

University of Plymouth

Faculty of Science and Engineering

School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences

Programme Specification

MSc in Human Geography Research (6275)

September 2017

1. **MSc Human Geography Research**

Final award title Master of Science in Human Geography Research

Level 7 Intermediate award title(s)

Completion of 60 Credits: Postgraduate certificate

Level 7 Intermediate award title(s)

Completion of 120 Credits: Postgraduate Diploma

JACS code L700 Human and Social Geography

2. **Awarding Institution:** University of Plymouth

Teaching institution(s): University of Plymouth

3. **Accrediting body(ies)**

No accrediting or regulated bodies but this programme meets the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) requirements for level 7 research training, prior to study at Level 8 (PhD).

4. **Distinctive Features of the Programme and the Student Experience**

The distinctive features of the MSc in Human Geography Research at Plymouth arise from:

- the breadth and depth of high-quality research in human geography undertaken at Plymouth;
- an emphasis on applied and inter-disciplinary research, facilitated by the activities of the University's [Sustainable Earth Institute](#).

Human Geography at Plymouth has been recognised as a 'pocket of excellence' by the ESRC and, in light of this, it forms part of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) South West Doctoral Training Partnership for the South West (SWDTP). Research in human geography is centred on two research groups, i) Environment, Development and Governance and ii) Society, Culture and Mobility that together form part of the Geography-wide Centre for Research in Environment and Society (CeRES). Key research themes in human geography include:

- big data and quantitative methods (Rahman, Smith);
- culture, landscape and nature (Simpson, Ward, Yarwood);
- environmental management and climate policy (Bailey, Essex);

- migration, identity and place (Harmer, Holton);
- mobility and transport (Shaw, Simpson);
- political and military geographies (Harmer, Rech, Yarwood);
- risk and resilience (Smith, Wilson);
- rural and agricultural geography (Rahman, Ward, Wilson, Yarwood);
- spatial planning and governance (Essex).

The applied character of this research is particularly evident in a recent 4* graded REF case study on smart ticketing within mobility and transport. The [Sustainable Earth Institute](#) (SEI) connects academic researchers with relevant stakeholders through seminars, training and targeted initiatives.

These strengths allow us to deliver a distinctive MSc with:

- **training in qualitative and quantitative research techniques** in human geography, led by academic staff who are active researchers in the field;
- **a critical knowledge of human geography research:** covering its core philosophies, epistemologies, ontologies, ideologies and methodologies;
- teaching delivered through **tutorials and small group** workshops/seminars, affording the opportunity to work closely with staff in Human Geography and to benefit from their specialist expertise;
- **assessments** designed to develop critical and reflective thinking;
- delivery and quality underpinned by **research excellence**;
- working in an active **research environment** that includes a lively PGR community and opportunities to participate in School seminars and research meetings;
- the provision of research training tailored to meet **ESRC requirements and SWDTP commitments** for future doctoral study;
- opportunities and preparation to apply for **PhD funding** with the ESRC SWDTP.

5. Relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Group(s)

The programme will build upon the QAA undergraduate subject benchmark for [Geography](#), be guided by the [QAA Masters Programme Statement](#) and will fulfil the [ESRC's postgraduate training guidelines](#).

6. Programme Structure

The MSc in Human Geography Research is designed to provide the Level 7 training stipulated by the ESRC to fund [doctoral studentships](#) (+3 and 1+3 models) in Human Geography. The training requirement is defined as *'including significant social sciences research design, quantitative and qualitative research methods elements'*

(SWDTP 2017, p.8)¹. It fulfils Plymouth University’s commitments to PGR training made in the University’s application to join the South West Doctoral Training Partnership (SWDTP).

The degree is part of a suite of Masters subjects offered by the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (SoGEES). The programme is structured into a semester system, as outlined in Figure 1, with each taught module worth 30 credits, equating to approximately 300 hours of student work. The MSc degree contains 120 taught credits and a 60-credit dissertation module, reflecting the structure of similar degrees offered by DTP partners in the University of Exeter University and the University of Bristol.

