

## Nottingham Trent University Course Specification

### Basic Course Information

1.	Awarding Institution:	Nottingham Trent University.
2.	School/Campus:	School of Social Sciences/City
3.	Final Award, Course Title and Modes of Study:	MRes Psychological Research Methods FT, PT
4.	Normal Duration:	FT 1 year, PT 2 years
5.	UCAS Code:	Not applicable

### 6. Overview and general educational aims of the course

The MRes Psychological Research Methods is designed to prepare graduates in Psychology or related disciplines for PhD, for research related careers in academic or applied psychological disciplines, or for careers in which data handling and analytic skills are of relevance. Students also complete the course as a means of improving their research skills in preparation for further doctoral training as a professional psychologist (often as a clinical or educational psychologist). The MRes offers flexibility and option choice across its taught elements and opportunity to carry out an extended piece of psychological research focused in a chosen area of psychology.

The MRes Psychological Research Methods adopts a pragmatic approach to research, arguing that all research methods and approaches should be attuned to the subject-matter and the nature of the research hypothesis or question to be answered. Offering a balanced appreciation of all methodological approaches, their relative strengths and weaknesses, the first term of the course will leave you with a philosophical and theoretical introduction to the use of various quantitative, qualitative, and psychometric research methods and techniques in psychology. The second term of the MRes, module option choices and an extended independent project allow you to develop your methodological expertise in a 'tailored' fashion, in relation to a particular area of psychology, your own research interests, career aspirations or a combination of the above.

The Division of Psychology also offers an MSc Psychological Research Methods which runs alongside the MRes. These twin courses have been designed to offer you the maximum flexibility to tailor your research studies in relation to your own needs and career goals. The MSc award has a primarily taught focus, whilst the MRes allows a greater focus on independent research. The innovative course structure nonetheless means that a final decision about the most appropriate route for you can be delayed until the end of the first term of study, at which time our tutors will help you make the right decisions for yourselves and for your future careers.

The aim of the MRes Psychological Research Methods is to 'enable students to move from teacher dependence to learner autonomy' as you progress through the course. We aim to produce graduates who:

1. Are enthused about the discipline of psychology and its various

research methods and techniques.

2. Have extensive knowledge of psychological research methods and a critical awareness of the current philosophical, theoretical and methodological problems, debates, and insights that shape the discipline.
3. Have the necessary methodological knowledge and skills to progress to and benefit from further postgraduate or professional study in psychology, or to pursue academic and/or professional careers within the discipline.
4. Have the necessary methodological knowledge and skills to design studies and to apply a range of appropriate research methods and techniques in response to specific research problems in psychology, and to conduct such independent research in an ethically sensitive manner.
5. Adopt an independent and reflective approach to your learning and to your future careers.

7. **Course outcomes**

Course outcomes describe what you should know and be able to do by the end of your course if you take advantage of the opportunities for learning that we provide.

All the learning outcomes of the course (outlined below) are consistent with (and can be mapped against) the national qualifications framework for psychology.

**Knowledge and understanding**

By the end of the course you should be able to:

1. Demonstrate your comprehensive knowledge, understanding, and critical awareness of the complex specialised technical research issues debates and initiatives that lie at the forefront of research in psychology.
2. Demonstrate your comprehensive understanding of research methods and techniques applicable to your own research and career aspirations in psychology.
3. Understand and critically reflect upon the ethical and legal issues arising from the conduct and dissemination of psychological research.

**Skills, qualities and attributes**

By the end of the course you should be able to:

1. Undertake in-depth research into an area or areas of psychology appropriate to your specific academic and /or career aspirations.
2. Deal with complex methodological issues in a systematic and creative way and show self-direction and originality in solving psychological research problems.

3. Demonstrate competence in research design and in the application of research methods and techniques applicable to your own research and career aspirations in psychology.
4. command wide ranging and conceptual skills to allow the development of individual research
5. Communicate the results of research to peers in an appropriate manner.
6. Demonstrate expertise in highly specialised and advanced research, technical communication and professional skills.

