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	**Programme Title**	Applied Linguistics
2	**Programme Code**	ELLT01 (Full-time); ELLT10 (Part-time)
3	**JACS Code**	Q110
4	**Level of Study**	Postgraduate
5a	**Final Qualification**	Master of Arts (MA)
5b	**QAA FHEQ Level**	Masters
6	**Intermediate Qualification**	Postgraduate Diploma (PG Dip), Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert)
7	**Teaching Institution** (if not Sheffield)	Not applicable
8	**Faculty**	Arts and Humanities
9	**Department**	English Language and Linguistics
10	**Other Departments involved in teaching the programme**	Not applicable
11	**Modes of Attendance**	Full-time or Part-time
12	**Duration of the Programme**	1 year or 2 years
13	**Accrediting Professional or Statutory Body**	Not applicable
14	**Date of production/revision**	December 2014, Revised October 2019, Revised August 2021, Revised March 2022

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

Applied Linguistics is a wide–ranging discipline focussing on the study of language learning and language teaching, and on problems of language in society more generally. As such, it is inherently interdisciplinary drawing on such source disciplines as linguistics, education, psychology and sociology. Over the last 40 years its presence as an area of enquiry has become more prominent and it is now established as one of the most important branches of the study of language.

MA programmes in Applied Linguistics provide essential academic and professional training for those already working in, or embarking on, careers in a variety of language–related professions: language teaching, language testing, curriculum development, translation and interpreting, as well as forensic and clinical work involving language.

The Sheffield MA in Applied Linguistics places particular, though not by any means an exclusive, emphasis on what is commonly believed to lie at the core of the field—the systematic study of language education, language learning and language teaching. What distinguishes our programme, however, from many competitors is that it provides and relates two vital elements: a) the development of understanding of language as a formal system along with more formal techniques of language analysis, and b) the development of a sound critical understanding of practical techniques of language teaching along with an appreciation of their underpinning theoretical principles. Throughout, the programme encourages students to reflect critically on current practice and methodology, and to relate theoretical principles and insights to their own contexts of practice.

Students leave this programme with a sound grasp of the central concepts and issues in applied linguistics and with practical expertise in analytical techniques relevant to their future professional practice.

16.   **Programme aims**

The MA in Applied Linguistics aims.

1.   To provide students with high quality opportunities for learning about a range of areas central to applied linguistic enquiry: language structure, language in use, language learning and acquisition, language policies, language teaching methodology.

2.   To provide a stimulating learning environment in which the teaching is of high quality and informed by the ongoing research of staff teaching on the programme.

3.   To equip students with a systematic critical understanding of central concepts and theories in the area of language in use, language teaching and language learning.

4.   To equip students with the requisite conceptual tools and expertise for the analysis of language, and the English language in particular.

5.   To foster an ability to evaluate current practices, research and scholarship in the discipline.

6.   To develop students' capacity to reflect critically on their current or past professional practice and on the applicability of techniques or insights introduced during the course to their contexts of professional practice.

7.   To equip students with a capacity to continue their professional development on an independent basis.

17. Programme learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding - Students successfully completing either the MA or PG Dip will have developed:	
K1	A systematic understanding of contemporary theories, principles and practices in language teaching, language learning and language acquisition.
K2	A systematic understanding of the grammar and discourse of the English language and an awareness of how that understanding may guide and inform the teaching and learning of English as a second language.
K3	A critical understanding of the various methods of enquiry that are common in applied linguistics; e.g. ethnography, corpus-based research, experimentation, observation, introspection.
K4	An awareness of the reciprocal character of the relation between language and society and of how language teaching/learning is embedded in, and hence influenced by, the various social contexts in which it is carried out.
K5	A practical knowledge of contemporary techniques and practices in language teaching, their advantages and their limitations.

Skills and other attributes - Students successfully completing either the MA or PG Dip will have developed:	
S1	The ability to make informed and appropriately critical responses to current thinking and theorising in language teaching and language learning.
S2	The ability to describe and analyse language in use in a way that demonstrates a sound grasp of linguistic concepts and an appropriate descriptive apparatus.
S3	The skills to evaluate and to design language teaching/learning programmes, materials and activities.
S4	The ability to relate the inputs of the course to students' own context of professional practice and, where appropriate, to reassess their previous professional practice.
S5	The ability to take a significant role in language teaching/learning innovation in the student's professional context.
S6	The ability to consume applied linguistic research in a discerning way.
S7	The confidence to challenge professional practice, where this is appropriate, and the ability to act independently in the analysis and solution of professional problems.

| **In addition, students achieving the award of MA will have developed:** |
| **S8** | Increasing independence and self-direction in identifying problems, formulating research questions and designing and executing small-scale research projects in applied linguistics. |

18. Teaching, learning and assessment

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

1. Lectures: These are largely informal and interactive in character. Their essential purpose is to provide the necessary conceptual frameworks and knowledge relating to K 1- 5. A secondary purpose is to allow programme tutors to communicate their attitudes to the content presented and to highlight what is essential and primary and what secondary or subsidiary in the bodies of knowledge that applied linguistics comprises. Lectures also provide a context in which skills of argumentation and analysis can be modelled by staff.

