MSc in Sociology with Research Training

Awarding Institution:	The University of Reading
Teaching Institution:	The University of Reading
Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences	Programme length: 12 months (24, part-time)
For students entering in 2004	Date of specification: 09.09.2003
Programme Director: Dr. Jorge Rodriguez	
Board of Studies: Sociology	
Accreditation: Not appropriate	

Summary of programme aims
Formally, the master's programme provides the required one-year of research training for students registered in a 1+3 PhD programme in Sociology (2 years, if taken part-time). It can also be taken as a 'stand alone' master's course in Sociology with research training. Substantively, the programme aims to provide the methodological and analytical skills and competencies necessary to successfully engage in advanced sociological research.

Transferable skills
- General research skills: bibliographic & computing skills; teaching skills; awareness of the ethical and legal issues affecting sociological research and of the possibilities or problems of academic or commercial exploitation of research and Intellectual Property Rights.
- Personal development and employment-related skills: communication skills, team-working and research management skills; personal and career development skills.
- The MSc provides training for the ESRC recognised 1+3 PhD programme.

Programme content
The MSc in Sociology with Research Training shares a similar structure with other Masters with Research Training offered by social science departments in the University. The aim is to provide a stable and coherent environment for the programme and to standardise the provision of generic and general research training to all social science students. The Master's programme has the following structural characteristics:

- It consists of 180 credits (1,800 hours of student effort) to be gained over 12 months (24, if part-time).
- The MSc programme has 2 components: a taught component of formal training (120 credits), and a research component involving 'hands-on' experience on a research project/ dissertation (60 credits).

The following table lists the modules in the programme:

Mod Code	Module Title	Credits	Level
EDMES2	General Research, Personal & Transferable Skills	10	M
SOM100	Research Methods	20	M
SOM200	Sociological Analysis	20	M
SOM300	Social Statistics	30	M
SOM400	Techniques of Data Collection	20	M
SOM500	Techniques of Data Analysis	20	M
SOM600	Supervised Research	60	M

Part-time/Modular arrangements
The length of the programme for part-time students is of 24 months.
Modules EDMES2, SOM100 & SOM200 are taken entirely in year 1.
Module SOM300 is taken entirely in year 2.
Modules SOM400, SOM500 & SOM600 are taken over the two-year span of the programme.

Progression requirements
Only students who have earned at least half the credits (60) of the taught component at the end of the regular period of classes (end of Spring term) can register in the research component.

Summary of teaching and assessment
The programme emphasizes the use of pedagogical tools that promote the learning of its contents (see below for details). These pedagogical tools include an appropriate sequence between the didactic units of the programme and adequate methods of delivery: from on-line, to seminars, to lectures, to workshops, and to computer labs.

The sequence between the parts of the programme is designed to maximise students' learning progression at all levels of the programme (components, units, modules, etc.). This is achieved mainly by arranging an adequate sequential order between the bits of the programme. At the highest level, the taught component precedes the research component. Within the taught component, general social science training in theories and methods precedes the more specialised instruction in techniques of data collection and analysis, with data collection preceding data analysis, so as to mimic the research process. Within the research component, the activities related to the research set-up precede students' work on their research proposal and dissertation.

Module Assessment
Formal assessment of taught modules is based fully on coursework. Modules are assessed with a variety of methods: from weekly assignments, to tests, to practicum's, to oral presentations, to research papers, and to critical reviews.

Special examinations and resubmission of dissertation
Students may be allowed to retake failed tests and resubmit failed coursework within each module, as stated in the module descriptions. Following the examination board in the summer term, students who still average less than 50% in any given module may take a special examination in September on the whole contents of the module. This examination will not be necessary when students gain an overall average mark of 50 or more and meet the requirements as outlined below.

A candidate who has completed but failed to gain a mark of 50 or more in the dissertation may, on recommendation of the Examiners and the departmental Research Committee, resubmit the dissertation to the Registrar within one year of the date of first submission. Candidates who opt for resubmission are not eligible for the Distinction Award.

Course and degree classifications
The University's taught postgraduate marks classification is as follows:

Mark	Interpretation
70 – 100%	Distinction
60 – 69%	Merit
50 – 59%	Good standard (Pass)
Failing categories:	
40 – 49%	Work below threshold standard
0 – 39%	Unsatisfactory Work

To pass the MSc students must gain an average mark of 50 or more overall in modules worth 180 credits including a mark of 50 or more in the dissertation and have no mark below 40. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 50 must be less than 60 credits.

