UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Programme Specification for M.Sc. in

Educational Research Methodology
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  N/A
4. Final award  M.Sc.
5. Programme  M.Sc. in Educational Research Methodology
6. UCAS code  N/A
7. Relevant subject benchmark statement  N/A
8. Date of programme specification  June 2010
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, quantitative and mixed methods approaches to research design, data analysis and interpretation
   - To develop understanding of the role of educational research in policy development, implementation and critique
   - 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. At the end of the programme, students will demonstrate:

- The philosophical and theoretical bases and assumptions of educational research
- The issues and epistemological underpinnings surrounding qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches
- Major research paradigms and designs
- A range of approaches to analyzing qualitative and quantitative data
- The ethical and philosophical issues associated with research in education
- Various modes of presenting 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 are provided by OUDE staff and literature access skills (including electronic searches) are provided by OUDE library staff.

All students undertake a two week full-time internship project, attached to one of the Department’s funded research projects.

Additionally, students are expected to attend departmental Research seminars which are held during 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 all assignments is required for a student to be admitted to the examination.

Summative assessment of the course is organised through Part 1 and Part 2 assessment. Part 1 consists of four components:

1. Foundations of Educational Research is assessed through two written coursework assignments, one submitted at the end of Michaelmas and Hilary terms.
2. Strategies of Educational Research is assessed by a workbook of practical exercises demonstrating competence in research methods.
3. Qualitative data analysis is assessed through a portfolio of qualitative data analyses carried out during the course.

4. Quantitative data analysis is assessed through a portfolio of quantitative data analyses carried out during the course.

Part 2 consists of a dissertation of 15,000-20,000 words.

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
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 Structure and Features**

The programme is offered almost exclusively on a full-time basis. A very small number of students study part-time. The course has four main compulsory ‘units’

1. Foundations of Educational Research
2. Strategies of Educational Research
3. Qualitative design and data analysis
4. Quantitative design and data analysis

Students also undertake a two week internship and participate in seminars on Current issues in educational research. The main teaching sessions of the course take place during the first two terms. In their third term, the main focus of students’ work is normally data collection, analysis and writing up of the dissertation of between 15,000 and 20,000 words.

**Foundations of Educational Research**

This unit has the following aims:

Foundations of Educational Research is the common paper to all routes of MSc Education and is taught over two terms.

At the end of this course, students should:

- understand the basic principles of research design in the social sciences and the importance of developing focused research questions.
- be aware of the range of research methods and research skills, and have gained ‘hands-on’ experience in conducting interviews and designing surveys.
- appreciate the importance of ethical issues in educational research, and the procedures for gaining ethical consent and research clearance.
- understand how different forms of qualitative and quantitative data are generated and can be analysed.
- have developed their own dissertation research ideas.

**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 research design and their skills in using a range of different methods of data collection.
- 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 course. Additional readings and preparatory material will be available prior to each session as appropriate.
Qualitative 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 introduce new topics and ideas in relation to analysis of qualitative data.
- that students gain competence in basic techniques in the analysis of 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.

Quantitative design and data analysis

This unit has the following aims:

- that students build on the Foundation of Educational Research and the Strategies for Educational Research and introduce new topics and ideas in relation to analysis of quantitative data.
- that students gain competence in basic techniques in the analysis of quantitative 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. The internship is not formally assessed.

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. This course is not formally assessed.

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 encouraged to attend a wide ranging programme of research seminars given by visiting researchers throughout each term, both 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 during term-time until 8.30 p.m. Monday to Thursday, until 7 p.m. on Friday and in the afternoons of the weekend. Opening hours are slightly shorter outside term-time. 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 has a supervisor who provides academic guidance and oversees their progress and supervises work for the dissertation. 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 minimum of a good upper second class degree, or its equivalent, in a relevant domain of studies. 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 indicators 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 examination 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 Education Committee 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 Education Committee 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 Education Committee.

- 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 Oxford Learning Institute (OLI).

- Student feedback on the course is provided by 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 examiners.

All written assignments and the dissertation are subjected initially to blind double marking.

Examiners and assessors then compare their respective marks and the written reports and come to an agreed mark for each assignment and dissertation. When a disagreement between the two examiners cannot be resolved, a third marker will be asked to make a judgement. In certain cases, the external examiner will act as a third marker to resolve the differences. The examiners may award a distinction for excellence in the whole examination.

