

Programme Handbook

Certificate: Applied Social Research

1. Welcome

Welcome to the Applied Social Research programme. This course is designed for graduates in the social sciences who wish to develop advanced research skills for academic or professional careers. The programme provides a rigorous, multi-disciplinary foundation in both quantitative and qualitative methods, preparing you to design, conduct, evaluate and report on high-quality social and/or organisational research.

2. Programme Aims and Objectives

- **To provide** advanced theoretical and practical training in a range of social research methodologies.
- **To equip** learners with the skills to critically evaluate social and/or organisational phenomena and apply appropriate research methods to complex problems.
- **To foster** a deep understanding of the ethical considerations, design processes, and analytical techniques relevant to contemporary social research.
- **To develop** learners' ability to critically evaluate, synthesise and communicate research findings to academic and non-academic audiences.

3. Programme Structure

This programme is composed of four core modules. The total time for completing this course is circa 60 hours which includes 20 hours of guided learning. Each module has its own assessment. On top of this, there is a capstone assignment which includes a (a) poster presentation and (b) the submission of a draft article for possible publication. The article will demonstrate skills in data evaluation, synthesis and communication.

4. Core Module Descriptions

Module 1: Writing for Publication

- **Module Aims:** This module develops learners' writing and communication skills for disseminating social research findings. It covers the entire process of academic writing, from structuring an argument to navigating the peer-review process. It also analyses the structure of a typical academic journal article.

- **Core Content:**
 - **The anatomy of a research article:** How to structure and draft key sections (introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion).
 - **Communicating with different audiences:** Tailoring writing for academic journals, policy reports, and public-facing platforms.
 - **Finding the right journal:** Matching your research topic and scope to appropriate academic publications.
 - **The peer-review process:** Responding to reviewer feedback and revising manuscripts constructively.
 - **Ethical considerations in writing:** Avoiding plagiarism and managing co-authorship.
- **Learning Outcomes:**
 - Select an appropriate journal and write an effective article synopsis and abstract.
 - Draft a research article in a style and format suitable for scholarly publication.
 - Understand and engage with the academic publishing process.
- **Assessment:** Abstract of a journal article (350 words), and a quiz.

Module 2: Qualitative Data & Methods

- **Module Aims:** This module provides students with an advanced understanding of the theoretical and practical aspects of qualitative research. It equips students with the skills to design, conduct, and analyse qualitative studies.
- **Core Content:**
 - **Epistemological foundations of qualitative inquiry:** Examining different theoretical approaches, such as interpretivism and ethnography.
 - **Research design:** Formulating qualitative research questions and selecting appropriate methodologies.
 - **Data collection techniques:** In-depth interviewing, focus groups, participant observation, and textual analysis.

- **Data analysis:** Using techniques such as thematic analysis, grounded theory, and discourse analysis.
- **Software training:** Practical workshops on computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (e.g., NVivo).
- **Ethical considerations and reflexivity:** Addressing the challenges of conducting ethical and reflexive qualitative research.
- **Learning Outcomes:**
 - Critically analyse the theoretical and ethical principles underpinning qualitative methods.
 - Apply a range of qualitative data collection and analysis techniques.
 - Evaluate the strengths and limitations of different qualitative research designs.
- **Assessment:** Quiz.

Module 3: Quantitative Data & Methods

- **Module Aims:** This module introduces students to the core principles and techniques of quantitative data analysis, enabling them to design and execute studies using statistical methods.
- **Core Content:**
 - **Quantitative research design:** Understanding the process of designing a robust quantitative study, including survey design and experimental design.
 - **Statistical concepts:** Covering descriptive and inferential statistics, hypothesis testing, and confidence intervals.
 - **Regression analysis:** Exploring bivariate and multivariate regression models.
 - **Software training:** Practical workshops using statistical software such as SPSS.
 - **Engaging with quantitative literature:** Critically evaluating quantitative findings in social science research.

- **Learning Outcomes:**
 - Understand and apply the principles of statistical description and inference.
 - Select and perform appropriate statistical analyses for a given research question.
 - Utilise statistical software to manage and analyse quantitative data.
- **Assessment:** Quiz, and poster presentation.

Module 4: Theoretical Frameworks

- **Module Aims:** This module provides an advanced understanding of the role of theory in social research. It explores how theoretical frameworks inform research design, data collection and analysis.
- **Core Content:**
 - **The theory-research relationship:** Examining how theoretical frameworks guide research and how research findings contribute to theory.
 - **Key theoretical paradigms:** Exploring major theoretical perspectives in social science, such as functionalism, post-structuralism, and feminist theory.
 - **Conceptual and theoretical frameworks:** Differentiating between and applying different types of conceptual models in research design.
 - **Linking theory to method:** Understanding how theoretical assumptions influence methodological choices.
 - **The role of existing literature:** Critically reviewing scholarly literature to build and position a theoretical framework.
- **Learning Outcomes:**
 - Critically evaluate the role of theory in the social research process.
 - Construct a robust theoretical framework for a specific research topic.
 - Demonstrate an understanding of how theoretical assumptions influence research design and methodology.
- **Assessment:** Quiz.

5. Teaching and Learning

The programme utilises blended teaching approaches, including:

- **Interactive lectures** to introduce key concepts and theories.
- **Hands-on workshops** for practical application of software and research techniques.
- **Small-group seminars** to facilitate discussion and critical debate.
- **Independent study** supported by online resources and extensive reading.

6. Assessment

Each module has separate assignment tasks. Assessment is a combination of written coursework, quizzes and practical exercises. The capstone assignment for this programme however is a poster presentation and a draft article for possible publication. You must pass the module related assessment and the capstone assignments. Formative feedback will be provided throughout the modules to help you develop your skills and prepare for summative assessments.

6. Key readings

Becker, H. S. (1998). *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. New York, McGraw-Hill

Morgan, D. (2014). *Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: A Pragmatic Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Punch, K. (2005) *Introduction to Social Research*. London: Sage.

Robson, C. (2011) *Real World Research: a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings*. London: Wiley.

Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy entry, 'Theory and Observation in Science'
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/science-theory-observation/>