#### 8. **Teaching and Learning Methods**

A variety of teaching and learning approaches are used to support you in your development of subject-specific knowledge and understanding, and transferable skills. We place an emphasis on providing you with rigorous training in both the theory and practice relevant to different research methodologies. Most of the modules on the MRes Psychological Research Methods strike a balance between teaching and practical work as we recognise the importance of giving you 'hands on' experience of different research techniques and specialist research equipment and software. The final independent research project builds on these classes and provides an opportunity for you to plan, conduct and report a large empirical study under the individual supervision of a research active member of staff with relevant expertise.

A mixture of lectures, seminars and workshops are used throughout the course to develop your knowledge and understanding, whilst small group tutorials are provided in order to support your development of both subject knowledge and a range of transferable skills.

We also make extensive use of Nottingham Trent University Online Workspace (NOW), which gives you access to course materials and provides a medium for discussion groups, access to additional resources and information and provision of feedback on learning throughout the course.

#### 9. **Assessment Methods**

The Psychology Division pursues a policy of establishing a varied, fair and rigorous assessment regime based upon clearly specified criteria. The MRes Psychological Research Methods will make use of a variety of assessment practices across its modules. Assessment of work will clearly determine whether you have satisfied the learning objectives and outcomes of individual modules and the course as a whole. Nonetheless, assessment within the Psychology Division is also designed to encourage independent and active learning and to serve a number of 'formative' purposes:

1. To inform you of your strengths and weaknesses, thus playing a part

in facilitating personal development.

2. To increase motivation by allowing you to demonstrate your knowledge, understanding and skills and to benefit from the receipt of positive and constructive feedback.
3. To provide you with the opportunity to review and consolidate aspects of their learning.

The main assessment methods to be used on the MRes Psychological Research Methods are as follows:

**Practical Reports:** The skills of reporting research can only be learnt through practice. The course team emphasises this as a vital preparation for the independent research project and for any research related career inside or outside psychology.

**Assessed essays:** These enable you to demonstrate your ability to focus on a particular problem and to explore its parameters in a balanced fashion. In addition, the independent 'specialist essay' will also allow you to demonstrate your ability to generate clear, relevant and timely questions based on their understanding of current theory and practice.

**Research project:** An aim of the course is to provide you with the requisite professional and personal skills to undertake further postgraduate training or to pursue research related careers in psychology. The research project requires you to work independently, to synthesise material, to design, plan and carry out a piece of empirical research, to meet ethical standards, to analyse research data, and to produce a written report according to appropriate professional standards. It is thus a key assessment device both in terms of the formative feedback given during supervision and in terms of the summative assessment of the project report.

**Presentations:** These assess your ability to deliver arguments and information orally. They test ability to engage an audience (where appropriate using aids such as OHPs, handouts, presentational software, tapes, video clips, posters etc.), and to handle an appropriate range of primary and secondary source material, while presenting.

## 10. **Course structure and curriculum**

The MRes Psychological Research Methods consists of 180 credits. In Term One, all full-time MRes students complete five core modules which provide a thorough introduction to the knowledge and skills that form the basis of advanced training in psychological research methods. These modules build on knowledge and skills you will have acquired during an undergraduate psychology degree course or equivalent.

Term 1

- Advanced Experimentation and Statistics 1 (10 Credits)
- Psychometrics 1: Developing Psychometric Scales in Research and Practice (10 Credits)
- Qualitative Research Design and Analysis 1 (10 Credits)
- Research and Professional Skills (20 Credits continuing in Term 2)
- Option 1 (10 Credits)

The first three modules in this list are designed to provide you with a philosophical and theoretical introduction and rationale for the use of quantitative, qualitative, and psychometric research methods and techniques in psychology. These modules will also develop your knowledge of research design, data handling, management, and analysis in each area. Research and Professional Skills will teach a range of key research management and dissemination skills (including project management issues; grant proposal and capture; ethics; literature searching; writing for publication; and poster and presentation skills). These four core modules will be supplemented by a further Option Choice module chosen from a short list of purpose designed method options.

