Programme Specification for M.Sc. Education

(Child Development and Education)
PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR

M.Sc. Education (Child Development and Education)

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. Education (Child Development and Education)
6. UCAS code                 N/A
7. Relevant subject benchmark statement  N/A
8. Date of programme specification  September 2014
9. Educational aims of the programme

  • To promote students’ critical understanding of child development theories and research, including cognitive, social and emotional aspects of development;

  • To provide students with a critical knowledge of widely disseminated programmes aimed at preschool children and at the development of language and literacy, cognitive stimulation and the development of numeracy in school;

  • To develop students’ knowledge and skills required for the analysis of current issues in the education of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in different early childhood settings and in schools;

  • To promote students’ reflective knowledge of different ways of approaching the education and assessment of children with special educational needs;

  • To provide students with experience with a range of research methods used in the evaluation of educational and early childhood programmes (including those for families and institutional settings) and to develop their ability to analyse critically evaluation reports;

* This programme constitutes one of five pathways of the MSc Education: Child Development and Education; Comparative and International Education; Higher Education; Learning and Technology; Research Design and Methodology. Section 11 of each specification indicates opportunities available to students for taking course options from other pathways, whilst sections 12-16 specify generic aspects of the MSc Education.
• To encourage discussion on how theories of child development inform practice and how challenges faced in educational and care settings call for further theoretical and research enquiry;

• To provide a strong basis for further studies in Child Development and encourage future applications to doctoral studies in this domain.

10. Programme outcomes

A. At the end of the programme, students will demonstrate:

• Critical knowledge of theories and current research on children’s cognitive, social and emotional development;

• Sound understanding of basic concepts and methods of data collection, research design and analysis in Cognitive and Social-emotional Development and in the evaluation of educational programmes;

• Insight into how widely used programmes for early childhood education were designed, implemented and evaluated and the challenges faced in these steps of programme development;

• The ability to critically discuss programme evaluation reports;

• The ability to design and implement a sound research study, to analyse data and write a concise and rigorous report;

• Insight into the ethical issues associated with research in educational, community and family settings and with vulnerable people.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Different methods of programme delivery will be used: lectures, seminars for discussion of specific topics, student led presentations, tutorials, workshops, a practicum on literacy and an independent research project carried out for the dissertation. Teaching sessions will include lectures and sessions divided into lectures followed by seminars for the discussion of readings related to the lecture topic. These will provide the opportunity for students to discuss, for example, data collection methods, design and analysis of research papers and become familiar with statistical methods through their use in research.

Individual supervisions will enable students to identify research questions, select areas for literature review, consider how they will carry out field work, and review drafts of the dissertation. Workshops will be used to discuss in greater depth approaches to data analysis and the theoretical background of interventions used with pre-school and school aged children. Students can audit an optional quantitative research methods course at the introduction level and must attend the course at intermediate level; these aim to develop their understanding of the use of statistical models in research. Students have the option of participating in a practicum about early years and primary literacy, which offers the opportunity to examine critically assessments and interventions to promote children’s literacy.

Attendance to the research seminars organized by the Children Learning and the FELL research groups is compulsory and aims to broaden the scope of their learning and their participation in the discussion of
current research. Students are also encouraged to attend the departmental seminar series.

**Assessment**

Formative assessment is provided through feedback on written assignments, feedback on students’ oral presentations and extensive feedback on dissertation drafts from supervisors. Summative assessment involves a written assignment of up to 3,000 words for each of the six papers, usually due at the start of the following term.

**B. Skills and other attributes**

**I. Intellectual and practical skills**

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

- Critical analysis of research and theoretical papers;
- Skills associated with data collection techniques;
- Skills required for setting up data-bases, including design of data files and data processing;
- Statistical analysis at an intermediate level, using appropriate statistical packages (primarily SPSS);
- Skills in carrying out literature searches and organizing bibliographic resources using ICT;
- Skills necessary to plan, conduct and report an original research study;
- Oral presentation skills using appropriate ICT and audio-visual resources;
- Practical skills in the domain of assessment and interventions in early childhood and primary literacy.