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more overall including a mark of 70 or more for the dissertation will be eligible for a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more overall including a mark of 60 or more for the dissertation and will be awarded eligible for a Merit.

Postgraduate Diploma
To pass the Postgraduate Diploma students must gain an average mark of 50 or more in modules worth 120 credits and have no mark below 40. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 50 must be less than 60 credits.

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more will be eligible for the award of a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more will be awarded eligible for a Merit.

Postgraduate Certificate
To pass the Postgraduate Certificate students must gain an average mark of 50 or more in modules worth 60 credits and have no mark below 40.

Admission requirements
Candidates for admission should hold a good first degree (typically, a 2:1) from a UK university or its overseas equivalent. A social science background is preferred but it is not required. The MSc modules will provide the basic training in sociology.
No previous knowledge of mathematics or statistics is required.

Admissions Tutor: Dr. Jorge Rodriguez

Support for students and their learning
University support for students and their learning falls into two categories. Learning support includes IT Services, which has several hundred computers and the University Library, which across its three sites holds over a million volumes, subscribes to around 4,000 current periodicals, has a range of electronic sources of information and houses the Student Access to Independent Learning (S@IL) computer-based teaching and learning facilities. There are language laboratory facilities both for those students studying on a language degree and for those taking modules offered by the Institution-wide Language Programme. Student guidance and welfare support is provided by Programme Directors, the Careers Advisory Service, the University's Special Needs Advisor, Study Advisors, Hall Wardens and the Students' Union.

Induction. Several induction activities are scheduled for the first week of the Autumn term, so as to familiarise students with the academic life and the available resources in the Department and the University. They include: Library, Departmental and University tours; a meeting with the Postgraduate Director; a general gathering with all Research Students and Members of Staff; and contacts with the Administrative Staff to collect basic office supplies and learn about the Department's administrative practices.

Departmental resources for MSc students include: access to sociology's staff/student common room and computer lab, and to office equipment and supplies. The Department also offers several studentships covering tuition fees for talented students pursuing postgraduate work. MSc student can apply for funds to attend conferences for up to £200.

Career prospects

General prospects

Because of the programme's heavy emphasis on the acquisition of strong methodological and practical skills in a variety of techniques of data collection and analysis—including survey methods and statistical techniques—it is expected that its master graduates may have access to highly qualified technical jobs. Demand for individuals with these qualifications is high in the UK, as few training institutions have the human capital needed to train students effectively. The Department has made a considerable—and successful—effort in the last few years in building such human capital among its members of staff (especially with regard to quantitative techniques) so as to place the Department in the vanguard of sociological research in the UK.

Specific prospects

In October of 2002, the Department opened its new Centre for Social Research, with the aim of conducting high-level empirical research, including survey research. In agreement with the Office of National Statistics, an effort has been made to employ similar technologies and methodologies as in the ONS (e.g., same software for Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing). Students are trained in the use of these technologies and methodologies as part of their MSc curriculum, so as to facilitate their placement in the ONS or similar institutions.

The Department obtained ESRC CASE recognition in 2002. The goal of the programme is to encourage MSc graduates pursuing a PhD in the Department to enter into collaborative arrangements with non-academic institutions. It is expected that by the end of the programme these collaborations will turn into permanent jobs.

Opportunities for study abroad or for placements

Not available.

Educational aims of the programme

The programme aims to provide the methodological and analytical skills and competencies necessary to successfully engage in advanced sociological research. To meet this general goal, the programme promotes the attainment of the following sets of specific qualifications:
Generic or transferable skills, general research methods skills for the social sciences, sociology-specific analytical and methodological skills, specialised skills on techniques of data collection and data analysis, both traditional and 'state of the art', and applied research skills. For students registered in the 1+3 PhD programme, the programme aims at providing the basic methodologically expertise to successfully pursue graduate work.

