

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

Name, title and level of final qualification(s)	MSc/MA Brain and Cognitive Development (Level 7)
Name and title of any exit qualification(s)	PG Dip, PG Cert Brain and Cognitive Development
Awarding Body	University of London
Teaching Institution(s)	Birkbeck, University of London
Home School/other teaching departments	Psychological Sciences
Location of delivery	Central London
Language of delivery and assessment	English
Mode of study, length of study and normal start month	Full-time (1 year) Part-time (2 year) October
Professional, statutory or regulatory body	not applicable
QAA subject benchmark group(s) Higher Education Credit Framework for England	Psychology
Birkbeck Course Code	TMACOGBD_C, TMSCOGBD_C
HECoS Code	(100953) child psychology (100952) developmental psychology (101381) cognitive neuroscience
Start date of programme	Autumn 2010
Date of programme approval	Summer 2010
Date of last programme amendment approval	November 2022
Valid for academic entry year	2024-25
Date of last revision to document	29/05/2024

Admissions requirements

Candidates are normally expected to have a second-class honours degree (2:2) or above in psychology, cognitive science, education, behavioural sciences or relevant discipline. A strong understanding of research methods and statistics is expected for the MSc programme. Relevant professional experience of childhood and development may also be considered. Applications are reviewed on their individual merits and your professional qualifications and/or relevant work experience will be taken into consideration positively. We actively support and encourage applications from mature learners.

Course aims

The aim of this programme is to offer a detailed introduction to the methods and findings from modern brain and cognitive development research, which will enable students from a variety of backgrounds to appraise these findings and carry out independent research projects appropriately (MSc) or integrate relevant literature into a comprehensive review (MA).

The methods include biological, experimental, neuroimaging and genetic approaches, as well as survey and large-scale assessment methods more typical of social sciences (MSc). In the MA course, students will critically assess a body of literature in order to provide novel insights. The results cover the following broad areas: Neurobiology of development; genetics of development; Gene x Environment interactions; cognitive development; Social and economic constraints on child development.

The programme is designed to be accessible for graduates from a range of disciplines in the human and life sciences, and for both full-time students over 1 year and part-time students over 2 years. This course provides access to world renowned developmental researchers and facilities with broad international appeal, including the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, combining Birkbeck's strengths in qualitative and quantitative psychological research. There is a focus on face-to-face teaching, with a part-time (day release) option.

The MSc/MA in Brain and Cognitive Development offers a unique combination of theoretical approaches to studying development (neurobiological, genetic, social policy) that enables an overview of all factors contributing to children's development.

Course structure

Level	Module Code	Module Title	Credit	Status	Likely Teaching term(s)
Full-time – 1 year					
7	PSYC077H7	Advanced Quantitative Methods	15	Core MSc/ Compulsory MA	Term 1
7	PSYC074H7	Qualitative Methods	15	Compulsory	Term 1
7	SCPS149H7	Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience	15	Compulsory	Term 2
7	SC12004H7	Neurodiversity through the Lifespan	15	Compulsory	Term 2
7	SC12001H7	Academic Skills for PG Students	15	Compulsory	Term 1
7	SCPS007H7	Genetics of Development	15	Compulsory	Term 1
7	SCPS220H7	Child Development in a Global Context	15	Compulsory	Term 2
7	SCPS013H7	Critical Book Review	15	Compulsory	Term 2
7	PSYC078H7/ SCPS008D7	MSc Dissertation (MSc only)/ MA Psychological Research Dissertation	60	Core	Terms 1,2,3

Part-time – 2 years					
Year 1					
7	PSYC077H7	Advanced Quantitative Methods	15	Core MSc /Compulsory MA	Term 1
7	PSYC074H7	Qualitative Methods	15	Compulsory	Term 1
7	SCPS149H7	Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience	15	Compulsory	Term 2
7	SC12004H7	Neurodiversity through the Lifespan	15	Compulsory	Term 2
Year 2					
7	SC12001H7	Academic Skills for PG Students	15	Compulsory	Term 1
7	SCPS007H7	Genetics of Development	15	Compulsory	Term 1
7	SCPS220H7	Child Development in a Global Context	15	Compulsory	Term 2
7	SCPS013H7	Critical Book Review	15	Compulsory	Term 2
7	PSYC078H7/	MSc Dissertation (MSc only)	60	Core	Terms 1, 2,3
7	SCPS008D7	MA Dissertation (MA only)	60	Core	Terms 1, 2,3

Core: Module must be taken and passed by student

Compulsory: Module must be taken but can be considered for compensated credit (see CAS regulations paragraph 24)

Option: Student can choose to take this module

How you will learn

Your learning and teaching is organised to help you meet the learning outcomes (below) of the course. As a student, we expect you to be an active learner and to take responsibility for your learning, engaging with all of the material and sessions arranged for you.

