MSc / Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching English Language in University Settings (TELUS)

http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/courses/pgdip-telus/

Overview

This innovative two-year part-time course offers a cutting-edge introduction to the knowledge about language and pedagogy needed for teaching English language in higher education. It is characterised by intense online interaction and feedback, using a range of communication media. Its small-group teaching format pursues the Oxford tradition of demanding much of students and giving them much in return.

Students are initially admitted as Postgraduate Diploma Students, and follow a taught programme of two informally assessed residential modules and eight formally assessed distance modules, in the periods between July and April for two successive years. The distance modules are assessed via take-home examinations and reflective portfolios based on tasks performed during term. No work is required between April and July of the first year, but students who aspire to the MSc prepare their dissertation project during this time, with light-touch help from the course tutor. During the taught portion of the course, students are not affiliated to an Oxford college.

Students who pass the first six modules can apply in February of Hilary Term of their second year to progress to the MSc. Their applications are assessed by the Department of Education and by Linacre College on the basis of the soundness of the dissertation project proposals. Students who progress to the MSc matriculate at Linacre College in late spring, and normally complete their dissertation by the end of August.

Students may choose to opt for a Postgraduate Diploma on successful completion of the taught portion of the course, rather than applying for progression to the MSc.

The course recruits worldwide among teachers of English as a second or foreign language in university settings, and among teachers who wish to teach in these settings (these teachers might, for example be teaching or aspiring to teach English for academic purposes in the increasing number of English-medium university-level institutions in non-English-speaking

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countries or in UK institutions; or teaching / aspiring to teach service English for university departments in non-English-speaking countries). Some applicants will be teachers in those English for academic purposes courses which every UK university delivers for its students and potential students. However, the majority of applicants usually come from overseas.

Overall responsibility for the new course lies with the Applied Linguistics Group in the Department of Education (http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/applied-linguistics/). The course sits alongside the MSc in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition (http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/courses/msc-applied-linguistics/), providing a distance alternative for experienced teachers of English who seek a more focused qualification in this area.

Dr Catherine Walter (http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/directory/dr-catherine-walter/) leads the course and provides supervision for students; she is aided by one or more Teaching Assistants with expertise in the area.

The aims of the course are

- to provide students with the knowledge, understanding and skills critically to evaluate research in the area of English language teaching and learning, within the broader context of research in applied linguistics
- to develop in students a broad knowledge of theoretical and empirical work in the areas of English language learning, teaching, materials development and assessment, and to provide them with the means of pursuing in more depth those areas of the field which interest them
- to enable students critically to apply this knowledge and these skills to the different contexts of teaching at university level as described above
- to develop a solid basis for further study in the area

A formatively assessed residential module takes place before Michaelmas term (i.e. in July or August) every year.

The bulk of the taught portion of the course consists of eight summatively assessed distance learning modules, described in detail below. In a typical week of term students complete set readings (or equivalents, e.g. listen to / watch podcasts or other audio/video-recorded materials) for each of the two modules in which they are enrolled, and they work through a series of tasks, the products of which are commented upon by the tutor and/or the teaching assistant, and sometimes by peers. Tasks involve individual and group work and small projects. Interaction takes place asynchronously in the University’s WebLearn virtual learning environment, and aims to exploit the possibilities of contemporary educational technology while remaining accessible to students in countries with less advanced communications infrastructures. A knowledge and skills audit is included in the induction module, and this module allows for intensive individual work for students whose information technology literacy requires upgrading.

Each of the eight summatively assessed modules is assessed by a combination of (a) an end-of-module written take-home examination and (b) a portfolio of work chosen from

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tasks completed during the module, accompanied by a brief reflection on the choice of work and its value in the learning process.

The content of each summatively assessed module is free-standing rather than building upon content from other modules.

**Student status**

Students are registered as University of Oxford students and have full access to Oxford electronic sources.

Students do not have a College affiliation during the taught portion of the course (and this lowers the cost of the course).

Students who progress to the MSc matriculate at Linacre College (http://www.linacre.ox.ac.uk) and are therefore members of the Collegiate University.

