



## Programme Specification

A statement of the knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin a taught programme of study leading to an award from  
**The University of Sheffield**

1	<b>Programme Title</b>	Social Research
2	<b>Programme Code</b>	SMIT01 (FT) and SMIT02 (PT)
3	<b>JACS Code</b>	X210; L900
4	<b>Level of Study</b>	Postgraduate
5a	<b>Final Qualification</b>	Master of Arts (MA)
5b	<b>QAA FHEQ Level</b>	Level 7
6a	<b>Intermediate Qualification(s)</b>	Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert), Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip)
6b	<b>QAA FHEQ Level</b>	Level 7
8	<b>Faculty</b>	Social Sciences
9	<b>School</b>	Education
10	<b>Other Schools involved in teaching the programme</b>	Architecture and Landscape; Economics; Geography and Planning; Journalism, Media and Communication; Management School; Sociological Studies, Politics and International Relations (Faculty of Social Sciences) Psychology (Faculty of Science) History, Philosophy and Digital Humanities; Languages Arts and Societies; Law (Faculty of Arts and Humanities) Medicine and Population Health; Allied Health Professions, Nursing and Midwifery (Faculty of Health)
11	<b>Mode(s) of Attendance</b>	Full-time or Part-time
12	<b>Duration of the Programme</b>	1 year or 2 years
13	<b>Accrediting Professional or Statutory Body</b>	None
14	<b>Date of production/revision</b>	March 2017, April 2021, January 2024, September 2024

### 15. Background to the programme and subject area

The University of Sheffield's **MA in Social Research** provides students with the subject, research and professional skills they need to launch a successful career in social science research. The programme is housed within the Sheffield Methods Institute and draws upon the combined research and research training experience of the whole of the Faculty of Social Science, the School of Psychology in the Faculty of Science, and the School of History, Philosophy and Digital Humanities in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

The core staff members involved in the delivery of this MA in Social Research programme have expertise across a broad range of research methods, are active in methodological development in their fields, and have experience in researcher development at all levels of higher education. Therefore, graduates of this programme can expect to transition directly to innovative PhD research or find employment within roles that require high-level research skills.

Highlights of the University of Sheffield's MA Social Research include:

- A programme that has been purpose-built to develop researchers in the social sciences to world class standards (benchmarked against the Economic and Social Research Council's latest Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines).
- Building research skills within the context of academic disciplines: academic tutors, subject-specific teaching and independent research projects within specific Schools provide a strong disciplinary base to all students' learning.
- Linking students to interdisciplinary research practice and challenges: the programme has a teaching team

drawn from across a variety of academic schools, and links directly to interdisciplinary research themes

- Opportunities to choose further training in quantitative and qualitative methods, and select subject-specific content from a wide range of units offered within the Faculty of Social Sciences, the School of Psychology in the Faculty of Science, the School of History, Philosophy and Digital Humanities and the School of East Asian Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the School of Medicine and Population Health and the School of Allied Health Professions, Nursing and Midwifery both within the Faculty of Health.
- Continuous assessment throughout the academic year which allows students to use positive feedback to build upon their skills as they progress through the programme.

**About the Faculty of Social Science:** The Faculty of Social Sciences has a longstanding reputation for delivering world class research. Our research addresses the major challenges facing society and our ideas are leading academic debates internationally and shaping policy and practice across the globe. Consistently over the last twenty years our departments have been ranked at the very top in UK research assessments. The impact of our research is exemplary and is recognised by national research council prizes and international awards.

The Faculty of Social Science has also, since 2011, been home to the White Rose Doctoral Training Centre, a collaboration between the Universities of Sheffield, Leeds and York that has been at the forefront of doctoral training nationally. This programme draws on the breadth and depth of this research and training environment to provide a cutting-edge degree that prepares students to address the grand challenges facing social science researchers globally.

