

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR M.Sc. IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Awarding institution/body	University of Oxford
2. Teaching institution	University of Oxford
3. Programme accredited by	n/a
4. Final award	M.Sc.
5. Programme	Educational Research Methodology
6. UCAS code	N/A
7. Relevant subject benchmark statement	N/A
8. Date of programme specification	January 2008

9. Educational aims of the programme

- To provide students with the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to evaluate educational research critically and to carry out rigorous research in the field of education.
- To develop in students the ability to define and formulate research problems and questions and, where appropriate, formulate hypotheses that can be tested
- To develop critical analysis, problem solving skills and research skills
- To enable students to understand the relationships between, and the rationale for using, particular qualitative and quantitative research methods
- To develop understanding of the role and use of theory in qualitative and quantitative research and the role of educational research in policy development and implementation
- To enable students to read critically research papers which have used a wide range of research methodologies and methods
- To enable students to understand the use of and be able to use a range of methods and to be able to decide on appropriate methods for their research problems.

10. Programme outcomes

A. Students will develop a knowledge and understanding of:

- The philosophical and theoretical bases and assumptions of educational research
- The issues and epistemological underpinnings surrounding a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches

- Major research paradigms and designs
- A range of approaches to collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data
- The ethical and philosophical issues associated with research in education
- Various modes of presenting, communicating and disseminating research findings
- Major debates in the field of educational research, and their methodological implications.

Related teaching/learning methods and strategies

The teaching methods include tutor presentations, small group work, student led presentations, seminars and workshops, project work, and tutorials. All students undertake classes on quantitative and qualitative data analysis and there is substantial 'hands-on' experience in methods of data collection and analysis. Tutorials support students in identifying research questions, selecting areas for literature review, carrying out field work, and reviewing drafts of the dissertation. Supported ICT sessions and literature access skills (including electronic searches) are provided by library staff.

All students undertake a two week full-time internship project, attached to one of the Department's funded research projects. Students are also expected to present their own research to colleagues and staff.

Additionally, students are expected to attend departmental research seminars which are held regularly throughout the course of the year in order to broaden the scope of their learning and further develop their own critical skills.

Assessment

Formative assessment is provided through a series of written assignments for each of the units of the course, oral feedback on student presentations and extensive feedback on dissertation drafts from supervisors. Satisfactory completion of formative assignments is required for a student to be admitted to the examination.

Summative assessment consists of four components:

1. The course Foundations of Educational Research is assessed through two written coursework assignments, one submitted at the end of each of Michaelmas and Hilary terms.
2. The course Strategies of Educational Research is assessed by one three hour unseen written examination paper taken at the beginning of Trinity term.
3. The course Qualitative and quantitative data analysis is assessed through a portfolio of written assignments.

4. A dissertation of 15,000-20,000 words.

The coursework and written examinations assess students' ability to understand approaches to educational research and to critique research papers. The dissertation assesses students' ability to work independently, to formulate research questions, to design and carry out a research project and to write appropriate academic text.

B. Skills and other attributes

Students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills during the course:

I. Intellectual and Practical Skills

1. Critical reading and analysis of research literature using both primary and secondary data sources
2. Skills in qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis
3. Skills in bibliographic and internet searches
4. Skills associated with a wide range of research techniques including questionnaire design, observation schedule design, interviews, development of tests and measurement
5. Skills in planning, conducting and reporting a programme of original research
6. Skills in presenting own research

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

See under A above.

Assessment:

See under A above.

II. Transferable skills

Students will learn how to:

1. Communicate effectively
2. Present information via a data projector and interactive whiteboard
3. Improve their Information and Communication Technology competence
4. Work as a member of a team
5. Manage resources and time
6. Develop autonomous learning

7. Develop critical analysis

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

See under A above

Assessment:

See under A above.

11. Programme Structures and Features

This is a twelve month programme, offered mainly on a full-time basis. A very small number of students study part-time. The course has five main compulsory 'units'

1. Foundations of Educational Research
2. Strategies of Educational Research
3. Qualitative and quantitative data analysis
4. Internship experience
5. Current issues in educational research

These units take place during the first two terms. In their third term, students undertake work towards the production of a dissertation of between 15,000 and 20,000 words.

