

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION



1	Awarding Institution	Newcastle University
2	Teaching Institution	Newcastle University
3	Final Award	MA
4	Programme Title	Applied Policy Research
5	UCAS/Programme Code	4024
6	Programme Accreditation	Not appropriate
7	QAA Subject Benchmark(s)	Not applicable
8	FHEQ Level	Level 7
9	Date written/revised	May 2009

10 Programme Aims

1. to meet the aims of the ESRC's postgraduate training guidelines by providing high quality research training at Master's level.
2. to provide learning opportunities to enable graduates to acquire the knowledge and understanding, skills and aptitudes necessary to undertake advanced research in the social sciences in general and applied policy research in particular
3. to contribute to the University's objectives by providing high quality research training to an increasing number of postgraduates (Institutional Plan, 6.7 (ii) and (iii)) and enhancing their key skills and employability (5.7 (iv))
4. to produce graduates who are capable of successfully undertaking and completing advanced research projects
5. to produce employable graduates who can proceed to careers in research in Universities, the public sector, or the private sector
6. to provide a qualification which fully meets the learning outcomes at level 4 in the national qualifications framework

11 Learning Outcomes

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate knowledge and understanding, qualities, skills and other attributes in the following areas.

Knowledge and Understanding

On completing the programme students should show:

A Knowledge and Understanding in Social Policy

A1 appreciation of the theoretical traditions and concepts that influence and shape social policy as a discipline and the implications (both practical and methodological) of such theories for research

A2 awareness and understanding of the variety of philosophical principles and epistemological frameworks that underpin approaches to social inquiry

A3 understanding of the way in which social divisions (including gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and disability) are generated as structures of power and patterns of inequality; how these are reproduced and transformed over time; and how they shape and impact social policy

A4 understanding and appreciation of the profound transformations in contemporary political, social, cultural and economic institutions and practices, and the implications of this restructuring for institutional change, collective and individual agency, and lived experience

A5 knowledge of the value and efficacy of comparative research within and between societies

Teaching and Learning Methods

Theoretical traditions and concepts within social policy (A1) will be explored through lectures, group exercises, and student presentations in various modules (*Social Divisions and Inequality; Comparative Perspectives in Social and Environmental Change, States, Markets and Social Transformations, Cities, Economies and Cultures*) and through independent reading and one-to one tutoring. An enhanced understanding of the epistemological and philosophical bases of social inquiry (A2) will be developed through the lectures, group workshops and student presentations. An improved awareness of the importance of social divisions and social change, and the benefits of comparative research within the social sciences (A3-A5), will be developed through the lectures, group exercises, and student presentations in modules (*Social Divisions and Inequality; Comparative Perspectives in Social and Environmental Change*), and through independent reading and one-to-one tutoring. In addition, students take 20 credits of applied policy, policy research or policy modules from outside the department – students selections are made from a choice of relevant modules amounting to 180 credits. All of the sociological skills (A1-A5) will be enhanced by the student's dissertation project. The department also offers a yearly seminar programme, featuring talks from staff and guest speakers (including many renowned scholars), and students are encouraged to attend to improve their knowledge of the discipline.

Assessment Strategy

All of the skills (A1-A5) will be assessed through written essays and the dissertation.

Intellectual Skills

On completing the programme students should be able to:

B Training in Research Methods

The programme provides the opportunity for students to develop and demonstrate:

B1 Principles

- (i) to be able to define and formulate research problems and questions and hypotheses
- (ii) will understand the rationale for research methods, appreciate the value for sociological research of the range of methods and sources available, be able to evaluate and select appropriate methods, and be properly critical and reflexive about these choices
- (iii) a knowledge and understanding of the social and political context of research activity and its uses
- (iv) will advance understanding of qualitative research in the social sciences, including an examination of the range of available methods such as participant observation, ethnographic fieldwork and interviewing and an exploration of the ethical principles, implications and dilemmas of qualitative research
- (v) will understand sampling, sampling error, and biases in results
- (vi) will understand and be able to apply concepts of generalisability, validity, reliability and replicability

