UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Programme Specification for M.Sc. Education

(Higher Education)
PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR
M.Sc. Education (Higher 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 (Higher 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 provide students with the research skills necessary to evaluate and discuss current debates in higher education policy and practice.
   • To develop critical analysis, problem solving skills and research skills
   • To develop the ability to critically assess the historical development and philosophical underpinnings of different models of higher education.
   • To develop the ability to define and formulate research problems and questions in the field of higher education.
   • To encourage students to articulate and defend their own views on research and academic practice in higher education
   • To situate debates about contemporary higher education within appropriate economic, political and institutional contexts.

10. Programme outcomes

   A. Students will develop a knowledge and understanding of:

   • A range of approaches to collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data in the field of higher education
   • The theoretical, historical and philosophical bases of higher education
   • The current controversies surrounding higher education and their underlying reasons
   • Different models and systems of higher education
• Major research paradigms and designs for conducting higher education research
• Changing approaches to higher education management and policy, and their impact on academic identity and student learning.
• The complex connections between higher education and the economic system, and their consequences for higher education policy and practice
• Student learning experiences in higher education, their histories, and their pedagogic rationale
• Debates around academic practice and professional development in higher education

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. The ability to plan, carry out and evaluate systematic research in the field of higher education
3. Skills associated with analysing educationally relevant phenomena in a wide range of higher education contexts
4. Skills in presenting one’s own research.

II. Transferable skills

Students will learn how to:

1. Communicate effectively
2. Develop critical analysis
3. Develop autonomous learning
4. Work as a member of a team
5. Improve their Information and Communication Technology competence
6. Manage resources and time

11. Programme structures and features

This is a twelve-month programme, offered on a full-time basis. The programme provides students with the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to engage in different roles in higher education. Part 1 of the programme consists of six assessed courses, three taken in Michaelmas term and three in Hilary term (and are also free to follow one further course in each term on a non-assessed basis). The following five assessed courses are obligatory:
Michaelmas Term

Higher Education 1: Philosophical underpinnings and current debates

This course compares and discusses the work of some of the most important thinkers in the area of higher education, providing a basis for a research-led review of current issues. These issues focus, in the first instance, on higher education in the UK but will increasingly include international debates. For the international comparisons the course will draw on course members’ experiences of different higher education systems. Issues covered will comprise the funding of higher education institutions, funding and quality of research, and the institutional set-up of higher education systems.

Higher Education and the Economy

The course reviews research on the connections between higher education and the economy. This includes the connections between universities and the labour market, between higher and vocational education, and between higher education research and economic performance. The course will introduce and discuss concepts such as the graduate premium, private and social cost of higher education, and graduate occupations. This will feed into the discussion of the question of how much participation in higher education is required for sustainable economic growth.

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.

Hilary Term

Higher Education 2: Issues of internationalisation and equity

This course discusses the forces of internationalisation in higher education, by critically assessing European Union policies in higher education and international university rankings. The course will introduce different models of higher education systems and will, based on the comparative work started in HE 1, examine how different systems deal with issues of access to, and equality of outcomes in, higher education. As part of this, tensions between international and national agendas will be explored.

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.

The sixth assessed course will be chosen from the following course options in Hilary Term:

• Policy, Politics and Education
• Education in Africa
• Researching Students’ Lives
• Qualitative Research
• Intermediate Quantitative Research
• Learning, Technology and Society
• Engagements with Educational Technology Research
• Skills Policy and Vocational Education and Training

These courses 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.

Assessment

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

Summative assessment consists of two parts:

Part 1 (six papers)

1. Higher Education 1 is assessed by a 3,000 (max.) words written coursework assignment due at the beginning of Hilary term.
2. Higher Education 2 is assessed by a 3 hour unseen examination at the end of Hilary Term.
3. Higher Education and the Economy is assessed by a 3,000 (max.) words written coursework assignment due at the beginning of Hilary Term.
4. Foundations of Educational Research 1 is assessed through 3,000 (max.) words written coursework assignment due at the end of Michaelmas term.
5. Foundations of Educational Research 2 assessed through a written coursework assignment due at the end of Hilary term.
6. The Optional paper is assessed by a written assignment of up to 3000 words due at the start of the Trinity term.

Part 2

A research-based dissertation of 15,000-20,000 words
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 achieved a rating of 5 in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise and 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.