**About the School of Psychology:** Postgraduate research students in the School of Psychology have the opportunity to undertake cutting-edge research supervised by internationally acclaimed researchers in a wide range of research areas. 100% of the Department's staff are research-active and over. 92% of its research is rated in the highest two categories in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021, meaning it's classed as world-leading or internationally excellent.

**About the School of History, Philosophy and Digital Humanities:** The Department of History has long been a leading centre for historical research, and the home of many influential and important historians. Departmental staff have interests ranging from Nazi Germany to contemporary America and medieval Europe. It is currently ranked among the UK's top three History departments for the impact and quality of their research. **About the Sheffield Methods Institute:** The Sheffield Methods Institute (SMI) is a unique organisation created to promote innovation in research methods that can be applied to the social sciences to ultimately help solve the big challenges facing today's society. It exists to facilitate the production of world class research quantitative and qualitative methodologies by providing high quality training in research methods. By forging lasting partnerships with policy makers and other organisations, we hope to transform the research environment outside of academia by training and promoting research innovation to businesses and industry partners.

## 16. Programme aims

The aims of the MA Social Research are as follows:

1. To prepare students for doctoral study and professional research roles by offering a course which meets the requirements of world class academic institutions.
2. To engender in students an awareness of both the possibilities and limitations of a range of methodological approaches and techniques used across the social sciences in identifying and researching real world problems.
3. To use teaching informed by research to provide a stimulating culture of learning, the development of high-level research skills, and enthusiasm for applying these within subject-specific and interdisciplinary contexts.
4. To support students in developing critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and independent judgement.
5. To educate able and well-motivated students from a wide variety of backgrounds.

## 17. Programme learning outcomes

<b>Knowledge and understanding:</b>	
Upon completion of the MA in Social Research, MA, PG Dip and PG Cert students will have developed:	
<b>K1</b>	An understanding of how analytically rigorous research is formulated, and the range of philosophical and epistemology approaches informing sound research design.
<b>K2</b>	An understanding of the importance, and practical utility of, quantitative research methods in addressing research problems in the social sciences.
<b>K3</b>	An understanding of the importance, and practical utility of, qualitative research methods in addressing research problems in the social sciences.
<b>K4</b>	The ability to objectively assess and critically engage with the strengths and limitations of research design and methodology in the social sciences.
<b>K5</b>	An understanding of the subject-specific and interdisciplinary debates that equip them with the knowledge to identify research challenges at the frontier of their field of specialised knowledge.
<b>K6</b>	An understanding of the contribution that social science research can make to society.
<b>K7</b>	An understanding of the role of professional and transferable skills within high-level research, and the importance of reflexive evaluation of their own skill set within their ongoing development.
<b><i>In addition, students achieving the award of Masters' will have developed:</i></b>	
<b>K8</b>	The ability to design an independent research project that shows the application of their understanding of the research process within a specialised area of social science.

<b>Skills and other attributes:</b>	
Upon completion of the MA in Social Research, MA, PG Dip and PG Cert students will have developed:	
<b>S1</b>	The ability to undertake bibliographic searches, including the use of computer-based techniques; manage and maintain records of their searches and other research-related data.
<b>S2</b>	The ability to design a research study and provide a rationale for that design informed by theoretical and methodological concerns.
<b>S3</b>	The ability to relate the main ethical, legal and intellectual property concerns within social scientific research and illustrate how these, and more specific issues, are relevant to their own work.
<b>S4</b>	The ability to demonstrate competence in applying a range of data collection and analysis methods, including the use of computer-based tools.
<b>S5</b>	The ability to demonstrate awareness of the disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts of social science research, including a reflexive approach to their own work.
<b>S6</b>	The ability to communicate clearly through written and oral means, to a range of audiences.
<b>S7</b>	The ability to reflexively evaluate their own development of professional, methodological and transferable skills.
<b><i>In addition, students achieving the award of Masters' will have developed:</i></b>	
<b>S8</b>	The ability to demonstrate originality in the application of their knowledge and skills through the production of an independent research project within an appropriate subject area of social science.

