

## **MA (Research) Social Work and Social Care**

### **For students entering in 2008**

Awarding Institution:	The University of Reading
Teaching Institution:	The University of Reading
Faculty of Social Sciences	
Programme length:	12 or 24 months
Date of specification:	October 2008
Programme Directors:	Professor Christina R Victor & Prof Jan Keene
Board of Studies:	School of Health & Social Care Postgraduate Board of Studies
Accreditation:	Not applicable

### **Summary of programme aims**

The aim of the programme is to prepare students for research careers either in academia or in organisations where social work/social science research skills and knowledge are required. The course provides the foundation for doctoral work in social work/social care for appropriate students.

More specifically the programme aims:

- To provide students with an appropriate grounding in the main philosophical approaches to social work and values.
- To develop students' understanding of the ways in which epistemological and theoretical debates in the social sciences have influenced research approaches in social research and an understanding of the ways in which contested concepts, inequality and diversity shape research questions.
- To provide training in a broad range of quantitative and qualitative social science research designs including evaluative and participatory approaches, secondary data and use of archival materials
- To provide training in the major quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analysis and experience in using data analysis software .
- To provide students with an awareness of and sensitivity to the ethical and governance aspects of social work/social care research
- To provide students with knowledge of the social and political contexts, and power relationships that influence the uses of social science research.
- To provide opportunities to students to develop their generic, transferable research skills and the reflexivity and critical approach to social work/social care research and practice.
- To explore the relationship between research and practice and the role of users in the research process
- To provide guidance and support to students on the preparation and completion of a research dissertation and in the management and dissemination of social work/social care research.

### **Transferable skills**

Research design and analysis, narrative & systematic critical literature reviewing, bibliographic and computing skills, report writing; seminar presentation; internet skills, research management and inter/multi-disciplinary team working, working with users in research, career development skills.

## Programme content

The programme content consists of two elements (a) generic social science research methods courses provided by the Graduate School for Social Sciences (GSSS) and (b) the subject specific research content provided by taught courses within the School of Health and Social care, tutorials, supervision and the completion of a dissertation. This forms the basis of our 1+3 ESRC recognised training programme in social work.

### 1) RESEARCH METHODS COURSE (co-ordinated by GSSS) (70 credits)

GSM001	Principles of Research Design 1
GSM002	Principles of Research Design 2
GSM003	Data Collection and Analysis 1: Statistics for Educational & Social Research
GSM004	Data Collection and Analysis 2: Interviewing & Observation
GSM005	Data Collection and Analysis 3: Questionnaires & Surveys in Social Research
GSM006	Data Collection and Analysis 4: Analysing Language- and Text-based Data
GSM007	Data Collection and Analysis 5 Using Electronic and Other Sources
GSM009	Generic and Transferable Skills programme

### 2) SPECIALIST TAUGHT CONTENT (40 credits)

HCMQ03: Research Methods for Social Work (20 credits)

HCMS02: Policy and Practice in Health and Social Care (20 credits)

### 3) DISSERTATION (60 credits)

HCMS09: Dissertation

## Part-time arrangements

Part-time MA (research) students may take the programme over two years. The timetable arrangements allow for attendance at the GSSS co-ordinated research methods modules on Thursday pm in the first year and on Friday mornings in the second year (RMP part 2). School modules are taught on a Thursday and can be taken in either year to suit the circumstances of students.

## Summary of teaching and assessment

The programme is taught in various formats: workshops, seminars, formal presentations from subject experts, student led activities, distance learning, activities and reading appropriate to the topic and the needs of adult learners. Tutorials and supervision sessions serve to link the generic social research material with subject specific issues (eg participatory and emancipatory research). A series of advanced and specialist workshops explore specific social work related research issues as appropriate (eg working with children, thematic & narrative synthesis of literature & evidence). All assignments, which are designed to be tailored to the students specific area of interest and dissertation topic.