Programme Outcomes

Knowledge and Understanding

A. Knowledge and understanding of:	**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**
General research methods for the social sciences, i.e., a good general understanding of principles and strategies of research design, of basic statistical methods, and of techniques of data collection and analysis for the social sciences; an awareness of the ethical and epistemological issues surrounding social science research; and a good grasping of the "tempo" of social research and of the main problems facing researchers. Sociology-specific analytical and methodological tools, including: A critical understanding of key substantive issues in the discipline, and of key debates between alternative theoretical approaches, for the explanation of social diversity, conflict and inequality; at the individual, group and societal level of analysis; from a case-oriented and comparative perspective. Proficiency in the use of statistical methods of analysis for sociology (e.g. multivariate analyses for large samples).	Training is delivered with a variety of pedagogical methods. These methods allow a range of learning experiences, and give students opportunities to develop critical skills. These pedagogical methods include: Lectures, in which staff members outline and develop a structured set of contents for each class (such as those pertaining to the teaching of statistics) while encouraging students' participation Seminars, where students critically assess in front of their peers a piece of literature/research/methodology, sparking discussions on its strengths and weaknesses On-line sessions designed to provide a theoretical foundation on general issues of interest to social scientists, and to serve as an introduction to more detailed, subject-specific, and face-to-face training *Assessment* Weekly assignments (memos, problems, reports or practices) Tests (in/out-class or on-line; multiple-choice, short essays or problems) Research papers (research reports, proposals or reflections) Critical reviews (e.g. of bodies of literature)

Skills and other attributes

B. Intellectual skills – able to:	**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**
1. Critically analyse and deconstruct claims and arguments 2. Think on terms of cause-effect relations, variables, and theories 3. Organise arguments through the use of logic and empirical data 4. Apply concepts and procedures of rigorous data collection and analysis 5. An appropriate consideration of ethical issues arising in sociological research	Theory and methods are at the heart of the discipline. Therefore, all modules involve deconstruction and application of a wide range of theoretical frameworks, training students to analyse and apply different types of data relevant to sociological issues *Assessment* Tests, written work, and oral presentations assess students' capacities to conceive, implement and present an argument that is a careful, critical, coherent and synthetic combination of theory and data. Hence all intellectual skills are addressed in each module, although some modules, such as Techniques of Data Collection and Analysis, focus more narrowly on the logic and methodology of research.

C. Practical skills – able to:	**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**
Specialised skills on techniques of data collection and data analysis, both traditional and 'state of the art'. These techniques should be tailored to students' needs and interests, but also provide an adequate balance between quantitative and qualitative techniques, and 'hands-on' experience on issues of both data collection and data analysis.	Workshops, where lecturers lead and coordinate students' teamwork on the use of specific techniques of communication or data collection and analysis
	Computer labs where students learn and practice on specialised software.
Proficiency in the use of standard and specialised computer packages (e.g., SPSS, SAS, NUD*IST, Krackplot, UCINET, etc.).	*Assessment*
	Practicum's: in or out-class, individual or group, research task assignments.
Applied research skills, i.e., an ability to apply the various pieces of knowledge learned in class to real sociological problems and real data, by engaging in empirical research. In particular students should be able to: search and select the relevant literature for a major research project; clearly state the main research questions and goals; provide an adequate justification and application of the methods used in the study; give appropriate consideration of ethical issues; make accurate and adequate use of quantitative or qualitative methods of data collection and analysis; provide a logical structure for the main arguments.	Dissertation: Originality of ideas, knowledge of literature and references, careful research design and analysis, clarity and cogency of the main arguments, appropriate consideration of ethical issues, and elegant presentation, provide the most important criteria of assessment.

D. Transferable skills – able to:	**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**
General research skills: bibliographic & computing skills; teaching skills (; awareness of the ethical and legal issues affecting sociological research and of the possibilities or problems of academic or commercial exploitation of research and Intellectual Property Rights.	Face-to-face one-day workshops, each comprising a mix of information presentation and guided student activity, individual and group based.
	Supervisory activities use as resources/ support to the development of skills and to contextualise them to the research topic area.
Personal development and employment-related skills: communication skills, team-working and research management skills; personal and career development skills.	*Assessment* In-class oral presentations, short or long, on a body of literature or a piece of research
	Oral defence of a dissertation proposal in front of peers, supervisors and other members of staff
	Personal Portfolio, i.e., a portfolio of reading, activity and evaluation of development to demonstrate a skill gain in an area with a skill deficit. Dissertation supervisors assess the portfolio.