



## Programme Specification

A statement of the knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin a taught programme of study leading to an award from  
The University of Sheffield

1	<b>Programme Title</b>	Cognitive Studies
2	<b>Programme Code</b>	PHIT20
3	<b>JACS Code</b> (if applicable)	V500
4	<b>Level of Study</b>	Postgraduate
5a	<b>Final Qualification</b>	Master of Arts (MA)
5b	<b>Position in the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications</b>	Master's Level
6a	<b>Intermediate Qualification(s)</b>	Diploma, Certificate (see below)
6b	<b>Position in the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications</b>	Not applicable
7	<b>Teaching Institution</b> (if not Sheffield)	Not applicable
8	<b>Faculty</b>	Arts and Humanities
9	<b>Department</b>	Department of Philosophy
10	<b>Other Department(s) involved in teaching the programme</b>	Department of Psychology; School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics; Department of Human Communication Sciences; Department of Archaeology
11	<b>Mode(s) of Attendance</b>	Full-time, part-time
12	<b>Duration of the Programme</b>	1 year full-time, 2 years part-time
13	<b>Accrediting Professional or Statutory Body</b>	None
14	<b>Date of production/revision</b>	January 2008

### 15. Background to the programme and subject area

Cognitive studies is an arena for interdisciplinary discussion of the theoretical significance of research in a number of specialist disciplines. Major theoretical issues in cognitive studies concern questions such as:

- How much of human knowledge and ability is innate and how much is acquired through learning?
- Is human learning domain-specific and, if it is, what are those domains and their boundaries?
- To what extent can the human mind be viewed as a suite of modules with ways of processing information of which we are not consciously aware?
- What makes some parts of cognition available to conscious awareness?
- What is the role of natural language in cognition?
- To what extent is human cognition moulded by the cultural environment in which a child grows up?
- How do humans acquire a moral sense and a feeling of being obligated by moral norms?

In recent decades developmental psychology, computational modelling of cognitive processes, studies of language acquisition, and studies of developmental and acquired deficits, both in language and other cognitive competences, have greatly enhanced systematic knowledge of human cognition. Using these advances to achieve an understanding of the mechanisms and functions of cognitive processing requires integrating findings from diverse areas, in an attempt to resolve issues which have implications for several fields of study (including adult psychology, child development, language acquisition, human communication, and evolutionary psychology). The Hang Seng Centre for Cognitive Studies, based in Sheffield and under the direction of staff in the Philosophy Department, has, since the early 1990s, organised a series of international and interdisciplinary research programmes in Cognitive Studies. In consequence the University of Sheffield has acquired an international reputation in cognitive studies, which has generated considerable interest in those considering study in this area at postgraduate level.

The **MA in Cognitive Studies** is designed to serve that interest, exploiting both the expertise of researchers in Psychology, Linguistics, Human Communication, Archaeology, and Philosophy and also interdisciplinary interaction

between these researchers which previously existed at the level of research workshops and reading groups.

This MA programme has two distinctive attractions: 1. because of its interdisciplinary design it will enable students to engage with research projects in several areas, acquiring a strong perspective on their interconnections, and learning from the contributions of members of more than one university department; 2. for those students continuing to a PhD in Sheffield there will be opportunities to attend workshops organised by the Hang Seng Centre, meeting leading researchers in Cognitive Studies from all over the world, and being introduced to possibilities of international collaboration in their own research projects.

## 16. Programme aims

The MA in Cognitive Studies aims:

- i. to provide students with an understanding of central theoretical issues in Cognitive Studies;
- ii. to equip students with an appreciation of how these issues are related to empirical findings concerning the development and functioning of human cognition;
- iii. to introduce students to an environment of interdisciplinary research and communication;
- iv. to produce students who are well prepared to pursue their own research projects at PhD level;
- v. to support students in identifying appropriate research questions and in addressing these in sustained pieces of academic writing;
- vi. to give students the ability and confidence to present their work to a professional audience;
- vii. to give students in the programme an appreciation of the opportunities open to researchers in Cognitive Studies, and to support them in applying for and taking advantage of those opportunities.