The assessment strategy for each module is specified thus:-

Module code	Module title	Credits	Level	assessment
GSM009	Generic and transferable	10	M	Portfolio

	skills			
GSM001	Principles of Research Design 1	10	M	2000 word critical evaluation of 7-10 subject specific research articles relevant to research topic
GSM002	Principles of Research Design 2	10	M	2000 word research and thesis plan for own research topic
GSM003	Data Collection and Analysis 1	10	M	2000 word report on statistical analysis of own or archive data set
GSM004	Data Collection and Analysis 2	10	M	2000 word essay discussing advantages/disadvantages of interviews and ethnographic observation for research topic/subject
GSM005	Data Collection and Analysis 3	10	M	2000 word protocol for a survey relevant to own research topic and design short (15-20 questions) questionnaire
GSM006	Data Collection and Analysis 4:	10	M	2000 word essay discussing 6-10 papers reporting analysis of language/text based data in your topic area and suggest how such methods might be used in own research
GSM007	Data Collection and Analysis 5	10	M	2000 word critical appraisal of one source included in the module
HCMQ03:	Research methods for social work	20	M	4 000 word subject specific essay
HCMS02	Policy and practice in health and social care	20	M	4000 word subject specific essay
HCMS09	Dissertation	60	M	15-20,000 word dissertation based on empirical research

### *For Masters in Research Degrees*

To pass the MRes students must gain an average mark of 50 or more overall including a mark of 50 or more for the dissertation *and have no mark below 40 in modules specified by the School involved*. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must not exceed 55 credits.

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more overall including a mark of 60 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more overall including a mark of 50 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for a Merit.

## **Admission requirements**

For acceptance onto the course, a student must already possess a good degree from a U.K. University (normally at least a 2.1 standard in social work, social sciences or a related subject) or have equivalent qualifications or experience from elsewhere.

**Admissions Tutors:** Professor Christina Victor and Professor Jan Keene.

## **Support for students and their learning**

University support for students and their learning falls into two categories. Learning support includes facilities offered by IT Services and by 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. Additionally students are part of the Graduate School for Social Sciences, providing them with a base on campus (Old Whiteknights House), dedicated study and computing facilities and a supportive network of staff and fellow students from other social science disciplines.

## **Departmental support is provided through:**

- The Programme Directors and the student's project/dissertation supervisor
- The course handbook.
- Dedicated Blackboard sites for each module
- Departmental Postgraduate committee – on which students are represented.

Each student will have a supervisor with expertise in the subject area of the student's dissertation project. It is the responsibility of the *supervisor* to give guidance to the student through regular meetings. For full-time students we expect meetings between supervisor and students to take place fortnightly in term time, more frequently at critical stage of the work and less often in vacation periods when a supervision timetable must be agreed in advance. For part-time students meetings normally take place monthly. It is the responsibility of the *student* to raise with the supervisor any difficulties or problems which occur in the course of the work and to submit coursework and progress reports as required by the course handbook. At the start of the programme students and supervisors complete a 'Learning needs analysis'. On the basis of this students select 8-12 sessions from the GSSS Generic and Transferable skills programme (eg presentation skills) as appropriate and this forms the basis of their assessed portfolio.

## **Career prospects**

The programme particularly attracts graduates who intend to undertake a higher degree by research and/or to work in the future in research or in a role where research skills/knowledge of research is central. Some students already in employment, may wish to complete the MA Research course on a part-time basis, working on a research project relevant to their job.

## **Educational aims of the programme**

The main educational aim is to prepare students for research careers either in academia or in non-academic organisations where social work and /or health care skills and knowledge are required.

Therefore the programme aims to:

- provide a broad based training in social science research philosophies and methodologies and the values, ethics and approaches specific to the social work/social care context.
- examine the ways in which philosophical and epistemological debates in the social sciences and contested concepts have developed and influenced social work/social care research.
- provide training in generic and subject specific aspects of research design, methods, analysis and dissemination.
- equip students with the skills required to investigate a proposed research topic and establish the extent of published knowledge in the field, understand and summarise that knowledge and be able to report formally, both orally and in writing.
- Provide training in the ethical and governance dimensions of research and locate research within the socio-political context and the importance of user involvement in research
- prepare students to undertake a higher degree by research in a specialist area and to meet the examination requirements (if appropriate).

