

Module 1: 'Introduction to Social Research'

This unit deals predominantly with concerns at the more practical and operational end of the continuum. Subjects covered include: our expectations at doctoral level, and in particular how to develop an appropriate style of writing, writing clearly, avoiding the academic 'pose', etc.; searching, evaluating, and managing the literature; addressing ethical considerations — confidentiality, data storage, building trust with respondents; and key considerations in developing a meaningful approach to a research problem.

Module 2: 'Foundations of Social Research'

This unit deals more with the 'philosophical' end of the debates: questions such as what constitutes valid knowledge and how can we obtain it? What exists in social reality? What different approaches are there to these questions? Core conceptual dilemmas, such as the structure–agency dilemma, and the approaches that have been developed to resolving these are looked at. There is a comparison of the philosophy of social science with the sociology of knowledge as starting points for research. The aim of this unit is to encourage course members to adopt a critical and conceptually-informed approach to their intended fields of study, and to address some important fundamental questions which, ultimately, have a profound bearing on how their research should, could, and will proceed.

Module 3 'Quantitative Methods' and Module 4 'Qualitative Methods'

These units address questions of methods and methodology. They examine qualitative and quantitative research strategies and techniques. A whole range of techniques is explored: everything from questionnaires and interviews to focus groups and documentary research. Different strategies of analysing qualitative and quantitative data are considered, and, in relation to this, different means of moving between and linking theory and research.

What will, no doubt, soon become apparent when studying these modules is the fact that all the areas considered are inextricably linked. For example, your position on fundamental questions relating to what constitutes valid knowledge might have profound implications even for how you structure your dissertation. In a similar manner, you will see, even in the stylistics of writing — the very mechanics of how sentences are constructed — will relate to fundamental assumptions about how you understand and conceptualise your subject matter, indeed, how you view the social scientific 'project' itself.

Please note that module content and option module availability may be subject to change.

[Modules 5-7](#)

This section of the Doctorate requires candidates to select three specialist options, each of which is assessed by assignment, in order to demonstrate knowledge of the chosen specialist areas within the field. Option availability may vary dependent upon the availability of the teaching and research interests of members of staff. The options currently available are listed below

Workplace Learning

This option aims to compare and explore what learning is, to identify how learning takes place within the workplace, to examine the mechanisms for assessing and identifying learning and to explore the pedagogies of workplace learning.

In recent years, the concept of workplace learning has been attracting increasing interest from both researchers and policymaking communities in many countries around the world. This partly reflects a growing understanding that 'learning' is not something that only happens in classrooms but something which forms part of people's everyday lives and, hence, 'learning' happens at work. It also reflects a desire by policy makers to try to capitalise on any learning, which might help improve their countries' economic performance.

Alongside the promotion of workplace learning for its economic potential, there is a social justice argument for recognising the workplace as a site for learning. Access to learning at work is being promoted as a way of: helping adults overcome educational disadvantage; improving the quality of working life; helping employees to progress in their jobs; providing a platform for employees to change jobs; and generally encouraging people's motivation for lifelong learning.

Throughout this option, you will be asked to reflect on the terminology used to describe workplace learning, but also associated phenomena such as 'education', 'training', 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'identity'. Such reflection is required because the very idea that it is possible to learn outside so-called formal educational settings is still very contested.

At the end of this option you will be able to;

- be able to explain what constitutes learning in the workplace
- use appropriate mechanisms and strategies for identifying learning at work
- be fully conversant with the process of workplace learning and the various pedagogical practices associated with it.

Gender, Work and Society

This option aims to explore the gendered nature of work, examine the utility of competing theoretical perspectives, to compare the gendered work experience of men and work to ascertain impacts on work life balance and to examine concepts of equality and diversity.

Gender is an important concept and social category when considering an individual's experiences of work, and when exploring how the labour market is structured. Indeed, it has been a central focus for labour markets debates since the mid-1950s. However, it was only with the rise of feminism and the adoption of equal opportunity legislation that gender became such a central concern in work and labour market debates. This option aims to introduce course members to the gendered nature of work and employment and explore key debates surrounding men and women's participation in the labour market.