**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

The development of skills will be promoted through a variety of opportunities for practical engagement in research (e.g. workshops, practicum in early childhood and primary literacy, dissertation), critical analysis of research papers, oral presentations in seminars and workshops. Descriptions are included under A above; further details can also be found in the brief overview of the modules.

**Assessment**

Besides the assessments described under A above, students will also have on-going assessments for learning on their oral presentation and, through tutorials, on their work while designing, implementing, analysing and reporting their dissertation work.

**II. Transferable skills**

Students will develop:
• Oral and written presentations skills;

• ICT competence;

• Expertise in the preparation of data bases and techniques of analysis;

• Ability to discuss ideas critically and to work as member of a team;

• Autonomous learning strategies and time management.

11. Programme Structure and Features

The programme is offered on a full-time basis. The programme comprises six compulsory papers, seminars on contemporary research in child development and education, workshops on uses of data analysis in research, and supervisions designed to support the students in the work towards the completion of the dissertation. During Hillary Term, students must take two methodological modules (Foundations of Educational Research 2 and Intermediate Quantitative Methods) and opt for which one will be taken as an assessed module. Students must pass each paper and the dissertation. Essays are completed during the first two terms and the dissertation is submitted at the beginning of August. During Michaelmas Term, students have the opportunity to participate in the Practicum in Early Years and Primary Literacy, which offers an opportunity to examine critically materials used in assessments and interventions.

Students are also expected to attend research seminars in the Department to widen their knowledge basis and participate in academic discussion.

Brief description of courses

Michaelmas Term

During this term students take three compulsory modules for assessment. They also must take Introduction to Quantitative Methods, if they do not have previous knowledge of statistical techniques, as a non-assessed course. They have the option of participating in the Practicum in Literacy in the Early Years and in Primary School.

Foundations of Educational Research 1: Research design

This course has the following learning outcomes:

• Understanding the key concepts and basic principles of research design and methodology in the social sciences;

• Awareness of the processes and relationships involved in planning, conducting, reporting and following up a research project;

• Appreciation of the role of well-developed research questions in educational research;

• Ability to critically assess research literature;

• Appreciation of the importance of ethical issues in educational research, and understand the procedures for gaining ethical consent and research clearance;

• Development of students’ own dissertation research ideas.
Child Development 1

The aim of this paper is to introduce the students to theories that seek to describe and explain children’s cognitive development and to research relevant to children’s learning and education. Specific consideration is given to general theories of cognitive development (Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s theories, executive function, working memory) as well as to theories about specific aspects of development: mathematical, language and literacy learning. The emphasis during this term is on development during the primary school years. The research seminar series is an integral part of the course.

Outcomes of the course
At the end of this term, you should:
- be familiar with major theories about children’s cognitive development, including specific aspects of development (mathematical, linguistic and reading development);
- have a critical understanding of the empirical basis of these theories and their implications for education;
- be aware of the challenges for theories stemming from practical settings.

Interventions and policies to promote children’s development 1

The aim of this paper is to introduce the students to programmes that support children’s cognitive development with a focus in primary school years and to promote a critical analysis of these programmes. Cognitive acceleration programmes and those that support children’s working memory, mathematical development and language and reading development will be considered during this term.

Outcomes of the course
At the end of this term, you should:
- be familiar with different cognitive and language development programmes;
- be skilled and critical readers of intervention programmes (local, national and international examples) with a specific focus on language development, cognitive and socio-emotional development;
- be able to analyse critically the connections between theory and practice in educational programmes;
- have developed some confidence on evaluations of interventions (national and international examples) and the assessment of children’s cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes.