## 18. Teaching, learning and assessment

### Development of the learning outcomes is promoted through the following teaching and learning methods:

Knowledge and understanding is acquired by means of a series of inter-related compulsory and option modules which have been designed and developed to foster the wide range of technical expertise, practical understanding and theoretical knowledge that students are expected to obtain by the end of the MA.

**Lectures** will largely be used for imparting essential knowledge and are an important means of engaging students with an understanding of substantive issues around the research process, methodological approaches, and subject-specific debates. The knowledge and understanding outcomes which are particularly relevant to this method are as follows: K1, K2, K3, K5 and K6. Skill development will, in part, be assisted through lecture-based materials (in particular S1, S2 and S3): however, throughout the MA it is only by combining lectures with other teaching and learning methods that students will be able to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge.

**Seminars** are an important means of developing students' critical understanding of the issues addressed within the programme and offer a more intensive, hands-on learning environment than lectures. Seminar groups will require participants to read, review and critically assess material prior to meetings. This method of teaching will be particularly important in realising the knowledge and understanding outcomes K1, K4, K5 and K6. This method of delivery will also help develop the skills identified in S2, S3, S5, S6 and S7 in a way that builds upon the critical perspectives offered in lectures.

**Computer workshops** are an absolutely essential part of the MA Social Research programme, enabling students to learn and put into practice a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research techniques of data collection and analysis as well as develop bibliographic skills. This learning and teaching method in particular relates to a high number of knowledge and understanding learning outcomes *and* skills and attributes outcomes. There is a strong emphasis in the programme on the development of critical thinking about the research process but, in addition, we also expect all students to emerge from the programme with data analysis and bibliography skills that are developed in the context of a variety of different software tools. Therefore, computer workshops relate strongly to K2, K3, K5 and K8 in addition to S1, S4, S6 and S8.

**Independent study** provides students with the opportunity to develop important knowledge and skills at the postgraduate level. For this programme in particular independent study will be particularly important in relation to skills acquisition as students will need to spend a significant amount of time working on their own (with learning material provided by tutors). Within core modules there is considerable flexibility for students to identify topics that particularly interest them and then to take these forward in study for the Dissertation and/or in choosing assessment topics for core and option modules. This method of learning is expected to contribute to the acquisition of knowledge and skills in relation to K8, S1, S2, S4, S6, S7 and S8 in particular but will of course also play a supporting role in the realisation of all other programme learning outcomes.

**Individual tutorials** will be used to embed critical self-reflection (in the form of the Training Needs Analysis) from the outset of the programme and will be the main mechanism of supervision and support for the dissertation. This form of contact is an invaluable way of assessing, on a formative basis, the extent to which students on the programme are working towards the successful achievement of the knowledge and understanding learning outcomes of the whole of the programme, and K7, K8, S7 and S8 in particular.

**Group work** will be used at different points within the programme and provides students with the collaborative skills and applied knowledge they will need to ensure that they graduate with sufficient expertise to work effectively within collaborative research projects. This method of learning particularly seeks to address K4, K5, K6 and K7 from a knowledge and understanding perspective and S5, S6 and S7 in relation to skills development.

### Opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes are provided through the following assessment methods:

**Essays** are used as an assessment method where there is a need to evaluate comprehension of particular concepts, theoretical perspectives, or methodological and epistemological debates. Essays also help to develop students' ability to communicate clearly through fluent writing and the construction of well-developed arguments. Essays are also used by some modules in the demonstration of students' specialist knowledge and skills. In particular, the use of essays in this programme as an assessment method is intended to demonstrate the achievement of K1, K4, K5, K6 and S5.

**Project reports** are used to test students' knowledge and understanding and skills across more applied elements of the programme. They play an important role in relation to demonstrating understanding of the practical utility of quantitative and qualitative research methods, and hence are particularly important in the achievement of K2, K3, and S4.

