

**The University of Edinburgh  
The Moray House School of Education  
School Postgraduate Studies Committee**

**22 November 2016**

## Course Proposal: Introduction to Social Research Methods

### Brief description of the paper

The aim of this paper is to provide a detailed course proposal for the re-design of Research Methods (REDU11063) within the Postgraduate Programme in Digital Education. This re-design preserves much of the current course content, learning outcomes, assessment structure, and teaching commitments, however the mode of delivery will be changed to the 'Massive Open Online Course' (or MOOC) format.

This format will allow the new course to be re-designed in a cross-school collaboration with Digital Sociology in the School of Social and Political Science, as well as providing the means to make course content publically accessible to participants not enrolled at the University. The re-design therefore proposes a course with openly accessible material, combined with three different 'assessment tracks': Firstly, assessments similar to the current Research Methods (REDU11063) will allow enrolled MSc Digital Education students to complete the course with 20 Credits at SCQF Level 11. Secondly, students enrolled on the MSc Digital Sociology programme will complete a different set of assessments, resulting in 20 Credits at SCQF Level 11. Thirdly, 'public', non-enrolled participants will receive a non-credit bearing 'statement of accomplishment' from the MOOC platform provider (see Annex A for student scenarios).

### Action requested

For approval

### Resource implications

Does the paper have resource implications? No

If 'Yes', in which section(s) of the paper are they described?

### Risk assessment

Does the paper include a risk analysis? No

If 'Yes', in which section(s) of the paper is it set out?

### Equality and diversity

Does the paper have equality and diversity implications? No

If 'Yes', in which section(s) of the paper are they described?

### Freedom of information

Can this paper be included in open business? Yes

### Any other relevant information

None

### Originator of the paper

Jeremy Knox, Digital Education  
November 2016

# Introduction to Social Research Methods

## Course Descriptor

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### Purpose of this Paper

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This paper is in two sections:

- A: the enhanced course descriptor for the proposed course
- B: a briefing paper providing a wider rationale for the course as well as additional detail on the MOOC structure.

### A: the enhanced course descriptor

Course Name	Introduction to Social Research Methods
Course Level	PG
Availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students on the MSc Digital Education</li><li>• Students on the MSc Digital Sociology (SPS)</li><li>• 'Public', non-enrolled students (participation without accreditation)</li></ul>
SCQF Credit Volume	20
SCQF Credit Level	11

Home Subject Area	Education
Other Subject Area	Sociology
Course Organiser	TBC
Course Secretary	Angela Hunter
% Not taught by this institution	0%
Collaboration information	<p>The course will be re-designed in a cross-school collaboration with colleagues in Digital Sociology in the School of Social and Political Science. This will allow the course to be made relevant to both groups of students, as well as offer different assessment tracks relevant to each programme.</p> <p>There is also significant potential for collaboration with other programmes within the School of Education. The course materials will be publically accessible and relevant to a range of social science interests, and thus open to reuse and reconfiguration from other School of Education programmes.</p>
Total Contact Teaching Hours	To be identical to Research Methods (REDU11063)
Costs to be met by students	N/A
Pre-requisites	<p>This course would be open to students on the MSc in Digital Education who have completed the Introduction to Digital Environments for Learning (IDEL) course and at least one other course. This is to ensure that the students have a firm grounding in the content and approaches of the programme as a whole.</p> <p>It will also be open to students on the MSc Digital Sociology in SPS.</p> <p>The content of the course (but not the accreditation route) will be publically accessible on a MOOC platform.</p>
Co-requisites	N/A
Visiting Student Pre-requisites	N/A
Summary Course Description	<p>This course will give students the framework and contextual knowledge they need in order to plan, design and execute a programme of independent research for the dissertation element of the MSc in Digital Education. The course will enable students to formulate a research question and an outline project plan. It will give them key skills in research design and enable them to position their own programme of research within the broader context of social science enquiry. It will introduce</p>

	them to data collection and analysis and to key methods for analysing both quantitative data and qualitative research texts.
Keywords	research methods; social science research; digital education; online education
Fee Code if invoiced at course level	
Examination and Assessment Information	<p>Students of the MSc in Digital Education will undergo coursework (as described below in components of assessment).</p> <p>Students of the MSc in Digital Sociology will undergo assessment as defined by their programme.</p> <p>Non-enrolled MOOC participants have the opportunity to complete the coursework (for example, as described below in components of assessment), however this will not result in credit.</p>
Default Delivery Period	Each semester
Marking Scheme	Common Marking Scheme
Taught in Gaelic	No
Course type	Online
Learning outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrate critical awareness of key aspects of epistemology, validity and ethics as they relate to social science and digital education research</li> <li>2. Locate and critically analyse published research</li> <li>3. Engage critically with a range of data collection and analysis methods and approaches</li> <li>4. Effectively plan a programme of research, identifying appropriate research questions and how they might be addressed by particular methodological approaches</li> <li>5. Demonstrate an awareness of academic conventions in the presentation of research</li> </ol>
Special Arrangements	
Components of Assessment	<p>100% coursework:</p> <p>MSc Digital Education students:</p> <p>Part 1 (30%): A short critical review of a piece of published research. (1000 words). This is due at the end of week 5 of the course.</p>