Foundations of Educational Research

This unit has the following aims:

- That students should become familiar with important aspects of the nature of the educational research, its history, philosophy and current challenges, and its different traditions, and its position in relation to other social/natural science research
- That students should develop their capacity to frame research questions and to devise appropriate designs
- That students should begin to develop their competence and confidence in using a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches to gathering, analysing and interpreting evidence
- That students should become skilled and critical readers and users of different kinds of educational research including large scale international and comparative datasets
- That students should be introduced to the importance of ethical issues and codes of ethics in educational research

Strategies for Educational Research

This unit has the following aims:

- That students should develop further their understanding of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of educational research
- That students should develop their understanding of and skills in using different methods of data collection through hands-on experience
- That students should gain confidence in their understanding of the appropriateness of different methods of data collection in relation to different research questions

The course builds on the Foundations of Educational Research course. In particular, this course provides workshops and more 'hands-on' experience of strategies of educational and social research, and aims to develop in students the competence and confidence to use a range of different approaches and methods. Each session aims to build on and extend the learning developed in the Foundations of Educational Research course. Additional readings and preparatory material are available prior to each session as appropriate.

Qualitative and Quantitative design and data analysis

This unit has the following aims:

- That students build on the Foundations of Educational Research and the Strategies for Educational Research and are introduced to new topics and ideas in relation to analysis of data.
- That students gain competence in basic techniques in the analysis of quantitative and qualitative evidence.
- That students develop competence and confidence in choosing and applying appropriate techniques that match the types of research design being used and the characteristics of the data being collected and to begin to consider the analytic implications of decisions about research design.

Internship experience

All students are attached for two weeks to a funded research project within the Department. This provides the opportunity for students to gain experience with the practicalities of research project activities, such as project management, data entry, setting up fieldwork, and the realities of carrying out educational research.

Current Issues in Educational Research

This course is seminar-based and informs the other courses and aims to encourage a critical awareness of current issues in educational research. All students will be expected to give an initial presentation in at least one of these sessions. The seminars are

structured in such a way that a variety of views can be put forward and debated, in order that students gain substantive knowledge and understanding of major issues and debates in the field, and that they develop presentation skills and skills of critical analysis.

12. Support for Students and their learning

All students have access to a wide range of resources and facilities both within the Department of Education and in the University Computing Services. The Department of Education is able to offer excellent teaching accommodation, study and social provision, a common room, workspace in the resources unit which includes IT stations, complete access to the library, and two IT suites. Wireless internet access is available across the whole Department.

Students are able to attend a programme of research seminars given by visiting researchers throughout each term, and a range of other seminars in the Department of Education and across the University. There are excellent opportunities for contact and work with academic staff and other graduate students. The Departmental library is open until 7 p.m., and the computer room and common room facilities are available around the clock. All course materials are posted on WebLearn, the University Virtual Learning Environment, which also provides comprehensive facilities for online communications and social networking, as well as for the online storage of electronic data.

In addition to departmental provision, students have access to the first-rate library resources of the University including the Bodleian libraries. All students are able to use the extensive IT facilities at Oxford University Computing Services (OUCS) where the Learning Technologies Group is based. This includes free attendance on the IT training courses, access to computers 8.30 a.m. to 8.30 p.m., free email and web accounts, free advisory service, and a shop selling hardware and software.

The course director has overall responsibility for the course, co-ordinating teaching, and arranging specialist supervision for dissertation writing, in collaboration with the Department's Director of Graduate Studies. In addition, each student will have a University supervisor who provides academic guidance and oversees their progress. Within their college, each student has a college advisor who is responsible for their general welfare and is available to assist in any problems on the academic side. There is also a general Tutor for Graduates or Senior Tutor (in graduate colleges).

There are a number of schemes at college or university level offering financial support in cases of hardship.

The University runs a counselling service offering advice and support to all students.

13. Criteria for Admission

Candidates for admission should normally have a good upper second class degree, or its equivalent. Candidates for whom English is a second language are required to obtain an overall score of 7.5, with at least 7.0 in each component in IELTS, or an overall score of 630 in TOEFL (plus a score of 5 in TWE); an overall score of 109 in the Internet-based TOEFL or Grade B in the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English.

