



Programme Specification

A statement of the knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin a taught programme of study awarded by
The University of Sheffield

1	Programme Title	Public Health (Health Services Research)
2	Programme Code	HART32
3	JACS Code	B900
4	Level of Study	Postgraduate
5	Final Qualification	Master of Public Health
6	Intermediate Qualification(s)	PG Certificate; PG Diploma
7	Teaching Institution (if not Sheffield)	Not applicable
8	Faculty	Health
9	Home Department	School of Medicine and Population Health (Population Health)
10	Other Department(s) involved in teaching the programme	None
11	Mode(s) 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 2006, March 2018, February 2019, January 2020, January 2023, February 2024

15. Background to the programme and subject area

The Master of **Public Health in Health Services Research** provides high quality education and training in the range of analytical techniques required to assess and plan health services and evaluate the effectiveness of health technologies. It builds on the success of the current MPH in attracting students from the UK and overseas and an acknowledged reputation for postgraduate training in health services research and technology assessment provided by the previous MSc in Health Services Research & Technology Assessment (HSR&TA).

Health Services Research (HSR) may be defined as the systematic assessment of direct and indirect effects of particular health care interventions. The subject of study embraces content or method of delivery and health services organisation. It enables the analysis of costs and effects of interventions in their widest senses, and the use of the information obtained for policy and decision making at national, local and clinical levels. Both in developed and newly developed countries, these processes of analysis are essential to achieve effective and efficient uses of resources to meet the demands of epidemiological and demographic change, including urbanisation, globalisation and new threats from diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, or from poverty and the effects of rapid social change.

This Masters' course provides a firm grounding in the range of skills and disciplines which are essential to good health services research, including study design, epidemiology and statistics, qualitative analysis, economic evaluation, systematic reviews and critical appraisal. The course is co-ordinated and taught by tutors with an established track record of practical policy-related health services research.

The course is designed to accommodate both people with demanding full-time jobs, by requiring attendance at the University on a part-time basis and those, including international students, who wish to complete the course in one year by attendance on a full-time basis. The course is particularly suitable for those wishing to embark on a career in HSR; for health care professionals who wish to develop or improve their skills in HSR; and for those working in public health, or information departments in the NHS or other health care organisations and services. Former students of the MSc in HSR & TA have successfully obtained highly competitive national (MRC) and regionally funded fellowship positions and others continue to use the contacts made in SchARR to seek support in gaining research grants and publishing their work.

The School's co-ordinated approach to postgraduate studies means that students can benefit from a range of options, and will be part of a large multi-disciplinary student body while gaining the advantage of retaining smaller

class sizes.

Particular features of the MPH (HSR) include:

- a firm grounding in the range of skills and disciplines essential to good health services research, within the context of the public health care needs and challenges facing students from both developed and newly-developing backgrounds.
- a focus upon both qualitative and quantitative research methods and their application to decision analysis.
- core units (studied alongside other MPH students) in research design, epidemiology, statistics, public health, qualitative research and Randomised Controlled Trials. Options in a range of advanced techniques.
- comparative study as an important ingredient both of core and specialised study modules.
- a variety of teaching techniques, with seminars, workshops, exercises and projects an essential part of the teaching and learning strategy.
- continuous assessment conducted through a range of methods including written work, oral presentations, group project outputs etc.
- a dissertation, which comprises the final piece of work MPH (HSR) students undertake.

The Sheffield Centre for Health and Related Research (SCHARR) within the School of Medicine and Population Health has an international reputation in the field of HSR and technology assessment and draws on a wide range of health-related expertise including: health economics, operational research, management sciences, epidemiology, medical statistics, social sciences and information science. We also have clinical and non-clinical staff from primary care, psychiatry, rehabilitation and public health. The School conducts applied and methodological health services research and consultancy and has demonstrable strengths in academic impact (6th nationally) and research (91% rated in the highest two categories of REF2021) making it one of the UK's leading centres for research in this field. The School has a strong focus on postgraduate studies and offers a portfolio of programmes including MPH, Health Economics and Health Management. The School also has more than 75 postgraduate research students from home and overseas, and is recognised by the ESRC for research training. Students entering this programme therefore learn in an environment dedicated to leading edge health services research from staff actively engaged in high quality, large-scale related research programmes.

