

## Nottingham Trent University Course Specification

### Basic Course Information

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| 1. | Awarding Institution:                         | Nottingham Trent University            |
| 2. | School/Campus:                                | School of Social Science / City Campus |
| 3. | Final Award, Course Title and Modes of Study: | MA Sociology FT and PT                 |
| 4. | Normal Duration:                              | FT 1 year and PT 2 years               |
| 5. | UCAS Code:                                    |  |

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

#### Welcome to a Sociology course that really makes a difference...

The MA Sociology at NTU offers you an exciting opportunity to develop a specialist and distinctive focus within sociology - on Public Sociology. Public Sociology awakens and empowers your sociological imagination by connecting what you study with the social issues and challenges faced by contemporary civil society. It not only gives you the opportunity to develop advanced and specialist knowledge of sociological theory and research: it supports and challenges you to use this knowledge in ways that directly benefits others. The course is designed and delivered by academic professionals with expertise in carrying out research for and with many different clients, groups and communities.

Public Sociology 'engages with diverse publics, reaches beyond the university, to enter into an ongoing dialogue with these publics' (Zussman & Misra 2007). It 'strikes up a [dialogue] between sociologist and public in which the agenda of each is brought to the table, in which each adjusts to the other' (Burawoy 2005: 9).

From day one of the course, you will link theory, research and practice, developing in-depth knowledge and insights as well as gaining the practical experience needed to build your skills as a Public Sociologist. You will take what you learn in the classroom to the various 'publics' of Nottingham and beyond, gaining valuable experience through modules that emphasise working with communities, engaging with local and national policy makers and contributing to debates that ignite public interest.

The course embodies not only the pursuit of understanding, critique and argument essential to advanced sociology, but also a call to action. Through a course design that emphasises the continuous interplay between theory and practice, you will develop both your in-depth knowledge and your practical skills in being a Public Sociologist. Working together, we aim to:

- Build richness, depth and criticality in our understanding of the world we live in, the communities we are part of, and the institutions that impact upon all our lives.
- Use theory and research to underpin questions about what could be changed and how that change might come about.
- Make an active contribution to change by demonstrating public sociology.

#### General educational aims

The course offers you an exciting opportunity to study sociology at an advanced and specialised level with a distinctive focus on the tradition and contemporary forms of public sociology. In studying the course you will have the opportunity to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which sociological theories and methods can be used to influence social policy, communities and lives. The course will engage you in the critical evaluation of sociology as a profession and as a way of understanding and influencing the world it studies. You will be encouraged to apply sociology to a variety of spheres of social life. You will also apply this to your own sociological research practice through placement experiences, innovative public engagement work and your own research project.

You will study in a lively and questioning environment, on a course that makes available to you the wide experience of academic professionals who have carried out research for and with, local, national and international communities, policy makers, and public, voluntary & community sector organisations. The course will offer you unrivalled opportunities to network with key public decision makers, develop your public engagement skills, and work at a grassroots level in partnership with different communities.

The overarching aims of the course are to enable you to:

- Systematically construct sociological knowledge, generate own questions and guide others in generating their own, and weight the legitimacy of knowledge claims and underlying assumptions of policy and practice decision making;
- Acquire an informed and critical understanding of what public sociology is;
- Demonstrate a critical awareness of the history of ideas, the cultural context, and the sociological theories that inform and influence the practice of public sociology;
- Leave the course with a critical awareness of the current philosophical, theoretical and methodological problems, debates, and insights that are at the forefront of, and shape, the discipline;
- Become an independent scholar who can apply specialised and advanced conceptual and methodological tools to evaluate sociological knowledge, and communicate those understandings to a variety of publics;
- Enhance life-long learning skills and personal development by enabling the adoption of an independent and reflective approach to learning;
- Enhance career development and employability by providing practical experience of public sociology, emphasising qualities such as independence & accountability, leadership, problem solving, creativity, and sophisticated communication skills.

