MA in
Digital
Theology

Durham University · **CRANMER HALL DURHAM**

in partnership with

**Durham University
&
Cranmer Hall,
St John's College, Durham**

Guide

The MA in Digital Theology Guide

This Guide is designed to introduce our MA in Digital Theology and to give information that you will need to navigate your way through the course. More detailed information can be found in the MA Academic Handbook.

We hope that all the information given here is correct but we reserve the right to make mistakes and to make amendments! This guide is not a substitute for personal conversation and we hope that you will feel able to ask any further questions which you may have.

Welcome

Dr Jocelyn Bryan	Academic Dean	j.m.bryan@durham.ac.uk	0191 3343853
Revd Dr Nick Moore	MA Programme Director	nicholas.j.moore@durham.ac.uk	0191 3343899
Dr Jonas Kurlberg	MADT Programme Manager	jonas.kurlberg@durham.ac.uk	0191 3343850

Aims

Cranmer Hall offers three MA programmes, in **Theology & Ministry (MATM)**, **Consultancy for Mission and Ministry (MACMM)**, and **Digital Theology (MADT)**. These programmes aim to develop lay and ordained Christians who will then be equipped to play a leading role in the development of Christian mission and ministry in the UK and internationally as practitioners, educators and enablers of the whole people of God. Our ambition is to provide the best programmes in the UK for integrating high quality theological thinking with imaginative and disciplined ministerial training and training for consultancy. Recent external examiner reports – see our website – indicate that we are realising our hopes.

This is achieved by a rigorous course of inter-disciplinary postgraduate level theological education, validated by Durham University, taught in Cranmer Hall with the Wesley Study Centre (a centre for Methodist research and scholarship within St John's College).

The **MA in Digital Theology** aims to explore the core elements of a theological reflection on digital culture and its effect on Christian theology and practice.

The aim of the programmes assumes diversity among the potential student body.

The **MATM** programmes attract students with a range of different educational needs embraced within this overall aim including:
- Practitioners wanting to explore and extend a range of ministerial skills.
- Theological educators looking for a foundation from which to teach particular disciplines.
- Ordinands needing to fulfil the training requirements of the churches at postgraduate level.
- Students wanting to lay a foundation for research to doctoral level in an area not covered by the Durham University Department of Theology and Religion's MA suite of programmes (such as Practical Theology or Missiology).

The **MA in Digital Theology** attracts students from a number of different interested groups including:
- Students with a particular interest in theological reflection on digital culture.
- Theological students in TEIs or in overseas seminaries who seek to progress to a PhD programme in cognate studies.
- Lay people or ordained ministers involved in Church communications, leadership, pioneer ministry, or discipleship and learning and evangelism.
- Persons with a background in the IT-industry who wish to integrate their work experience with their faith.

Ethos

The **MADT** is an exercise of **contextual theology. 'Doing theology contextually is to do theology in dialogue with two realities: the experience of the past recorded in Scripture and the church's tradition(s) and the experience of the present or the context in which Christian theologians live.'** (Bevans, 2010). The **MADT** therefore brings together these two core realities – the historical investigation of Christian theology within the context of contemporary digital culture. Students are expected to examine both realities within their own experience of Christian ministry and practice and to reflect on how their findings impact that ministry and practice. Modules and options have been chosen to develop different aspects of contextual theology. Students should discuss with the Programme Manager the choice of modules which enables them to explore specific aspects of this contextual theology.

The MA programmes, as a whole, sit within the discipline of Practical Theology. **'Practical Theology' is the study of theology in the context of ministerial practice, such that the resources of the Scriptures, the theological tradition and the human sciences and arts are used as material for reflection upon practice and that practice itself generates new insights into Scripture and tradition. It is a disciplined engagement with the interface between theology and ministry.**

The **MADT**, however, should not be narrowly construed as an MA in Applied or Pastoral or Empirical Theology but as embracing a broad range of interests and priorities both from our theological traditions and from contemporary experience.

Within a comprehensive range of subjects, the degree's academic integrity is ensured through a carefully designed curriculum comprising two core modules in digital theology; one methodology module from a choice of three offered on the MATM and in the Department of Theology and Religion; an elective module drawn from a wide range of choices; a dissertation, common to all students on the MADT, which must be a sustained piece of theological reflection on contemporary digital culture, digitally mediated Christianity or similar.

What is Digital Theology?