2. Seminars, which are usually staff-led but occasionally student-led, are used extensively throughout the programme. Their essential purpose is to reinforce information and concepts introduced through lectures, to provide opportunities to reflect on that information, and to practise skills of analysis and evaluation. Small group discussion or pair work is a common working modality in the seminars. The following are the kinds of activities commonly undertaken:

● Analysing authentic and constructed language data to develop skills of language description/analysis. (S2);

● Analysing and evaluating samples of language teaching/learning materials, programmes, activities and tests. (S3, S4);

● Experiencing and reflecting on practical language teaching techniques and activities. (S3, S4);

● Discussion of ideas, theories, concepts previously introduced in lecture sessions. (K1, S1, S5, S6);

● Giving presentations on research and reading undertaken outside class. Some presentations involve critical reviews of, and reflections on, the literature on key topics. (K1, S6, S7);

● Discussion and exercises involving the comparison of problems of language teaching/learning in different countries and social contexts. (K4, S4, S5);

● Data analysis exercises to practise and evaluate research techniques (and instruments) commonly employed in applied linguistics (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, observation, introspection). (S6).

3. Independent Study plays a vitally important role in the MA (Diploma) programme. It is geared primarily towards (i) preparatory reading for practical seminar tasks and exercises, (ii) background reading for written assignments, (iii) the broadening and deepening of knowledge gained through lectures and seminars, (iv) preparation for small group or individual presentations. Independent study is also seen as an important means for reinforcing and developing student's independence and self-direction over the course of the programme. (S7, S8) (K1-5).

4. One to One Consultations and Dissertation supervision: One important purpose of one to one consultations with members of the programme teaching staff is to discuss and help students plan upcoming written module assignments - to determine, for example, the feasibility and suitability of student approaches to the assignment topic. The MA course director also meets with each MA (Diploma) student individually to give and discuss feedback on module assignments and to review general progress on the programme.

One-to-one consultations also play a very significant role in the MA dissertation supervision process, which commences in the second half of the second semester. Supervision meetings initially focus on helping students select an appropriate and sensible dissertation topic, formulate an adequate research plan and identify suitable background reading. In later meetings the emphasis falls on responding to student's ideas and written drafts. (K3, S6, S7, S8).

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

**1.	Written Assignments:** MA and Diploma students are required to produce a written assignment for each module studied. This often takes the form of an essay but other genres are not infrequently demanded. There is considerable emphasis throughout the programme on data based essays where students are either presented with a body of data for analysis or, less commonly, invited to analyse data that they themselves have collected. The rationale for emphasising data –driven written work is that it provides students with an opportunity not only to display mastery/acquisition of content knowledge but also to demonstrate their ability to apply that knowledge to novel, previously unseen problems.

The actual nature of the tasks undertaken in these written assignments varies according to module but the following are typical (K1-5, S1-8):

●	Writing book reviews;

●	Developing written analyses of language data;

●	Reviewing and critically commenting on theories of language learning, language teaching and language acquisition;

●	Designing language teaching programme modules and materials, and justifying design decisions;

●	Evaluating samples of tests, materials and programmes;

●	Writing up oral presentations;

●	Reflecting on current or past professional practice in the light of course inputs.

**2.	Oral Presentations**: In some modules written assignments are complemented by oral presentations prepared either individually or in groups. Among other things, these presentations are intended to have positive washback effects on student's formal speaking skills. (K1-4; S1-5).

**3.	Dissertation (only for MA students)**: The MA programme culminates in a written dissertation of 15,000 words written over the summer months. Each student is allocated an individual supervisor to guide them through this major exercise. The dissertation is intended to provide students with an opportunity to integrate and mobilise the knowledge gained over the preceding year and to demonstrate their readiness to undertake a significant though small-scale piece of independent applied linguistic research. (S8). This will typically involve collecting and analysing language data, in some cases requiring fieldwork in authentic settings. During the course of the first semester from September till February, students follow a core module in Research Methods to help equip them for the MA Dissertation. In semester 2, students take a further core module entitled Research Dissertation Practice, which provides additional training in how to design, carry out, and write a dissertation.

**4.	**This prepares them to write a Dissertation proposal submitted in May, which must be approved by the relevant supervisor before they proceed to writing the dissertation. Satisfactory attendance on the Research Methods course is obligatory and permission to proceed to the MA dissertation will not be given to students who have not met this condition.

19. Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statements
https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (2014)
https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf

University Vision
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/vision

Learning and Teaching Strategy (2016-21)
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.661828!/file/FinalStrategy.pdf

ESRC subject-specific guidelines for applied linguistics

20. Programme structure and regulations

The programme has two phases: a coursework phase from the opening of the academic year until the following June and a dissertation phase from June till early September.