16. Programme aims

The MPH (HSR) aims to provide students with in depth understanding of the public health context and process of health services research, and apply this to the specific challenges in delivery, planning and management of health services in their national context. Specifically, it aims to:

- equip students with the knowledge and skills required to apply high quality, methodologically sound and ethical health services research and health technology assessment techniques to a range of public health problems.
- enable students to review and critically appraise the methods and results of existing research, and understand the implications for policy and practice.
- develop practical solutions to protect and promote the public health in the context of academic or professional settings.

17. Programme learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding:	
K1	Critical understanding of the principles of research design and the range of methods available for health service research in the context of the public health and the planning and management of health services.
K2	Critical understanding of the principles of health economics and its contribution to HSR.
K3	Applied understanding of statistics and processes of quantitative data analysis.
K4	Understanding of the principles of epidemiology and the use of routine data in HSR.
K5	Detailed understanding the principles of systematic reviews and critical appraisal techniques and their contribution to the development of evidence based practice.
K6	Understanding of the processes of qualitative research design and analysis in HSR.
K7	Broad knowledge and critical awareness of the relationships between health service research, health service policy and the development of research based health care.

Students achieving the award of either **MPH or PG Diploma** will have developed well-grounded knowledge and understanding defined by outcomes K1 – K7.

Students achieving the award of **PG Certificate** will have developed well-grounded knowledge and understanding defined by K1 – K4.

Skills and other attributes: having successfully completed the programme, students will have developed:	
S1	Ability to use and interpret predictive assessment tools for diagnostic and screening tests.
S2	Competence in the critical appraisal of an economic evaluation using a structured checklist.
S3	Ability to plan, execute and present an analysis of a dataset using a statistical software package.
S4	Ability to structure and write a convincing research proposal.
S5	Ability to competently conduct and present a rapid systematic literature review.
S6	Ability to collect, interpret and present qualitative health service research data.
S7	Ability to independently develop, execute, analyse and present a piece of original research.

Students achieving the award of **MPH** will have developed to a high degree the skills and attributes defined by S1 – S7.

Students achieving the award of **PG Diploma** will have developed to a high degree the skills and attributes defined by S1 – S6.

Students achieving the award of **PG Certificate** will have developed to a high degree the skills and attributes defined by S1 – S4.

18. Teaching, learning and assessment

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

Intro Week lasting three days immediately before the autumn semester begins enables students to meet each other and staff who will be teaching them, to familiarise them with the resources available within SchARR and to explore their expectations of the programme. In addition to programme-specific activities and meetings, students participate in a programme alongside other SchARR postgraduate students, providing basic skills in information management, independent study and personal skills development.

Lectures provide students with formal teaching input in the core subject areas of health services research supported by presentations and discussion of research currently being undertaken in SchARR, and presentations from external speakers with expertise in specific subject areas. (K1-7).

Group work and Structured group exercises encourage the development of independent research skills, and students are encouraged to apply the principles of HSR in practice, through sharing and discussion of the research issues which arise in their own contexts (K1-7; S1-5).

Hands-on **Practical sessions** provide training and practice in the use of information technology-based methods and resources including statistical software packages for data analysis and literature searching (K3, 5; S3, 4).

Independent study is a key element of participation in the programme and students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning in class, and for the learning of other members of the group. Classes are used to identify and begin to explore topics, and students work outside these periods to study further and work on projects.

A **departmental seminar programme** is held each semester and students are encouraged to attend seminars that may be in areas of particular interest to them. (K1-7; S1-6). The **dissertation** itself is a major piece of work that students must conduct on their own initiative, again, with guidance from supervisors, contributing to development of skills relevant to learning outcomes S1-7. The dissertation also provides students with the opportunity to increase their substantive knowledge, and synthesise the various elements of the programme, thus contributing to K1 – 7 outcomes.