At the end of the option you will:

- have an understanding of the gendered nature of work, employment and learning
- be able to identify and appreciate the consequences of the gendered nature of employment
- be able to reflect critically on theories of gender and work
- be able to problematise masculinity and work
- be able to critically reflect upon gender identities in the context of work, employment and learning.

Knowledge Management and the Learning Organisation

Both knowledge management (henceforth KM) and the learning organisation (henceforth LO) have all the characteristics of managerial 'fads': each has been accompanied by an explosion of practitioner and academic literature devoted to their conceptual and operational implications; each has involved a proliferation of neologisms; each has guru proponents with disciple-like followers; etc. However, while KM and the LO may be — and to some degree already are being — replaced by new ideational/strategic models, these terms nonetheless point toward important shifts in the workplace, and highlight issues which, it is argued here, have enduring significance for HRD scholars and practitioners.

This option aims to provide an overview of KM and LO both as academically-based concepts, and as managerial discourses which inform concrete workplace practices. The discussion below will introduce a number of central questions in relation to both KM and the LO: what are the intellectual origins and foundations of each?; what are the core ideas and principles involved?; what, if any, are the key debates and divisions between proponents of KM and LO?; what are the implications of these concepts for practice, particularly HRD practice?; to what extent do/should KM or LO practitioners take account of factors such as culture, structure, and organisational size?; what are the implications of these concepts for how power and control are exercised within the workplace?; and finally, what are the conceptual and practical limitations of KM and LO?

At the end of the option you will be able to:

- promote a conceptual awareness of debates and issues relating to Knowledge Management and Learning Organisations
- provide course members with a broad overview of the literature pertaining to Knowledge Management and Learning Organisations
- highlight some of the theoretical and operational issues relating to Knowledge Management and Learning Organisations.

Comparing National Education and Training Systems

This option starts with the theory of national systems and then proceeds to see how these translate into classifications of national systems. This is followed by an analysis of globalisation, the force that is transforming national systems, and then moves on to examine how the national systems are responding. However, as you might expect, at the doctorate level the situation is far more complex, primarily because our theoretical knowledge is so under-developed.

We have classifications of national systems and attempts to theorise about them, but no one well-developed theory. We have theories of aspects of globalisation, such as international trade, but no well-developed theory of globalisation. As you will see, there are many assertions that globalisation is transforming national VET systems or aspects of them, but in the absence of a clear theory of globalisation the validity of these assertions must remain suspect. One of the initial problems we tackle here is how to conceptualise the processes involved.

The thinking behind the organisation of this option has been influenced by the work of Norbert Elias. He argues that the forces of change are located in the dynamics of the relationships between states as these tend to have the most powerful impact on relationships within societies. However, there are changes occurring within societies which themselves influence the inter-state relations especially in more powerful societies. In this option we are therefore looking at the dynamics of relations both within and between societies, with the latter usually acting as the most powerful of the influences.

By the end of the option, you will be able to:

- explain why national systems differ in their structures
- identify the main processes of change which are affecting national systems of VET;
- understand the impact of global processes of change on national VET systems;
- be able to critically assess the impact of these wider processes of change on the policy framework of one country.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Lifelong Learning

In response to economic globalisation, the development of new technologies and concerns about social inclusion, governments across the world are re-examining their approach to both the role and practice of Vocational Education and Training (VET). In addition, the concept of 'lifelong learning' is being advocated by policymakers as a solution to their concerns about the growth of the so-called knowledge economy, to the breakdown of traditional certainties such as the notion of 'jobs for life', and as a means of increasing social inclusion.

This option will examine how different countries conceptualise and organise their VET systems and the extent to which lifelong learning is regarded as an over-arching concept or a rhetorical device to promote a human capital approach to education and training more generally.

The discourse of both VET and lifelong learning will be analysed in order to problematise the two concepts. We will also consider the impact of VET and lifelong learning policies on employers, teachers and trainers, learners, and communities. Throughout the option, we will need to be alert to how policy and practice affect (or choose to ignore) the barriers which people face in accessing VET and lifelong learning as a result of their gender, social class, and ethnicity.

