



UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON

# Programme Specification 2021–2022

Humanitarian Action  
International  
Development

MSc

Important document – please read

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## Important information regarding the Programme Specification

### About this document

**Last revised:** 28 September 2021

The Programme Specification gives a broad outline of the structure and content of the programme, the entry level qualifications, as well as the learning outcomes students will achieve as they progress. Some of the information referred to in this programme specification is included in more detail on the University of London website. Where this is the case, links to the relevant webpage are included.

Where links to external organisations are provided, the University of London is not responsible for their content and does not recommend nor necessarily agree with opinions expressed and services provided at those sites.

If you have a query about any of the programme information provided registered students should use the *ask a question* button in the [student portal](#) otherwise the *Contact Us* button on each webpage should be used.

### Terminology

The following language is specific to the Department of Development Studies:

**Module:** Individual units of the programmes are called modules. Each module is a self-contained, formally structured learning experience with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

**Elective modules:** Optional modules that are studied in succession after the core module(s).

**Dissertation development stage:** A learning stage that follows each module which develops the skills needed to write and submit a final dissertation.

**Module Convenor:** Programme team member who ensures that design and delivery of high quality learning opportunities are available for students on the module.

**Associate Tutor:** Programme team member who delivers small group teaching, or may be used for their specialist expertise to deliver lectures or lead seminars.

**E-tivity:** Online assessment prepared in response to a task or tasks specified by the Programme Director.

### Key revisions made

Programme specifications are revised annually. The quality committee of SOAS, University of London, as part of its annual review of standards, confirms the programme structure and the educational aims and learning outcomes, and advises on any development in student support.

Where changes have been made which may impact on continuing students, these are listed below. For all new students, the programme and general information provided in this document is correct and accurate and will be applicable for the current year.

### Significant changes made to the programme specification 2021-2021

There are no significant changes for the 2021-22 period.

## **Programme title and qualifications**

Postgraduate Degrees of the University of London may be classified. The award certificate will indicate the level of the academic performance achieved by classifying the award. The classification of the degree will be based on the ratified marks from the completed assessments.

The classification system for this programme is as follows:

- Distinction
- Merit
- Pass

Specific rules for the classification of awards are given in the [Programme Regulations](#), under Scheme of Award.

### **Qualifications**

Students are registered on the following:

- Master of Science in Humanitarian Action
- Master of Science in International Development

### **Exit qualifications**

- Postgraduate Diploma in Humanitarian Action
- Postgraduate Diploma in International Development
- Postgraduate Certificate in Humanitarian Action
- Postgraduate Certificate in International Development

An exit qualification is an intermediate qualification, for which the student may not have registered at the outset but which may be awarded on completion of specific modules/courses (or credit accumulated) in a longer programme of study, if the student leaves the programme.

Exit qualifications are awarded at the discretion of the Board of Examiners and once a student has accepted an exit qualification they will not be permitted to continue their study of the same award with the University of London.

### **Individual modules**

There is no provision for individual modules of the programme to be studied on a stand-alone basis.

### **Award titles may be abbreviated as follows:**

Master of Science – MSc

Postgraduate Diploma – PGDip

Postgraduate Certificate – PGCert

## **Level of the programmes**

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ) forms part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education of the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education](#) (QAA).

The qualifications are placed at the following Levels of the FHEQ:

- |                               |         |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| • MSc                         | Level 7 |
| • PGDip (exit qualification)  | Level 7 |
| • PGCert (exit qualification) | Level 7 |

## **Relevant QAA subject benchmarks group(s)**

Not applicable

## **Awarding body**

University of London

## **Registering body**

[www.london.ac.uk](http://www.london.ac.uk)

University of London

## **Academic direction**

Department of Development Studies, SOAS University of London

## **Accreditation by professional or statutory body**

Not applicable

## **Language of study and assessment**

English

## **Mode of study**

Flexible and online study. Supported by an individual personal tutor and dedicated Associate tutor for each module.

## **Programme structures**

The MSc in Humanitarian Action consists of four modules and a dissertation as follows:

- One core module
- Three elective modules chosen from a list of options
- A dissertation

## Programme Specification 2021-2022 Department of Development Studies: Humanitarian Action (MSc), International Development (MSc)

The MSc in International Development consists of four modules and a dissertation as follows:

- One core module
- Three elective modules chosen from a list of options
- A dissertation

All students on either programme must study their core module first. All assessments for each module must normally be submitted before a student may progress to a subsequent module.

Full details of the Scheme of Award are included in the [Programme Regulations](#).

### Maximum and minimum periods of registration

The maximum and minimum period of registration, from a student's effective date of registration, are:

	Minimum	Maximum
MA degree	Two years	Five years

Study materials are made available after registration and on payment of the applicable fee.

