UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Programme Specification for
M.Sc. Education (Research Training)
PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR

M.Sc. Education (Research Training)

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 (Research Training)

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 knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to evaluate educational research critically and to design and 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 and be able to use a range of methods and to select appropriate methods for their research problems.

* 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 Training. 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.
10. Programme outcomes

A. Students will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- 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.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

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

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

Students are expected to attend all taught lectures and follow up seminars, to read and prepare before lectures and to contribute to seminars.

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.

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 their own research

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

11. Programme Structure and Features

The programme is taken on a full-time basis. Exceptionally, a student studies part-time. Students also undertake a two week internship. 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. Part 1 of the course consists of six assessed courses:

**Michaelmas Term**
1. Foundations of Educational Research 1: Research Design
2. Philosophy of Education Research
3. Introduction to Quantitative Research

**Hilary Term**
4. Foundations of Educational Research 2: Methods and Strategies
5. EITHER Perspectives on Qualitative Research OR Intermediate Quantitative Research

6. Candidates may select their sixth assessed course from the following choices, and may attend one further course on a non-assessed basis in each term:

- Perspectives on Qualitative Research
- Intermediate Quantitative Research
- Policy, Politics and Education
- Intermediate Quantitative Research
- Learning, Technology and Society
- Engagements with Educational Technology Research
• Ethnographies of Youth and Childhood
• Theories and Methods for 21st Century Learning
• Higher Education and the Economy
• The Political, Economic and Cultural Dimensions of Education in Africa
• Skills Policy and Vocational Education and Training

Foundations of Educational Research 1: Research design
• 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.

Foundations of Educational Research 2: Methods and strategies
• 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 project.

Philosophy of Education Research
By the end of this unit, students should:
• appreciate the importance of philosophical and theoretical assumptions in research design and methodology in the social sciences;
• have developed a working understanding of key concepts in research design and methodology;
• understand the relationship between epistemic aims and claims in a research project, and the importance of their alignment with research questions and research design;
• understand the relationship between theoretical and empirical components of educational research, and illustrate it with reference to pedagogical and sociological theories;
• engage in philosophically informed deliberation about ethical decisions in research;
• draw upon philosophical, theoretical and methodological concepts to critically assess research literature.

Qualitative Research
This unit has the following aims:
• that students develop their understanding of the use of qualitative methods for researching educational issues
• that students gain confidence and competence in using a range of qualitative methods appropriate to their research design
• that students develop an understanding of different approaches to the analysis of findings.
that students begin to consider the analytic, methodological and ethical implications of decisions about research design.

**Introductory Quantitative Research**

The course provides a solid base of understanding (e.g., scale-types, significance testing, normal distribution) for increased statistical literacy; aims 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, provides students with the skill to read and create informative graphical representations and tables.

**Intermediate Quantitative Research**

Building on the foundations set in the introductory course in the first term, this course aims, firstly, to set a solid base of understanding for increased statistical literacy; secondly, to enhance the ability to select variables, build statistical models, carry out and interpret the results of multivariate statistical tests for answering a range of research questions; thirdly, to create and interpret informative graphical representations and tables; fourthly, to be able to interpret and critique quantitative findings in a range of forms of publications.

**Internship experience**

All students are attached for two weeks to a research project within the Department. This provides the opportunity for students to gain experience with the practicalities of research project activities, these can include activities such as project management, literature review, data entry, setting up fieldwork, data analysis and the realities of carrying out educational research. The internship is not formally assessed.

**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 feedback on dissertation planning, research design and on written dissertation drafts from supervisors. Satisfactory completion of all assignments is required for a student to be admitted to part 2 of the examination.

Summative assessment of the programme is organised through Part 1 and Part 2 assessment. Part 1 consists of six papers, *four* of which are assessed by the following core coursework assignments:

1. Foundations of Educational Research 1 is assessed through one written coursework assignment, submitted at the end of Michaelmas Term.
2. Foundations of Educational Research 2 is assessed through one written coursework assignment, submitted at the end of Hilary Term.
3. Conceptualising Educational Research is assessed by a workbook of assignments demonstrating understanding of relevant issues in research design and competence in research methods.
4. Introduction to Quantitative Research is assessed through a portfolio of quantitative data analyses carried out during the course.
The other two assessments are chosen from the following:

5. Perspectives on Qualitative Research is assessed through a portfolio of qualitative data analyses carried out during the course.

6. Intermediate Quantitative Research is assessed through a portfolio of quantitative data analyses carried out during the course.

7. A written coursework assignment of 3,000 words relating to one of the other course options available.

Part 2 consists of a 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.

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

7. 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 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, this course is ESRC recognized as a doctoral training pathway.