In Term Two, you will continue with Research and Professional Skills and select two other taught modules, many of which build directly on material presented in term 1, allowing you to engage with methods and techniques at the forefront of quantitative, qualitative and psychometric research in psychology. A short list of additional method options will also be provided to increase the range of choice available to students in Term Two (indicated by Option Choice 2 below).

#### Term 2

- Research and Professional Skills (20 Credits continued from Term 1)

*Students then select 2 modules from:*

- Advanced Experimentation and Statistics 2 (10 Credits)
- Psychometrics 2: Using Psychometric Scales in Research and Practice (10 Credits)
- Qualitative Research Design and Analysis 2 (10 Credits)
- Option 2 (10 Credits)

In order to complete the course, MRes students must complete an Independent Research Project (worth 100 credits). This will allow you opportunity to carry out an extended piece of empirical research of your own

design, under the supervision of an individual staff member with specialist knowledge in the chosen area of study.

Taught modules are completed across two 10-week terms, with classes scheduled from Wednesday-Friday. Term 3 onwards is for independent supervised study on the empirical research project. This focussed period of attendance is in recognition that many students on the MRes Psychological Research Methods either live away from Nottingham, or complete the course in the context of existing familial or work-based commitments.

Part-time students on the course will divide the 180 credits over two years and offers a degree of flexibility in order to offer an opportunity to people who wish to combine study and employment. The course team discuss this with students at induction and help organise their time appropriately across the two years.

A Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) and Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) in Psychological Research Methods are also available as interim awards for those students who do not progress through all stages of the course. Students achieving 60 credits will be awarded a PGCert, whilst 120 credits are required for award of a PGDip.

#### **11. Admission to the course**

For current information regarding all entry requirements for this course, please see the 'Applying' tab on the course information web page.

#### **12. Support for Learning**

The teaching staff pride themselves on being an approachable and friendly team and the range of academic, pastoral and careers support offered to you is a key feature of the MRes Psychological Research Methods. All the core modules on the course are taught by methods experts who have published widely in the theory and application of such methods and are therefore amassed sufficient expertise to inform their teaching and enable you to obtain insights into the challenges of doing psychological research at an advanced level. We strongly encourage your participation and interaction in all modules and provide a dedicated tutorial system to further support learning and encourage the development of transferrable skills. Tutorials are hour-long timetabled sessions where group size is typically 6-8 students. Tutorials are a mixture of planned and student-led sessions. Building on these foundations, the MRes Psychological Research Methods aims to foster a dynamic and supportive learning environment in which you become enthused about the academic study of psychological research methods.

International students are given tailored support through additional weekly sessions with the Psychology Division's English Language Support Officer. This is a member of staff who is familiar with the demands of the course. These additional sessions are open to international students from across all of our

postgraduate courses and are designed not only to facilitate language and study skills, but to provide a supportive environment for students who may be studying in the UK for the first time. Even those who do have good English language skills often require support for getting used to employing discipline-specific language to enable them to cope with the demands of a psychology course. In addition, the study skills support is provided for those students that come from an educational environment that is very different to the UK Higher Education system.

A key feature of the MRes Psychological Research Methods is with respect to the subject-specific careers support that is available to all students. The Psychology Division has a dedicated Postgraduate Careers Coordinator who sets up a range of career related events throughout the year. Invited talks are presented by psychologists from specialist areas such as clinical and educational psychology, in order to give postgraduate psychology students professional advice and guidance on career progression and applying for further training in specific fields of psychology. Most notably, the Postgraduate Careers Coordinator also provides career advice for students, helping you to make the most of your previous and current qualifications and experience. Advice is given about CV preparation, content and presentation, as well as the writing of personal statements and PhD/job applications in general. You will often receive this advice relative to specific PhD/job applications and through discussion of the advertised post, the job and person specifications and the essential criteria required for appointment.