This option will enable you to:

- critically examine the shifting discourses of VET and lifelong learning.
- gain an understanding of the factors which shape and influence different countries
- critically examine the role of government, employers and education and training providers vis-à-vis VET policy
- frame research questions for possible thesis topics.

National Culture and HRD

This option aims to introduce course members to the concept of culture and to illustrate its relevance in key theoretical debates in the social sciences. As we narrow down from the more general to the more specific the option moves on to present a series of examples to illustrate how culture has been used as a means of exploring the world of work. In the final unit we explore the importance of culture for understanding patterns in the ways in which human resources develop and are developed at the level of the individual, the organisation, the nation and in the international arena. The pedagogical orientation of this option is to provide a 'taster' of some of the core issues and debates relating to the field. The expectation is that the material can be used to obtain an initial grasp on the subject as a whole, and subsequently to form a platform from which course members can explore the suggested reading and beyond.

Culture is a concept that attracts much debate. Many people have an opinion on its importance, and culture is used as an explanation for many variations in behavior in discussion both in 'coffee shop chat' and in academic discourse. Any serious attempts to understand culture have to move on from culture as the off-hand explanation for any difference in the way of doing things. In order to try to provide the foundation for such an attempt this option starts from what might seem a rather

theoretical and abstract background with little immediately obvious link to HRD. Many of the texts around, particularly those oriented to the practitioner in management, take culture as a given, an unproblematic concept about which there is a clear consensus. In reality the case is far more complex. Therefore, before we can even consider the impact of culture on HRD we have to spend some considerable time grappling with what culture actually is. To do so we have to return to classic debates within the social sciences to see how the concept has been used and to explore how meaning, interpretation and investigation of this concept has itself been bound up with the general influences on social science of the time.

By the end of the option, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of culture and how it has been used by key authors
- Critically examine the significance of culture within the context of central theoretical debates within the social sciences.

Youth Transitions, HRD and the Labour Market

This option seeks to explore the problem of youth in the context of labour market and HRD debates. This option will focus on four main issues including – The Transition from School to Work, Young Workers in the Labour Market, Training the Young Worker and finally Young Workers Careers and Identities.

The option begins with an examination of the debates surrounding the transition from school to work. It examines ‘youth as a problem’ and provides a broad historical overview of how youth has emerged, been defined and problematised in terms of the labour market. We then go on to examine youth in the labour market, beginning with an historical overview of youth employment trends before considering the gendered nature of youth employment. Finally we examine issues relating to youth training and the role that work plays in the transition to adulthood and the formation of identities.

At the end of this option you will be able to:

- develop an understanding of the ‘problem of youth’
- examine youth in the context of labour market and HRD debates
- have an appreciation of trends in youth training and labour market issues
- develop an understanding of the training of young workers in the context of broader debates such as identity and career progression.

Globalisation: Work, Employment and HRD

This option aims to impart an understanding of work, employment, skills and learning within the global social context. A central objective is to heighten student awareness of the links and tensions between local and global social processes and their implications for HRD strategy and practice.

Particularly since the early 1990s, debates around the concept of globalisation have come to feature prominently in a good deal of social science literature and the term has also entered the everyday lexicon. However, the actual meaning of the term ‘globalisation’ is very difficult to pin down. The academic literature on globalisation is so broad-ranging that it is almost impossible to summarise it in any succinct yet comprehensive manner: there is a considerable body of literature from the disciplines of sociology, politics, geography, and economics. Our intention is that the option commentaries and readings will stimulate course members to delve further into the literature, and

to pursue the debates in greater depth. Our central aim is to provide course participants with an initial 'grip' on the concept, and to explore some of (what we consider to be) the core debates surrounding the term. We go on to explore more centrally the significance of debates around globalisation for the study of work and employment. Here we will consider whether work has undergone a transformation in relation to processes of globalisation and whether national institutions (through responding to the exigencies of industrialisation and globalisation) and commercial organisations (through structural design) are beginning to 'converge'. We also consider the impact of globalisation on labour markets — their structure, their constitution, and so forth. We focus on multinational and transnational organisations; in particular, we look at the implications of the rise of these organisational forms for the practice of HRD. Finally, we consider whether there is such a thing as 'global management', whether, for example, truly global HRD practices are in fact possible — and what, indeed, these might entail.