Practicum in Early Years and Primary Literacy

This is an optional practicum for CDE students to be taught during Michaelmas term. Students will engage in workshops with a focus on literacy assessments and interventions, and write critical reports on the assessments and teaching activities at the end of the session. Each student will collect and evaluate resources that have similar aims, such as the assessment of word reading, word spelling, or reading comprehension, or teaching/intervention programmes that aim at developing children’s achievements in similar ways. Sessions will include individual and group activities to evaluate assessments or teaching materials, including the analysis of supporting information and the use of the materials in research and interventions.
Outcomes of the practicum

At the end of this practicum you should demonstrate:

1. Sound knowledge of principles used in two or more literacy assessments and the nature of data that they provide for teachers or researchers
2. Good knowledge of principles used in two or more literacy interventions and a critical understanding of how these principles translate into practice
3. Familiarity with programmes that aim to promote an integrated approach to literacy across the curriculum

Introduction to Quantitative Methods

The aims of the course are, firstly, to set a solid base of understanding (e.g., scale-types, significance testing, normal distribution) for increased statistical literacy; secondly, to enhance the ability to select, carry out and interpret the results of appropriate statistical tests for answering a range of research questions; and thirdly, to read and create informative graphical representations and tables.

At the end of this course, you should:

- know how to interpret statistical analyses in research papers;
- be familiar with a range of statistical methods that can be used in educational research
- be able to use a statistical package to carry out data analysis.

Hilary Term

During this term students take three compulsory modules for assessment: Child Development 2, Interventions and policies to promote children’s development 2 and either Intermediate Quantitative Methods or Foundations of Educational Research 2. The latter two courses are compulsory but only one of these is taken as an assessed course.

Foundations of Educational Research 2: Methods and strategies

This course has the following learning outcomes:

- Advances students understanding of the key concepts and basic principles of research design and methodology in educational research and other social sciences;
- Ability to critically assess research literature;
- Awareness of the range of research methods and techniques;
- Gaining ‘hands-on’ experience in conducting interviews and designing surveys;
- Understanding how different forms of qualitative and quantitative data are generated and can be analysed;
- Further Development of students’ dissertation research ideas.

Intermediate Quantitative Methods

This course aims to set a solid base of understanding for increased statistical literacy and to promote students’ ability to build statistical models and interpret the results of multivariate statistical tests.
At the end of this course you should:

- be able to select variables, build statistical models, carry out and interpret the results of multivariate statistical tests;
- be able to present results by using language appropriate for social science research;
- be able to create informative graphical representations and tables;
- be able to interpret and critique quantitative findings in a range of forms of publications.

**Child Development 2**

This paper focuses on the critical analysis of theories that seek to describe and explain children’s social and emotional development. A range of topics will be covered including attachment in infancy and childhood, the role of the family in children’s development, children’s understanding of the other, their beliefs about competence and morality, the development of their friendships and peer relations.

**Outcomes of the course**

At the end of this term, you should:

- be familiar with major theories about children’s social and emotional development and factors that are considered to influence this development throughout childhood;
- have a critical understanding of the empirical basis of these theories and their implications for education;
- be aware of the significance of the cultural context for understanding children’s development;
- be a critical reader of research on selected issues about the education of children with special educational needs;
- be aware of the challenges when established theories are used in new cultural settings.

**Interventions and policies to promote children’s development 2**

The aim of this paper is to critically introduce the students to all components of children’s development in both the family and institutional settings. The sessions will focus on risk factors, policies and interventions that aim to ameliorate these factors. Research that evaluates interventions at local, national and international level will be part of the core readings of the paper. Hilary term’s sessions consider young children’s development in the family, the community and in pre-schools (pre-school children) as well as frameworks for the education of children with special educational needs.