### **13. Graduate destinations / employability**

The MRes Psychological Research Methods will enable you to develop a wide range of analytical abilities, a proficiency in research methods, data handling, data management, analysis and interpretation, as well as good written and verbal communication skills. The course aims to prepare graduates of psychology or closely related disciplines for PhD (or further postgraduate study), for research related careers in academic or applied psychological disciplines, or indeed for any career in which research, data handling and analytic skills are of relevance.

Although the MRes Psychological Research Methods is a dedicated research methods course, it nonetheless also teaches a range of transferable skills that are likely to appeal to a wide range of employers (including oral and written communication and presentation skills, effective planning and organisation, teamwork and independence, use of IT and numeracy). Tutorials and sessions with the Postgraduate Careers Coordinator are used to help students recognise where and how they have acquired skills such as these in order that they can best present themselves to future employers. Employability skills are embedded throughout the modules taught on the MRes Psychological Research Methods but are addressed explicitly in the Research and Professional Skills module. This module runs through terms 1 and 2 and provides you with a range of key research and dissemination skills necessary for the pursuit of an academic or professional career in psychology. The

module also teaches you how to best present yourselves and your work to prospective employers and funding bodies. In term 2 of this module, you will work on developing a personal development plan and professional CV, reflecting on the skills you have acquired throughout the course.

The majority of students graduating from the MRes Psychological Research Methods are successful at gaining employment or progress to further study. Some students go on to pursue a range of professional careers in psychology through further specialist training, whilst many progress from the course to PhD study and an academic career. Some will go on to develop careers in the highly competitive, high status psychology professions such as Clinical Psychology, for which knowledge and expertise in research methods is vital. A number of our graduates are now either career researchers or academics working in the subject area of psychology in higher education.

All students receive support from the university's Careers Development Centre as well as Psychology's Postgraduate Careers Officer. The School of Social Sciences are active in organising careers events designed to support career planning and throughout the year the Psychology Division invite visiting speakers from different professions within psychology.

#### **14. Course standards and quality**

The quality management of the MRes Psychological Research Methods has developed in line with University regulations and guidelines. The Course Committee, which meets once a term, oversees all quality management issues. The first of these committee meetings is known as the Annual Review and it is here that the Course Standards and Quality Report (CSQR) is presented. This is a report prepared by the members of the course management team which reflects on issues of standards and quality raised in the previous year.

The Psychology Division also has a Teaching Committee which addresses a range of learning and teaching issues.

External Examiners play a crucial role in the quality management and enhancement of psychology provision. Their comments are invited at meetings of the Board of Examiners and their recommendations addressed through the Teaching Committee and Course Committee.

One important aspect of quality control and enhancement operates at a local level through Module Leaders, who are encouraged to position themselves as 'reflective practitioners', critically evaluating the quality of their modules. They are required to write an annual report on their module, reflecting, on the basis of evidence, on its strengths and potential areas for development. Student feedback is part of the evidence that is used. Module Leaders' Reports have been praised by External Examiners as 'a model of good practice' and as 'refreshingly self-critical'.

Ongoing student feedback is also systematically sought via student



representatives who formally report to the Course Committees and who liaise more informally with Course and Deputy Course Leaders.

In addition a Postgraduate Student-Staff Consultative Committee (SSCC) has been created to further enhance communication between students and the teaching team. The aim of the SSCC is to enable student representatives from all postgraduate courses in psychology to meet and to discuss issues that their peers have raised. The expectation is that regular dialogue and discussion will help to inform practice in all aspects of subject provision.

15. **Assessment regulations**

This course is subject to the University's Common Assessment Regulations (located in its [Academic Standards and Quality Handbook](#)). Any course specific assessment features are described below:

There are no course specific exceptions from the University regulations

16. **Additional Information**

Collaborative partner(s):	None
Course referenced to national QAA Benchmark Statements:	Psychology
Course recognised by:	N/A
Date implemented:	April 2013
Any additional information:	