### Credit value of modules

Further information about the credit systems used by universities in the UK and Europe is provided by the [Quality Assurance Agency](#) and the [European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System](#).

Where credits are assigned to each module of a programme, credit indicates the amount of learning carried out in terms of the notional number of study hours needed, and the specified Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England (FHEQ) credit level indicates the depth, complexity and intellectual demand of learning involved. The details below indicate the UK credits and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) values.

For these programmes, credits are assigned to the modules as follows:

- 30 UK credits or 15 ECTS credits at FHEQ Level 7 for the core and elective modules.
- 60 UK credits or 30 ECTS credits at FHEQ Level 7 for the dissertation module.

A student awarded either the MSc Humanitarian Action or the MSc International Development will have accumulated 180 UK credits or 90 ECTS credits.

One UK credit equates to a notional ten hours of learning.

## Recognition of prior learning and credit transfer

Recognition of prior learning is a generic term for the process by which we recognise and, where appropriate, award credit for learning that has taken place elsewhere, before entry onto this programme of study.

Where the prior learning covered a similar syllabus to a module/course studied elsewhere, credit will be awarded as if you took the [programme title] module/course.

See the [General Regulations](#) (Section 3) and [Programme Regulations](#) for more rules relating to prior learning.

Prior learning will not be recognised or accredited for this programme.

If you are registered on an MSc degree and have been allowed to proceed to the elective modules, you may study up to **two** elective modules at SOAS on an equivalent part-time basis in place of online learning modules (Blended Learning). The credit obtained will be transferred to your programme of study.

There will be restrictions on the availability of elective modules available for Blended Learning study.

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## Entrance requirements

### Postgraduate entrance requirements

Applicants must submit an application in line with the procedures and deadlines set out on the SOAS [website](#).

Entrance requirements for a postgraduate award vary. Full details are provided on the relevant programme page under the [Overview](#) tab.

All details of the programme specific requirements, and details of the application process, are provided on the relevant [programme page](#).

### English language requirements

All applicants must satisfy the English language requirements for the programme. These are set out in detail on the relevant programme page under the [Apply](#) tab.

Where an applicant does not meet the prescribed English language proficiency requirements but believes that they can demonstrate the requisite proficiency for admission the University may, at its discretion, consider the application.

### Internet access and computer specification

Students will require regular access to a computer with an internet connection to use the University of London's online resources and systems.

The computer should have at least the following minimum specification:

- a web browser with Cookies and JavaScript enabled (a latest version of Firefox or Chrome is recommended);

- a good internet connection;

And the following applications installed:

- a word processor that accepts Microsoft Word formats (.doc and .docx);
- a pdf reader.

### **Students with access requirements**

The University of London welcomes applications from disabled students and/or those who have access requirements. The University will make every effort to provide reasonable adjustments to enable those with a disability, learning difficulty or access requirements to have the same opportunity as all other students to successfully complete their studies.

The University is committed to managing the application procedure and the programme itself to ensure that services are accessible for all students and that an inclusive environment is created. Students with a disability, or others who may need access arrangements to assist in taking examinations, should complete the relevant section of the application form, or contact the [Inclusive Practice Manager](#). A separate room or other arrangements may be considered.

Requests are considered by a University panel, whose purpose is to ensure that students with disabilities and/or specific access requirements are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by such arrangements when compared with other students. These considerations remain separate from the academic selection processes.

For further information, see [Inclusive Practice Policy](#)

### **Sources of funding and scholarships**

Information about potential sources of funding and scholarships is updated annually and where available is included in the prospectus web pages.

For further information see the [website](#)

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## **Educational aims and learning outcomes of the programmes**

### **Learning outcomes of the Humanitarian Action programme:**

The programme takes an integrated approach to knowledge, intellectual, practical and transferrable skills.

As such this programme will allow students to achieve the following:

- a thorough and interdisciplinary analytical understanding of humanitarian action;
- a specialised knowledge of particular case studies, as well as overall trends;
- skills to think in policy relevant terms;
- analytical skills and understanding of practical methodologies to proceed to professional employment and/or PhD research



This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the Humanitarian Action programme. The learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if they take full advantage of the learning opportunities provided by the programme. More detailed information on the specific learning outcomes, content and the learning and teaching and assessment methods of each module can be found on the SOAS website.

Students who successfully complete the MSc Humanitarian Action will gain the following skills and knowledge:

**Subject specific – knowledge and understanding**

- development of a critical understanding of the history of humanitarian action, the key players, institutions and contexts;
- knowledge of present core policy issues of humanitarian work internationally and nationally, and of proposals for their practical solution; combine theoretical knowledge with case study/empirical knowledge;
- development of knowledge over data collection and constraints in emergency settings. Awareness of different data gathering techniques, including case studies, quantitative analysis, surveys, etc. Knowledge of main relevant data sources and outlets;
- development of specialised regional, sectoral or theoretical knowledge and understanding through choice of optional courses from within the department and across the School. Further development and internalisation of specialised knowledge through the dissertation or work-based project.