**Organisation of the course**

**Structure of the course**

- The taught portion of the course takes place only in Michaelmas and Hilary Terms each year, over a period of two years for the course. In the previous experience of the tutor of the course, this type of distance course and the intensification of work that it implies for students who are working full-time can to problems with completion of second year modules. Being required to participate actively on the course for only two terms out of three is likely to lessen the chances of these problems occurring. It also corresponds to the pattern in other M-level courses in the Department, where teaching occurs in Michaelmas and Hilary Terms only. There is an opportunity (but not an obligation) in Trinity Term of a student’s first year for individual study on a chosen topic, which may be the proposed topic for the MSc dissertation. The tutor will provide up to four email tutorials on the chosen topic during Trinity Term.

- Each cohort consists of no more than 8 students.

- This structure implies that there is a maximum of 16 on the course at a time.

- In any given year, only half the assessed modules are taught, and first- and second- year students follow the same modules. Each year a formatively assessed residential module takes place before Michaelmas term (in July or August). In a student’s first year, this is Module 0, the Induction module. In a student’s second year, this is Module 9, Research Methods. In the residential week, joint seminars with local and invited speakers, combined with social occasions, give the two cohorts the opportunity to work together as colleagues before they embark on online modules together.

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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Modules</th>
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<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>Cohort A</td>
<td>Second year</td>
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<td>Cohort B</td>
<td>First year</td>
<td>0, 5, 6, 7, 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>Cohort B</td>
<td>Second year</td>
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<td>Cohort C</td>
<td>First year</td>
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... and so on. This produces a group size conducive to productive online work.
• Within the structure of free-standing modules, thematic links between modules are made explicit. Within a single year, modules build upon one another, with themes continuing from one module to the next. The development of students’ skills in evaluating and criticising research and practice.

**Modules**

0. Induction (Formatively assessed residential module)

This module precedes a cohort’s first assessed module, and takes place in July or August. In this module students build a learning community that will continue as an online community, acquire skills in academic reading and writing, carry out a knowledge and skills audit, acquire the basics of quantitative & qualitative data analysis, develop skills in accessing the diverse electronic resources available to Oxford students and in managing their references, develop skills in using the virtual learning environment (VLE), and complete a formatively assessed assignment.

1. Individual and group differences in language learning

Outcomes: students will develop an awareness of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the study of individual and group differences in second language learning, a broad knowledge of the empirical evidence for differences, and an ability critically to evaluate studies in the area. Differences explored will include aptitude, gender, personality, first language, culture, styles, strategies and motivation. Students will become aware of the basic concepts and methodology of needs analysis for course design, within the context of group differences.

2. Listening to and reading English in university settings

Outcomes: students will develop an understanding of the mechanisms and processes involved in reading and listening to English as a second or foreign language; of how these modes of accessing meaning are similar, and how they are different; of the characteristics of a selection of genres of academic writing and speech that affect second language learners’ access to them; and of how English language teachers can facilitate learners’ abilities to listen to and read English, especially in university settings. Understanding of needs analysis based on informed analysis of spoken and written texts within the student’s context, and skill in the implementation of needs analysis, will be developed within the context of curriculum and materials design for reading and listening.

3. Understanding and teaching the grammar of English

Outcomes: students will develop a clearer and more detailed knowledge of the grammar of English, of learners’ grammar acquisition sequences, and of the particular features of the grammar of those genres used in university settings; will equip themselves with the means of continuing to develop their knowledge in this area; and will develop skills in evaluating and designing materials for the teaching of grammar both at the micro level, and, in the context of needs analysis for their learners, at the level of curriculum design, based on informed analysis of grammar features in texts within the student’s context.

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4. Speaking and writing in university settings
Outcomes: students will develop an understanding of the mechanisms and processes involved in speaking and writing English as a second or foreign language; of how these modes of expression are similar, and how they are different; of the relationship between fluency, complexity and accuracy; of the characteristics of a selection of genres of academic speech and writing; and of how English language teachers can facilitate learners’ abilities to speak and write English, especially in university settings, with focus both on needs analysis for curriculum design, based on informed analysis of spoken and written texts within the student’s context, and on development of materials at lesson and unit level.

