitment to conservation of the environment</td>
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<td>18. Ability to communicate key information from one’s discipline or field to non-experts</td>
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<td>19. Ability for abstract and analytical thinking, and synthesis of ideas</td>
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<td>20. Ability to interact constructively with others regardless of background and culture and respecting diversity</td>
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<td>21. Ability to design and manage projects</td>
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<td>22. Ability to interact with others in a constructive manner, even when dealing with difficult issues</td>
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<td>23. Ability to show awareness of equal opportunities and gender issues</td>
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<td>24. Commitment to health, well-being and safety</td>
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<td>25. Ability to take the initiative and to foster the spirit of entrepreneurship and intellectual curiosity</td>
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<td>26. Ability to evaluate and maintain the quality of work produced</td>
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<td>27. Ability to use information and communications technologies</td>
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<td>28. Commitment to tasks and responsibilities</td>
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<td>29. Ability to adapt to and act in new situations and cope under pressure</td>
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<td>30. Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness</td>
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<td>31. Ability to work in an international context</td>
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The results of the questionnaire were subsequently analysed in terms of the ratings of the competences as regards their importance and the extent to which they are actually developed and achieved, and their relative ranking; the results of the analysis were presented to the members of the subject area group at the second meeting of the project.

The final stage of the discussion of the generic competences involved an extended consideration of the results of the questionnaire, both across all subject areas and in the specific context of Theology and Religious Studies, but with a particular focus on the identification of those of the generic competence which were, in the opinion of both the respondents and the members of the Subject Area Group, central to the academic and professional practice of the discipline as being crucial to the subject area; these were as follows (in the order of importance; original numbering retained):
2. Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning
3. Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word in first language
4. Ability to be critical and self-critical
15. Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding of the profession
21. Interpersonal and interaction skills
8. Ability to search for, process and analyse information from a variety of sources
7. Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity)
11. Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations
10. Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems
19. Ability for abstract thinking, analysis and synthesis
13. Ability to undertake research at an appropriate level
25. Appreciation of and respect for diversity and multiculturality
6. Ability to show awareness of equal opportunities and gender issues

5. SUBJECT SPECIFIC COMPETENCES

In the process of identifying the most important professional competences central to the subject area, The Theology and Religious Studies Subject Area Group was able to utilise materials produced by two Thematic Networks (EuReSIS and TRES) which gave some initial orientation. They also used the Tuning list of generic competences, the list of specific competences of History area, the list of specific competences on religious studies from Estonia and the list of specific competences from QAA UK Benchmarks on Theology and Religious Studies for inspiration.

The Group studied critically the above mentioned documents and after a long, productive and often lively discussion elaborated the list of 30 subject specific competences that were afterwards tested via the Tuning consultation of the four target groups of stake-holder groups (graduates, employers, students and academics):
SUBJECT SPECIFIC COMPETENCES