In the spirit of interdisciplinary and contributory research – here are some different ways of describing what digital theology might be:

Digital theology is an exercise of contextual theology - a bringing together of two core realities: the historical investigation of Christian theology and the specific context of contemporary digital culture. I have sometimes likened the process to the Large Hadron Collider – slamming digital culture and theology together and then investigating what happens, what new learning is found, what the effect is on theology and on digital culture from them being brought together. But it is also about who does the theology – we need to bring different people and disciplines to the table – scientists, coders, computer programmers, sociologists, entrepreneurs, digital humanists. Digital theology is a place to play with ideas and do interdisciplinary research and discover new knowledge.

If theology is the theo-logic—the study of God and the relationship of the divine to the human world, then digital theology is what happens when that theo-logic intersects with digital spaces. Expanding the boundaries of the created world to include digital spaces and technology, digital theology is the exploration of the relationship of the divine to this expanded world. It's thinking about questions such as: where is God online? What is sacramental in digital spaces? What does it mean to be human in a digital age? What is eschatology in a digital future?

Digital Theology happens when (1) digital tools or methods are applied to the something within the discipline of Theology and/or when (2) the tools or methods of Theology are applied to something related to digital technology or culture. An example of the former is the creation of a Bible App. An example of the latter is asking the question, 'Can we participate in communion remotely via skype'?

Christian digital theology attempts to:
- Accurately describe the process of change brought about by the impact of digital culture upon Christian beliefs and practices;
- Gain a clear picture of the resulting theology, that is, the nuances or emphases in Christian's beliefs and practices;
- Explain these developments with reference to pertinent disciplines (e.g. practical theology, sociology, history);
- Robustly theorise the medium and long-term implications of these changes;
- Critically engage with the resulting theology and its implications;

Digital Theology within the Digital Humanities

Digital Theology is part of a movement called the Digital Humanities (DH). In turn, DH is a contested field with many different definitions. Some people would argue that DH is simply computational technology and techniques applied to the humanities – this is sometimes known as the tools and archives approach. Alternatively, a broader definition of DH has encouraged others to see DH in as a movement in three waves:
1. Digitisation of material artefacts, such as manuscripts
2. Development of digital artefacts as both objects of research and tools to develop research
3. Proliferation of digital artefacts and of big data with related development of research methods

Alternatively, David Golumbia on the *Uncomputing* blog points to this broader definition which may well feed into a broader understanding of Digital Theology:

> At its core, Digital Humanities … teach[es] students to create and critique media content, to develop the necessary skills and abilities to evaluate this content, to manipulate and transform digital technologies, and to develop the requisite literacy across information environments and media forms, including textual, aural, visual, and digital domains.

Institutional Information

St John's College is an autonomous college within the University of Durham comprising two Halls. **Cranmer Hall**, within St John's, exists primarily for the training of ordinands for the Church of England. Cranmer Hall is unique among the theological colleges of the Church of England in that it is part of St John's College, which is a recognised, though independent, college of the University of Durham. The College is registered as a limited company and the Council acts as its Board. As the Council of the whole College it is answerable both to the Bishops of the Church of England and also to the Council of Durham University. It is therefore responsible for overall policy matters in the College as a whole and in its constituent parts. The Council has a subcommittee, the Cranmer Committee, which normally meets three times a year and oversees and reviews the life of Cranmer Hall. The Principal of St John's College is the Revd Prof. David Wilkinson. The Warden of Cranmer Hall is the Revd Dr Philip Plyming.

The **Wesley Study Centre** is a centre for Methodist Research and Scholarship. It is part of St John's College and its Director is the Revd Dr Liz Kent.

Cranmer Hall has a number of students preparing for lay ministry in different ways as well as ordinands. Both Cranmer Hall and the Wesley Study Centre are concerned to serve the Church in the wider region of the North East, across the UK and internationally by offering a range of different courses.

The programmes described in this guide are validated by Durham University, a world-class university ranked in the top 100, and on successful completion will lead to the award of a qualification of Durham University. The **MADT** includes modules from the Department of Theology and Religion, recently ranked fifth highest Theology Department in the world.

Students registered on the **MADT** are registered to St John's College and to Durham University. The validation arrangement is overseen by a Management Committee, comprised of members of St John's College and Durham University and chaired by a senior member of the University Faculty of Arts and Humanities. The Management Committee is responsible to the Senate of the University for oversight and maintenance of the academic standards of the programmes.

Entry Requirements and Selection Procedures

MA in Digital Theology (MADT)

The normal entrance requirement is a degree in Theology or Religious Studies or a related subject classed as a first or a good second class honours degree. Graduates in other disciplines and with experience of Theology or Religious Studies to at least Certificate level (with marks at credit or higher) may also be admitted to the programme. In addition to the appropriate academic qualifications, all candidates should have recent or current experience of the practice of Christian ministry, either through an ordained or lay perspective.

Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma in Digital Theology

The normal entrance requirement is a degree in Theology or Religious Studies or a related subject. Graduates in other disciplines with experience of Theology or Religious Studies to at least Certificate level may be admitted to the programme with the agreement of the Chair of Management Committee.

Suitably qualified mature students who have undertaken formal academic study to a similar level in non-accredited courses may also be admitted to the programme with the agreement of the Chair of the Management Committee. In addition to the appropriate academic qualifications, all candidates should have recent or current experience of the practice of Christian ministry, either through an ordained or lay perspective.

Standard of English

Candidates for whom English is not their first language, or who have not undertaken part or all of their earlier theological education in the medium of English, must satisfy the University of Durham's English language requirements.

Stand-alone Modules

In principle, all modules are accessible to students who wish to take them on a 'stand-alone' basis. Some students, who do not otherwise have the requisite entrance qualifications but who successfully complete the summative assessment for an individual module *may* include this as evidence for admission to further elements of the validated courses. They would then be subject to the normal interview procedure AND special concession entry procedure through the University. The following special regulations have been agreed with the University for students who wish to use a stand alone module subsequently as part of an application to join the full MADT programme.

Procedure to be followed in the case of a requested transfer onto the postgraduate programme in theology and ministry of a student who successfully completes the attendance and assessment requirements for one or more modules previously studied on a 'stand-alone' basis:

1 Students who successfully complete either one stand-alone module or two concurrently in the same academic year may apply for admission to the postgraduate programme **by concession** *either* in the following academic year *or*, by the latest, within twelve months of completion of the module(s) in question. All such applications will be considered individually on the basis of the candidate's performance in the stand-alone module(s) in question, which will provide evidence of his/her ability successfully to undertake postgraduate study.

2   That normally no more than one module may be completed in this way and submitted for consideration as part of the postgraduate programme in Digital Theology *unless* the student has studied two stand-alone modules concurrently in the same academic year. Even in the case of concurrent study of more than one stand-alone module a maximum of two modules will be eligible for consideration within the postgraduate programme. Hence, if after completing one (maximum two concurrent) stand-alone module(s) a student then considers signing on for a further stand-alone module, it will be made clear to them that they will not be allowed to carry any such module in to the postgraduate programme.

3   In the case of students admitted to the postgraduate programme in Digital Theology through this facility the actual mark obtained for the stand-alone module(s) will be included in the eventual postgraduate qualification profile of marks.

4   It will be made clear to students admitted to the postgraduate programme in Digital Theology on the basis of their performance in (a) stand-alone module(s) that they may NOT use this as the basis for any future appeal on the grounds that they performed badly because they did not have the formal entry requirements for postgraduate study and should not have been admitted.

Selection Procedures

Candidates will be invited to apply for a place on the MADT through Cranmer Hall and asked to complete an application form. Three references will be requested including at least two academic references, one reference commenting on experience of Christian ministry from a lay or ordained perspective. For candidates in full-time employment or stipendiary ministry, a reference from their employer/denomination indicating support for the programme of study. Candidates will also be required to satisfy the Colleges that they are able to meet the fees for the programme.

All candidates will be interviewed by the Programme Manager or their nominee and, subject to their satisfying the above criteria, an offer of a place may be made.

Accredited Prior Learning

It is possible to apply for Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) for Certificated or Experiential Learning. Students are advised to consult closely with Programme Directors when considering an APL application and to study Durham University student guidelines (http://www.dur.ac.uk/admissions/).

Key regulations include the following:

1. The award of APL is processed through the University Validation Office, to which all relevant documentation must be submitted, through the relevant Programme Directors, and is entirely at the discretion of the University, by concession.

2. The responsibility rests with the student to demonstrate that he/she has achieved the intended learning to outcomes of the module(s) in respect of which he/she is requesting APL.

3. A student may not normally be given APL in respect of more than one third of his/her total programme of study or modules to the value of a maximum of 60 credits at Level 4 for taught doctorates: i.e. no more than 20 credits for the Postgraduate Certificate, 40 credits for the Postgraduate Diploma and 60

credits for the MA. APL may not be sought for an optional module where a viable alternative module is available.

4. Applications for APL relate to study etc. prior to commencing a Durham programme.

5. Applications for APL may be made after a place has been offered but must be made prior to commencement of the programme.