5. Learning and teaching of vocabulary
Outcomes: students will develop an understanding of the major issues and concepts in the field of vocabulary learning and teaching; will understand what it means to know a word or a multi-word unit; will be aware of the empirical evidence for how second language words are learnt, stored and retrieved; will be able to judge what the lexical requirements are for efficient university study in a second language; will have a thorough understanding of word frequency and how this relates to the use of corpora in language teaching; and will develop skills in designing and implementing programmes of vocabulary teaching for their students based on needs analysis for groups of learners.

6. Evaluating and designing English language teaching materials for university settings
Outcomes: students will develop an awareness of the critical literature in the field of materials evaluation and design; will focus on needs analysis as a prerequisite both of materials evaluation and of materials design; will develop criteria for evaluating English language teaching materials in general, and materials for university settings in particular, having regard both to print and to electronic materials; will acquire skills in evaluating materials at micro- and macro-levels, and in making strategic decisions about materials; will gain experience in designing materials for their students and in piloting and evaluating their own materials.

7. New technologies and language learning and teaching
Outcomes: students will develop an understanding of the theoretical and conceptual background to studies of learning with new technologies; will develop an awareness of how to take the affordances of new technologies into account in their teaching; will develop an ability to analyse critically the proposed facilitative potential of technology as claimed in empirical studies; will develop their abilities to evaluate, adapt and design materials for teaching with new technologies in the context of needs analysis within each student’s educational context.
8. Assessing language learning

Outcomes: students will develop an understanding of the major concepts and issues in the field of language assessment; will become familiar with types of summative language assessment and their advantages and drawbacks; will be aware of issues such as validity, reliability, impact, washback effect, rating procedures and the social aspects of language testing and how these can be taken into consideration in both the development of summative assessment instruments and in preparation of students for standard tests, with regard to the needs of particular groups of students; will develop awareness of the theoretical underpinnings of formative feedback and knowledge of the ways in which it can be delivered.

9. Research Methods (Formatively assessed residential module)

Research methods will be explored in an embedded fashion through analysis of the research methods used in the research literature and through the tasks that are set in relation to that literature (as in the MSc ALSLA). This formatively assessed residential module, to take place preceding the students’ second year of the course, will supplement that learning. It will explore in more depth the range of experimental designs and methodologies for data collection and analysis used in applied linguistics research. Students will also acquire practical experience of using software for data analysis. Pairs or triads of students will undertake a very small research project, which will be formatively assessed.

**Summative assessment**

Summative assessment at the end of each module is based upon a written take-home examination and a reflective portfolio. The portfolio serves in part as a means of incentivising disciplined module participation and learning via reflection on past work. The take-home examination assesses students’ ability to discuss the issues in English language teaching and learning covered in the module, using appropriate language; to analyse and critique classroom practice; to analyse and critique research articles both for their content and for their research methods; to make links between theory and practice; to solve problems; and to draw implications for teaching in their own context. The balance of these elements in the assessment of the examination may differ between modules. Students are required to submit a declaration for each take-home examination paper that the work in the paper is their own and that they have respected academic conventions for citing of sources. In addition, all take-home examinations are checked through the Turnitin© software.

The take-home examinations are under the supervision of the Departmental Board of the Department of Education. An Examination Board is organised with the participation of at least three members of the Applied Linguistics team, and an appropriate External Examiner is appointed. All reflective portfolios are assessed by the course tutor on a pass/fail basis depending on whether the submission corresponds to the technical requirements. All take-home examinations are initially subjected to blind double marking, and any disagreements are moderated between the two examiners, or if the disagreement cannot be resolved, are resolved by the External Examiner. Criteria for marking and rules for regulation of assessment are those current in the Department of Education and in the University.

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A choice of titles for the take-home examination for each module is published in Week 9 of that module. Examinations must be submitted electronically by 12.00 midday on Friday of Week 0 of the following term.

In order for the Postgraduate Diploma in TELUS to be awarded, a candidate must submit a take-home examination for each of the eight summatively assessed modules; however, the overall mark for the Diploma will be the average of the seven highest-marked modules. Late submissions without prior or retrospective permission from the Proctors of the University of Oxford automatically incur a penalty, to be decided by the Examination Board.