## 17. Programme learning outcomes

**Knowledge and understanding: By the end of this programme, students taking this MA will have developed:**

<b>K1</b>	a critical understanding of central theoretical issues in cognitive studies
<b>K2</b>	familiarity with major empirical findings in cognitive studies and an appreciation of their theoretical significance
<b>K3</b>	specialised substantive knowledge of specific areas in cognitive studies
<b>K4</b>	a detailed understanding of the research methods and techniques appropriate to their chosen areas of specialisation
<b>K5</b>	a capacity to identify appropriate research questions

**Skills and other attributes: By the end of the programme graduates of this MA will have developed abilities to:**

<b>S1</b>	engage and interact with others, by presenting aspects of their work orally, responding appropriately to feedback and questions
<b>S2</b>	relate empirical evidence to major theoretical issues and evaluate its significance in an informed and critical way
<b>S3</b>	write incisively and informatively on relevant topics, both for their own research, and for funding applications
<b>S4</b>	construct intelligent experimental designs, integrating theoretical questions with appropriate experimental methods
<b>S5</b>	(where appropriate according to specialisation) work effectively and ethically with participants in trials and experiments, collecting, summarising and analysing the data acquired

## 18. Teaching, learning and assessment

**Development of the learning outcomes is promoted through the following teaching and learning methods:**

### 1. Seminars and Workshops

Seminars and workshops will be a major form of teaching and learning on the MA in Cognitive Studies, providing a venue for exposition and discussion of theoretical and experimental issues and a medium for further reflection in combination with independent study. Seminars may be either tutor-led or student-led. Some will have a standard reading-group format, centred around prior study of recommended texts and recent publications. In modules devoted to empirical investigations the focus of seminars will be on methodological issues, experimental design, and the analysis of data. (K1-K5, S1, S2)

## **2. Lectures**

Some modules will use lectures as a teaching method, particularly where background material needs to be summarised (as preparation for seminars or independent study) or where a lecturer wishes to give her own perspective on theoretical issues or present the results of her own research. (K1-K5, S1, S2)

## **3. Individual Supervision**

Each student on the MA in Cognitive Studies will be assigned a supervisor from one of the collaborating departments, depending upon the student's intended area of specialisation (philosophy, psychology, linguistics, human communication, archaeology). As well as advising the student throughout the MA programme, the supervisor will arrange one-to-one consultations to discuss topics and drafts of work for the PhD Proposal (where appropriate, for research-track MA students) and the MA dissertation. (K1-K5, S2, S3, S4)

## **4. Independent Study**

Independent study is vital on this MA (as on other programmes), for very good reasons. It enables students (i) to prepare for discussion in lectures and seminars, (ii) to put in the necessary background reading for written assignments, (iii) to broaden and deepen knowledge gained through lectures and seminars, and (iv) to rehearse and assemble materials for presentations. In general independent study is also important because it promotes students' autonomy and personal capacity for taking initiative, equally valuable as preparation for PhD research or for other career paths. (Relevant to all programme learning outcomes.)

## **5. Practical Training**

In some units in the programme, according to specialisation (e.g. the Research Support Module for Language Acquisition), the students will receive practical training through collaborative work with lead researchers on ongoing projects. (K3-K5, S2, S4, S5)

## **Opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes are provided through the following assessment methods:**

### **1. Essays**

For most individual modules in the programme the main form of assessment will be a research paper or written assignment, surveying relevant literature and reviewing and discussing major issues and recent research. As the character of written work in the contributing disciplines differs according to the nature of the research involved, the requirements for written work are specified for specific modules selected. Those in Philosophy, for example, require a 4-6,000 word paper or two 2-3,000 word papers. (K1-K5, S2, S3)

### **2. Oral Presentation**

Some modules will require students to give class presentations on topics they have studied and prepared in advance. Presentations of this sort will form a standard way of organising seminar programmes in several of the modules within the MA in Cognitive Studies. Presentations may be given by individuals or by groups of students, depending upon the topics and numbers involved. (K1-K5, S1, S2)

### **3. Dissertation**

The largest single element in the assessment for the MA in Cognitive Studies is a dissertation of 10-14,000 words\*, completed over the summer months. Each student is allocated an individual supervisor to guide them through this exercise. The dissertation is intended to provide students with an opportunity, by synthesising the knowledge and skills acquired over the previous year, to develop their own independent research projects within a supportive structure. (K1-K5, S2, S3; and where appropriate also S4, S5)

(\*Or an equivalent Research Project in the case of Human Communication Sciences. See the units AAP6009, ELL6600, HCS6007, and PHI6800 for further details.)