Applications will normally be considered in the light of a candidate's ability to meet the following criteria:

1. The applicant has provided appropriate indications of proven and potential academic excellence. Appropriate indicators may include two or more highly positive references, academic transcripts or their equivalent showing excellent achievement, samples of work produced by the student showing high levels of academic or scholarly ability, and good performance at interview.
2. The applicant has provided sufficient evidence, in the view of the assessors, to suggest that they have the academic ability and commitment to pursue the chosen programme to a successful conclusion within the required time limits.
3. The programme of study that the applicant wishes to pursue is well suited to the academic interests and abilities to which they have drawn attention in their application, and (where appropriate) the applicant has undertaken any preliminary work or course which is normally considered indispensable to acceptance on the proposed programme of study.
4. The Department is able to provide appropriate supervision and facilities for the candidate's programme of work.

14. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of learning

- There is annual evaluation of the course and performance of students in assessments and the dissertation by a board of examiners. Examiners' reports (both internal and external) are required each year for submission to the Department of Education Departmental Board, the Social Sciences Board, and the Educational Policy and Standards Committee (EPSC) of the University. The department is required to report steps that will be taken to address any particular issues identified. In addition, there are periodic major reviews of courses and departmental provision including a review after five years of all new graduate courses by the University's EPSC and the Social Sciences Board.
- Any changes to the programme agreed by the department have to be reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences Board and the EPSC.
- Annual staff appraisal, and reports on staff in their initial period of office, includes assessment of teaching. Training courses in e.g. supervision are offered by the University's Learning Institute (OLI).
- Student feedback on the course takes the form of written evaluations of the modules by all students, and by regular meetings between a student liaison committee of student representatives and the course development committee (consisting of the course director and other key academic staff).

15. Regulation of assessment

The examinations are under the supervision of the Departmental Board of the Department of Education, which, with the concurrence of the Social Sciences Board, is responsible for approving examining conventions. A Nominating Committee proposes the names of examiners for approval by the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors. It is the examiners' responsibility to appoint appropriate assessors for any component of the examination requiring specialist expertise outwith that of the internal examiners.

All written assignments and the dissertation are subjected to blind double marking. Examiners and assessors then compare their respective marks and come to an agreed mark for each assignment and dissertation. When a disagreement between the two examiners cannot be resolved, it is the responsibility of the external examiner to mark a third time to resolve the differences. The examiners may award a distinction for excellence in the whole examination. Assignments are marked using the University's standard numerical scale.

Internal and external examiners will be required to produce reports after the examinations for consideration by the department's Departmental Board, the Social Sciences Board, and the EPSC.

External examiners act as moderators, providing informed comment on two major issues:

1. to verify that standards are appropriate to the award, in part by comparison with the standards of comparable institutions, and to ensure that the assessment procedures and the regulations governing them are fair and otherwise appropriate.
2. To ensure that the conduct of the examination and the determination of awards have been fairly conducted, and that individual student performance has been judged in accordance with the regulations and conventions of the Examining Board.

External examiners are expected to report to the Vice-Chancellor in each year in which they act. Their reports are expected to cover the following points:

- the standards demonstrated by the students
- the extent to which standards are appropriate for the award
- the design, structure, and marking of assignments
- the procedures for assessment
- whether or not external examiners have had sufficient access to, and the power to call upon, any material necessary to make the required judgments
- students' performance in relation to their peers in comparable courses
- the coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and their consonance with the explicit roles required of them
- the basis and rationale for any comparisons made
- the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort
- the quality of teaching and learning which may be indicated by student performance

The report is addressed to the Vice-Chancellor, and will be considered by the Social Sciences Board and the Educational Policy and Standards Committee of the University. The report will also be scrutinised by the Departmental Board of the Department of Educational Studies, by the Board of Examiners, and more widely within the department.