B2 Data collection and analysis

- (i) a knowledge and understanding of the application of selected methods of data collection
- (ii) a knowledge and understanding of the wide range of data sources available for research in social policy, including archival and historical data, survey and qualitative data, longitudinal studies, and material drawn from the mass media.
- (iii) an understanding of strengths and weaknesses of different types of data and the development of a critical use of sources
- (iv) an understanding of the use of methods and tools to analyse data, including techniques for analysing qualitative data (as an example discourse analysis or event

	analysis) and multivariate analysis (such as multiple regression and log linear models)
(v)	proficiency in both qualitative and quantitative data analysis

Teaching and Learning Methods

Teaching strategy

B1 (i) and (ii) will be delivered through the modules “Thinking About Research” and “Dissertation Preparation”. B1 (iii-v) will be delivered through the Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods modules.

The teaching strategy for B1 (i) and (ii) is a combination of lectures, workshops and both discipline specific and multi-disciplinary teamwork. Students learn through preparation of a dissertation and team-based problem solving exercises. Teaching for B1 (iii) and (iv) will be through lectures and group discussions. Teaching for B2 (i - v) will be delivered through the Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods modules. The teaching strategy for B2 (i - iv) is a combination of lectures, workshops and data analysis practicals.

Learning strategy

For B1 (i - v) students will learn through completing assignments and practical exercises. For B2 (i - v) students will learn by completing assignments, practical exercises and in the writing of their dissertations.

Assessment Strategy

For B1 (i - v) will be teamwork assessment, practical assessments and a 3,000 word written report. Assessment strategy for B2 (i - iv) will be a combination of data analysis practicals and 3,000 word reports and evaluation of the dissertation.

Practical Skills

On completing the programme students should be able to:

C General Research skills

C1 Bibliographic and computing skills:

- (i) the skills to identify and obtain relevant materials relating to research, including annals, books, journals, theses, conference proceedings, and resources available electronically and on the WWW
- (ii) the skills to maintain a personal research bibliography and use EndNote
- (iii) IT skills, including word processing and other basic computing skills including spreadsheets and database management, SPSS and NuDist

C2 Language skills

- (vii) where appropriate, the acquisition of the language skills necessary to enable research in, or pertaining to, a non-English speaking country, to be undertaken

C3 Ethical issues

- (i) a knowledge and understanding of matters relating to privacy and confidentiality in research
- (ii) an awareness of the political context of research
- (iii) an awareness of professional codes of practice
- (iv) a knowledge and understanding of the power relations inherent in research fieldwork
- (v) an awareness of the ethical responsibilities that a researcher has towards the researched

Teaching and Learning Methods

Teaching strategy

Bibliographic and computer skills are taught through workshops and practical classes. Ethical issues are taught by lectures and workshops.

Learning strategy

Students learn bibliographical skills (C1 (i - ii)) by developing an initial bibliography for their dissertation. Students acquire knowledge of ethical issues through team work, presentations, case studies and independent reading.

Assessment Strategy

General research skills will be assessed by means of unseen written exams and coursework. Both employ a range of approaches in order to accurately assess student abilities. The assessment for the information skills module will be constructing a bibliography, incorporating bibliographic search strategies and professional design and layout. IT skills will be assessed by the bibliographic exercise and data practical assessment. Ethical issues will be assessed by a combination of team work assessment and 3,000 word written reports.

Transferable/Key Skills

On completing the programme students should be able to:

D Key Skills

The programme provides the opportunity for students to develop and demonstrate:

D1 the skills to communicate and present research findings effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences

D2 the skills of effective written communication and presentation

D3 the skills to manage research, including writing proposals, planning the research project, and implementation on time

D4 the ability to work independently, with initiative, and to work effectively as a member of both subject-specific and multi-disciplinary teams

Teaching and Learning Methods**Teaching strategy**

D1, D3 and D4 are taught through teamwork and individual presentations which provide opportunities to cooperate, develop ideas, improve problem-solving capacity and work to deadlines. D2 is taught through a range of iterative written assessments.