	<p>Part 2 (20%): Participants will work with an existing set of either qualitative or quantitative data, chosen from a range of possible sets. They will perform some simple analysis and/or interpretation directed towards answering a series of questions posed about the data. Results of the analysis will be written up as a brief report. (1000 words). This is due at the end of week 10 of the course, and presents the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that lead directly to assessment part 3.</p> <p>Part 3 (50%): Presentation of a research proposal for the dissertation, including the research question to be addressed, critical discussion of the methodology to be used, and an outline of how data will be collected and analysed (if relevant). The proposal will also include a provisional project plan outlining key milestones and timescales for the various stages of the project. (2000 words)</p>
<p>Examination Information</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Course Description</p>	<p>This course will give students the framework and contextual knowledge they need in order to plan, design and execute a programme of independent research for the dissertation element of the MSc in Digital Education. The course will enable students to formulate a research question and an outline project plan. It will give them key skills in research design and enable them to position their own programme of research within the broader context of social science enquiry. It will introduce them to data collection and analysis and to key methods for analysing both quantitative data and qualitative research texts.</p> <p>While this arrangement is identical to the existing Research Methods course (REDU11063) the format and mode of delivery will be developed into a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). This format will allow the new course to be re-designed in a cross-school collaboration with Digital Sociology in the School of Social and Political Science, as well as providing the means to make course content publically accessible to participants not enrolled at the University. The re-design therefore proposes a course with openly</p>

	<p>accessible material, combined with three different 'assessment tracks': Firstly, assessments similar to the current Research Methods (REDU11063) will allow enrolled MSc Digital Education students to complete the course with 20 Credits at SCQF Level 11. Secondly, students enrolled on the MSc Digital Sociology programme will complete a different set of assessments, resulting in 20 Credits at SCQF Level 11 (this to be proposed at the relevant boards in SPS). Thirdly, 'public', non-enrolled participants will receive a non-credit bearing 'statement of accomplishment' from the MOOC platform provider.</p>
Graduate Attributes	<p><b>A. Research and Enquiry</b>  To be able to identify, define and analyse conceptual and/ or practical problems in Digital Education through the critical appraisal of existing evidence.  To be able to generate creative and innovative approaches to research appropriate to the broader context of Digital Education.</p> <p><b>B. Personal and Intellectual Autonomy</b>  To be able to exercise substantial autonomy and initiative in the identification and execution of their intended learning activities.  To be independent learners able to develop and maintain a critical approach to issues in Digital Education.</p> <p><b>C. Communication</b>  To be make effective use of the multimodal capabilities of digital technologies to communicate appropriate knowledge and understanding of emerging concepts and practices in Digital Education.</p> <p><b>D. Personal Effectiveness</b>  To be able to recognise and respond to new opportunities for learning and development.  To be able to work effectively with others in diverse digital environments for learning.</p>
Breakdown of learning & teaching activities	<p>Total Hours: 200</p> <p>Seminar/Tutorial Hours: 2</p> <p>Online Activities: 25</p> <p>Formative Assessment Hours: 6</p> <p>Programme Level Learning and Teaching Hours: 4</p> <p>Directed and Independent Learning: 163</p>
Study Abroad	N/A
Reading List	In development (see below partnership with Sage Research Methods)

Feedback	As described above (components of assessment), the three elements of assessment allow for formative feedback from tutors. This is staged throughout the course to allow feedback to develop student understanding, and enhance subsequent submissions.
High Demand	Yes. This course will be mandatory for all students wishing to progress to the dissertation.

## B: Introduction to Social Research Methods MOOC

a proposal to amend an existing course in order to collaborate with Digital Sociology, and 'open' course content to the public

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### Key innovations:

- Developing a MOOC-for-credit model
- Integrating accredited online provision with open access MOOC offerings
- Developing MOOC-to-ODL Masters conversion. This will be particularly important post hard Brexit, to maintain EU numbers and expand ODL provision
- Establishing innovative practices that can shape research methods teaching in the School of Education
- Building inter-School links through collaboration with SPS Digital Sociology
- Reusability and reconfiguration by other MSc programmes in the School and beyond
- Link to expansion of distance PhD provision across the University, and contribution to the research training needs of off-campus doctoral students
- Partnership with SAGE Research Methods Database (see below)
- Building international profile of the School and the MSc DE via mass engagement

Proposed schedule: September 2017 launch

### Context

The teaching of research methods is a significant omission in current MOOC offerings<sup>1</sup>, and the Coursera, edX and FutureLearn platforms are dominated by courses on data science and analytics. These statistical methods constitute only a narrow approach to the much broader field of social research methodologies, which include significant qualitative practices such as virtual ethnography, and discourse and multimodal analysis. No current MOOCs offer the broad suite of social research methods training.