## **19. Reference points**

### **The learning outcomes have been developed to reflect the following points of reference:**

- The Mission Statement of the University of Sheffield, as presented in the corporate plan and the Learning and Teaching Strategy of the university;
- The appropriate qualification descriptors contained in the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2001

## 20. Programme structure and regulations

From September to May students on the MA in Cognitive Studies will be attending seminars and preparing coursework assignments, which will count for 120 of the 180 credits. MA students will then go on to write a dissertation between May and September on a topic within their particular area of specialisation.

In the first semester all students on the MA will take the Cognitive Studies Seminar, which is intended to provide general orientation on central theoretical issues and to highlight areas in which these issues can be further illuminated and advanced by empirical research, providing an overall interdisciplinary approach. Students will also select an additional module (or modules) in the first semester to the value of 30 credits from the approved modules in Philosophy, Psychology, Linguistics, Human Communication Science, and Archaeology, in accordance with their particular research interests and in consultation with the co-Directors for the MA in Cognitive Studies programme.

In the second semester, students will take a further 60 credits of approved advanced content units. Those who have exhibited sufficient ability in the first semester and who wish to continue research at doctoral level will be encouraged to work on formulating a proposal for a PhD level research project under the guidance of their supervisor, in order to assist them in applying for funding for further postgraduate research. (For students with a research speciality in Philosophy this would be done via the unit dedicated to this purpose, PHI6700 PhD Proposal. Students with a research speciality in other disciplines should do this in connection with a unit in their chosen discipline.)

During the second semester, students will also start their 60 credit dissertation (assisted by one-to-one consultations with a supervisor), which will be completed over the summer months.

So, in summary, the programme structure is:

### MA in Cognitive Studies

Cognitive Studies Seminar (30 credits)

Approved modules to the value of 90 credits

A dissertation of 10-14,000 words (60 credits)

Students who successfully complete 120 credits, but who do not complete a dissertation, will be eligible for the award of Diploma in Cognitive Studies. Students who successfully complete 60 credits will be eligible for the award of Certificate in Cognitive Studies.

Detailed information about the structure of programmes, regulations concerning assessment and progression and descriptions of individual modules are published in the University Calendar available on-line at [www.shef.ac.uk/calendar](http://www.shef.ac.uk/calendar)

## 21. Student development over the course of study

The MA in Cognitive Studies programme is designed to produce graduates who are capable of contributing to interdisciplinary debate in Cognitive Studies, who have their own area of specialisation, and who have also developed an ability to formulate and carry through their own research projects.

The Cognitive Studies Seminar is a core component and central element in the programme, since it lays general theoretical foundations and provides orientation in significant interdisciplinary issues, as well as providing practical exercise in interdisciplinary interaction. Its seminars are intended to provide a parallel at the postgraduate level to the workshops organised at advanced research level in Hang Seng Centre research programmes. For those advancing to PhD study in Sheffield they may also provide an introduction to attendance at these workshops.

The coherence of the programme is provided by this core element, and also by the guidance of the programme's co-Directors in assisting students to put together from the approved modules an individual suite of units, which combines appropriate research training and specialisation.

Over the course of the degree, students will acquire the skills and confidence to enable them to work increasingly independently of their supervisors, the final dissertation being the realisation of this increased autonomy.

## 22. Criteria for admission to the programme

Students admitted onto the MA should have, or be predicted to obtain, a good 2.1 Honours Degree or better, or an equivalent qualification from an overseas institution. We will also take into account applicants' writing samples and references.

Detailed information regarding admission to all postgraduate programmes offered by the Department of Philosophy is available on-line at:

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/philosophy/prospectivepostgraduates>. Applicants whose first language is not English will be

required to provide evidence of an adequate level of proficiency in English. The University's policies on assessment of proficiency in English are detailed at:

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/postgraduate/info/englang.html>

In applying these standards for entry to the MA in Cognitive Studies, where a range is specified for the minimum threshold, performance at the higher end of that range will be required.

### **23. Additional information**

Students on the MA in Cognitive Studies will be strongly encouraged to attend both the interdisciplinary reading groups organised in parallel with Hang Seng Centre research projects, and departmental research seminars appropriate to their chosen fields of specialisation.

This specification represents a concise statement about the main features of the programme and should be considered alongside other sources of information provided by the teaching department(s) and the University. In addition to programme specific information, further information about studying at The University of Sheffield can be accessed via our Student Services web site at [www.shef.ac.uk/ssid](http://www.shef.ac.uk/ssid).