6. Modules awarded by APL shall be recorded as a Pass.

7. If a student is given APL in respect of a module which contributes to his/her degree average, the average including the classification of distinction shall be made on the basis of the remaining modules studied at Durham

Organisation, Design and Structure

The **MA in Digital Theology** provides candidates with the option of focussing their postgraduate qualification on the specialism of and the interplay between Christian theology and technology and digitalisation. This MA requires students to follow a prescribed pathway with a choice of methodology modules and one elective module.

Within the MADT there are four components:
- Two core modules
  - Digital Theology (THMN45030)
  - Digitally Mediated Christianity (THMN44930)
- A choice of one methodology module from the following:
  - Theological and Practical Reflection on Ministry and Mission (THMN40130)
  - Social Scientific Methods in the Study of Religion (THEO41330)
  - Ecclesiology and Ethnography (THEO43830)
- A choice of one module selected from those offered within the MATM provision for the year or from those offered by the Department of Theology and Religion. Students are invited to give particular consideration to the following modules:
  - Intellect and Imagination: Apologetics and the Mass Media (THMN41030)
  - The Dialogue of Science and Theology in Mission and Ministry (THMN42930)
  - Biblical Literacy in a Media Culture (THMN44130)
- A Dissertation (THMN45160)

Students will be awarded a **Postgraduate Certificate in Digital Theology** on successful completion of the two core modules in Digital Theology (THMN45030) and Digitally Mediated Christianity (THMN44930). Students will be awarded a **Postgraduate Diploma in Digital Theology** on successful completion of four of the modules outlined above with the exception of the Dissertation (THMN45160).

The majority of students will undertake the MADT through part-time study over two or three years. The distribution of work for full and part-time students will *normally* be as follows.

	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
One Year FT	2 Core Modules 1 Methodology 1 Elective Dissertation (= 180 credits)		
Two Year PT	2 Core Modules 1 Methodology (= 90 credits)	1 Elective Dissertation (= 90 credits)	
Three Year PT	1 Core Module 1 Methodology (= 60 credits)	1 Core Module 1 Elective (= 60 credits)	Dissertation (= 60 credits)

Timetable

Considerable thought has been given to the question of timetabling so as to meet the needs of both internal and external students**.** Our normal rhythm is:

1. The first year will begin with two days of induction to Digital Theology/Digitally Meditated Christianity, followed by two days of induction to the MATM programme and postgraduate study skills.

2. Modules will be delivered either through module-specific teaching blocks, term-time seminars/lectures or through online provision.

3. Throughout the year, full-time and part-time students will have access to a series of regular blended learning (offline/online) seminars on subjects related to the course.

4. Students will have access to a MADT-specific social media platform for conversation, chat and sharing of information and research.

5. Each April, Cranmer will sponsor a Digital Symposium, which will include training on dissertation writing and further study skills sessions. For full-time students a similar exercise will be offered in October (see below).

6. Notice of timetable changes will be given well in advance of the start of the programmes, although some flexibility will be retained in order to avoid clashes.

We believe the timetable offers both access and choice for full and part-time students and for local and distance students.

Full time students or part time students close to Durham will also in practice be able to access a wider range of modules from the Department of Theology and Religion MA programmes, Applied Social Sciences and Community and Youth Work courses.

The Delivery of the Programme

Key Skills

Three/four days of lectures, seminars and practical instruction to develop key skills in research, IT, and presentation of work.

Core Modules

THMN45030 Digital Theology

Two days of lectures and seminars at the beginning of the academic year (September) exploring an introduction to the theological study of Digital Culture and the integration of Digital research methods with theological research methods. A further two-day teaching block will be taken in the middle of the academic year.

THMN44930 Digital Mediated Christianity

Two days of lectures and seminars in the middle of the academic year exploring an introduction to the theological study of Digital Culture and the integration of Digital research methods with theological research methods. A further two day teaching block will be taken later in the academic year.

Digital Symposium

Cranmer Hall will sponsor a 24hr conference in the early Summer for all students on the MA, and for prospective MA students, exploring key issues related to Digital Theology, with guest speakers, seminars and research skills/dissertation skills training included.