Learning strategy

Students acquire the key skills through active participation in large and small multidisciplinary and discipline-specific groups. The dissertation project provides specific opportunities of skill development through the construction of a research plan, through synthesizing knowledge and by participating in dissertation workshops and individual meetings with supervisors.

Assessment Strategy

Key skills are not independently assessed. However, effective written communication (D2) is indirectly assessed by coursework in the form of written essays, D3 is indirectly evaluated through fulfilment of module requirements in a timely manner, and D4 will be evaluated through student team presentations in various modules. All key skills (D1-D4) are assessed by the process of the dissertation.

12 Programme Curriculum, Structure and Features**Basic structure of the programme**

This programme has been re-designed to meet the new ESRC 1+3 training guidelines. These guidelines emphasize the need for students to acquire key generic and subject-specific

research skills in the Masters year prior to embarking on a doctoral programme. The programme will also cater for non ESRC-sponsored students, who could progress on to a doctoral programme or pursue a career in academic or non-academic research.

This is a one year full time or two year part time programme. It consists of three parts: training in research methods and skill development; modules in applied policy research and policy studies; and a dissertation project. 70 credits are taught at Inter-Faculty level, 30 credits within the subject area, and 20 credits from outside the subject area (in either Politics, Institute of Health and Society, or Human Geography).

The 70 credits taught at inter-faculty level focus on generic research skills and competencies across the social sciences. The general research skills component of the programme, such as Bibliographical skills and IT skills (A1), are taught in the *Information Skills* module (10 credits). Training in research methods (both quantitative and qualitative analysis) (B1, B2) is dealt with in two double modules, *Introduction to Quantitative methods* (20 credits) and *Qualitative methodology in the Social Sciences* (20 credits). Instruction in the framing of research questions and hypotheses, the context of research, and the need for a critical and reflexive strategy towards research in sociology (B1 (I)-(iv)) will be treated in two modules: *Dissertation preparation* (10 credits) and *Thinking About Research* (10 credits).

The 30 credits taught within the Department are discipline-specific. Training in Social Policy will be developed through four 10 credit modules. *Cities, Economies and Cultures, States, Markets and Social Transformations, Social Divisions and Inequalities, Comparative perspectives in Social and Environmental Change*, introducing students to some of the key conceptual issues in social policy, as well as the contemporary debates and transformations regarding the market, state and household. All modules will give students an overview of the theoretical traditions within social policy and a broad understanding of the epistemological and philosophical frameworks that form the basis for social inquiry (A1, A2). In addition, students select 20 credits from outside the subject area, and have a complement of 230 credits of policy, policy research or applied policy modules offered from Politics, Institute of Health and Society, and Human Geography or from two Sociology modules taught within the MA in Latin American Studies. Through these 'external' modules, students are able to gain a critical overview of many contemporary policy issues across a broad spectrum of policy sectors, both comparatively, historically and nationally. (A3-A5).

Students will complete a dissertation project (60 credits) which will enhance and demonstrate their research skills and training in social policy. There are no formal restrictions on the type of project that can be chosen although projects are likely to employ some empirical research.

Key features of the programme (including what makes the programme distinctive)

- to equip students from different academic and professional backgrounds with the skills and knowledge appropriate to understanding and researching contemporary policy issues;
- to provide you with an understanding of the interdisciplinary theoretical framework necessary to research social and policy problems and issues;
- to develop appropriate research proposals and designs for a variety of contemporary policy situations;
- to develop research skills to allow you to develop, design, execute and write up a piece of original research, placing it within an appropriate theoretical framework.