Full-Time Route

	Semester 1	GEES522 (30 credits)	GEES523 (30 credits)
		Research in Human Geography: Philosophies and Design	Quantitative Research in Human Geography
	Semester 2	GEES524 (30 credits)	GEES525 (30 credits)
		Qualitative research in Human Geography	Applied Research in Human Geography
GEES520 MSc dissertation (60 credits)			

¹ SWDTP (2017) *Studentship Timeline, Admissions Requirements and Selection Process* SWDTP, Bristol

Part-Time Route

		Semester 1	Semester 2	
	Year 1	GEES522 (30 credits)	GEES524 (30 credits)	
		Research in Human Geography: Philosophies and Design	Qualitative research in Human Geography	
	Year 2	GEES523 (30 credits)	GEES525 (30 credits)	
		Quantitative Research in Human Geography	Applied Research in Human Geography	
		GEES520 MSc dissertation (60 credits)		

The taught modules in Semesters 1 and 2 provide a comprehensive grounding in research training in social research/human geography. They will enable students to develop and apply quantitative and qualitative research skills that are responsive to the needs of the discipline of human geography, the broader base of social science and a wide range of users. These are all designated as core modules to ensure that students receive a grounding in all aspects of research designated by the ESRC yet there is scope within these modules for students to pursue particular research methods and interest in more depth through, for example, targeted pieces of coursework.

Students following a part-time route will complete the taught modules over two years. They can informally start planning their dissertation in Year 1 of their programme but will formally enrol on the module and undertake associated research during Year 2 in order to maximise preparation and to retain currency in research knowledge.

Students consider their dissertation topic during Semester 1 within GEES522. As part of their assessment on research design, students will be required to write a research proposal for their dissertation that will be used to guide the planning of this project and identify appropriate research techniques.

Students are allocated to a dissertation supervisor through this module and embark on their research project after semester two, after extensive discussion and agreement of the project supervisor.

7. Programme Aims

Within the disciplinary context of Human Geography, the MSc in Human Geography Research aims to:

1. train students to understand and apply a broad range of advanced quantitative and qualitative research methods, skills and techniques, including the use of appropriate software for their application;
2. impart the principles of research design and strategy, including a critical understanding of how to formulate research questions;
3. develop a systematic and critical appreciation of alternative epistemological positions that provide the context for theory construction, research design, and the selection of appropriate analytical techniques;
4. develop in students the abilities to plan, manage, complete and communicate research within a specified timeframe and in a way that is consistent with professional practice
5. provide a critical understanding of the scientific method and of the nature of reflexivity;
6. develop understanding of the nature and application of good ethical practice in research;
7. prepare graduates for future research careers, specifically for MPhil/PhD programmes, by meeting the ERSC's training requirements.

8. Programme Intended Learning Outcomes

8.1. Knowledge and understanding

On successful completion, graduates should be able to demonstrate a systematic and critical knowledge of:

1. the principles of research design and strategy, including a critical understanding of how to formulate advanced research questions;
2. key conceptual underpinning in human geography epistemology and ontology and their relation to research design;
3. the scientific method and the nature of reflexivity;
4. good ethical and reflexive practices.

8.2. Cognitive and intellectual skills

On successful completion, graduates should be able to:

1. Undertake critical investigation, by identifying, formulating and resolving novel, significant and complex problems and research questions using good scientific practices and contemporary methods in human geography;

2. evaluate critically and apply a broad range of quantitative and qualitative research methods, skills and techniques.

8.3. Key and transferable skills

On successful completion, graduates should be able to:

1. show independent capabilities for planning, management and completion of a research project within a specified timeframe;
2. communicate research effectively in written forms;
3. present research using verbal forms of communication;
4. work independently and organise his/her own learning autonomously to a high academic level;
5. work reflexively.

8.4 Employment related skills

On successful completion, students should be able to:

1. apply knowledge to a detailed research-based investigation;
2. demonstrate awareness of impact and dissemination in research;
3. write research proposals;
4. work collaboratively, including with partner organisations;
5. demonstrate fulfilment of ESRC training requirements for +3 doctoral study.