### **Fellowship of the RSA**

As a result of an exciting partnership with the national policy organisation, the RSA, students will also have the opportunity to be enrolled as Fellows. The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) is an enlightenment organisation committed to finding innovative practical solutions to today's social challenges. Fellowship will open up a number of opportunities for students to engage with this important national organisation.

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| <p>The aims and learning outcomes of the MA Sociology comply with the Quality Assurance Agency's 'Master's degree characteristics' (published in September 2015) as well its 'Sociology subject benchmark statement' (published in July 2017).</p>  |
| <p><b>7. Course outcomes</b><br/>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.</p>   |
| <p><b>Knowledge and understanding</b><br/>By the end of the course you should be able to:</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critically evaluate historical and contemporary understandings of the public role of sociology, and specifically how these perspectives influence current approaches to studying and doing public sociology;</li> <li>• Critically articulate and practice established research techniques and methodologies used within sociology;</li> <li>• Demonstrate a reflexive knowledge and understanding of the major ethical issues involved in social research;</li> <li>• Demonstrate in-depth and systematic understanding of current debates and understandings of public sociology;</li> <li>• Effectively plan and manage a project or a programme of work.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Skills, qualities and attributes</b><br/>By the end of the course you should be able to:</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate a critical appreciation of the complex intellectual and practical challenges faced by sociologists working with the public, professionals, policy makers and politicians;</li> <li>• Communicate ideas effectively and with clarity in writing and/or speech, to a variety of publics;</li> <li>• Show significant initiative, independence, and personal responsibility in decision-making and problem solving;</li> <li>• Critically reflect on the ethical implications of your work;</li> <li>• Plan and defend appropriate advanced research methods and methodologies for public sociology research;</li> <li>• Demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge produced in sociological research;</li> <li>• Analyse complex issues critically and creatively whilst exercising a sound judgement of available data.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>8. Teaching and learning methods</b></p>  |
| <p>The teaching and learning methods on this course reflect the aims and ethos of Public Sociology. Taught elements of the course will be provided in a variety of forms including lectures, tutorials, seminars and workshops. There is a major emphasis on nurturing interactive and participatory learning environments. Interactive lectures provide you with a strong subject-based knowledge of the core themes and issues. They will provide you with key information and concepts to pursue your intellectual development, and sociological scholarship in a way that is related to wider society. Interactive workshops enable you to critically discuss and evaluate current theory and practice in public sociology and to synthesise those ideas and concepts. There will often be a focus on collaborative work and on providing formative tutor and peer feedback as a way of developing your knowledge and understanding. Workshops may involve a mixture of tutor-led and student-led sessions. Student-led seminars offer you a regular opportunity test and develop your ideas and receive tutor and fellow student feedback.</p> <p>Blended learning is also a feature of the course with access to an innovative media suite enabling you to learn through social media, social networks,</p> |

blogs and online discussion forums. The Service Learning module provides you with the opportunity to engage in a real-world fieldwork experience, working in partnership with a local community or organisation responding to community needs. You will also develop skills in participatory action research methods and you will be encouraged to use these in your dissertation project.

In each module, students will be directed to appropriate specialist texts, primary and secondary literature, and internet resources. You will also be supported in undertaking independent studies, with or without direction from tutors. This may involve, for example, revision of course materials, and independent self-directed reading and research.

The teaching and learning strategy of the course is designed to engage you in a range of challenging but structured activities. Formative feedback and discussions help maximise your motivation by giving you the opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge, understanding and skills. They also enable you to benefit from a variety of sources of constructive input; in sum our teaching and learning methods provide you with many opportunities to gather materials for - and to structure, review and consolidate your learning.

Teaching on the course also benefits from the active research activities of the Department of Sociology. The currency of taught material is ensured by a vibrant synergy between research, professional activities and teaching. All members of the team publish research, engage with a range of research and professional activities, present papers at national and international conferences and/or engage in a professional capacity with local, national and international policy and practitioner forums, and community/voluntary groups. Consequently the course enables you to acquire extensive knowledge not only of the scholarly discipline, but also of practical public sociology. This includes relevant professional skills: proficiency in the use of relevant software; a capacity for independent thought; enhanced information, data, and time and people management skills.