Programme regulations (link to on-line version)

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/programme/2009-2010/documents/AppliedPolicyResearchMA.pdf>

13 Criteria for admission

Entry qualifications

Some applicants to this programme will have an ESRC Research Studentship and will therefore satisfy the prevailing ESRC conditions for studentships.

Other applicants will normally have, at least, a second class honours degree from a UK University or its overseas equivalent. Preferred subjects include Sociology, Social Policy, Public Policy, Geography and other degrees in the social sciences.

Admissions policy/selection tools

Admissions policy and additional requirements : In addition to the First degree, the main criteria for the selection of a postgraduate research student are: Supportive reference letter(s) and, TOEFL for those who have not studied their first degree in English, a good knowledge of the English language (with a score of 6.5 IELTS or 575)

The process of selection within the Department can take only a few days, if all the relevant documents are supplied by the candidate. If any of these documents are missing, the applicant is contacted directly. If the applicants are in the UK, they may be invited for an interview. The interviewers complete the Form A2 and make a recommendation. If more than one supervisor is needed for the research project, the Director of Postgraduate Research facilitates the process of identification of, and communication between, supervisors.

The Department and Faculty are committed to equality of opportunity and treats all applicants as equals, disregarding their gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, age, and any disability as can be seen in the current mix of our research students from around the world.

Non-standard Entry Requirements

Alternative entry qualifications: other qualifications and related experience may be considered

Additional Requirements

None

Level of English Language capability

Applicants for whom English is not a first language or whose first degrees were not taught in English are required to demonstrate proficiency in English, usually by means of an IELTS score of 6.5 or greater.

14 Support for Student Learning

The Student Services portal provides links to key services and other information and is available at: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/>

Induction

During the first week of the first semester students attend an induction programme. New students will be given a general introduction to University life and the University's principle support services and general information about the School and their programme, as described in the Degree Programme Handbook. New and continuing students will be given detailed programme information and the timetable of lectures/practicals/labs/ tutorials/etc. The International Office offers an additional induction programme for overseas students.

Study skills support

Students will learn a range of Personal Transferable Skills, including Study Skills, as outlined in the Programme Specification. Some of this material, e.g. time management is covered in the appropriate Induction Programme. Students are explicitly tutored on their approach to both group and individual projects.

Numeracy support is available through Maths Aid and help with academic writing is available from the Writing Centre (further information is available from the Robinson Library).

Academic support

The initial point of contact for a student is with a lecturer or module leader, or their tutor (see below) for more generic issues. Thereafter the Degree Programme Director or Head of School may be consulted. Issues relating to the programme may be raised at the Staff-Student Committee, and/or at the Board of Studies.

Pastoral support

All students are assigned a personal tutor whose responsibility is to monitor the academic performance and overall well-being of their tutees. In addition the University offers a range of support services, including one-to-one counselling and guidance or group sessions / workshops on a range of topics, such as emotional issues e.g. Stress and anxiety, student finance and budgeting, disability matters etc. There is specialist support available for students with dyslexia and mental health issues. Furthermore, the Union Society operates a Student Advice Centre, which can provide advocacy and support to students on a range of topics including housing, debt, legal issues etc.

Support for students with disabilities

The University's Disability Support Service provides help and advice for disabled students at the University - and those thinking of coming to Newcastle. It provides individuals with: advice about the University's facilities, services and the accessibility of campus; details about the technical support available; guidance in study skills and advice on financial support arrangements; a resources room with equipment and software to assist students in their studies.

Learning resources

The University's main learning resources are provided by the Robinson and Walton Libraries (for books, journals, online resources), and Information Systems and Services, which supports campus-wide computing facilities.