8.5 Practical skills

On successful completion, graduates should be able to demonstrate the practical skills of:

1. diverse approaches to data collection;
2. data analysis: utilising manual and computer-based analysis of quantitative and qualitative data with precision and effectiveness, adapting skills or procedures for new situations;
3. reporting original research: planning, design, execution and report writing using personal initiative, potentially towards peer-reviewed academic publications where appropriate.

9. Admissions Criteria, including APCL, APEL and DAS arrangements

The admissions policy for the programme complies with the University Policy of Admissions to Postgraduate Taught Programmes of Study.

The Programme Leader (who is also responsible for admissions) will use the criteria below as a guide in making admissions decisions. Wherever possible, established relationships or equivalencies to other national or international qualifications will be used in making decisions. Admissions are administered through the University Postgraduate Admissions Office.

Students admitted to the MSc programme are expected to have a very good Honours degree in geography or a relevant discipline. The Programme Leader will

be responsible for ensuring that applicants have, through prior learning (formal study and/or experience), developed the requisite knowledge, critical thinking, understanding and skills required for the successful participation in this programme. The suitability of candidates will be assessed through a combination of the written application, evidence of formal qualifications, personal references and candidate interviews (where appropriate).

Entry will be based on (a) the classification of their honours degree, (b) their research potential as evidenced by their references. MSc candidates will normally be expected to attend an interview. All will be expected to be capable of fulfilling the objectives of the programme and achieve the required standard.

In compliance with the University's policies of equality and diversity, and disability, all appropriately qualified applicants will be given equal consideration during the selection process. The University welcomes applications from people with disabilities and the support available is described [here](#).

Entry requirements (in summary):

- Normally an honours degree (Upper Second class or better) in a relevant discipline OR overseas equivalent.
- A minimum grade C in English Language or a minimum score of 6.5, with 5.5 in each of listening, reading, speaking and writing in IELTS.
- A minimum Grade C Mathematics at GCSE level or equivalent.

Overseas applicants must have proficiency in English that is in accordance with the current university regulations. Completion of an English language course prior to commencing the programme may be recommended to students for whom English is not their first language.

Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL): Students can exceptionally apply for exemption from any modules through APEL or APCL, following standard University procedures, described in the University's [academic regulations](#) on admissions.

Any non-standard academic entrant onto the programme is strongly encouraged to seek support from the University's [Learning Gateway](#) team before commencing their studies as well as during the programme. This support will be additional to any support provided by staff on the MSc programme. The onus is on the student to ensure that they are aware of the requirements of higher education study at Masters level and to seek appropriate help and support where extra guidance and tuition is considered necessary. Early feedback on coursework and discussions with module leaders and personal tutor will identify cases where such support would be advisable.

10. Progression criteria for Final and Intermediate Awards

Progression criteria for the final and intermediate awards, including the award of MSc with Merit or Distinction, follow the standard University regulations.

11. Exceptions to Regulations

None

12. Transitional Arrangements

None

13. Mapping and Appendices:

13.1 Appendix – Learning Outcomes map

LEVEL 7				
QAA FHEQ Descriptors a higher education qualification at level 7: Master's degree	Subject Benchmark(s): ESRC Postgraduate Training Guidelines	Programme Aims	Programme Outcomes	Core Modules linked to outcomes
Students will have demonstrated:				
A systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights at or informed by the forefront of their academic disciplines, field of study or area of professional practice;	understanding of the significance of alternative epistemological positions that provide the context for theory construction, research design, and the selection of appropriate analytical techniques;	3. develop a systematic and critical appreciation of alternative epistemological positions that provide the context for theory construction, research design, and the selection of appropriate analytical techniques.	8.1.1. the principles of research design and strategy, including a critical understanding of how to formulate research questions 8.1.2 key conceptual underpinnings in human geography epistemology and ontology and their relation to research design	GEES522
A comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship;	competence in understanding and applying a broad range of research methods, (including	1. apply a broad range of quantitative and qualitative research methods, including the use of appropriate	8.1.4 good ethical and reflexive practice 8.2.2. evaluate critically and apply a broad range of quantitative,	GEES523, GEES524, GEES525

