



## 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>	Political Theory
2	<b>Programme Code</b>	HPHT040 (Full-time), HPHT041 (Part-Time)
3	<b>JACS Code</b>	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>	Masters
6a	<b>Intermediate Qualification(s)</b>	Postgraduate Diploma (PG Dip), Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert)
6b	<b>Position in the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications</b>	Diploma; Certificate
7	<b>Teaching Institution (if not Sheffield)</b>	Not applicable
8	<b>Faculty</b>	Arts and Humanities
9	<b>Department</b>	Philosophy
10	<b>Other Department(s) involved in teaching the programme</b>	Politics
11	<b>Mode(s) of Attendance</b>	Full-time or Part-time
12	<b>Duration of the Programme</b>	12 months (Full-time); 24 months (Part-time)
13	<b>Accrediting Professional or Statutory Body</b>	None
14	<b>Date of production/revision</b>	20 November 2004, February 2016, March 2018, March 2026

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

Political theory, conceived as the study of fundamental principles and methods of justification underpinning political organisation and activity, is a subject which naturally unites the disciplinary skills practised in departments of Politics and Philosophy. Aspects of this subject are studied in both politics and philosophy departments in many universities, but there are few courses that offer a genuinely interdisciplinary and cross-departmental approach, especially at postgraduate level. The current programme is intended to offer postgraduate students access to the knowledge and research expertise across both departments of Politics and Philosophy at Sheffield. Each department has a well-established international reputation for teaching and research.

The collaboration of these top rated departments provides an attractive prospect for students by offering a distinctive and interdisciplinary programme for the award of an MA in Political Theory.

### 16. Programme aims

Both the Departments of Philosophy and Politics endorse the University's Mission, 'To maintain the highest standards of excellence as a research-led institution, whose staff work at the frontiers of academic enquiry and educate students in a research environment'.

#### Both Departments aim to:

- (a) equip students with an understanding of a range of political theorists, philosophers, and central philosophical and political problems, while encouraging as deep a critical engagement with those theorists and problems as is feasible in the time available;
- (b) promote respect for the norms of clarity; careful analysis; critical reflection and awareness of the importance of key political and philosophical concepts; rational argument; sympathetic interpretation and understanding; and impartial pursuit of truth;

- (c) promote independence of thought and a critical and analytical approach, not only to theories and concepts, but to the assumptions on which they are based;
- (d) equip students with the core skills involved in careful reading, comprehension and compression of textual material; clear thinking; sound argumentation; and the clear and well-organised expression of ideas;
- (e) provide high quality teaching which is informed and invigorated by the research activities of members of staff;
- (f) facilitate an awareness of the application of philosophical and political thought to other academic disciplines or to matters of public interest, encouraging students to apply their skills more widely where appropriate;
- (g) encourage students to plan for themselves the contents of their pathway through this MA by choosing particular modules provided by politics and philosophy, and to plan and organise their own work, within the constraints and advice provided by both departments;
- (h) recruit highly qualified students, while at the same time providing access for those with non-standard qualifications who can benefit successfully from the postgraduate programme;
- (i) enable students who have previous knowledge of philosophy and political theory to deepen their understanding of the subject, and to test out their aptitude for further research.

### **Programme-specific aims**

#### **MA, PG Diploma, and Certificate**

- To enable students without different backgrounds in political theory and political philosophy to achieve a deeper and more detailed understanding of several key areas of this subject area;
- To give students the opportunity to take courses introducing them to some major figures from the history of philosophical and political thought, which courses encourage careful reading, sympathetic exegesis, and critical engagement with these works;
- To impart transferable research and learning skills applicable both within and outside the discipline of Political Theory as an academic field;
- To foster in students general intellectual and communicative skills, including the ability to construct a reasoned argument, synthesise relevant information, exercise critical judgement, and communicate effectively in written work;
- To enable students' manage their own learning, reflect on it critically, and seek and use constructive feedback.

#### **Additional Aims for the students on the MA**

- To allow students to pursue a particular topic in greater depth through the writing of a dissertation.

#### **Additional Aims for those students interested in PhD study**

- To train students in research and research methods in political theory in order to prepare them for writing a PhD dissertation;
- To encourage students to develop specialised substantive and research knowledge in a selected field of political theory;
- To place students in their strongest possible position to compete for PhD funding during the course of the year.