Internal and external examiners will be required to produce reports after the examinations for consideration by the Departmental Board, the Social Sciences Board, and the Education Committee.

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 Education Committee of the University. The report will also be scrutinised by the Departmental Board of the Department of Education, by the Board of Examiners, and more widely within the department.

**Part 1 Coursework assignments & unseen examination requirements**

Every candidate will be required to pass all three elements of Part 1 and the dissertation (Part 2). Procedures for submission of essays and dissertations, including the time and place, are included in the relevant Course Handbook.

The following mark-related assessment criteria will be used for all examinations and coursework (Part 1 assessment) for the MSc in Education, and MSc in Educational Research Methodology:

80+ (High Distinction level)

*Evidence of criteria for 70+ distinction level and additionally:*

1. Clear evidence of individual searching and extensive reading of original sources;
2. Exceptional quality of presentation, argument, analysis and conclusions

70+ (Distinction level)

1. Strong and clear line of argument, well-structured;
2. Engages with the question/topic thoroughly and explicitly;
3. Writes clearly, logically and concisely, with flair;
4. High presentational standards including adherence to academic conventions;
5. Strong understanding of and engagement with key issues in the field and with relevant theory;
6. Engages with literature and evidence critically where appropriate;
7. Some evidence of original insight and analysis;
8. Adherence to practices of academic integrity, and avoidance of plagiarism

60-69 (High Pass Level)
1. Generally well structured; logical argument throughout;
2. Addresses the question clearly and in a relevant way;
3. Good clear writing;
4. Respects academic conventions;
5. Good range of relevant literature discussed, and critically evaluated, as appropriate;
6. Clear understanding of and engagement with key issues in the field and with relevant theory;
7. Some evidence of original insight in discussion;
8. Adherence to practices of academic integrity, and avoidance of plagiarism

50-59 (Low Pass)
1. Reasonably well structured with some attempt at pulling argument together;
2. Limited discussion of how topic/question is being addressed;
3. Writing quality is acceptable, despite some minor errors;
4. Adequate use of academic conventions;
5. Some engagement with relevant literature; lack of critical engagement;
6. Over-reliance on limited range of texts and on secondary sources;
7. Moderate level of discussion of key issues in the field and to relevant theory;
8. Adherence to practices of academic integrity; and avoidance of plagiarism

49 or lower (at fail level)
1. Little or no cohesion between ideas;
2. Weak written English (spelling, grammar, punctuation) renders text difficult to follow, sentences tortuous and hard to follow;
3. Insufficient attention to academic conventions;
4. Insufficient discussion of key issues; weak knowledge of topic and field;
5. Insufficient reading, and over-dependence on secondary sources.
6. Insufficient discussion of literature used;
7. Lack of insight;
8. Failure to explain or demonstrate how the question has been addressed;
9. Failure to adhere to practices of academic integrity; and/or evidence of plagiarism*

* Evidence in this respect automatically incurs award of fail mark.

Part 2. Dissertations

All students are required to submit a dissertation of a minimum of 15,000 and maximum of 20,000 words (including tables, figures, appendices and endnotes but excluding the list of references). This contains a report of original empirical research, which can be based on primary or secondary data, or a meta-analysis of previous studies. The subject will be selected by the candidate in consultation with the supervisor and 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 and by the Departmental
Board of the Department. The writing standards are based on those used for publication in the domain of research.

Three printed copies of the dissertation and one soft copy (using a programme available in the Department) must be delivered to the MSc examiners, c/o Examination Schools, no later than the deadline set by the Course Team. Candidates wishing to submit dissertations later than this date must obtain the approval of the Departmental Board at least two weeks in advance of the deadline. 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.

The following mark-related assessment criteria will be used for examining dissertations (Part 2 assessment) for the MSc in Education, and MSc in Educational Research Methodology:

**80+ (Distinction level)**

*Evidence of criteria for 70+ distinction level and additionally:*
1. Quality of the research, presentation, and argument is of publishable quality.
2. Displays a strong individual voice in writing;
3. Evidence of originality in understanding and insight; adds to knowledge in the field.