**Portfolios** are an important assessment method in this programme. They are used both to capture students' engagement with a range of methodological techniques (for example, in achievement of K3), and to promote and embed a process of reflexive learning and self-evaluation (K4, K7, S5 and S7) through which they develop both their own research projects and an understanding of their broader professional development.

**Oral presentation** is an important part of the formative assessment within the programme since it tests students' ability to communicate their thinking, its implications and limitations in a face-to-face setting and then receive instantaneous verbal feedback which they can respond to. Students will make oral presentations at various points in this programme, and this will assist in their development of a range of elements of their knowledge and understanding, particularly K1, K4, and K6; and S2 S3, S5 and S6.

**The Independent Research Project** represents the culmination of the programme as an assessment method and therefore allows students to demonstrate the achievement of a large number of programme learning outcomes. To some extent, the project allows us to test all knowledge and understanding and skills outcomes but the particular focus on the dissertation is on K1, K2 and/or K3 depending on the focus of their research, K5 and K8, and S1-S3, S5 and S8. The Independent Research Project, therefore, offers all students on the programme the opportunity to put into practice the knowledge and understanding and skills they have developed during the course of the academic year as a result of the combined learning and teaching methods set out above.

A mapping of the knowledge, skills and forms of assessment to individual units of assessment follows below under '21: Student development over the course of study'.

## 19. Reference points

### The learning outcomes have been developed to reflect the following points of reference:

The programme has been designed to meet national expectations of training for doctoral study as expressed within the Economic and Social Research Council's *Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2015*, <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/skills-and-careers/studentships/doctoral-training-centres/postgraduate-training-guidelines/>

Within the White Rose Doctoral Training Centre (WR DTC hereafter), the programme is providing a model for the development of masters-level research training across the participating Universities. Its design has therefore been informed by extensive debate with stakeholders within the WRDTC, including representatives of the 23 research pathways within the DTC in Sheffield, Leeds and York, and members of the DTC's academic quality committee, including the AQC's student representatives.

In addition, the following reference points have influenced the design of this programme:

Subject Benchmark Statements

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (2024)

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/qualifications-frameworks#>

University Vision and Strategic Plan

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/vision>

## 20. Programme structure and regulations

The programme is structured to provide the majority of core knowledge and understanding in the first semester, with more flexibility and opportunities to specialise in the second semester and through the summer period. All MA students will take modules to the value of 180 credits, which are structured as follows:

Compulsory Units:

Students must take *Principles of Research Design*, and *Research Ethics and Integrity*. Students must also complete 45 credits (3 modules) of research methods training from a total of 60 credits (4 modules) from *Introduction to Qualitative Methods*, *Introduction to Quantitative Methods*, *Advanced Qualitative Methods* and *Advanced Quantitative Methods*. The purpose of this combination of modules enables students to work with

their supervisors on determining the most appropriate mix of methods modules in order to become well rounded researchers and to make use of the most appropriate methods for their research as well as developing an appreciation for differing methodologies used in social research.

Students on the ESRC 1+3 programme will also take *Working Beyond Disciplines* plus 30 credits of optional modules from the prescribed list of optional PGT modules from across the Faculty. All other students take 45 credits of optional modules from the prescribed list of PGT modules from across the Faculty.

All students will also complete an Independent Research Project (60 credits), and will begin in the Spring Semester, with more intensive work from June to September. The default option will be that students complete the Independent Research Project as a stand-alone Dissertation. Where students have previous experience of conducting a high-level academic research project, they may instead (on the recommendation of their academic tutor and by approval of the Programme Director) undertake the Independent Research Project by Proposal, which instead tests their ability to identify and design a research project suitable for Doctoral study. This experience would normally be demonstrated through prior completion of an MA-level dissertation or equivalent work in a relevant field of study) of this module.

Optional Units:

Students then have a choice of multiple option modules within a prescribed list, from which they must choose sufficient units to reach a 180-credit balance by the end of the academic year. Their choice within this list is guided through discussion with their supervisor/academic tutor who will help them develop their subject knowledge in areas most supportive of their research.