Methodology Modules (students take *one* of the following options)

THMN40130 Theological and Practical Reflection for Mission and Ministry

One half day of lectures at the beginning of the academic year will cover an introduction to the methodology of theological and practical reflection. For full-time students, a further eight seminars in the first term will develop these themes. The second half of the course comprises student led Theological and Practical Reflection (TPR) Seminars. For 'block teaching' students, there will be two further periods of residence lasting 48 hours: typically in January, and at the end of the Epiphany Term for the student led TPR seminars. The first ninety minutes of each TPR seminar will be student led followed by fifteen minutes of reflection facilitated by the course teachers. In preparation for the seminars students will be expected to engage with and research a wide range of reading and other materials, which will include both reflection from contemporary culture and insights from Scripture and the theological tradition. The module is assessed in part through the student led seminars on the basis of content, educational process and quality of theological reflection and in part on a written piece of work. (Further details will be given in the TPR Seminar Pack.)

THEO41330 Social Scientific Methods in the Study of Religion

Seminars are held in two blocks of two days, along with an initial briefing seminar.

THEO43830 Ecclesiology and Ethnography

The teaching will be delivered in a blended and a distance mode. Following an introductory lecture, there will be 8 hours of lectures delivered online. These lectures will be recorded in the studio at the business school and made available on Duo each week during term. Students will be required to keep a log of their notes and reflections on each lecture. Each lecture will be supported by a seminar of 1.5hrs based on set

readings and student reflections on the lectures. The seminars will take place weekly in Durham but students will also be able to participate at a distance using Skype or another similar interactive platform. In the first year it is anticipated that there will be a small number of distance students so there will be a single seminar. The intention is to pilot distance learning participation for a limited number of students (3-4). These students will participate in the weekly Durham seminar attending via Skype. If the take up of distance students rises then two seminars will be held one online and one in Durham. If this is the case the online seminar will be held using Blackboard Collaborate via Duo. The introductory lecture will also be delivered using the mix of students in Durham and Skype for those at a distance.

Other Taught Modules

In addition to the core modules and methodology module, students take another 30 credits at Master's level, from the MATM, Department of Theology & Religion, or another department of the University (subject to the approval of both boards of study). Usually thirty hours (30 credit module), fifteen hours (15 credit modules) of contact time usually over 2-day 3-day residential blocks or 5-day residential block. Some modules chosen may be term-time delivery requiring regular attendance in Durham. Students will be given guidance on where to find details of specific modules and the choice available to them, given their specific context and availability.

THMN45160 Dissertation

The subject of the 15,000 word dissertation must be a sustained piece of theological reflection on contemporary digital culture, digitally mediated Christianity or similar, and must be approved by the Board of Examiners. Learning is largely through individual research supported by the key skills element of the programme followed by (normally) four individual sessions of supervision either in person or through online engagement (Skype, Facetime, etc).

Module outlines for the above modules and other postgraduate modules in the University can be accessed via https://www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.modules/.

All the modules will be ecumenical in the sense that they will be open to all students on the programme. The institutions will be open to suggestions from students or the University to offering modules more frequently should there be the demand or should choice appear unduly restricted in any pathway.

Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning

Interdisciplinary teaching and learning is central to the entire programme. The core modules in particular aim to provide students with a range of methodologies and tools for engagement in interdisciplinary work (see module outline). The other modules include the opportunity to engage with social scientific models, biblical studies, apologetics, ethnography, anthropology and sociology.

Assessment

All modules incorporate formative and summative assessments. Generally speaking these are written essays or portfolios, and the core module also incorporates an assessed seminar. Full details of the marking criteria to be used throughout the MA follow the Durham University postgraduate marking scale and are found in the MA Academic Handbook. Additional information about assessment of the seminar in the core module is appended to the module description. Any other assessment criteria that are specific to a

particular module are issued at the beginning of the module by the module leader.

Welfare & Student Support

In the MACMM the role of academic advisor is fulfilled in various ways depending on the status of the student. *Anglican ordinands* are part of the full-time training community and provided for through the tutorial system. Other *full-time* and *part-time students* will be assigned an academic advisor, typically the Programme Manager or another member of Cranmer staff. All students have access to the worship and social life and social and welfare provision within Cranmer Hall and St John's College.

Special Educational Needs (SENDA)

St John's College has adopted the University's policy on Equality and Diversity. If you have special needs or learning difficulties that you wish to disclose they will be handled in confidence, and our aim is to provide the support you need to pursue successfully the courses we offer and reach your full potential. In relevant cases we liaise closely with Disability Services in order to ensure our courses are accessible to all, including developing and circulating requests for reasonable adjustment. If you wish to discuss support before applying or beginning the course, please contact the MA Programme Manager.

Any Other Questions?

We hope that this Guide is useful and informative, and we are grateful for your interest in our programmes. If you have any further questions or would value a conversation, please do not hesitate to contact the MADT Programme Manager, or the MA Programme Director (details on p. 1).