

# Social Policy and Intervention

Training pathways	Structure(s) of provision	Method of study	Links to other training pathways
Comparative Social Policy, Evidence Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation	1+3 (MSc + DPhil) 2+2 (MPhil + DPhil)	Full time	
Social Policy, Social Intervention	+3 (DPhil)		<a href="#">Area Studies</a> (+3 Social Policy)

## Introduction

[The Department of Social Policy and Intervention](#) (DSPI) is a multidisciplinary centre of excellence for research and teaching in social policy, the development and systematic evaluation of social interventions, and population studies. We offer taught courses in Comparative Social Policy (CSP) and Evidence-Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation (EBSIPE).

DSPI is home to staff from a range of academic disciplines, including social policy, sociology, politics, geography, social work, psychology and demography. In the 2008 RAE 70% of its research activity was rated as world leading or internationally excellent; over the last eight years DSPI acquired an average of 20 new research grants each year. Research is international, interdisciplinary and collaborative. Research activity is organised into three research clusters: the Centre for Evidence-Based Intervention (CEBI), the Oxford Institute of Social Policy (OISP), and the Oxford Centre of Population Research (OXPOP). DSPI also hosts the Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy (CASASP) and co-hosts (with the Department of Public Health) the Centre for AIDS Interdisciplinary Research at Oxford (CAIRO). DSPI also has extensive links with research users, and members of staff regularly provide advice to UK and overseas governments, other public bodies and voluntary organisations.

This academic environment (intrinsically multidisciplinary, international, and outcome-focused) provides a rich and relevant research environment for graduate students. DSPI hosts one year (MSc) and two-year (MPhil) degrees in both CSP and in EBSIPE (ESRC recognised for the 1+3), and research degrees (DPhil) in Social Policy and in Social Intervention. The MPhil caters to students who wish to undertake additional substantive training, and have the opportunity to produce a more extended thesis. The MSc and MPhil degrees provide research methods training (instruction and practical classes), and students produce a research-based dissertation under detailed supervision. DSPI is the academic base for some 55 MSc/MPhil students and 75 DPhils. Doctoral admission is to 1+3, or direct to the DPhil +3, (if candidates have completed an ESRC-recognised Masters or equivalent), or 2+2 (i.e. 2 years MPhil and 2 years doctoral studies).

For information on the training available for students in Social Policy and Intervention please click [here](#). An overview of the Research Environment can be found [here](#).

# Training - Social Policy and Intervention

## Skills Review & Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and progress

As is standard practice, students' individual training needs are assessed at entry, Transfer, and Confirmation of Status; the online GSS reporting scheme additionally requires students termly to identify training needs.

## Core subject specific training and research methods

All students following 1+3/2+2 routes take compulsory/core courses and options within the MSc/MPhil component. For CSP this includes a compulsory paper on Social Policy/Welfare States (approaches to the study of social policy; theories of the welfare state; goals and means, and effectiveness and efficiency in social policy) and one or two option papers. Recent options offered include educational policy; policy challenges of ageing societies; population challenges; labour market policy and poverty in comparative context, education policy, family care and social policy. Students on EBSIPE have a choice of two pathways: a core course on evidence-based interventions (major theories underlying EBSI; EBSI in comparative perspective; theoretical, ethical, methodological and practice issues using exemplary intervention research studies); or a core course on policy evaluation. This course develops understanding of the rationale for, and approaches to, evidenced-based policy evaluation using examples from a wide range of policy areas.

They also choose from a range of options including children and families, multicultural mental health, HIV/AIDS, community work, refugees and asylum seekers.

In addition to these research-oriented substantive courses, the MSc/MPhil courses provide a comprehensive and broad-based training in research methods. For CSP, the explicit methods training consists of five components: (i) Quantitative Methods – 8x2-hour lectures, and 8x2-hour practical classes; (ii) Qualitative Methods – 8x2-hour lectures; (iii) Principles of Research Design – 3x2-hour lectures; (iv) Practicalities of Research Design – 4x2-hour classes; (v) Designing a Research Project – 4x2-hour lectures. For EBSIPE, the methods training consists of the following components: (i) Research Design – 8x2-hour lectures; (ii) Statistics – 8x2-hour lectures/classes; (iii) Qualitative Methods – 4x2-hour lectures; (iv) Systematic Reviewing Methods – 8x2-hour workshops; Social Policy Analysis – 8x1-hour lectures; Advanced Policy Evaluation – 8x1 lectures and 8x1 workshops.

For both streams a significant component of assessment uses assignments and 'workbooks', to ensure that student learning translates into practical, deployable research skills. In addition graduate students are expected to attend weekly departmental seminars.