Students successfully completing 60 credits as prescribed in the Programme Regulations are eligible for the award of the Postgraduate Certificate in Social Research. Students successfully completing 120 credits as prescribed in the Programme Regulations are eligible for the award of the Postgraduate Diploma in Social Research. Students successfully completing 180 credits are eligible for the award of the MA in Social Research.

Detailed information about the structure of programmes, regulations concerning assessment and progression, and descriptions of individual modules are published in the University Calendar available on-line at <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/calendar/>

## 21. Student development over the course of study

This programme of study has been carefully designed and organised so that there is clear development in relation to substantive knowledge and key analytical skills over the course of study. The teaching and learning is developmental in focus and we place a high priority on student-centred learning. As the year progresses, we expect students to use their independent study time to build upon the knowledge and skills developed during modules from a variety of teaching and learning methods, whilst being continually supported in their efforts by the teaching team.

As the following table shows, specific key learning outcomes have been associated with all modules in the programme, but it is important to note that we view the development of knowledge and skills as continuous rather than separated into discrete stages:

MA Social Research	Key Learning Outcomes*		Assessment Methods
<b>Autumn Semester</b>			
<i>Principles of Research Design (30)</i>	<i>K1, K4, K6</i>	<i>S2, S3</i>	<i>Diagnostic, Critical Review and Research Proposal</i>
<i>Introduction to Quantitative Research (15) and/or</i>	<i>K2, K4</i>	<i>S2, S3, S4</i>	<i>Report</i>
<i>Introduction to Qualitative Research (15)</i>	<i>K3, K4</i>	<i>S2, S3, S4</i>	<i>Portfolio</i>
<b>Spring Semester</b>			
<i>Advanced Quantitative Methods (15) and/or</i>	<i>K2, K4</i>	<i>S2, S3, S4</i>	<i>Project Report</i>
<i>Advanced Qualitative Methods (15)</i>	<i>K3, K4</i>	<i>S2, S3, S4</i>	<i>Project Report</i>

<i>FCS601 Research Ethics and Integrity (0)</i>	<i>K6</i>	<i>S3, S6</i>	<i>Short Reflection</i>
<i>Department Option Module(s) (30)</i>	<i>K5, K6</i>	<i>S5</i>	<i>Various, mainly Essay</i>
<i>Working Beyond Disciplines (15)</i>	<i>K5, K6</i>	<i>S5</i>	<i>Podcast and Reflection</i>
<b>All Year</b>			
<i>Independent Research Project (60)</i>	<i>K8</i>	<i>S2, S8</i>	<i>Independent Report</i>
<b>Total: 180 Credits</b>			

This is not an exhaustive listing but shows particular emphases within each unit of assessment. S6 'the ability to communicate clearly through written and oral means, to a range of audiences' is embedded within formative and summative assessment of *all* units.

S1 'the ability to undertake bibliographic searches' and S7 'the ability to reflexively evaluate skills' are taught directly in *Professional Skills for Researchers*, but further developed in students' engagement with most other units of assessment.

## 22. Criteria for admission to the programme

High entrance requirements for postgraduate taught Masters' degree programmes at Sheffield reflect the quality of the University. The University of Sheffield has been welcoming students from all over the world for many decades and we have substantial experience in assessing and understanding the many different international qualifications.

We require applicants to hold a minimum of an upper second-class honours degree from a UK University (or an international equivalent). This will normally be in a cognate discipline to their intended specialist subject area for research. Students with other qualifications or suitable relevant experience will be considered on an individual basis. International students are also required to hold a suitable English language qualification, such as IELTS (an average score of 7.0 with a minimum of 6.5 in each component).

## 23. Additional information

This specification represents a concise statement about the main features of the programme and should be considered alongside other sources of information provided by the teaching department(s) and the University. In addition to programme specific information, further information about studying at The University of Sheffield can be accessed via our Student Services web site at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ssid>.