Modules run on a 'year-long' basis. Each module, with the exception of the dissertation, will usually meet for 2 hours per week. Full-time students can therefore expect 8 hours of scheduled face-to-face contact per week, in a variety of formats and fora. Academic staff will also be available during regular office hours and for individual appointments where possible. We endeavour to timetable all modules (full and part-time routes) over two consecutive days.

#### 9. **Assessment methods**

The Department of Sociology pursue a policy of establishing a fair and rigorous assessment regime based upon clearly specified criteria, in line with the NTU Common Assessment Regulations. Consonant with the advanced intellectual nature of post-graduate sociological study, the assessment strategy is based upon a mixed range of assessments, which will clearly determine whether you have satisfied the learning outcomes and intended aims of individual modules, and of the course as a whole. Nonetheless, assessment on the MA Sociology is also designed to serve a number of formative purposes, and to encourage independent and active learning:

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 provide you with the opportunity to benefit from positive and constructive developmental feedback.

3. To provide you with the opportunity to review and consolidate aspects of your learning which involves the development of your critical appraisal of relevant theory and evidence, and the synthesis of complex ideas.

The course offers a clear and well informed 'diet' of assessment to ensure you are assessed across a range of different formats of performance and achievement. The course is assessed through the University's Grade Based Marking Scheme. Summative feedback will be provided for all final pieces of assessment.

In sum, the Course assessment strategy is designed to promote coherence, integration and progression in your learning.

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

The MA Sociology has been designed to provide a challenging contemporary curriculum, which reflects the specific features of public sociology as an area of specialised advanced study. The course is particularly focused on key practical and theoretical issues. It also provides you with a view of the development of thought in the subject. It further enables the development of the practical application and advanced understanding of a range of methods and methodologies available to support research.

The MA Sociology consists of 180 credit points, consisting of four taught modules (30 credit points each) and a dissertation (60 credit points). All modules are compulsory.

Each module is specifically designed to reflect current developments and thinking in public sociology, and in the development, implementation, and evaluation of methods of engaging publics in sociological thinking and analysis. The course is structured around four taught modules:

- Theorising Public Sociology
- Research Methods for Public Sociology
- Service Learning
- Contemporary Approaches to Public Sociology

The first two of these four modules are designed to provide you with a firm grounding in a theoretically informed analysis of a publicly engaged sociology, and a solid preparation for carrying out established forms of academic and participatory forms of sociological research. Together they provide firm foundations for the critical discussion and exploration of an engaged sociology, within the enduring concerns of professional sociology and the problems and challenges of the social world it seeks to study.

The other two taught modules, *Service Learning* and *Contemporary Approaches to Public Sociology*, provide a carefully structured exploration of the huge variety of ways in which public sociology can be, and are, practiced. The *Service Learning* module seeks to integrate the worlds of sociological scholarship and its application to the lived experience of community groups and citizens, to strengthen and transform them both. Through dedicated service learning placements you will apply your sociological imagination in work with practitioners, academics and community members to propose and test solutions to some of the challenges those groups face. The *Contemporary*

*Approaches to Public Sociology* module consists of a carefully selected and structured schedule of sessions in which practicing sociologists from the course team introduce you to their research and various aspects of public engagement associated with it.

The dissertation is intended to be a crystallisation of all your learning and development of the theoretical, methodological and substantive knowledge, understanding and skills covered in the course. It gives you a structured, supported opportunity to display your knowledge, creativity and imagination in the design and execution of a research project. As such, you will be able to display specialist skills of design and project management, critical, analytic and synthesising skills that would be transferable to further postgraduate studies or to working in other professional settings. Academic staff across the Department of Sociology will be available to supervise dissertations in their area of specialism, and where appropriate and possible we could allow a dissertation to be supervised by another colleague from the wider School of Social Sciences.