All new students whose first language is not English are required to take an English Language Proficiency Test. This is administered by INTO Newcastle University Centre on behalf of Newcastle University. Where appropriate, in-session language training can be provided. The INTO Newcastle University Centre houses a range of resources which may be particularly appropriate for those interested in an Erasmus

15 Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning

Module reviews

All modules are subject to review by questionnaires which are considered by the Board of Studies. Changes to, or the introduction of new, modules are considered at the School Teaching and Learning Committee and at the Board of Studies. Student opinion is sought at the Staff-Student Committee and/or the Board of Studies. New modules and major changes to existing modules are subject to approval by the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee.

Programme reviews

The Board of Studies conducts an Annual Monitoring and Review of the degree programme and reports to Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee. The FTLC takes an overview of all programmes within the Faculty and reports any Faculty or institutional issues to the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

External Examiner reports

External Examiner reports are considered by the Board of Studies. The Board responds to these reports through Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee. External Examiner reports are shared with institutional student representatives, through the Staff-Student Committee.

Student evaluations

All modules, and the degree programme, are subject to review by student questionnaires. Informal student evaluation is also obtained at the Staff-Student Committee, and the Board of Studies. The results from student surveys are considered as part of the Annual Monitoring and Review of the programme and any arising actions are captured at programme and School / institutional level and reported to the appropriate body.

Mechanisms for gaining student feedback

Feedback is channelled via the Staff-Student Committee and the Board of Studies.

Faculty and University Review Mechanisms

The programme is subject to the University's Internal Subject Review process. Every five years degree programmes in each subject area are subject to periodic review. This involves both the detailed consideration of a range of documentation, and a two-day review visit by a review team which includes an external subject specialist in addition to University and Faculty representatives. Following the review a report is produced, which forms the basis for a decision by University Teaching and Learning Committee on whether the programmes reviewed should be re-approved for a further five year period.

16 Regulation of assessment

Pass mark

The pass mark is 50 (Postgraduate programmes)

Course requirements

Progression is subject to the University's Masters Degree Progress Regulations, Taught and Research and Examination Conventions for Taught Masters Degrees. Limited compensation up to 40 credits of the taught element and down to a mark of 40% is possible and there are reassessment opportunities, with certain restrictions.

The University employs a common marking scheme, which is specified in the Taught Postgraduate Examination Conventions, namely:

Summary description applicable to postgraduate Masters programmes

<50	Fail
50-59	Pass
60-69	Pass with Merit
70 or above	Pass with Distinction

Summary description applicable to postgraduate Certificate and Diploma programmes

<50	Fail
50 or above	Pass

Role of the External Examiner

An External Examiner, a distinguished member of the subject community, is appointed by Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee, after recommendation from the Board of Studies. The External Examiner is expected to:

- ◆ See and approve examination papers
- ◆ Moderate examination and coursework marking
- ◆ Attend the Board of Examiners
- ◆ Report to the University on the standards of the programme

In addition, information relating to the programme is provided in:

The University Prospectus: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/postgraduate/>

The School Brochure

Degree Programme and University Regulations: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/docs/>

The Degree Programme Handbook

Please note. This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and of the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve if she/he takes full advantage of the learning opportunities provided. The accuracy of the information contained is reviewed by the University and may be checked by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

Mapping of Intended Learning Outcomes onto Curriculum/Modules

MA Applied Policy Research

Module	Type	Intended Learning Outcomes			
		A	B	C	D
HSS8001	C		1 2	3	1 2 3 4
HSS8002	C			1	
HSS8003	C		1 2	3	1 2 3 4
HSS8004	C		1 2	3	1 2 4
HSS8005	C		1 2	3	1 4
SOC8034	C	1 2 3		3	1 2 4
SOC8045	C	1 2 5		3	1 2 4
SOC8046	C	1 2 4		3	1 2 4
SOC8047	C	1 2 4		3	1 2 4
SOC8001	O	1 2 3 4 5		3	1 2 4
SOC8101	O	1 2 4 5		3	1 2 4
SOC8098	C	1 2 3 4 5	1 2	1 3	1 2 3 4
SOC8100	O	1 2 4 5		3	1 2 4