LEVEL 7				
QAA FHEQ Descriptors a higher education qualification at level 7: Master's degree	Subject Benchmark(s): ESRC Postgraduate Training Guidelines	Programme Aims	Programme Outcomes	Core Modules linked to outcomes
	quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods), and the use of appropriate software for their application; understanding of the basics of probability, and a critical understanding of the scientific method and of the nature of reflexivity;	software for their application;	qualitative research methods, skills and techniques; 8.2.1. undertake critical investigation, by identifying, formulating and resolving novel, significant and complex problems and research questions using good scientific practices and contemporary methods in human geography 8.3.5 work reflexively 8.5.1 diverse approaches to data collection; 8.5.2 data analysis: utilising manual and computer-based analysis of quantitative	

LEVEL 7				
QAA FHEQ Descriptors a higher education qualification at level 7: Master's degree	Subject Benchmark(s): ESRC Postgraduate Training Guidelines	Programme Aims	Programme Outcomes	Core Modules linked to outcomes
			and qualitative data with precision and effectiveness, adapting skills or procedures for new situations;	
Originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create an interpret knowledge in the discipline;	comprehension of principles of research design and strategy, including an understanding of how to formulate research questions which are amenable to empirical investigation and an appreciation of alternative approaches to research;	2. impart the principles of research design and strategy, including a critical understanding of how to formulate research questions;	8.2.1 undertaking critical investigation, by identifying, formulating and resolving novel, significant and complex problems and research questions using good scientific practises and contemporary methods in human geography	GEES522, GEES520

	LEVEL 7			
QAA FHEQ Descriptors a higher education qualification at level 7: Master's degree	Subject Benchmark(s): ESRC Postgraduate Training Guidelines	Programme Aims	Programme Outcomes	Core Modules linked to outcomes
Conceptual understanding that enables the student (a) to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline (b) to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and where appropriate to propose new hypotheses.	understanding of the significance of alternative epistemological positions that provide the context for theory construction, research design, and the selection of appropriate analytical techniques; comprehension of principles of research design and strategy, including an understanding of how to formulate research questions which are amenable to empirical	3. develop a systematic and critical appreciation of alternative epistemological positions that provide the context for theory construction, research design, and the selection of appropriate analytical techniques impart the principles of research design and strategy, including a critical understanding of how to formulate research questions	8.1.2 demonstrate a systematic and critical knowledge of key conceptual underpinnings in human geography epistemology and ontology and their relation to research design 8.1.1. the principles of research design and strategy, including a critical understanding of how to formulate advanced research questions	GEES522, GEES520

	LEVEL 7			
QAA FHEQ Descriptors a higher education qualification at level 7: Master's degree	Subject Benchmark(s): ESRC Postgraduate Training Guidelines	Programme Aims	Programme Outcomes	Core Modules linked to outcomes
	investigation and an appreciation of alternative approaches to research;			
Students will be able to:				
Deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences;	capabilities for managing research, including data management, and conducting and disseminating research in a way that is consistent with both professional practice and the normal	4. develop in students the abilities to plan, manage, complete and communicate research within a specified timeframe and in a way that is consistent with professional practice	8.3.1 show independent capabilities for planning, management and completion of a research project within a specified timeframe 8.3.2 communicate research effectively in written forms; 8.3.3 present research using verbal forms of communication;	GEES520

LEVEL 7				
QAA FHEQ Descriptors a higher education qualification at level 7: Master's degree	Subject Benchmark(s): ESRC Postgraduate Training Guidelines	Programme Aims	Programme Outcomes	Core Modules linked to outcomes
	principles of research ethics;		8.3.4 work independently and organise his/her own learning autonomously to a high academic level;	
Demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level;	comprehension of principles of research design and strategy, including an understanding of how to formulate research questions which are amenable to empirical investigation and an appreciation of alternative approaches to research; understanding of the application of good	2. impart the principles of research design and strategy, including a critical understanding of how to formulate advanced research questions;	8.1.4 demonstrate a systematic and critical knowledge of good ethical and reflexive practices 8.4.1 apply knowledge to a detailed research-based investigation; 8.5.3.reporting original research: planning, design, execution and report writing using personal initiative, potentially towards peer-reviewed academic	GEES520, GEES525

