

## PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION



1	<b>Awarding Institution</b>	Newcastle University
2	<b>Teaching Institution</b>	Newcastle University
3	<b>Final Award</b>	MA
4	<b>Programme Title</b>	Sociology and Social Research
5	<b>UCAS/Programme Code</b>	4027
6	<b>Programme Accreditation</b>	Not appropriate
7	<b>QAA Subject Benchmark(s)</b>	Not applicable to Masters
8	<b>FHEQ Level</b>	Level 7
9	<b>Date written/revised</b>	May 2010

### 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 sociology 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 7 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 Sociology**

- A1 appreciation of the theoretical traditions and concepts that influence and shape sociology 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 sociology (A1) will be explored through lectures, group exercises, and student presentations in various modules (*Sociological Theory and Explanation; Being, Belonging and Identity; Cities, Economies and Cultures*, for example) 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 in the compulsory module *Sociological Theory and Explanation*. 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; States, Markets and Social Transformations; Comparative Perspectives in Social and Environmental Change*), and through independent reading and one-to-one tutoring. 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:

**B Training in Research Methods**

**B1 Principles**

- (i) be able to define and formulate research problems and questions and hypotheses
- (ii) 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) show knowledge and understanding of the social and political context of research activity and its uses
- (iv) show 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) understand sampling, sampling error, and biases in results
- (vi) 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 show:

#### **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 Nu.Dist

##### **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

<p><b>C3 Ethical issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) a knowledge and understanding of matters relating to privacy and confidentiality in research</li> <li>(ii) an awareness of the political context of research</li> <li>(iii) an awareness of professional codes of practice</li> <li>(iv) a knowledge and understanding of the power relations inherent in research fieldwork</li> <li>(v) an awareness of the ethical responsibilities that a researcher has towards the researched</li> </ul>
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**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 show:

**D Key Skills**

- 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 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 the discipline of sociology; and a dissertation project. 70 credits are taught at Inter-Faculty level and 50 credits within the Department.

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 50 credits taught within the Department are discipline-specific. Sociological training will be developed through five modules. *Sociological Theory and Explanation* (10 credits) is the foundation course in this section: it will give students an overview of the theoretical traditions within sociology and a broad understanding of the epistemological and philosophical frameworks that form the basis for social inquiry (A1, A2). The programme also offers a further four 10 credit modules, reflecting staff expertise, that deal with important sub-fields within the discipline: *Social Divisions and Inequality*, *Cities, Economies and Cultures*, *being, Belonging and Identity* and *States, Markets and Social Transformations* (A3-A5). Finally, students take optional modules to a value of 10 credits in *Comparative Perspectives in Social and Environmental Change*, and *Specialist Study* (10 credits): a module designed around intensive one-to-one tutoring and directed reading sessions which gives them the opportunity to expand their knowledge and understanding of a specific area of the discipline (as dictated by staff expertise) (A1-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)**

- an appreciation of the theoretical traditions and concepts that influence and shape sociology as a discipline and the implications (both practical and methodological) of such theories for research;
- an awareness and understanding of the variety of philosophical principles and epistemological frameworks that underpin approaches to social inquiry;
- an understanding of the way in which social divisions are generated as structures of power and patterns of inequality;
- an understanding 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.

**Programme regulations (link to on-line version)**

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/programme/>

**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 Development Centre (further information is available from the Robinson Library).

#### *Academic and Pastoral support*

Each undergraduate and taught postgraduate student will be assigned a personal tutor.\* A personal tutor is one part of a wider network of advice and guidance available to students to support their personal and general academic development. The module leader acts as the first point of contact for subject-specific academic advice. Thereafter the Degree Programme Director or Head of School may be consulted. Issues relating to the programme may be raised at the Student-Staff Committee, and/or at the Board of Studies. Within the academic unit, students may also receive additional academic and pastoral advice from a range of other student-facing staff including degree programme directors, dissertation/project supervisors, and administrative support staff.

\*Arrangements may vary for students taking special types of provision.

The University also offers a wide range of institutional services and support upon which students can call, such as the Writing Development Centre, Careers Service and Student Wellbeing Service. This includes 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 Student Union 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 team 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 exchange.

### **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 Board of Studies and/or the School Teaching and Learning Committee. Student opinion is sought at the Student-Staff Committee and/or the Board of Studies. New modules and major changes to existing modules are subject to approval by the Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee.

#### *External Examiner reports*

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

#### *Student evaluations*

All modules, and the degree programme, are subject to review by student questionnaires. Informal student evaluation is also obtained at the Student-Staff Committee, and the Board of Studies. The results from student surveys are considered as part of the Annual 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 Student-Staff Committee and the Board of Studies.

#### *Faculty and University Review Mechanisms*

The programme is subject to the University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework for Research Degree Programmes. This provides Schools with an opportunity to reflect on practice and a forum for enhancement of the student experience through the sharing of good practice and feedback from external sources. An Annual Review of Research Degree Programmes provides a formal opportunity to monitor the effectiveness of provision. The Annual Review is supplemented by a Review Visit every six years. The outcome of the Annual Review and the Review Visit are considered by the Graduate School Committee and the outcomes reported to the University Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee.

#### *Accreditation reports*

#### *Additional mechanisms*



## 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. There are reassessment opportunities, with certain restrictions. Limited compensation up to 40 credits of the taught element and down to a mark of 40% is possible for candidates who commenced their programme in 2013/14 or earlier. For students starting their programme in 2014/15 or later, no compensation is possible.

### *Common Marking Scheme*

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 <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/marketing/services/print/publications/ordering/>

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 Sociology and Social 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	O	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
SOC8033	O	1 2 3 4 5		3	1 2 4
SOC8036	C	1 2		3	1 2 4
SOC8044	C	1 2		3	1 2 4
SOC8096	C	1 2 3 4 5	1 2	3	1 2 3 4
SOC8100	O	1 2 3 4 5		3	1 2 4
SOC8101	O	1 2 3 4		3	1 2 4