## 17. Programme learning outcomes

<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>	
<b>By the end of the programme, students achieving either the MA or PG Diploma will:</b>	
<b>K1</b>	Be familiar with a range of fundamental terms and concepts essential to the discipline of political theory, as developed in an interdisciplinary academic environment promoted by the joint teaching of this course by the departments of Politics and Philosophy;
<b>K2</b>	Have acquired a good understanding of a number of areas in political philosophy and political theory, and an informed grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of different proposals made within those areas;
<b>K3</b>	Have an awareness of selected current debates in political philosophy and political theory at the level necessary to engage with central issues in both areas.
<b>In addition, students achieving the award of MA will have:</b>	
<b>K4</b>	pursued a topic in greater depth through the writing of a dissertation, with the independent though guided research that this entails.
<b>In addition, students taking the PhD Proposal module will have:</b>	
<b>K5</b>	gained specialized knowledge of a body of literature relevant to their PhD proposal.

<b>Skills and other attributes:</b>	
<b>By the end of the programme, students achieving either the MA or PG Diploma will:</b>	
<b>S1</b>	Have developed oral and presentational skills through seminar style teaching appropriate to the pedagogic aims of Masters level academic education;
<b>S2</b>	Have increased their ability to think critically, to work independently, and to manage a broad workload in the field of political theory;
<b>S3</b>	Have improved their capacity to present, criticise and defend in written and oral form particular positions, theories and arguments in line with the canons of scholarly rigor and academic precision;
<b>S4</b>	Be able to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of political theory to the wider study of politics and philosophy;
<b>S5</b>	Have the skills necessary to synthesise, organise and critically evaluate a large body of difficult and challenging material.
<b>In addition, students achieving the award of MA will have developed:</b>	
<b>S6</b>	skills needed to control a larger body of material and to connect a longer series of arguments together by writing a dissertation.
<b>In addition, students taking the PhD Proposal module will have developed:</b>	
<b>S7</b>	skills imparted by substantive, specific research training equipping them for independent doctoral research in political theory.  Students awarded the Postgraduate Certificate will have developed well-grounded knowledge, understanding and skills of some of the learning outcomes listed above, depending on the combination of units to the value of 60 credits which have been successfully completed.

## 18. Teaching, learning and assessment

<p><b>Development of the learning outcomes is promoted through the following teaching and learning methods:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lectures</b> provide introductory guidance to particular bodies of academic material and to philosophical terminology, and offer guidance on how that material is to be understood, used and evaluated. Lecturers are clearly linked to follow-up seminars. Having attended a lecture on a topic, students are then well equipped to do more analytical work both in private study and in small-group discussions (K1-5, S5).</li> <li>• <b>Seminars</b> support and provide constructive feedback for the student's independent learning. Through seminar participation a student develops relevant knowledge, learns to apply conceptual tools, and improves cognitive, communicative and transferable skills, including the capacity to present reasoned and effective arguments in oral form, to make individual and group presentations, to pursue independent learning and to show critical judgement. (K1-2, S1-3).</li> </ul>
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- **Written work** is designed to test the student's knowledge of relevant theories, texts, concepts and arguments; the student's capacity to assess and analyse arguments; and the student's acquisition of skills, including the ability to evaluate concepts and theories, to employ both primary and secondary sources, to present reasoned and effective arguments in written form, and to pursue independent learning and to show critical judgement. Students will therefore be able to demonstrate, through their written work, an effective knowledge of the key areas of debate and be able to identify the key thinkers and schools of thought associated with particular debates in political theory, and be able to evaluate the relative merits of different thinkers, approaches and arguments. (K1-5, S2-7).
- **Private study** in preparation for lectures, seminars and assessment develops students' understanding of texts and problems, and increases their knowledge base. The amount of independent study broadly expected for each module is clearly set out in the graduate information booklet. (K1-5, S2-7).
- Students completing the MA in Political Theory or studying on the Research Track of the MA in Political Theory will develop more advanced independent research skills through their detailed investigation of a particular topic in the form of an extended dissertation. Work on this dissertation will promote student ownership of the learning experience through the requirement to undertake extensive self-directed learning in the form of a research project. Building on the experience of the particular modules taken during the academic year, the student will choose and design a topic for further research, which a member of staff will supervise. (K4, S6).
- Students intending to continue on to read for a PhD will, furthermore, be required to produce a detailed research proposal with full initial literature survey, which they will develop through regular engagement with a supervisor who will most probably be their future doctoral supervisor. Through process of developing a research proposal students' gain substantive, specific training equipping them for advanced doctoral research in political theory. (K5, S7).