1. A critical awareness of the historical, social, and cultural significance of religious traditions and of attitudes toward religions.
2. An awareness of the ways in which theological understanding or religious belief may influence and inform the ethics, outlook, and behaviour of individuals and communities.
3. A knowledge of the ways in which specific religions and religious institutions are structured and regulated.
4. The ability to read texts critically and accurately with a view to their original meaning, and their historical and contemporary application.
5. A sensibility to the problems of religious language and experience, and to issues of multiple and conflicting interpretations of language and symbols, texts and traditions.
6. A critical awareness of the interactions between religions and societies, both historically and in the contemporary world.
7. An appreciation of, and the capacity to apply in practice, an understanding of the complexity of different mentalities, social behaviours and aesthetic responses, and of the ways they have been shaped by beliefs and values, and conversely, how beliefs, sacred texts and art forms have been shaped by society and politics.
8. An appreciation of both the interconnectedness and internal tensions within a system of beliefs and practices, and of the theological significance of religious statements.
9. An ability to understand and evaluate new and developing forms of religious belief and practice.
10. An ability to apply theological knowledge in professional and social life, in accordance with human rights and European values.
11. To understand and, as appropriate, to participate in dialogue between religious traditions and belief systems.
12. An awareness of the roles of the theologian in different contexts and societies.
13. A knowledge of the history, and specifically the religious history, of relevant regions.
14. An ability to read and comprehend academic texts in relevant disciplines.
15. A critical awareness of the ongoing nature of theological research and debate.
16. An ability to communicate orally in ones own language using the terminology and techniques accepted in the profession.
17. An ability to communicate orally in other languages using the terminology and techniques accepted in the profession.
18. An ability to read historical texts or original documents in ones own language, to summarize, transcribe and catalogue information as appropriate.
19. An ability to read historical texts or original documents in other languages, to summarize, transcribe and catalogue information as appropriate.
20. An ability to write with clarity using appropriate styles of writing.
21. A knowledge and ability to use selectively information retrieval tools, such as bibliographical or other databases.
22. A knowledge and ability to use specific tools and relevant software to study sources.
23. An ability to use appropriate information technology and internet resources.
25. An awareness of, and, as appropriate, an ability to employ tools from other relevant disciplines (e.g. literary theory and criticism, semiotics, art history, archaeology, anthropology, law, sociology, philosophy, economics, natural sciences, bioethics).
26. An awareness of methods and issues in different branches of theological and religious studies.
27. An ability to define research topics which can make a suitable contribution to knowledge and debate in the areas of theology and religious studies.
28. An ability to identify sources of information for research projects, and to use them appropriately.
29. An ability to communicate theological and religious concepts and contexts to a broader public.
30. A knowledge of the theory and practice of religious education.
The group discussed and analysed at length the results of the consultation with regard to their perceived importance and achievement. It was decided to formulate a list of the 11 most important specific competences (key competences) for all four groups of stakeholders. It was decided to formulate a list of the eleven most important specific competences for all four groups of stakeholders, which proved to be competence numbers: 29, 2, 4, 1, 7, 6, 10, 15, 16, 20, 30.

The specific competences that were considered less important (according to the results of the questionnaires), were analysed by the group and the possibility that they should be given a higher position on the competence list considered. After a long discussion on rating and ranking, a list of the 10 most important specific competences was created: 29, 2, 4, 11, 1, 7, 6, 10, 15, 30.

After further discussion the group finally decided that the key competences for the subject area of Theology and Religious Studies were (original numbering retained):

29. An ability to communicate theological and religious concepts and contexts to a broader public
2. An awareness of the ways in which theological understanding or religious belief may influence and inform the ethics, outlook, and behaviour of individuals and communities
4. The ability to read texts critically and accurately with a view to their original meaning, and their historical and contemporary application
11. To understand and, as appropriate, to participate in dialogue between religious traditions and belief systems
1. A critical awareness of the historical, social, and cultural significance of religious traditions and of attitudes toward religions.
7. An appreciation of, and the capacity to apply in practice, an understanding of the complexity of different mentalities, social behaviours and aesthetic responses, and of the ways they have been shaped by beliefs and values, and conversely, how beliefs, sacred texts and art forms have been shaped by society and politics
6. A critical awareness of the interactions between religions and societies, both historically and in the contemporary world
10. An ability to apply theological knowledge in professional and social life, in accordance with human rights and European values
26. An awareness of methods and issues in different branches of theological and religious studies
30. A knowledge of the theory and practice of religious education
9. An ability to understand and evaluate new and developing forms of religious belief and practice.
### 6. COMPETENCE BASED CYCLE DESCRIPTORS

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<tr>
<th>KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>SKILLS</th>
<th>COMPETENCE</th>
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<td><strong>GRADUATES IN THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES AT LEVEL 6 ARE EXPECTED TO HAVE...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>An advanced knowledge of the historical, social, and cultural significance of religious traditions and of attitudes toward religions.</td>
<td>The capacity to apply in practice as required an understanding of the complexity of different mentalities, social behaviours and aesthetic responses, and of the ways they have been shaped by beliefs and values, and conversely, how beliefs, sacred texts and art forms have been shaped by society and politics.</td>
<td>Ability to show awareness of equal opportunities and gender issues</td>
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<td>A critical understanding of the ways in which theological understanding or religious belief may influence and inform the ethics, outlook, and behaviour of individuals and communities.</td>
<td>The ability to participate in dialogue between religious traditions and belief systems.</td>
<td>Ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning</td>
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<td>A knowledge of the ways in which specific religions and religious institutions are structured and regulated.</td>
<td>Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word, using the terminology and techniques accepted in the profession.</td>
<td>An ability to understand and evaluate new and developing forms of religious belief and practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A critical understanding of the interactions between religions and societies, both historically and in the contemporary world.</td>
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<td>Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations</td>
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<tr>
<td>A critical understanding of the complexity of different mentalities, social behaviours and aesthetic responses, and of the ways they have been shaped by beliefs and values, and conversely, how beliefs, sacred texts and art forms have been shaped by society and politics.</td>
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<td>Ability to be critical and self-critical</td>
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<td>A critical understanding of both the interconnectedness and internal tensions within a system of beliefs and practices, and of the theological significance of religious statements.</td>
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<td>Ability for abstract and analytical thinking, and synthesis of ideas</td>
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**LEVEL 6**

Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity)

An ability to apply theological knowledge in professional and social life, in accordance with human rights and European values.

Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word.
<p>| A critical understanding of dialogue between religious traditions and belief systems. An awareness of literature, methods and issues in different branches of theological and religious Studies, and of the ongoing nature of theological research and debate. | Ability to search for, process and analyse information from a variety of sources |
| Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems |
| Ability to undertake research at an appropriate level |
| Ability to participate effectively in small-scale projects |
| Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning |
| An ability to identify sources of information for research projects, and to use them appropriately |</p>
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<tr>
<th>KNOWLEDGE</th>
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<tr>
<td>A specialised knowledge of the historical, social, and cultural</td>
<td>The capacity to apply in practice as required an understanding of the</td>
<td>An advanced ability to understand and evaluate new and developing forms</td>
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<td>significance of religious traditions and of attitudes toward religions.</td>
<td>complexity of different mentalities, social behaviours and aesthetic</td>
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<td>responses, and of the ways they have been shaped by beliefs and values,</td>
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<td>shaped by society and politics.</td>
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<td>An advanced and critical comprehension of the ways in which</td>
<td>An ability to employ tools as necessary from other relevant disciplines</td>
<td>The capacity to take responsibility for the practical application of their</td>
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<td>theological understanding or religious belief may influence and inform</td>
<td>(e.g. literary theory and criticism, semiotics, art history, archaeology,</td>
<td>knowledge</td>
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<td>the ethics, outlook, and behaviour of individuals and communities.</td>
<td>anthropology, law, sociology, philosophy, economics, natural sciences,</td>
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<td>bioethics).</td>
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<td>An advanced knowledge of the ways in which specific religions and</td>
<td>An ability to communicate theological and religious concepts and contexts</td>
<td>Ability to reflect critically and self-critically</td>
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<td>religious institutions are structured and regulated.</td>
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<td>tensions within a system of beliefs and practices, and of the</td>
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<td>theological significance of religious statements.</td>
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A specialised understanding of dialogue between religious traditions and belief systems.

An awareness of literature, methods and issues in different branches of theological and religious Studies, and of the ongoing nature of theological research and debate.

An awareness at an advanced level of interdisciplinary issues and of relevant methods and theories in other disciplines (e.g. literary theory and criticism, semiotics, art history, archaeology, anthropology, law, sociology, philosophy, economics, natural sciences, bioethics).

A knowledge of the theory and practice of religious education.
Graduates in theology and religious studies at level 8 are expected to have...

<table>
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<tr>
<th>LEVEL 8</th>
<th>KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>SKILLS</th>
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<td></td>
<td>An expert knowledge of a specific issue in the field of theology and/or religious studies.</td>
<td>The ability to apply and evaluate in the most advanced way methods or methodologies used in the field</td>
<td>To advance knowledge and the field of research through discovery, innovation or redefinition of significant issues</td>
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<td>A highly informed knowledge of the broader area within which the subject of research lies.</td>
<td>The ability to analyse and evaluate theories which are established or at the cutting edge of the discipline.</td>
<td>The ability to define research topics which can make a significant contribution to knowledge and debate in the areas of theology and religious studies.</td>
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<td>An expert knowledge of theories, methods and issues in relevant branches of theological and religious studies, or of other fields of study as appropriate to the topic of research.</td>
<td>To present and disseminate the results of research in a clear and professional way.</td>
<td>The ability to work autonomously, or collaboratively in the design, guidance and leading of projects</td>
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7. Teaching, learning and assessment

The use of learning outcomes and competences is necessary in order to make study programmes, course units or modules student-centred/output oriented. This approach presupposes that the key knowledge and skills that a student must achieve during the learning process determine the content of the study programme. Learning outcomes and competences focus on the requirements both of the discipline and of society in terms of preparing for citizenship and employability. The first two cycles should not only give access to the following cycle but also to the labour market. This shows the relevance of using the concept of competences as a basis for learning outcomes.