## Programme Outcomes

### *Knowledge and Understanding*

<p><b>A. Knowledge and understanding of:</b></p> <p><i>1 Research methods and skills in the social sciences</i></p> <p><i>2. The principles of research design and strategy, including their ethical and legal implications.</i></p> <p><i>3. The theoretical, political and ethical implications of different research approaches and the formulation of research questions</i></p> <p><i>4. The context of socialwork/care research &amp; the relationship between research &amp; practice and the implications of working with vulnerable groups</i></p>	<p><b>Teaching/learning methods and strategies</b></p> <p>Acquisition of knowledge and understanding (1-3) is achieved mainly through attendance and participation at GSSS research methods module sessions on the principles of research design (GSSS Modules 1,2), and on research design, methods and skills (GSSS Modules 3-7); through the specialist modules (HCMQ03,HCMS03 )and through guided independent study including pre-session and post-session reading of references for each module session; and through appropriate use of the webbased Essentials course materials (GSSS Module 9) and resources which complement the lectures and seminars. Contextual,ethical and political aspects of research examined in School based modules (HCMQ03,HCMS03)</p> <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <p>Written essays, and final dissertation</p>
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### *Skills and other attributes*

#### **B. Intellectual skills – able to:**

- 1. Present an argument using research data.*
- 2. Present and/or verify qualitative and quantitative arguments.*
- 3. Critically assess the social science literature on a particular topic & demonstrate the links between research & practice & evaluate evidence.*
- 4. Identify important and relevant and feasible research questions & problems*

#### **Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

Skills 1-4 are developed through group discussion and analysis of contrasting philosophical viewpoints in research traditions (GSSS Module1), analysis of scenarios (GSSS Module 1), a systematic review of literature (GSS Module 2; specialist research module HCMQ03), formulation of research questions and problems (GSSS Module 2), application of key statistical procedures to social work/health care research (GSSS Module 3); critical analysis of interview and ethnography(GSSS Module 4); questionnaire and survey (GSSS Module 5); language-and text-based data (GSS Module 6) and the use of archival, secondary and online materials as research data. (GSSS Module 7). Evaluative designs and methods examined in specialist modules (HCMQ03,HCMS03)

#### *Assessment*

Oral report and seminar discussions  
Written essays and dissertation

**C. Practical skills – able to:**

- 1. Design a research plan and thesis plan*
- 2. Select and use research methods appropriate to different problems.*
- 3. Undertake practical work in the field.*
- 4. Select and use appropriate methods for analysing data.*
- 5. Use computers for recording and analysing data.*
- 6. Understand how evidence informs social work/care practice*

**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

Practical skills in designing a research plan and a thesis plan are acquired through seminars and individual presentations (GSSS Module 2)

Practical skills (2-5) are acquired through workshops on use of software in handling data, demonstration sessions on the selection and management of research methods; and group exercises on the analysis of data (GSSS Module 3 -7) . Data collection, analysis and interpretation covered in dissertation module

*Assessment*

Students are required to :

- a) Draw up a research plan and thesis plan for their research project (GSSS Module 2)
- b) Conduct and report a statistical data analysis in SPSS using either their own data or available archive data sets. (GSSS Module 3)
- c) Present a written account of the advantages and disadvantages of interviews and ethnographic observations as methods of data collection for their research topic (GSSS Module 4)
- d) Develop a protocol for a survey and design a short (15-20 questions) questionnaire (GSSS Module 5)
- e) Choose research papers which report the analysis of language – or text-based data and critically discuss the appropriateness of the methods used (GSSS Module 6)
- f) Write an appraisal of one of the sources of evidence with which they have worked (GSSS Module 7)
- g) specialist content – essays and final dissertation

**D. Transferable skills – able to:**

*1. Undertake individual research through planning to completion.*

*2. Write formal reports*

*3. Disseminate the outcomes of research to a range of audiences using appropriate communication skills.*

*4. Access and retrieve and evaluate data from a range of sources, including electronic media*

**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

1. Skills in undertaking individual research through planning to completion are achieved through seminar presentations and discussions on the principles of research design (GSSS Modules 1,2), and on data collection and analysis (GSSS Modules 3-7).

2. Coursework assignments are designed to support the students in the writing of their thesis. In addition, each module includes an analysis of published reports where students develop their ability to identify key characteristics, and to appraise the strengths and weaknesses.

3. Key skills in communication are developed through participation in seminar presentations and through the preparation of posters for conference audiences.

4. Skills in accessing and retrieving data are acquired through managing the relationship between material available on the web-based Essentials course and that on the GSSS/specialist content through developing skills in using the internet as an information resource (GSSS Module 7 and specialist modules).

*Assessment*

Seminar presentations and discussion  
Coursework essays and reports –final dissertation

**Please note - This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in the module description and in the programme handbook. The University reserves the right to modify this specification in unforeseen circumstances, or where the process of academic development and feedback from students, quality assurance processes or external sources, such as professional bodies, requires a change to be made. In such circumstances, a revised specification will be issued.**