



# Master of Public Administration (MPA) (Distance Learning)

## *Programme Specification*

### **Primary Purpose**

Course management and quality assurance.

### **Secondary Purpose**

Detailed information for students, staff and employers. Current students should refer to the related Course Handbook for further detail.

### **Disclaimer**

The University of Portsmouth has checked the information given in this Programme Specification. We will endeavour to deliver the course in keeping with this Programme Specification; however, changes may sometimes be required arising from annual monitoring, student feedback, review and update of units and courses. Where this activity leads to significant changes to units and courses, there will be prior consultation of students and others, wherever possible, and the University will take all reasonable steps to minimize disruption to students. It is also possible that the University may not be able to offer a unit or course for reasons outside of its control, for example; the absence of a member of staff or low student registration numbers. Where this is the case, the University will endeavour to inform applicants and students as soon as possible. Where appropriate, the University will facilitate the transfer of affected students to another suitable course.

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## Course Details

### **1. Named Awards**

Master of Public Administration (MPA) (Distance Learning)

### **2. Course Code (and UCAS Code if applicable)**

C2434F

C2434P

### **3. Awarding Body**

University of Portsmouth

### **4. Teaching Institution**

University of Portsmouth

### **5. Accrediting Body**

N/A

### **6. QAA Benchmark Groups**

NA at postgraduate level

### **7. Document Control Information**

Version: September 2017

### **8. Effective Session**

2018-19

### **9. Author**

Dr Mark Field

### **10. Faculty**

Humanities and Social Sciences

### **11. Department**

School of Area Studies, History, Politics and Literature

## Curriculum

### **12. Educational Aims**

This programme is designed to meet the developing needs of those holding, or aspiring to hold, senior positions in the public sector and the voluntary sector. It aims to ensure that students build both an academic and practical understanding of public management and governance at national and global levels. Specifically it aims to:

- support students so that they are able to develop the knowledge and skills in public services leadership and management in order to enhance their professional knowledge and practice and contribute to the wider public services context
- enable students to foster a current awareness and understanding of a range of issues and challenges facing the public sector at local, national and international levels and be able to provide coherent, constructive and strategic responses
- provide both systematic and in depth enquiry and critical analysis to identify, justify and advocate changes within the public sector in order to enhance and develop their own practice and to contribute substantially to improving practice in the specific service in which they work, or aspire to work
- provide an intellectually stimulating and challenging experience with an opportunity for reflection, enquiry and evaluation of public services leadership and management
- provide students with the skills and knowledge required to maximise career opportunities

### 13. Reference Points

- University of Portsmouth Curriculum Framework Document
- The UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualification Frameworks)
- QAA characteristics of qualifications types
- Higher Education Credit Framework for England
- Vocational and/or professional experience, the scholarship and the research expertise of academic members of staff

### 14. General Learning Outcomes

Master's degrees/ are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
  - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
  - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
  - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility

- decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
- the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development

On completion of the MPA (DL) students will be able to

- Define current issues and problems in public services and create new approaches to resolving them
- Demonstrate a specific knowledge framework and understanding of major themes in public services delivery and public policy making
- Exercise critical judgement in the creation of new understanding for public policy and public service delivery
- Critically assess existing knowledge and understanding to regularly challenge knowledge about public services
- Identify opportunities for, and apply, new knowledge, ideas and ways of thinking to public services

## 15. Learning Outcomes

### A. Knowledge and Understanding of:

- A.1 The comparative political, historical and financial context of public administration and public sector organisations.
- A.2 The processes by which public policies are formulated, implemented and evaluated in the public sector.
- A.3 The options available to deliver public services and the most efficient, effective and economic way of doing so.
- A.4 The structures and organisations available to construct public administrators.
- A.5 The accountability, ethical and democratic issues inherent to the field of study.
- A.6 Specialist subject knowledge of research in specific fields of relevance to their career choices.

### B. Cognitive (Intellectual or Thinking) Skills, able to:

- B.1 Apply a range of theoretical models to a broad spectrum of areas of public administration issues and areas of operation.
- B.2 Analyse and critique different theoretical models.
- B.3 Analyse and critique different methods of delivering public services and organising public sector institutions.
- B.4 Analyse and critique different policy making processes.
- B.5 Collate, synthesise and analyse data from a variety of sources using a range of methodologies.
- B.6 Demonstrate general and subject specific research and information retrieval skills, including the ability to gather, integrate and organise material critically and evaluate its significance within appropriate intellectual frameworks.