By the end of this option you will be able to:

- critically discuss theories of globalisation, convergence and divergence and debates relating to these concepts;
- apply core theoretical debates to the analysis of organisational and national HRD systems;
- understand the interrelationship between local and global social processes.

Work, Employment and Learning Issues in China and Hong Kong (SAR)

This option aims to examine the context of work, employment and Human Resource Development (HRD) in Mainland China and explore the implications of the rapid developments in this area for the Hong Kong (SAR). The option is divided into three units; the rise of China as a global economic powerhouse and its implications for Hong Kong, skill formation in China and Hong Kong and Globalisation and its impact on HR and organisational practices in China. We explore how rapid economic change has impacted upon the education and training system and look at recent reforms that are taking place within these systems. Finally, we examine the extent to which there is a distinctively Chinese workplace by asking whether work, employment and HRD in China is converging with practices in other countries and where divergence remains. It is important to note here that it is beyond the scope of this unit to provide a comprehensive review of all of the literature and issues around work, employment and HRD in China. Thus, the pedagogical orientation of this option is to provide a 'taster' of some of the core issues and debates in the field as understood by the writing team, and to highlight some important questions. The expectation is that the material can be used to obtain an initial grasp

At the end of this option, you will be able to:

- understand the fundamental changes that have been taking place and the factors that are shaping employment patterns in China
- understand the implications of these changes for HR matters in organisations
- understand some of the implications of China's economic growth for Hong Kong and other countries
- understand how China and Hong Kong's skill formation systems are changing in response to the different skills needs resulting from ongoing economic changes
- assess the extent to which convergence is taking place in China as a result of globalisation
- assess the extent to which divergence underpins the transfer of practices despite globalisation resulting in a distinctly Chinese workplace.

Industrial Relations

This module provides you with an understanding of industrial relations, trade unionism and the changing nature of the employment relationship covering issues such as governance, conflict and consent, industrial relations and the multinational organisation.

At the end of this option, you will be able to:

- situate the study of industrial relations within the context of the employment relationship both nationally and internationally.
- critically examine the employment relationship in terms of governance and social responsibility.
- understand current trends in labour management in the context of multinational corporations and the international division of labour.

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Developing Public Policy

This module examines the formation of public policy and the legislative framework that organisations have to operate within. The module starts with an overview of the development of different approaches to policy formation from the post-war Keynesian period through to the free-market based approaches of the early 21st Century. Following on from this the module discusses the roles available to the private sector in working with Governmental actors (either at the level of the nation-state or above (super) and below (sub)) and examines the extent to which organisations, particularly multi-national ones, can influence Government policy.

The second half of the module then looks at some examples of policy transfer between places and assesses the success or otherwise of transporting ideas from one area of the globe to another. It then moves on to discuss the territorial vs relational debate which examines the extent to which place has an impact on policy outcomes.

At the end of the module students will be able to:

- Critically assess the roles the private sector can play in the formation of public policy.
- Outline the development of Keynesian, neo-liberal and 'third way' approaches to policy formation and identify the implications for the role of the State.
- Critically examine and explain the concepts of policy borrowing and policy transfer.
- Evaluate the territory vs relational debate and assess the impact of place on policy

Module 8, The Thesis Proposal

In this module you will develop a relevant research question in the context of established theoretical positions. You will need to consider alternative rigorous research designs in relation to your research question and understand the ethical issues raised by your research question and design. You will also be required to develop potential adaptations to your research.

Assessment will be via a written thesis proposal of 5000 words and successful completion of University of Leicester online ethical approval form. The proposal will take the form of a portfolio of exercises that you will be asked to undertake. Progression on to the thesis is only possible after successful completion of all eight modules.

The thesis must be written on an appropriate field of study and is 50,000 words long. The thesis will demonstrate your ability to apply appropriate research methodologies and to analyse issues within the field of work, employment and learning. The thesis must contain original work and be of publishable quality. Doctorate theses have to be defended at a viva in the presence of two examiners. Vivas will take place at the University of Leicester.

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