

Postgraduate Education in Learning Disability Studies

This postgraduate programme is designed for experienced professionals involved in the care of people with a learning disability (the term used in the UK in place of 'intellectual disability'). It provides inter-professional education on a part-time distance basis, and students learn from specially-prepared study texts, weekend schools, and local tutorial groups.

The programme aims to:

1. To extend your knowledge of the diverse needs of people with an intellectual disability.
2. To develop your skills in promoting the empowerment and quality of life of service users.
3. To promote your capacity to critically evaluate theory and practice.
4. To support you in becoming an effective agent of change.
5. To teach you the research skills needed to critically appraise research and carry out evaluations of your own professional work.

Progress is assessed by essays completed for each of four modules, and a dissertation of 15,000 words based on original research. Successful completion of all of these assessments will result in the award of a Master of Science degree. Completing the assessments for all four modules (equivalent to 120 credits) but not the dissertation will result in a Postgraduate Diploma. A Postgraduate Certificate is awarded to students who complete modules equivalent to 60 credits.

Most students complete a masters degree (MSc) over three years, as follows:

Year	Semester	Modules	Credits
1	1	The needs and rights of people with intellectual disabilities.	30
	2	Development and communication among people with an intellectual disability	30
2	1	Health and healthcare for people with an intellectual disability	30
	2	Research and professional practice	30
3	1 and 2	Dissertation	60
Total			180

The main subjects covered in each of the four taught modules include:

Module 1. The Needs and Rights of People with Intellectual Disabilities. This module covers the place of people with intellectual disabilities in society, their civil rights and the various international declarations of rights; normalisation and other theories of care; government policies for people with intellectual disabilities, and the need to take account of sex and cultural variation; residential care, employment and leisure activities; the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities; and the application of these subjects to people with profound and multiple disabilities.

Module 2. Development and Communication among People with an Intellectual Disability. This covers the personal development of people with an intellectual disability from childhood to old age, the management of life transitions, the impact of intellectual disability on family life, intellectual disability and sexuality, the development of communication skills among people with an intellectual disability, the assessment of communication skills, and methods used to enhance communication and choice.

Module 3. Health and Healthcare for People with an Intellectual Disability. This module covers the epidemiology of illness and disability among people with an intellectual disability, the causes of mortality, sensory impairments, psychiatric and behavioural disorders, health promotion and other interventions, and the effectiveness of healthcare services in responding to the health needs of people with an intellectual disability.

Module 4. Research and Professional Practice. This module covers the techniques needed to critically appraise published research, and carry out a piece of original research. Topics include the scientific method applied to human services, literature search techniques, research design, sampling, the organisation of a research project, research ethics, measurement techniques, the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, the presentation of results, and dissemination.

Fees for the total programme for residents of the European Union (EU) and European Economic Area (EEA) are £4,100. Fees for students resident in other countries are £9,200 for the total programme. However, almost all students study part-time, and fees for EU and EEA residents can be spread over three years, with £1,500 in each of the first two years, and £1,100 in the third year. Fees can also be paid in instalments during the year. The University allows a maximum period of six years for the completion of a part-time masters degree, four years for a postgraduate diploma and one year for a postgraduate certificate.

Successful students have included nurses, social workers, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, teachers, physiotherapists, further special education lecturers, staff of social education centres, and managers of care organisations.

The programme team

Dr. Stuart Cumella is Senior Lecturer in Developmental Disability Policy in the Division of Neuroscience. His first degree was a B.Sc.(Econ) at the London School of Economics, and he has an M.Sc. in Politics at the University of Strathclyde, a Diploma in Social Work at the University of Stirling, and a Ph.D. at the University of London. He has worked as a social worker, a researcher in the Civil Service and with the Medical Research Council, and as a Director of Planning and Information in the NHS. Dr. Cumella has carried out many evaluations of community care services, including those provided for people with a learning disability, people with a mental illness, homeless families, and elderly people.

Professor Shoumitro Deb is Clinical Professor of Neuropsychiatry and Intellectual Disability. His main research interests are in epilepsy and intellectual disability, dementia and Down's Syndrome, and psychiatric disorders in people with an intellectual disability.

Dr Qulsom Fazil is Lecturer in Disability Studies. She is a psychologist, and has completed research in ethnicity and disability, advocacy, and experiences of healthcare among people from ethnic minorities.

Learning

Students learn by:

1. *Study texts.* The programme comprises a series of weekly study texts, which students download from the Internet. These come with a series of readings taken from research and professional journals. Each study text includes an introduction to a particular area of study, with self-completion activities and reading lists.
2. *Library resources.* Students build on what they have learnt from the study texts by accessing the University's 'e-library'. This includes the main research and professional journals in the field of intellectual disability. The Library operates a postal loan scheme for distance students, and also has arrangements with several university libraries in the UK and Ireland so that distance students can use their facilities.
3. *Distance tutors.* The programme has a network of experienced tutors in the UK and Ireland, who each work with a group of students. Tutors provide advice with academic work and support for students who are returning to study. When students begin their dissertation, they are allocated to an academic supervisor who advises them on their research.
4. *Weekend schools.* There is an annual weekend school every September. This is held at the University of Birmingham, and has two purposes: it introduces the programme to new students; and also provides support with research for students working on their dissertation. The weekend school is also a chance for students to meet each other, and meet the programme team.

The programme is affiliated to the British Institute for Learning Disability (BILD), which allows students to have access to its information services.

Entry requirements

To enter the course, students need an appropriate first degree or appropriate professional qualification, plus experience of working with people with an intellectual disability. For further information and application forms, phone Chris Bateman at the University of Birmingham on (0)121 415 8118. His email is C.Bateman@bham.ac.uk. Stuart Cumella can also be contacted directly on (0)121 414 8188. His email is: S.Cumella@bham.ac.uk

Information for Employers

The Masters in Learning Disability Studies will be of great value to staff with a professional qualification and experience of work with people with a learning disability. Supporting a member of staff by paying fees provides the following gains:

1. Improvement in the practice and policy-analysis skills of key staff, who are usually at the stage of being promoted to senior professional posts.
2. Information about research-based practice in intellectual disability, the needs of people with an intellectual disability, and evaluating clinical practice.
3. Supervised research and development, based on student assignments and dissertations.

Further information about how your organisation can benefit from the course is available from Dr Stuart Cumella, who will be happy to meet you.