### C. Practical (Professional or Subject) Skills, able to:

- C.1 Understand and contribute to current debates in comparative administration.
- C.2 Demonstrate the attributes required for a professional career in public sector management using a range of skills developed by the course.
- C.3 Use appropriate methodologies to investigate problems and issues relevant to public sector managers in order to develop policies and strategies for delivering public services to consumers and to advise policy makers.

## **D. Transferable (Graduate and Employability) Skills, able to:**

- D.1 Demonstrate advanced literacy and oral and written communication skill, including the ability to present a rhetorically effective, coherent, well supported and sustained argument.
- D.2 Structure and communicate complex ideas effectively.
- D.3 Use information technology to collect and analyse information.
- D.4 Apply appropriate numerical skills.
- D.5 Demonstrate an ability to work independently but seek support when necessary.
- D.6 Work within a group and recognise the value of other contributions.
- D.7 Develop interpersonal skills.
- D.8 Identify and provide credible solutions to complex problems.
- D.9 Demonstrate reticulist skills and political sensitivity.

## **16. Learning and Teaching Strategies and Methods**

Participants are supported in structured academic reflection using relevant conceptual frameworks. The strategy incorporates a focus both on theoretical and academic awareness and development, and application of this in a work-related context.

Teaching and learning is delivered through a blend of activities especially devised for Distance Learning (DL). These include, filmed lectures and interviews; guest lectures; case analysis; and interactive online activities such as, peer-group online group discussion and team-work, and online tutorials.

Advanced independent scholarship is encouraged through the study of the various disciplines within public services and through student-led research projects and the dissertation. These facilitate the opportunity for students to integrate the learning provided through the programme with professional and practical knowledge.

The staged approach of the online programme allows students to progressively gain the knowledge and understanding needed for each subject area and provides for the development and consolidation of advanced scholarship through the practice and refinement of independent learning required for successful study at master's level.

## **17. Assessment Strategy**

For the four core units of the MPA, essays, online presentations, team exercises and activities, plus reflective journals are all used as a means of assessing the ability of students to acquire and practice core knowledge and subject-specific skills (A1-6). Individual reflective presentations and accounts of student learning are employed to encourage discursive self-enquiry and appraisal. Students are also asked to self-manage their learning through virtual action learning sets or teams. This assessment approach enables students to acquire diverse skills over time to enable eventual synthesis in readiness for the dissertation/major project at the end of the course.

The dissertation/major project requires students to demonstrate that they have acquired the key skills relating to the synthesis and presentation of a substantial body of evidence and reasoned academic argument. It is designed to reflect the form of reporting of a substantial piece of work associated with an academic research degree. A major project reflects the reporting of a work-based, or professional project in the manner of a piece of consultancy and therefore has different features (executive summary instead of a conclusion), but is of the same length as a dissertation.

Learning materials encourage students to relate the concepts and theories in question to their workplace and professional experience (D1-6). On-line discussions will provide opportunities for the exploration of the relationship between course content and practical situations with other students in diverse contexts around the world, as well as with their campus-based colleagues (C1-3). All students on the course will be encouraged to network with each other via their Course level Moodle site, and within other unit-based Moodle sites, and to develop informal student study-groups. This will provide opportunities for direct exchange of information and experiences from a diverse range of course members. Critical examination of research evidence will inform the development of personal research proposals (B1-6).

## 18. Course Structure, Progression and Award Requirements

See [Unit Web Search](#)<sup>1</sup> for full details on the course structure and units

## 19. Employability Statement

At the University of Portsmouth, the quality of our degrees, our focus on developing students' employability skills and our reputation with employers means that our graduates are in a very strong position in the world of work. We consistently have one of the best records for graduate employment in the UK, with 96.5 per cent of our 2016 graduates entering employment or further study within six months of graduating. The University is ranked first out of the 17 other higher education institutions in the South East region in terms of our graduates' outcomes and ranked joint 21st out of 153 institutions nationally, putting us in the top 15 per cent.

We work closely with public sector employers to ensure currency in the MPA, by leveraging examples from the world of public services. Employers are regular contributors to the course with recorded lectures and interviews as part of the MPA DL. This direct input from employers in both the design and delivery of the programme helps to ensure that an authentic picture of the opportunities in public services careers are depicted. This initiative also brings together expertise from both the University and the world of work to present a current, relevant opportunity for study and career enhancement.

Students graduating from the Master of Public Administration report increases in career achievement such as promotion or the attainment of completely new positions in public services. Students have gone on to further study at PhD level. It is our aim to equip students with both the academic and practical expertise to apply their learning in the workplace and achieve greater levels of career enhancement.

