

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

MSc in Evidence for Public Policy and Practice

Awarding Institution: Institute of Education, University of London

Teaching Institutions: Institute of Education, University of London

Name of final award

Master of Science (MSc)
Postgraduate Diploma
Postgraduate Certificate

Programme title

Evidence for Public Policy and Practice

Language of study

The Institute of Education teaches and assesses participants through the medium of the English language. Competence in English language is required of all applicants. Programme regulations may indicate the level of competence required of each applicant and may make its achievement a condition of admission.

Participants

The programme is designed for graduates and experienced policy-makers, practitioners, managers and researchers wanting to become skilled in systematic reviewing, with a critical understanding of the relationships between research evidence and public, policy and practice decisions.

Educational Aims of the Programme

The programme aims to develop knowledge and understanding of:

- systematic research synthesis and wide-ranging user participation as methods central to evidence-informed policy, practice and research;
- the various influences on decision-making in public, policy and practice settings and differing models of knowledge development and use;
- the range of approaches to research synthesis, including how systematic reviews can address a broad range of research questions, can be both integrative and interpretive, can use both a-priori and iterative methods, and how research reviews, like all research projects, need to be appraised for their strengths and weaknesses;

the strengths and limitations of different research approaches in general, designs and methods for answering different research questions, and a range of frameworks for appraising research relevance and quality.

Learning Outcomes

After successful completion of the MSc students should: have a critical understanding of the value and limitations of a wide range of research approaches and methods for policy and practice decision-making and knowledge development; have a critical understanding of different methods of accessing and synthesizing

research evidence relevant to the full range of research, policy and practice questions; be able to design, plan, conduct and evaluate systematic reviews of research for social policy, and evaluate methods for the communication, interpretation and application of review findings; be able to assess influences on decision-making within public, practice and policy-making settings and recognise ways in which researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and the public can produce, help identify, interpret and synthesise knowledge.

Criteria for admission

Entry criteria are a first-class or second-class honours degree in health, education or another area of social science or social policy, or a professional graduate qualification which is accepted by the Institute as equivalent; for example, one relating to the police force, healthcare or social work. For those with a qualification other than those specified above, you may be eligible to join the programme through a qualifying examination.

Applicants whose first language is a language other than English may be required to provide evidence of their English language proficiency.

The Institute of Education is committed to admitting and supporting participants with disabilities and welcomes applications from them. Participants do not need to be “registered disabled” to draw on these services, though in order to provide services in the long-term we will need to ask for medical or other evidence, as appropriate.

Disabilities Support can also support people who have a temporary mobility / dexterity impairment / other difficulty as a result of an accident, injury, illness or surgery.

We aim to treat every person as an individual, with needs which may differ from those of other people with a superficially similar disability. We do not therefore have standard procedures for participants with dyslexia, nor standard procedures for visually impaired participants: each person's needs are considered individually.

Mode of study

The programme is offered over one year full-time study or two years part-time study. The core modules will each be taught over four full-day workshops, with online learning components.

Programme structures and requirements, levels, modules, credits and awards

The programme is composed of two main components, the compulsory modules/dissertation and designated modules. Students are required to obtain 180 credits in total. The Institute of Education uses the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), as a guide to support periods of study undertaken abroad and to assist student mobility. Currently it is assumed that two UK credits equate to one ECTS. Therefore a module of 30 credits would typically equate to 15 ECTS credits.

Compulsory Modules/Dissertation (120 credits)

Research synthesis for policy and practice (30 credits) Evidence for policy, practice, and personal decisions (30 credits) Dissertation (60 credits)

Designated Modules (60 credits)

There are many possible optional modules. Three recommended routes are:

- i) For a focus on methods for research synthesis (30 from this set, remainder from ii or iii) Methods for Research Synthesis (30 credits)
- ii) For a focus on general research methods (60 credits from this set) Philosophical and design issues (30 credits); Collecting data (20 credits); Qualitative analysis (30 credits); Quantitative analysis I or II (30 credits); Qualitative Evaluation methodology (30 credits)
- iii) For a focus on research in educational or childhood policy or practice (30 credits from this set, remainder from ii) Understanding education policy (30 credits); Research and Professional Practice (30 credits); Researching childhood (30 credits).