	LEVEL 7			
QAA FHEQ Descriptors a higher education qualification at level 7: Master's degree	Subject Benchmark(s): ESRC Postgraduate Training Guidelines	Programme Aims	Programme Outcomes	Core Modules linked to outcomes
	ethical practice across the entire research process.		publications where appropriate.	
Continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.	the development of research skills and techniques relevant to their field of study;	7. prepare graduates for future research careers, specifically for MPhil/PhD programmes by meeting the ERSC's training requirements.	8.4.2 demonstrate awareness of impact and dissemination in research; 8.4.3 write research proposals; 8.4.4 work collaboratively, including with partner organisations; 8.4.5. demonstrate fulfilment of ESRC training requirements for +3 doctoral study.	All modules
Students will also have:				

	LEVEL 7			
QAA FHEQ Descriptors a higher education qualification at level 7: Master's degree	Subject Benchmark(s): ESRC Postgraduate Training Guidelines	Programme Aims	Programme Outcomes	Core Modules linked to outcomes
The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring (a) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility; (b) decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations; (c) the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.	Development of skills applicable in practical research contexts	7. prepare graduates for future research careers, specifically for MPhil/PhD programmes by meeting the ERSC's training requirements.	8.3.1 show independent capabilities for planning, managing and completion of a research project within a specified timeframe; 8.3.4 work independently and organise his/her own learning autonomously to a high academic level; 8.3.5 work reflexively.	GEES520

13.2 Assessments against Modules Map

Module code	Module title	Critical Literature Review C	Research Proposal C	Research Report C	Portfolio of Research C	Dissemination Exercise C	Reflexive Diary C	Presentation P
GEES 522	Research in Human Geography Philosophies and Design	F, S (75%)	S (25%)					F
GEES 523	Quantitative Research in Human Geography			S (40%),		S (40%), F		S (20%),
GEES 524	Qualitative Research in Human Geography				F (100%), S			
GEES 525	Applied Research in Human Geography			F (50%)			F, S (Pass/Fail)	S (50%)
GEES 520	Dissertation			S (100%), F				

S = Summative F = Formative

13.3 Skills Against Modules Map

COGNITIVE AND INTELLECTUAL SKILLS	
1. undertake critical investigation, by identifying, formulating and resolving novel, significant and complex problems and research questions, using good scientific practices and contemporary methods in human geography	GEES522, GEES523, GEES524
2. evaluate critically and apply a broad range of qualitative and quantitative research methods, skills and techniques	GEES525, GEES520

KEY AND TRANSFERABLE SKILLS	
1. show independent capabilities for planning, managing and completion of a research project within a specified timeframe;	GEES522 GEES520
2. communicate research effectively in written forms;	All modules
3. presentation of research using verbal forms of communication	GEES522, GEES523, GEES525
4. work independently and organise his/her own learning autonomously to a high academic level;	GEES520
5. work reflexively.	GEES524

EMPLOYMENT RELATED SKILLS	
1. apply knowledge to a detailed research-based investigation;	GEES520
2. demonstrate awareness of impact and dissemination in research;	GEES525
3. write research proposals;	GEES522
4. work collaboratively, including with partner organisations;	GEES525,
5. fulfil ESRC training requirements for +3 doctoral study.	All modules

PRACTICAL SKILLS	
1. Diverse approaches to data collection;	GEES523, GEES524
2. Data analysis: utilising manual and computer-based analysis of quantitative and qualitative data with precision and effectiveness, adapting skills or procedures for new situations;	GEES523, GEES524
3. Reporting original research: planning, design, execution and report writing using personal initiative, potentially towards peer-reviewed academic publications where appropriate.	GEES520