Learning, teaching and assessment are linked to the learning outcomes as well as to particular competences.

The Theology and Religious Studies group after a long discussion defined 30 subject specific competences. These competences had a further elaboration in order to be compatible with the demands of the first, second and third cycle, in other word with EQF levels 6, 7 and 8. This outcome is essential for the curricula and course units design and consequently for the establishment of the respective learning outcomes. This procedure is based on the students’ workload measured in ECTS credits and includes teaching methods and assessment. It is a
holistic approach of the educational process coordinated by the teacher who interacts with his students.

Each course unit, module or curriculum is focused on a certain number of learning outcomes.

The assessment is focused on this group of learning outcomes. It is obvious that the variety of the choices of learning outcomes means a variety of approaches to learning/teaching and assessment. Each learning outcome has to be assessable. The most important is that studies become more open, flexible and can be updated easily.

7.1 DIFFERENT LEARNING/TEACHING APPROACHES

At European level the following practices are the most common:

**Lectures.** Usually a teacher speaks to a small or a larger group of students. Interaction is not in all cases guaranteed. The teaching methodology is often theoretical and generic. Students receive materials beforehand in order to facilitate learning. The participation of the student depends on the formal or informal character of teaching.

**Seminars and workshops.** This method can stimulate efficiently the participation of students in medium-size or small groups. They have the opportunity for informal and practical learning. The feel more free to express themselves. In this case specific learning outcomes could be achieved more easily. The teaching methodology includes actions as text comparison and critical thinking activities on chosen texts, group debate on critical conclusions, reports and verbal presentations.

**Tutorials** are useful to reinforce the interaction between the participants among themselves and the teacher. Teacher is regularly available in certain hours for more or less precisely programmed activities. Students individually or in groups can discuss and clarify issues raised during lecture courses.

**ICT** Teaching through the many virtual platforms for teaching. Students can participate in group or individually and in relation with main courses. Teacher can monitor teamwork skills as individual student learning.

**Excursions** (to worship places, museums, libraries) reinforce specific competences. Students can easier verify the theoretical knowledge in a very practical way in the relative environments.

**Placements** can offer very practical competences. Students experience on their future job. Common placements for Theology and religious studies are schools, religious communities, social services, NGO's.

The main learning activities students are required to do are linked with the various forms of teaching activities. Students can work individually or in a team:
• conducting searches on specific topics in libraries, archives or online
• preparing oral presentations,
• writing papers, reports, dissertations,
• communicating with people of different religions,
• attending different religious rituals,
• collaborating with students from other scientific areas.

7.2 ASSESSMENT

Assessment must be designed to ascertain whether or not the announced learning outcomes have been achieved to the level required. In theological and religious studies there is a variety of assessment methods which depends on national academic traditions. The most common are written and oral examinations. In written exams students are asked in a short or a longer period of time to answer questions, to comment on texts or to write themes. Assessment through “Multiple choice” is used in some countries. Furthermore, in some systems oral exams are used more commonly than written ones. It depends on class sizes and teacher choices. It seems that teaching at the level of the first cycle generally privileges exams over final papers, while in the second and the third cycles more importance is given to essay writing.

Students’ participation in classroom (discussion, asking questions, formulating comments, giving information) is usually used as a general indicator of the interest of the student and is auxiliary to the results of exams. Students also participate to the evaluation process. Students through there are also other quality assurance mechanisms that operate on institutional and extra-institutional levels. Some of them are regular accreditation and re-accreditation processes, annual reviews at departmental/institutional level, and periodic reviews organized both internally and externally. Questionnaires evaluate the course unit, teacher’s methods and practices and the ability to present course material set clear requirements for the course.

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