Each course is divided into modules. You will find information on the virtual learning site (Moodle, see Academic Support below) about each of your modules, what to expect, the work you need to prepare, links to reading lists, information about how and when you will be assessed.

Your learning for this course will be organised around the activities outlined below.

The programme includes lecture-based theory modules, practical laboratory modules and a supervised project (MSc) or a supervised dissertation (MA). The teaching styles will be matched to the content, and class sizes will be kept small or moderate (10–40) to encourage student participation, even in lecture-based modules.

Two modules (advanced quantitative methods and qualitative methods) will feature lectures with laboratory/practical session. These will provide students with hands-on experience of using statistical software and practical experience of using qualitative methods in a relatively self-contained setting.

One module (Academic Skills) will involve small group collaborative learning. The class will be split into smaller groups and each group will, under the direction of the Instructor, explore solutions to generic organisational issues such as time management, IPR, organising large amounts of literature. It will involve an oral presentation to a group of their peers and staff members of an outline of their possible research topic/dissertation.

Four modules (Genetics of Development, Child development in a Global Context, & Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, Neurodiversity through the Lifespan) will feature lecturing as well as guided discussion led by one or more members of the academic staff.

All modules will involve self-directed learning in the form of self-paced reading and preparation for each of the sessions. The supervised research project/dissertation will be carried out under the supervision of a member of academic staff with research interests in the area of the project. This will provide students with access to a specialist in their project area who can provide expert advice on all aspects of the research. The project will also ensure that taught skills are exercised within a constructive environment during the course.

How we will assess you

The course will use a variety of assessment methods. Assessment is used to enhance your learning rather than simply to test it. We use a variety of assessment methods. For most of the modules associated with this course, your assessment will be through coursework, in the form of essays, blogs, a dissertation, and statistical worksheets. You will also be asked to make a presentation outlining your dissertation project. Assessment procedures will ensure that students develop a portfolio of work over the duration of the programme, and feedback on coursework required for some of the modules will encourage personal development.

Learning outcomes (what you can expect to achieve)

'Learning outcomes' indicate what you should be able to know or do at the end of your course. Providing them helps you to understand what your teachers will expect and also the learning requirements upon which you will be assessed.

At the end of this course, you should be able to show:

Subject specific:

- Knowledge of the different theoretical positions underlying a range of areas within developmental science
- Practical knowledge of all phases of developing, conducting and reporting a research project (MSc); knowledge of all phases of researching and critically appraising a body of literature (MA).
- Understanding of conventions in psychological report writing and the purpose of each section within a research report
- Understanding the interplay between social biological contexts in child development
- Understanding and being able to evaluate the logical flow of a scientific research report
- Understanding the relation between research questions and research methodologies
- An understanding of a range of research designs and the conditions under which each is appropriate
- Understanding the relation between quantitative and qualitative research in developmental science
- Knowledge of a wide range of parametric and non-parametric univariate and multivariate statistical procedures, the conditions under which they may reasonably be applied, and how to interpret the results of the procedures
- Awareness of the principles of qualitative research and an understanding of techniques associated with some key qualitative approaches
- Understanding the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society and ramifications of ethical practice
- Understanding of how to critically appraise a book within the field

Intellectual:

- Ability to articulate some similarities and differences between qualitative methods and to evaluate the arguments presented for and against qualitative methodology
- A critical appreciation of contemporary research and research methodologies across a number of areas within Developmental Science
- Understanding alternative ways of addressing a research question and how to advance reported research
- Critical thinking skills in relation to presenting and critiquing an argument
- Evaluating theoretical assumptions underlying contemporary Developmental Sciences
- Reviewing and assimilating existing topic-specific literature and formulating a research question
- An ability to apply research methodologies to wider work/life situations
- The ability to formulate and test hypotheses (MSc)
- An ability to study a problem in-depth
- Logical thinking (e.g., in relation to hypothesis testing)
- Evaluation skills