The programme is international in perspective though the examples used are predominantly from research and research use in English speaking Western developed countries. Some experience of Western social science research methods is assumed.

Participants who for academic or personal reasons are unable to successfully complete the 180 credits required for the masters award may exit with the completion of 60 or 120 credits respectively and be awarded a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma in the subject area.

Teaching, learning and assessment strategies to enable outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated

A wide variety of teaching and learning strategies is used across the programme. These have been selected by the teaching team to motivate the learners, to maximise opportunities for learning. These include: teacher-led exposition, discussion and activities in pairs, small groups and within the whole group. The dissertation is supported by individual tutorials with learners.

Both core modules ascertain students' prior experience with relevant research methods at the programme start. This is done using an online, introductory activity for the first compulsory module. Steps are taken to ensure that groups are mixed in terms of experience throughout the remainder of the modules.

The two compulsory modules and the module 'Methods for Research Synthesis' are developed and taught by a team. They are taught in four whole day workshops with on line work between workshops. In addition, the core module 'Research synthesis for policy and practice' is also available as a fully online programme where learning is supported through an online learning environment;

Methods of assessment vary across modules.

- Research synthesis for policy and practice is assessed through two pieces of work: one that contains structured descriptions and appraisals of two reviews; and one critical comparative essay of 1,500 words.
- 'Evidence for policy, practice and personal decisions' is assessed through an outline proposal of approximately 4,500 words for either: (a) supporting and evaluating research-informed decision-making by policy makers, practitioners and service users; or (b) supporting and evaluating policy maker, practitioner and service user involvement in the creation and development of research based knowledge.
- 'Methods for Research Synthesis' consists of two substantially and methodologically different reviews (approximately 1,500 words each) and a short (maximum 2000) word essay reflecting on the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the two protocols, and on the different ways in which their proposed reviews might contribute to the area of policy and practice in which they are situated.

A central feature supporting student outcomes is the provision of extensive formative feedback on draft coursework for all of the above modules.

Information about assessment regulations

Learners must pass both core modules, the dissertation and modules making up a further 60 credits. Learners are given detailed formative feedback on each assignment and one resubmission for each failed unit is permitted.

All assignments are double marked for quality assurance. Internal moderation of both written work and practical teaching is undertaken by programme tutors.

An external examiner is appointed by Senate and plays an important role in monitoring the quality of the programme and evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching and support provided for the programme participants and the reliability of the judgements made in assessing them.

Support for learning

Support strategies for learners on the programme include:

- A programme handbook that gives detailed information about the programme and detailed advice on assessment.
- An induction programme including introduction to the Institute library, Blackboard, IT and other facilities provided by the Institute.
- Support to learners by module leaders.
- Pastoral care and progress of students through the programme.
- Assigning and overseeing supervisory support for dissertations
- Peer support and networking is facilitated in the group by the use of Blackboard and collaborative projects.
- Access to the full range of welfare and union facilities afforded to all Institute trainees

Methods for evaluating and improving the programme

Quality assurance arrangements include:

- procedures for the approval of each element of the programme;
- guidelines for the appointment of supervisors;
- a programme monitoring and evaluation system (including feedback from students);
- an external examining system.

The MScEPPP Programme Committee and the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee keep the programme under continuous review, monitoring each module for which the SSRU is responsible and sometimes seeking the advice of the External Examiner. At the end of each module, or more frequently, evaluation forms are distributed and student feedback is invited which is anonymous. Feedback to the concerns raised will be made to students on the whole programme by the student representative (if available). Feedback is provided after the issues have been discussed at the Programme Committee meetings. A section of the annual programme report also contain references to both students' responses and the programme team's feedback.

Indicators of quality and standards

- Indicators of quality include positive feedback by learners on evaluation forms at the end of each module and positive comments by the external examiner.
- There is high demand for short programme versions of the main modules internationally.

Relevant benchmark statements and other external and internal reference points used to inform programme outcomes

The main reference points are other programmes on evidence informed policy and practice internationally. This programme is broader in perspective in terms of production and use of research and in terms of breadth or research questions and methods of primary research and synthesis.

Date of completion/amendment of specification

June 2009