**Outcomes of the course**

At the end of this term, you should:

- be familiar with important aspects of risk and resilience in development, and knowledgeable of contributions of the child, the family and the environment factors to children’s development;
- have developed your knowledge of the family role and involvement in children’s learning, and of interdisciplinary methods of working with families;
- be skilled and critical readers of interventions (local, national and international examples) with a specific focus on language development, cognitive and socio-emotional development;
- have developed some confidence on evaluations of interventions (national and international examples) and the assessment of children’s cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes;
- be familiar with the main issues in the assessment and education of children with special educational needs.
Assessment

(i) Child Development 1 and 2 (Michaelmas and Hilary Terms) are assessed by means of two essays submitted at the start of the following term. These essays, of a maximum of 3,000 words each, should demonstrate students’ critical knowledge of child development theories and insight into the cross-fertilization between theory and challenges stemming from practical questions.

(ii) Interventions and policies to promote children’s development 1 and 2 (Michaelmas and Hilary Terms) are assessed by two essays (with a maximum of 3,000 words each), the first covering interventions designed for children in primary school (part 1) and the second for pre-school (part 2) children. The first essay is a critical analysis of an intervention programme designed to promote children’s development. The second essay is an analysis of the theoretical basis of an intervention programme or policy.

(iii) Foundations of Educational Research 1 and 2 are each assessed by written coursework of up to 3,000 words. Assessment of Intermediate Quantitative Methods involves practical work.

(iv) The practicum in early years and primary school literacy is assessed by oral presentations and reports presented during the sessions. Students will prepare one piece of work which analyses critically one literacy assessment or intervention. This should contain a description of the materials and a reflective piece of between 1,500 and 2,000 words. This should be submitted no later than 1 week following the presentation offered by the student. Students will also prepare a portfolio containing the brief reports they have prepared each session (minimum of 5 are needed). The portfolio must be submitted by Monday of week 2 in HT to the Higher Degrees office no later than 12 o’clock noon. Students who submit a portfolio deemed appropriate will be provided with a declaration to this effect;

(v) A dissertation, reporting on an empirical study, of 15,000-20,000 words.

Essays should demonstrate the students’ knowledge of theories and research in child development and widely used child development programmes as well as a critical understanding of the challenges in designing and implementing such programmes. The dissertations should demonstrate the students’ research and critical analysis skills as well as the ability to write clear and concise reports to a high level of academic competence.

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 through the University Computing Services. The Department of Education has 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, 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

Within equal opportunities principles and legislation, applications will be assessed in the light of a candidate’s proven and potential academic excellence. Applicants will normally meet the following criteria:

1. All applicants are normally expected to be predicted or to have achieved a good Honours degree (normally 2.1 or equivalent international qualifications, such as a GPA of at least 3.6/4.0) in a relevant subject, preferably in the social sciences. Relevant work experience may be desirable. Applicants must submit full details of qualifications (transcripts, certificates or diplomas).

2. Whilst entry is highly competitive, each application is considered on an individual basis, ensuring that candidates are well-matched to their chosen course, and have the ability and potential to benefit from the course.

3. Three highly positive academic references, supporting the applicant’s intellectual ability, academic achievement, motivation and ability to work in a group.

4. Two pieces of written work, which demonstrate the applicant’s understanding of the subject area, your ability to construct and defend an argument, and proficiency in academic English.

5. A convincing personal statement, explaining the reasons for applying to the programme and highlighting relevant academic and professional experience.

7. Performance at interview(s) that are normally held as part of the admissions process.

8. Applicants whose first language is not English are usually required to provide evidence of proficiency in English at the higher level required by the University;

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

- There is an 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 submitted 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 by the University’s Education Committee and the Social Sciences Board.

- Each course director prepares an Annual Review report for the Department’s Teaching Committee, where teaching and assessment methods are compared and improvements are identified. 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 student representation on the termly meetings of the course committee. The department also has a Joint Consultative Committee where student representatives can bring suggestions and concerns to the Head of Department and other key 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.

16. Indicators of quality and standards

The course is offered under the aegis of the Department of Education, which was rated joint first nationally in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. As part of the University’s Doctoral Training Centre, the department has ESRC recognition for its postgraduate training (1+3 in both full-time and part-time modes, and its teacher training was considered ‘Outstanding’ by OfSTED in 2011).