Course and examination requirements

Every candidate will be required to satisfy the examiners in the following:

- i. Satisfactory attendance at the appropriate classroom-based courses.
- ii. Satisfactory performance in Part 1 of the examination.
- iii. Satisfactory performance in formative assignments.
- iv. A dissertation of between 15,000 and 20,000 words (including appendices, endnotes and a reference section) on a subject selected by the candidate in consultation with the supervisor, which must be closely related to one or more of the themes of the course. The subject selected by the candidate must be approved by the supervisor on behalf of the Director of Graduate Studies and Departmental Board of the Department.
- v. Two word processed or printed copies of the dissertation must be delivered to the M.Sc. examiners, c/o Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX2 6PY, no later than noon on the last Friday in September of the year in which the examination has been taken. Candidates wishing to submit dissertations later than this date must obtain the approval of the Departmental Board by the last day of the preceding Trinity Full Term. Such approval will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. One bound copy of the dissertation of each candidate who is successful at examination shall be retained by the Department for deposit in the departmental library.
- vi. Each candidate, with the approval of the Departmental Board, may retake the entire Part 1 of the examination one further time on the next occasion they are examined (usually the next year).
- vii. Each candidate may, with the approval of the Departmental Board, re-submit their dissertation undertaken whilst registered for the M.Sc. if the original dissertation is deemed unsatisfactory. This shall normally be within one year of the initial failure.
- viii. Candidates must give notice to the Secretary of Faculties concerning the subjects which they intend to offer, together with the subject of their dissertation by the first day of the fifth week of Hilary Term.
- ix. Fees for examining will be the standard fee for M.Sc. (by coursework) as set out in the schedule of examining fees in Examination Decrees and Regulations.

Marking Scale and Grade Descriptors

1. Distinction
 - i) upper level: 80 > 100
 - substantial and in-depth reading of wide range of appropriate literature; strong evidence of critical analysis;
 - strong and critical exploration of theoretical perspectives; strong understanding of relevance to topic;
 - compelling line of argument that provides strong structure to essay;
 - Offers original and illuminating perspectives on topic set;
 - perfect referencing and bibliography;
 - compelling and cogent style of written English; pleasing presentation.
 - ii) lower level: 70 > 79
 - wide and appropriate scope of literature showing strong understanding; high degree of original choice; some evidence of critical analysis;

- confident exploration and application of theoretical perspectives; clear understanding of relevance to topic;
- coherent and engaging line of argument supported by strong structure to essay;
- Strong and illuminating engagement with topic set;
- detailed and accurate referencing and bibliography;
- clear, accurate and engaging use of written English; attractive presentation.

2. High pass: 60 > 69

- refers intelligently to wide & appropriate range of relevant literature; some evidence of original choice;
- evidence of sound understanding and relevance of theoretical perspectives;
- clear and appropriate structure; explicit and coherent line of argument;
- Relevant and responsive to the topic set;
- reliable and consistent referencing and bibliography;
- clear and accurate use of written and good presentation.

3. Lower pass: 50 > 59

- unoriginal and/or limited choice of literature; over-dependence on secondary sources;
- superficial reference to or exploration of theoretical perspectives; little evidence of relevance to topic;
- some degree of essay structure; lack of coherent argument;
- superficial engagement with topic set; some degree of space-filling;
- inconsistent and incomplete referencing & bibliography;
- mostly adequate written English and acceptable presentation.

4. Fail: <49

- insufficient & inappropriate reference to literature;
- lack of engagement with theoretical perspectives;
- lack of clear essay structure and/or coherent argument;
- fails to explore topic set in any depth;
- inaccurate and inadequate bibliographical information; lack of transparency;
- poor written English and shoddy presentation.

16. Indicators of quality and standards

The original version of this course was first run in 1994 and the course has been subject to continuous internal and external review since that time. Over the years the comments from both internal and external examiners have been highly favourable. The course was subject to a thorough review after 5 years by the appropriate university authorities. The course forms the research training part of the Department's doctoral training and the Department has been continuously recognised for Mode A and Mode B ESRC awards. It was reaccredited by the ESRC in 2001 and is now recognised for Type 1 + 3, Type + 3, CASE, and part-time studentships.

The course is under the *aegis* of the Department of Education, which achieved a rating of 5 in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise. The department also has ESRC postgraduate training (1+3) recognition for both full-time and part-time modes, and its teacher training was considered 'very good with several outstanding features' in the report of OfSTED in 2001.