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

- Formative feedback within most modules in the shape of essay tutorials from module lecturers enables students to present drafts of their work to their instructors, enabling students to acquire subject-specific knowledge (K1-3) and to develop key skills related to written work (S2-7).
- Students on the MA programme receive formative feedback on their written work through regular meetings with their supervisor for the PhD proposal and dissertation, developing a greater depth of knowledge (K4-5) and more highly developed research skills (S6-7). They will also receive formative feedback on presentations made in seminars (S1).
- Summative assessment on written work of all forms tests students' ability to demonstrate subject knowledge (K1-5) and the refinement of key skills (S2-7). The dissertation and the PhD proposal allow the demonstration of detailed subject knowledge, and more developed skills in research and argumentation (S6-7).

**19. Reference points**

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

- The research interests of departmental staff and the research strategy of the Departments of Philosophy and Politics
- The Mission Statement of the University of Sheffield, as presented in its Corporate Plan
- The Learning and Teaching Strategy of the University of Sheffield
- The Masters level qualification descriptor contained in the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- AHRC guidance on research training

## 20. Programme structure and regulations

This course structure comprises:

- Modules devoted to the historical, conceptual and normative study of political theory
- Modules related to subject specific research training in political theory
- Specialist subject modules related to the subject matter of political theory developed from the research specialisms of members of both departments
- A dissertation

Full time MA students take four 30 credit modules in the course of their MA year, normally two in each semester, thus enabling a balanced workload throughout the year. One of these will be the “Political Philosophy Research Seminar” in Autumn. In Spring, they also begin work on their 60-credit MA dissertation and the period between the end of the Spring Semester and the end of the period of the registration is devoted entirely to the dissertation. Part-time MA students take two 30 credit modules in their first year (one in each semester), two 30 credit modules in their second year, and write the 60 credit dissertation over the summer of the second year (supervision is available for those wanting to start work on Dissertations earlier).

All modules on this programme have been approved by the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences. The “PhD Proposal in Political Theory” (PHI 6700) – suitable for those intending to go on to a PhD in one of the subjects - is supervised between the departments of Politics and Philosophy, dependent upon the particular project chosen by the student and the potential supervisor of their research, whilst the “Political Philosophy Research Seminar” (PHI 6690) is taught between departments as appropriate to the requirements of the students in each particular cohort.

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 <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/calendar/regs>.

## 21. Student development over the course of study

- The advised module in ‘Political Theory’ outlines the diversity of approaches to the study of political theory, engages students in detailed general reflections on this area. Those on the research track will produce a detailed annotated PhD proposal with relevant literature survey and participate in the research training ‘Politics and Value’ seminar, in which they will be able to focus on areas specific to their research interests.
- Other modules on this MA programme allow students to survey in more detail than at undergraduate level key debates, concepts, and questions in a wide variety of areas in political theory, ranging from a focus on particular thinkers, to key concepts and theories of ethics.
- The dissertation provides the opportunity for advanced, independent though supervised research in considerable depth of a particular area in political theory

## 22. Criteria for admission to the programme

At least a good 2:1 British honours degree in politics, philosophy, a relevant dual honours degree, or an international equivalent in an appropriate subject. International students whose first language is not English are also required to offer a suitable language qualification, such as IELTS (minimum overall score 7 with a 6.5 in each category) or TOEFL. Details applicable to the standards expected from both the Departments of Politics and Philosophy can be found on the specific departmental WebPages:

<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/politics/study/masters/political-theory>  
<http://www.shf.ac.uk/philosophy/politicaltheory>

Detailed information regarding admission to the programme is available at <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/philosophy/prospectivepostgraduates/applying>

### **23. Additional information**

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).