**70+ (Distinction Level)**

1. Strong and well-structured argument, with clear presentation of topic and key question/s addressed in study; strong coherence throughout dissertation;
2. Writes confidently, logically, concisely, and with flair.
3. High presentational standards including use of academic conventions;
4. Shows a strong knowledge of the topic and field;
5. Strong understanding of and engagement with relevant theory;
6. Reviews and, where appropriate, critiques literature relevant to the overall topic,
7. Full and clear presentation of aims of research & research questions;
8. Sophisticated understanding and discussion of methodology and research design;
9. Illuminating description of data analysis processes;
10. Strong discussion of findings and conclusions; connections established between findings and broader context or theory;
11. Adherence to practices of academic integrity, and avoidance of plagiarism.

**60-69 (High Pass Level)**

1. Well-structured argument with clear presentation of topic and key question/s addressed in study; good coherence throughout dissertation;
2. Writes clearly, logically and concisely;
3. Good presentational standards including use of academic conventions;
4. Shows a comprehensive knowledge of the topic and field;
5. Understands and engages with relevant theory.
6. Reviews and, where appropriate, critiques literature relevant to the overall topic;
7. Clear presentation of aims of research & research questions;
8. Clear discussion and justification of methodology and research design;
9. Clear discussion of data analysis processes;
10. Good discussion of findings and conclusions;
11. Adherence to practices of academic integrity, and avoidance of plagiarism.
50-59 (Low Pass)

9. Adequate but limited structure and presentation of topic and key question/s addressed in study; evidence of coherence throughout dissertation;
10. Writing quality is acceptable, though possibly with occasional errors.
12. Shows adequate knowledge of topic and field;
13. Covers relevant literature but limited criticality, and/or over-reliant on secondary sources;
14. Make aims of research clear;
15. Adequate discussion of methods chosen;
16. Limited discussion of data analysis;
17. Moderate degree of insight in discussion of findings and conclusions; some assertions not substantiated
18. Adherence to practices of academic integrity, and avoidance of plagiarism

49 or lower (at fail level)

1. Weak written English (spelling, grammar, punctuation) renders text difficult to follow; sentences tortuous and hard to follow;
2. Insufficient attention to academic conventions;
3. Weak organization and presentation of structure; lack of clear line of argument or coherence throughout dissertation;
4. Weak or irrelevant choices of literature discussed; lack of clarity as to whether sources are primary or secondary;
5. Weak presentation of findings and/or discussion of conclusions; little or no cohesion between ideas;
6. Failure to discuss any ethical issues relevant to study;

**Evidence of any of the following may lead to the award of fail mark:**

7. Failure to:
   - discuss relevant literature and/or prior research in field
   - clearly state purpose of the research
   - address stated purpose of the research
   - explain methodology and research design
   - present and discuss findings and conclusions;
8. Failure to adhere to practices of academic integrity; and/or evidence of plagiarism.

The final marks for Part 1 and Part 2 examining will be awarded at the appropriate Board of Examiners Meetings, in June and September respectively. In computing the overall mark for each Paper, a simple average will be used. A candidate receiving two or more fail marks for their questions will automatically fail that Paper. Each paper has equal weighting of marks.

An External Examiner will read all assignments and dissertations with provisional failing marks and those dissertations where there is a possibility (but not a certainty) of a distinction. Oral Examinations (viva voce) on the written papers will be held in cases where candidates have been awarded overall failure marks.

Over-length dissertations may have the initial mark awarded reduced by up to 5 marks.

The University rules concerning arrangements in cases of illness, disability etc. as detailed in Examination Regulations 2007, p. 32, 11.1 to p. 34, 11.11, and to the arrangements for permission for candidates whose first language is not English to use a dictionary in the written examinations as detailed in Examination Regulations 2007, p. 39, l3.7. All students should note that they are
required to submit work by the deadline specified. An extension can only be granted if written
permission has been obtained. Unauthorized late submission will result in an automatic deduction
of 20% to the overall grade of the assessed work.

Award of Distinction

Candidates who pass all papers (Part I) and have at least two distinction marks in the papers in Part
I and a distinction mark for the dissertation (Part II) will be awarded a distinction.

Re-sits

Candidates who fail to satisfy the examiners in the essays or the dissertation may enter again for
the examination on one, but not more than one, subsequent occasion. This will take place on the
next occasion when the papers or dissertation are examined. The re-submitted dissertation may be
based on the same empirical research and candidates must ensure that they have addressed all the
feedback received from examiners. Essay titles will be those published for the occasion when the
candidate is examined.

16. Indicators of quality and standards

The course is offered under the aegis of the Department of Education, which achieved a rating of 5
in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise and the top rating in the 2008 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 OfST