Practical:

- Enhanced essay and report writing
- Enhanced numeracy in relation to understanding numerical data
- General IT skills (use of web browsers, email, Word, PowerPoint, EndNote)
- Subject specific IT skills (familiarity with SPSS; mainly MSc)
- Ability to conduct literature reviews using electronic search tools, electronic journals and databases (PsycInfo)
- Ability to summarise and assess contemporary research succinctly
- An ability to apply a range of research methods to specific research questions
- Data collection and analysis skills (MSc)
- Ability to present data in a meaningful way, and to transform it into different presentational formats
- Planning and organisational skills

Personal and Social:

- Ability to work with others in small groups on practical research tasks
- Ability to work independently
- To effectively plan and organise substantive, medium-term, projects
- Time management skills
- To communicate effectively through both written reports and verbal presentations
- An enhanced ability to appreciate (and formulate) a structured argument and to appreciate the theoretical assumptions underpinning such arguments
- An understanding of the relevance of scientific research as reported in the media to everyday questions
- An increased awareness of ethical issues and ethical practice

Careers and further study

Graduates can pursue career paths in psychology, health or social work, education and policy development. Possible professions may include:

- psychologist
- counsellor
- researcher

- further education lecturer.

Birkbeck's MSc/MA Brain and Cognitive Development graduates will complete with a set of valuable attributes, for example:

- High-level written communication skills in English
- Research skills
- Skills in evaluating and assessing types of information
- Quantitative and qualitative analyses skills
- Planning and organisational skills
- Data collection and presentation skills

Birkbeck offers a range of careers support to its students. You can find out more on [the careers pages of our website](#).

Academic regulations and course management

Birkbeck's academic regulations are contained in its Common Award Scheme Regulations and Policies published by year of application on the Birkbeck website.

You will have access to a course handbook on Moodle and this will outline how your course is managed, including who to contact if you have any questions about your module or course.

Support for your study

Your learning at Birkbeck is supported by your teaching team and other resources and people in the College there to help you with your study. Birkbeck uses a virtual learning environment called Moodle and each course has a dedicated Moodle page and there are further Moodle sites for each of your modules. This will include your course handbook.

Birkbeck will introduce you to the Library and IT support, how to access materials online, including using Moodle, and provide you with an orientation which includes an online Moodle module to guide you through all of the support available. You will also be allocated a personal tutor and provided with information about learning support offered within your School and by the College.

Please check our website for more information about student support services. This covers the whole of your time as a student with us including learning support and support for your wellbeing.

Students have access to a Postgraduate Psychological Sciences Learning Support Officer and to learning resources developed by the Learning Support Officer team of the Department of Psychological Sciences.

Quality and standards at Birkbeck

Birkbeck's courses are subject to our quality assurance procedures. This means that new courses must follow our design principles and meet the requirements of our academic regulations. Each new course or module is subject to a course approval process where the proposal is scrutinised by subject specialists, quality professionals and external representatives to ensure that it will offer an excellent student experience and meet the expectation of regulatory and other professional bodies.

You will be invited to participate in an online survey for each module you take. We take these surveys seriously and they are considered by the course team to develop both modules and the overall courses. Please take the time to complete any surveys you are sent as a student.

We conduct an annual process of reviewing our portfolio of courses which analyses student achievement, equality data and includes an action plan for each department to identify ongoing enhancements to our education, including changes made as a result of student feedback.

Our periodic review process is a regular check (usually every four years) on the courses by department with a specialist team including students.

Each course will have an external examiner associated with it who produces an annual report and any recommendations. Students can read the most recent external examiner reports on the course Moodle pages. Our courses are all subject to Birkbeck Baseline Standards for our Moodle module information. This supports the accessibility of our education including expectations of what information is provided online for students.

The information in this programme specification has been approved by the College's Academic Board and every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information it contains.

Programme specifications are reviewed periodically. If any changes are made to courses, including core and/or compulsory modules, the relevant department is required to provide a revised programme specification. Students will be notified of any changes via Moodle.

Further information about specifications and an archive of programme specifications for the College's courses is [available online](#).

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