### Structure

We propose a MOOC on research methods that will not only fill this substantial gap in Coursera/edX/FutureLearn provision, but will also form an innovative foundation for replacing the current Research Methods course (REDU11063) on the MSc Digital Education programme, as well as offering methods training for students in Digital Sociology in the School of Social and Political Science (see collaboration section below). This will

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<sup>1</sup> Coursera currently offer 4 courses in generic social science research methods, while nothing similar is offered by edX and FutureLearn.

develop a productive model of integrating an accredited online university programme with open access MOOC provision: the MOOC will offer credit for those already enrolled on University of Edinburgh programmes, as well as verified certification and open access participation for those just interested in the MOOC itself.

The MOOC will run in synch with the university semester. Sub-groups will be used to manage for-credit enrolees separately, and provide dedicating teaching for the credit bearing assessment. The MOOC will also be linked to the entire MSc in Digital Education programme so that students can gain experience with research methods throughout their participation with other option courses.

### **Collaboration**

The MOOC will be designed in a cross-school collaboration with Digital Sociology in the School of Social and Political Science. This will allow the course materials to serve both programmes, as well as facilitating the means to create independent assessment tracks relevant to each subject area.

The MOOC will also serve as an example of innovative practice capable of shaping research methods teaching in the School of Education. Being publically accessible, and relevant to a wide range of interests in social science methods, the materials and resources of the MOOC will be available for reuse and reconfiguration by other programmes and teams. In this sense, the accessible and flexible materials could be accompanied by a range of assessment configurations suited to different School of Education programme needs.

There is also potential to collaborate with the distance PhD roll out happening across the University. The MOOC will be able to provide basic methods training to off campus doctoral students, as well as for PGT programmes.

### **University MOOCs**

This course proposal will need to go through the central university MOOC approval procedure, which will require HoS approval. If the course goes through the selection process, there will be significant investment from the University. As an experiment in MOOC accreditation, the strategic advantages to the School for supporting may be considerable – the University is looking to support credit-bearing models, and this course would be one of the first of this kind.

### **High profile partnerships currently being developed:**

The Sage Research Methods Database

<http://srmo.sagepub.com/publicstart?authRejection=true>.

In discussions with Bronia Flett, Commissioning Editor, SAGE Research Methods, to provide open access content through the MOOC. The course will make substantial use of this quality content, raising the profile of the MOOC, and also reducing media production costs for the University. IS is now looking at the SAGE video suite with a view to purchase, and there

may be distinct advantages to the School in terms of raising its profile for innovation and global reach, as well as likelihood of attracting potential students to our other programmes and possibly to doctoral study.

The National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)

<http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/> at the University of Southampton. Currently in discussions with the NCRM, who serve as a focal point for national research and training activities in social science research methods.

## Annex A: student scenarios

### 1. MSc Digital Education student

Leonard decides to choose the *Introduction to Social Research Methods* course as his final option, aiming to subsequently undertake the dissertation. He enrolls in the standard way, and upon starting the semester is directed to the online course material located on the MOOC platform. Leonard is already familiar with the course and some of the material, as he has been directed to resources relating to research methods throughout his time on the programme, and the 'open access' structure has allowed him to browse the material independently.

However, now that he is formally enrolled on the *Introduction to Social Research Methods* course, he will follow a guided route through the course, supported by the course tutor, and accompanied by the cohort of other MSc Digital Education students undertaking the course. Leonard will have access to dedicated discussion spaces that are limited to this group, and that give him direct access to the tutor. However, he will also have access to the wider discussion spaces of the MOOC that will be populated by other participants: those studying for the MSc in Digital Sociology; and also members of the public (see below).

Leonard will need to complete the three stages of assessment by the required deadline, and if successful, will earn 20 credits SCQF Level 11.

### 2. Non-enrolled, 'public' MOOC participant.

Suzanne works full time waterways operative in central Europe, with a strong interest in independent and self-directed learning. She decides to study a MOOC from the University of Edinburgh, and chooses *Introduction to Social Research Methods*. Suzanne finds that she has free and open access to all of the course materials and activities, and is also able to communicate with students and staff in social spaces. She follows the prescribed self-directed route through the material, and decides to complete the 'light touch' assessment activities.

She also becomes aware that enrolled University of Edinburgh students are amongst her group of participants, and discovers that they are undertaking the same course, but completing additional assessment tasks that lead to university credit, with a Masters programme. Suzanne completes the MOOC assessment and receives a 'statement of accomplishment' from the MOOC provider. However, she is intrigued by the relationship with the Masters programme, and enquires further about ODL programmes offered by the University of Edinburgh.