During the coursework phase every student studies eight taught modules, each of which is assessed and carries 15 credits. Students are expected to complete the eight modules and accumulate 120 credits to be eligible to proceed to the writing of the dissertation, which carries a further 60 credits.

Successful completion of both the coursework (120 credits) and the dissertation (60 credits) is required to achieve the 180 credits necessary for the award of the MA degree. Students who successfully complete the eight modules of the coursework phase (120 credits) but who do not complete or pass the subsequent dissertation will be eligible for the award of a Postgraduate Diploma. Students who are awarded 60 credits at the end of the coursework phase of the programme will be eligible for the award of a Postgraduate Certificate.

A significant aspect of the programme is the division of the coursework into core and optional modules. There are two core modules in semester 1 (Current Issues in Applied Linguistics and Research Methods). Students then choose an additional 30 credits from a list of 15-credit optional modules shared with the MA in Language and Linguistics, and from a restricted list of modules offered as part of the MA TESOL.

In semester 2, students take the Research Dissertation Practice core module, plus an additional 45 credits from optional modules shared with the MA in Language and Linguistics, and from a restricted list of modules offered as part of the MA TESOL. There is thus substantial provision for student choice within the overall programme curriculum.

An examiners' meeting is held in June each year to review student attainment during the coursework stage and take decisions on progression to the dissertation. Permission to proceed to the dissertation is granted if students have successfully completed the eight taught modules and satisfied examiners as to the quality of their coursework.

Prior to the June meeting of examiners, each student will already have been allocated an individual supervisor with whom they will have had opportunities to discuss their plans for the dissertation. The supervisor provides close guidance on the feasibility, suitability and coherence of these plans.

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/regs.

21. Student development over the course of study

Progression is a fundamental consideration in the design of the overall programme and is informed by three overarching principles – **coherence**, **choice/opportunities for specialisation**, and **increasing autonomy**.

Coherence is primarily provided through the two core modules studied in the first semester. These are core in the double sense of (a) providing an essential foundation for subsequent more advanced and specialised study through coverage of key concepts and frameworks in applied linguistics, and (b) being common to all students following the MA programme. The two core modules are:

i.   Current Issues in Applied Linguistics, which ensures a sound knowledge of linguistic concepts and methods as used in prominent topics in contemporary applied linguistic research, and equips students with the ability to critically engage with these concepts and methods.

ii.   Research Methods, which equips students with the knowledge to critically evaluate the research they will encounter throughout the programme.

To complete semester 1, students then choose from a range of option modules which offer training in both theoretical and applied linguistics. These modules ensure that students have a sound knowledge base to draw on as they approach semester 2 and specialise by choosing further optional modules. The fact that core modules are taken by all students also helps unify the student cohort and provides a shared metalanguage for subsequent enquiry.

The breadth of applied linguistics and the diversity of contexts from which students come - not to mention the varied professional roles they may subsequently occupy – makes the second principle of **choice and opportunities for specialisation** a fundamental feature of the whole programme. This is primarily realised through the option modules which students are able to select from.

In concrete terms, the element of choice allows, for example, those students who foresee a career in language education to take modules which offer training in areas like core language skills teaching, second language acquisition, curriculum and materials design, English for specific purposes, and the theory and practice of language teaching. Those with a greater interest in language description and language per se might, by contrast, specialise in the range of modules which offer training in areas like discourse and conversation analysis, intercultural communication, phonetics and phonology, historical linguistics, literary linguistics, and sociolinguistics.

The principle of **increasing autonomy** is most specifically realised in the 15,000 word dissertation that MA students write during the summer months at the end of the academic year. This provides students with the opportunity to undertake a piece of independent research and to pursue in more detail a topic that has excited their interest in the preceding months.

Over the whole programme, then, progression assumes at least three distinct forms: from less autonomous to more autonomous work, from less advanced to more advanced written work, and from common core to more specialised topics within applied linguistics.

22. Criteria for admission to the programme

A minimum 2:1 (or equivalent) undergraduate degree in linguistics, English language and/or literature, a modern language (or a cognate subject like education or psychology where the applicant has at least two years' experience as a language professional).

The School of English has particular strengths and teaching expertise in four main areas:

- language and society
- historical linguistics
- literary linguistics
- theoretical linguistics

Prior experience in one or more of these areas is desirable.

Entry requirements for international students:

Overall IELTS score of 7.0 with a minimum of 6.5 in each component.

Further information regarding criteria for admission and applying to study is available from the Department's website at: http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/english/pgc

23. Additional information

Apart from their normal classes, students following the MA programme are also strongly encouraged to attend the weekly lunchtime research sessions at which visiting or in-house speakers present their research. This is seen as a significant element of their socialisation into the linguistics research community and a useful contribution to their continuing academic and professional development.

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.

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