## Inter-/multi-disciplinary, advanced and specialist training

Both EBSIPE and CSP are intrinsically multi-disciplinary in their intellectual structure (to study either is to engage in multi-disciplinary activity), and DSPI staff have a wide range of qualifications and expertise. Doctoral students are, by participating in this culture, ineluctably engaged in inter-disciplinary research. All DPhils are strongly encouraged to participate in advanced/specialist training as their research interests develop. Most common training includes: use of Nvivo; advanced quantitative methods courses (e.g. structural equation modelling, time-series analysis); and the Language Centre's training on advanced academic use of English. All DPhils and second year MPhils are required to attend a Research Group, meeting weekly or fortnightly. These focus on substantive academic issues and questions, and also provide training in transferable skills (see below). They strengthen the intellectual climate in the Department for research students.

## Preparation for international research

The pathways are intrinsically international in their concerns. EBSIPE, for example, participates in an active research program on AIDS in South Africa. CSP strength lies in the *comparative* approach. Many DPhils undertake overseas fieldwork, and the research environment within the Department is alert to international issues. All research training is international in focus; research interests of many of our doctoral students are likely to lie outside the UK.

The Department was an early adopter of a Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) structure. Our DREC is well-placed to provide students with detailed guidance on research ethics in non-UK environments. Students are also required to consider risk assessment in relation to fieldwork, and work through with academics and administrators potential issues they may face.

To enhance awareness of, and access to, the American academic environment, we have established a graduate exchange collaboration with the University of California, Berkeley. This provides opportunities for students to gain an international perspective on social policy and social intervention by studying in two of the foremost academic institutions in their field; it also facilitates joint ventures on international projects and comparative research.

### **General research skills**

All MSc and DPhil students attend sessions which cover computing, bibliographic skills (the Social Science Library provides workshops for the Department), and academic integrity. They also participate in sessions focusing on ethical issues and research impact. Other skills training, from archival research to fieldwork training, is optional, managed through Skills Review and Training Needs analysis. The regular Research Group meetings ensure that all research students have the opportunity to:

- present their own doctoral research in a formal setting;
- present and review draft conference papers, articles and research proposals;
- review/ critique other research;
- develop drafting, presentation, editing, and teamwork skills;
- explore a range of relevant research designs and methods;
- widen their understanding of relevant concepts and contexts, policy and research;
- learn how best to select, lead and present discussion; and
- meet research student colleagues at different stages of their DPhil ` by joining one of the Research Groups, such as Politics of Social Policy; Poverty and Social Exclusion; Education Policy and Governance; Quantitative Methods in Social Policy and Evidence Based Social Intervention.

### **Transferable skills**

As above. Additionally, research students (subject to eligibility and training) can develop teaching skills through undergraduate teaching for the Social Policy paper for the Philosophy, Politics and Economics degree, or graduate teaching for the Department's Masters courses.

### **Integration of training**

Research Group meetings provide an integrative role. All research students belong to a Research Group, and the groups organise their own pattern of work. As well as exploring substantive academic issues, the groups explore generic issues (from facilities to job interview presentations) relevant to integration and development as part of their training. Further, each year, with departmental support, students organise a research conference, with some external speakers/delegates, and the opportunity for students across the Department to present their research to peers and academics. We have found these occasions engender very fruitful exchanges of expertise and experience, as students focus down on the solution of research problems.

### **Delivery methods**

Teaching is via a mixture of lecture presentations, seminars, workshops, and student-led sessions. Care is taken to ensure students acquire skills of academic presentation and participation, as well as content skills. Extensive use is made of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE): all powerpoints/handouts are on the Department's Weblearn site.

### **Timing of training**

Full induction at start of year for all new graduates provides the intellectual, academic, and organisational context for their degrees, and is provided at divisional and Department level. All Masters and some doctoral students undertake core methods training in their first year. Milestones of Transfer and Confirmation of Status support and incentivise DPhil students in conceptualising and

organising their period of doctoral study. The student's own TNA progress report is a condition of Transfer of Status. TNA identifies and monitors individuals' needs and suitable timings of training in advance.

## **Research Environment - Social Policy and Intervention**

### **Research environment**

DSPI devotes resources to the research environment for research students. We have two dedicated workrooms, providing work areas for students to work in the Department.

There are two departmental seminar series (involving senior external speakers); and a colloquia series (primarily designed for 'work in progress of staff research): students are actively encouraged to participate in the discussion at these.

All research students are encouraged to present their research at conferences (the Department, allocates funds for this purpose), and are supported in preparing articles for publication. The Barnett Papers in Social Research gives students the opportunity to 'pre-publish' high quality research; collaborative and trans-disciplinary papers are highly encouraged. As an incentive, each year students are invited to submit work (journal article, working paper or conference paper) for the 'Barnett Prize' which is awarded for the best paper.