## Course Management

### 20. Support for Student Learning

- The Course is managed by a Course Leader
- An online induction programme introduces the student to the University and their course
- Each student has a personal tutor, responsible for pastoral support and guidance
- University support services include careers, financial advice, housing and counselling
- The Academic Skills Unit (ASK)
- The SSHLS Learning Development Tutor
- The Additional Support and Disability Advice Centre (ASDAC)
- Excellent library facilities
- Student course and unit handbooks provide information about the course structure and University regulations
- Feedback is provided for all assessments

### 21. Admissions Criteria

#### A. Academic Admissions Criteria

Good first degree in a related subject and appropriate public sector experience. Other applications will be considered (e.g. unrelated subjects, no public sector experience) but subject to interview with admissions tutor. English language IELTS 6.0 or equivalent.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.port.ac.uk/unitwebsearch](http://www.port.ac.uk/unitwebsearch)



## **B. Disability**

The University makes no distinction in its admissions policy with regard to disability and will endeavour to make all reasonable adjustments in order to make it possible for students to study at Portsmouth on a course of their choice.

## **22. Evaluation and Enhancement of Standards and Quality in Learning and Teaching**

### **A. Mechanisms for Review and Evaluation**

- Course Leader's Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review
- Head of Department's Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review
- Unit and Course Level student feedback considered at Board of Studies
- Unit Assessment Board consideration of student performance for each programme
- Annual Standards and Quality Reports to Board of Studies, including consideration of Subject and Award External Examiner Reports
- Periodic Programme Review
- Student Representatives and Student/Staff Consultative Committees
- National Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
- Staff Performance and Development Review
- Peer Review and Development Framework
- Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee

### **B. Responsibilities for Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Unit Co-ordinators for unit content and delivery
- Course Leader for day-to-day running of course
- University Academic Contact for day-to-day running of course
- Board of Studies with overall responsibilities for operation and content of course
- Head of Department
- Associate Dean (Academic)
- Associate Dean (Students)
- Quality Assurance Committee
- Unit, Award and Progression Board of Examiners

### **C. Mechanisms for Gaining Student Feedback**

- Student Representation on Board of Studies
- Student Staff Consultative Committees
- Unit and Course level student feedback questionnaires
- University participates in external student surveys, e.g. National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and International Student Barometer (ISB)
- Online anonymised discussion fora for student comments, suggestions and feedback

### **D. Staff Development Priorities**

- Academic staff undertake activities related to research, scholarship, teaching and learning and student support and guidance
- Annual staff performance and development reviews match development to needs
- Managers undertake a variety of management development programmes
- New academic staff required to undertake appropriate University of Portsmouth learning and teaching programmes



- All academic staff encouraged to seek Higher Education Academy membership
- Academic staff undertake initial and continuing professional development within the Academic Professional Excellence Framework (APEX) programme which is aligned with the Higher Education Academy (HEA)'s UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)
- Support staff are encouraged to attend short courses in areas such as minute taking, and specific IT packages

### 23. Assessment Regulations

The current University of Portsmouth academic regulations will apply to this programme (see [Assessment and Regulations<sup>2</sup>](#)).

### 24. Role of Externals

Subject External Examiners who will:

- Oversee unit assessment and usually attend Unit Assessment Boards
- Review unit assessment strategy
- Sample assessment artefacts
- Present report to Unit Assessment Boards

Award External Examiners (usually also a Subject External Examiner) who will:

- Oversee and attend Award/Progression Boards
- Scrutinise and endorse the outcomes of assessment
- Ensure that the standard of the award is maintained at a level comparable with that of similar awards elsewhere in the United Kingdom

### 25. Indicators of Standards and Quality

#### A. Professional Accreditation/Recognition

None.

#### B. Periodic Programme Review (or equivalent)

2018-19.

#### C. Quality Assurance Agency

QAA Higher Education Review, March 2015, judgements about standards and quality meet UK expectations (*for full report see [Higher Education Review of the University of Portsmouth, March 2015<sup>3</sup>](#)*).

#### D. Others

None.

### 26. Further Information

Further information may be found in:

- Student Handbook
- University of Portsmouth Curriculum Framework Document
- University of Portsmouth Prospectus

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<sup>2</sup> [www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qualitymanagementdivision/assessmentandregulations/](http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qualitymanagementdivision/assessmentandregulations/)

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Documents/University%20of%20Portsmouth/University-of-Portsmouth-HER-15.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Documents/University%20of%20Portsmouth/University-of-Portsmouth-HER-15.pdf)

- [University of Portsmouth](#)<sup>4</sup> and [School/Department](#)<sup>5</sup> websites

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<sup>4</sup> [www.port.ac.uk/](http://www.port.ac.uk/)

<sup>5</sup> [www.port.ac.uk/aboutus/](http://www.port.ac.uk/aboutus/)