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

Formative assessment

Regular formative assessments are conducted as part of module teaching sessions or as homework. These include structured exercises which require individuals to apply specific techniques, for example quantitative analytic tests (K3 - 5; S3 - 5), structured exercises designed to test critical thinking skills on an individual and group basis (K1, 2, 5-7; S1, 2, 5, 6) and group led projects and seminar discussions (K2, 6 - 7). These assessments are used to test abilities and understanding of core principles and skills during modules and allow any areas of weakness or difficulty in individual students to be identified and resolved before they undertake the more formal course assessment work. They also identify areas of specific interest and strengths, which can then be supported and developed as dissertation projects and transfer of skills to work based projects.

Summative assessment

Modules are primarily assessed by submission of a written assignment the format of which is specified to enable assessment of understanding of the taught component and achievement of HSR skills. (K1-K7; S1-S6). Assignments are not simply essays but designed to demonstrate application of knowledge in the form of, for example, a research proposal (S1), critical review of an economic evaluation (S2) and a systematic review (S4). One module is also assessed using a short answer examination (K1) while another uses a practical project (K6; S6). Submission of the dissertation allows the student to demonstrate their understanding of the taught modules, critical thinking and application of HSR principles to a piece of original, individually conducted research (K1-7; S1-7).

19. Reference points

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

The research-informed orientation of the University of Sheffield, the School of Medicine and Population Health, and the Sheffield Centre for Health and Related Research as set out in University and School research strategies.

Department of Health objectives of providing evidence based healthcare and developing research capacity within the NHS.

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (2024)

https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/the-frameworks-for-higher-education-qualifications-of-uk-degree-awarding-bodies-2024.pdf?sfvrsn=3562b281_11

University Vision and Strategic Plan

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

20. Programme structure and regulations

The MPH (HSR) has been designed to provide a structured programme, within which basic knowledge and skills are augmented progressively through study of core and advanced units, culminating in a period of independent study leading to the dissertation. Four introductory compulsory modules are taught in Semester 1 and two in Semester 2. Students choose three optional modules from currently seven options. Diploma students take the taught units alone, while a Certificate will be awarded following completion of the 60 credits of core units.

The dissertation is a 45-credit unit that is undertaken for the award of MPH (HSR). Progression to the dissertation is subject to satisfactory completion of the taught units.

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

www.sheffield.ac.uk/calendar/

21. Student development over the course of study

The programme has been designed to enable developmental understanding of the research process. A range of personal and generic skills are developed progressively alongside the development of research knowledge and skills through structured learning and assessments. Taught units are divided into core and options, to provide the student with the skills and knowledge which can then be applied to undertake a dissertation (MPH only).

The compulsory units (6x15 credits) impart the fundamentals of the research process and introduce the main building blocks in health services research. The optional modules (15 credits) build on these foundations, enabling students to focus on a specific area of interest.

The dissertation enables knowledge and skills gained during the taught units to be applied to a piece of original primary or secondary research, or to a systematic review of literature, according to the interests of individual students, following discussion with their supervisor.

22. Criteria for admission to the programme

The usual requirement for admission is an upper second-class Honours degree, a medical or dental bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification. Prospective students without the formal entry requirements or with different qualifications but with at least two years of relevant work experience in a health and/or social care related area are considered on an individual basis and offer of places is subject to approval by the Medical Faculty.

Detailed information regarding admission to the programme is available in the University's On-Line Prospectus at www.shef.ac.uk/prospective/prospectus.html

23. Additional information

The School of Medicine and Population Health) is a large, multidisciplinary School embracing public health medicine, health services research, decision analysis and mental health alongside clinical medicine. Disciplines represented in the staff complement include: health economics, medical statistics, medical sociology, operational research, psychology, rehabilitation research, medical informatics, health policy and management studies.

The School is home to the Sheffield Centre for Health and Related Research (SCHARR) , which provides high level academic support aimed at increasing the quantity and quality of health services research, including health related social care research.

Further information can be found on the website for SchARR at <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/scharr>.

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 www.shef.ac.uk/ssid.