If you are part-time student the MA is studied over a 2 year period. In your first academic year you will be required to take 60 credits, which will include *Theorising Public Sociology* and *Research Methods for Public Sociology*. The remaining 120 credits will be taken in the second year, consisting of the final two core modules *Contemporary Approaches to Public Sociology* and *Service Learning*, and the dissertation. The latter will be completed between December and September.

**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 course begins with an induction programme which will explain its aims, delivery and expectations. You will be provided with a course handbook which explains how the course works and outlines the academic and pastoral support provided by the course team and the University.

During the course, communication between staff and students is done both on a face-to-face basis, via email, and the NTU Nottingham Online Workspace (NOW). All of the course academic staff will provide regular 'office hours' when they are available to see you. Throughout your time at NTU you will be also be assigned a personal tutor who will provide scheduled and by appointment pastoral and academic support. This role will be further supplemented by your dissertation supervisor.

As an MA Sociology student you will have access to the University's libraries and computer facilities, and the further computer, technical and administrative resources provided by the School of Social Sciences. The NOW is used by all members of the course team to support and enhance module delivery, and is the principal means of disseminating course information.

The Boots Library - located in the heart of the city campus - will be the main resource for your studies. Many course materials can be accessed online, and there is a growing range of e-books and electronic journals available through the library. The course team's close working relationship with library personnel ensures that appropriate and up-to-date material is available to support your studies.

Support within the Department of Sociology is supplemented by effective School-based academic and pastoral support, which is widely publicised and used well by existing students. If you are an international student you will also have the option of in-session English support to help you with developing and sustaining your writing skills. The MA Sociology will have regular Course Committees where a representative of your course can communicate your experiences with the course management team. This provides an on-going feedback mechanism connecting the students and the course management team.

**13. Graduate destinations/employability**

Graduate employability is fundamental to the strategic aim of NTU. As a sociology graduate from this course you will have had the opportunity to reflect on the subject and the transferable skills that you develop while preparing coursework. These include expertise in writing complex yet concise analytical pieces, developing and implementing a research project, and the ability to present in-depth ideas. You will also have been helped and encouraged to articulate those skills in relation to the pursuit of your career development plans.

Course learning outcomes and assessment strategies are designed in part to help you to develop transferable skills and attributes as outlined above. While the primary aims of a university course have traditionally been intellectual in nature and specific to the subject(s) under study, NTU realises the importance of the role of higher education in preparing graduates to move into the labour market. It is envisaged that you might be entering the course because at a later date you will seek employment within community development, charity and voluntary sectors, social entrepreneurship or public service fields. To this end, the course further develops and enhances the qualities and skills desired by prospective employers operating in the 'third sector', as well as the academy. Above all, these include independent critical thought, analysis and evaluation, partnership working & organisational skills, and self-directed learning. Furthermore, this course offers the opportunity to develop the following skills: digital literacy, communication, time-management, team-working, and IT/modern technologies.

In addition to the expertise available within the School of Social Sciences, the University has a comprehensive Employability service open to all students to assist in securing employment.

**14. Course standards and quality**

- Course standards are monitored in a variety of ways:
- A course committee of staff and students monitors your feedback on module delivery and the learning experience.
  - An external examiner supports the course team and ensures quality in the delivery and assessment of the course.
  - You are given detailed feedback on each piece of assessed work, and on non-assessed diagnostic work
  - You will have a personal tutor with whom you can discuss your progress and gain additional feedback or advice on learning.
  - The course is located within the School of Social Sciences and is managed within the guidelines and standards set and assured by the School.

**15. Assessment regulations**

This course is subject to the University's Common Assessment Regulations (located in Section 16 of the Quality Handbook). Any course specific assessment features are described below:

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| There are no course specific exceptions from the University's postgraduate course common assessment regulations. |   |
| 16. <b>Additional Information</b>  | None  |
| Collaborative partner(s):  | Yes. QAA Benchmark Statement Sociology, July 2016 |
| Course referenced to Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Benchmark Statements:                   | N/A   |
| Course recognised by:  | September 2017                                    |
| Date this course specification approved:   | N/A   |
| Any additional information:  |   |