Students who progress to the MSc must pass all eight taught modules, but only the seven highest-marked modules contribute to their final mark. In addition, MSc students write a dissertation of between 15,000 and 20,000 words. The dissertation tests the student’s ability to work independently, provide a rationale for their study, critically evaluate the literature in the field, use appropriate techniques for the collection and analysis of data, and reflect on the implications of the results.

Formative assessment is interwoven into the comments on tasks. In addition, detailed feedback is provided for a 1500-word assignment written during the Induction module; a report of a small research project may be carried out during the Research Methods module and likewise be formatively commented upon by the course tutor or the Teaching Assistant. In a student’s first term, a draft of one of the assessed take-home examinations is commented on by the course tutor in terms of appropriate academic style, appropriate referencing and quality of academic English.

Additional support for students’ learning

- All required reading/listening/viewing resources are provided via the University’s virtual learning environment WebLearn. Resources in addition to the required materials are also provided on WebLearn, and links are provided to relevant articles in the University library, in order to facilitate broader reading on the topics treated in the modules.

- Students have full access to the online resources and facilities within the Department of Education and to the online courses and other resources provided by the University IT Services. There is a structured programme of support for online searching and downloading of materials from the University Library system, and one of the Teaching Assistant’s responsibilities is to support students’ learning in the use of online resources.

- Relevant seminars given in the Department of Education are available as podcasts at [http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/units/department-education](http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/units/department-education).

- Consideration is given in the design of both content and methods of communication to the needs of students with disabilities. The course team has experience of working with M-level students who have motor, visual, mental and unseen disabilities. All reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate course participation with a range of disabilities, and principled adjustments will be made according to the disabilities of the students who enrol.
**IT Skills**

Applicants are required to be proficient in the use of email and word processing software. All other necessary IT skills are taught in the induction week and throughout the course by the course tutor and teaching assistant.

**Administration**

The course tutor supervises the administration of the course, supported by the Higher Degrees Office of the Department of Education.

**Criteria for admission**

Candidates for admission should normally have a good upper second class degree, or its equivalent, in a subject which contains a substantial element of English language learning and/or linguistics. Candidates who do not have substantial qualifications in English language or linguistics may be required to submit qualifying work to demonstrate to the course team that they are able usefully to pursue the course. Candidates for whom English is a second language are required to obtain the higher overall score of 7.5, with at least 7.0 in each component in IELTS, or an overall score of 630 in TOEFL (including a score of 5 in TWE); an overall score of 267 in the Computer-based TOEFL (including an essay writing score of 5); an overall score of 109 in the Internet-based TOEFL or Grade B in the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English. In addition, candidates will normally be expected to have two years’ experience of teaching of English as a second or foreign language, and to be practising teachers at the time of enrolment (not necessarily in a university setting).

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 face-to-face or electronically mediated 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 course to a successful conclusion within the required time limits.

3. The course is well suited to the academic interests and abilities to which they have drawn attention in their application.

Applicants will be required to be proficient in the use of email and word processing software and to have daily access at least during the working week to a computer with an internet connection of sufficient specifications to enable them to carry out their coursework.

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Quality assurance

- There is an annual evaluation of the course and of the performance of students by the Board of Examiners, according to the usual procedures in the Department, the Division and the University. Any changes to the programme proposed by the Department are reviewed and approved by the University. Annual staff appraisal takes place. A student representative is elected each year, and students are provided with a private forum which the tutor does not access and where they can discuss any issues that arise. Students are asked to provide anonymous written feedback for each module, and this is taken into account in future modules.

- There is no subject benchmark statement for Applied Linguistics or Linguistics disciplines at M-level (NQF7), where the proposed course is situated. However, the subject benchmark statement for Linguistics (including Applied Linguistics) at H-level has been taken into consideration, and the proposed course meets or exceeds corresponding M-level standards for: subject knowledge and understanding; intellectual skills; subject-specific key skills and generic/transferable skills; and teaching /learning/assessment practices.

Cost of residential modules

In addition to the course fees, students pay their travel expenses for one trip to Oxford in each year of the course. However, accommodation and meals in an Oxford College during the residential modules are substantially subsidised. Students whose proposal to progress to the MSc is accepted need to make an additional (one-day) stay in Oxford in the academic year when they submit their dissertation, in order to matriculate (http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/yourfirstfewweeks/matriculation/).