**Intellectual and transferable skills**

- precise assessment of evidence, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different datasets, claims made on the basis of various kinds of evidence, and methodologies for arriving at substantive claims;
- questioning and critiquing interpretations, and reassessing evidence for themselves. Engaging in contemporary policy debates in relevant fields;
- developing an interest and confidence in thinking in interdisciplinary ways, drawing insights, questions and evidence from a variety of perspectives;
- formulating research questions and to work independently towards addressing those questions;
- structure and communicate ideas effectively both orally and in writing;
- digest rapidly and effectively substantial amounts of reading;
- ability to engage in meetings by presenting, discussing, and constructively critiquing ideas.

**Subject-based practical skills**

- communicate effectively in writing; retrieve, evaluate and select information from a variety of sources; listen and discuss ideas introduced during online discussions;

- practice research techniques in specialised research libraries and institutes and by drawing on data and analysis available on the web;
- develop initiative and capacity to define own research question/hypothesis, and to adjust hypotheses and approach in the light of work undertaken for the dissertation or work-based project.

### **Learning outcomes of the International Development programme:**

The programme takes an integrated approach to knowledge, intellectual, practical and transferrable skills.

As such this programme will allow students to achieve the following:

- a thorough and interdisciplinary analytical understanding of processes of change in developing regions;
- a specialised knowledge of particular case studies, as well as overall trends;
- skills to think in policy relevant terms;
- analytical skills and understanding of practical methodologies to proceed to professional employment and/or PhD research

This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the International Development programme. The learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if they take full advantage of the learning opportunities provided by the programme. More detailed information on the specific learning outcomes, content and the learning and teaching and assessment methods of each module can be found on the [SOAS website](#).

Students who successfully complete the MSc International Development will gain the following skills and knowledge:

#### **Subject specific – knowledge and understanding**

- development of a critical understanding of the main economic, political and sociological-anthropological theories of development. Knowledge of present core policy issues of development internationally and nationally, and of proposals for their practical solution; combine theoretical knowledge with case study/empirical knowledge;
- development of knowledge over data problems in developing countries. Awareness of different research methodologies, including case studies, quantitative analysis, surveys, etc. Development of skills in asking critical questions of commonly used datasets and evidence-based claims. Understanding roots of conflicting estimates and interpretations. Knowledge of main relevant data sources;
- development of specialised regional, sectoral or theoretical knowledge and understanding through choice of optional courses from within the department and across the School. Further development and internalisation of specialised knowledge through the dissertation.

**Intellectual and transferable skills:**

- students should become precise and cautious in their assessment of evidence, and understand the strengths and weaknesses of different datasets, claims made on the basis of various kinds of evidence, and methodologies for arriving at substantive claims;
- students should question interpretations, however authoritative, and reassess evidence for themselves. They should also be able to engage in contemporary policy debates in relevant fields;
- students should develop an interest and confidence in thinking in interdisciplinary ways, drawing insights, questions and evidence from a variety of perspectives;
- students should be able to formulate research questions and to work independently towards addressing those questions;
- structure and communicate ideas effectively both orally and in writing;
- digest rapidly and effectively substantial amounts of reading;
- ability to engage in meetings by presenting, discussing, and constructively critiquing ideas introduced during meetings.

**Subject-based practical skills:**

- communicate effectively in writing; retrieve, evaluate and select information from a variety of sources; present seminar papers; listen and discuss ideas introduced during seminars;
- practice research techniques in specialised research libraries and institutes and by drawing on data and analysis available on the web;
- develop initiative and capacity to define own dissertation research question/hypothesis, and to adjust hypotheses and approach in the light of work undertaken for the dissertation.

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## **Learning, teaching and assessment strategies**

Students learn on this programme by engaging with academically rigorous and up-to-date learning materials and resources in a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). For each module, students will be provided with access, through the University of London Online Library, to all necessary reading materials from a range of appropriate sources, as well as having access to the relevant journals and academic databases subscribed to by the University.

To help a student to organise their time, a bespoke Study Timetable is provided for each module and for the overall programme. This sets out the timetable for their learning and assessment. The programme and the modules themselves are carefully designed to allow students to progress according to their own learning styles. Modules are run over two six monthly periods, in conjunction with the ongoing study of the dissertation. Each module lasts 16 weeks, followed by one of the four stages of the dissertation modules.

The VLE will give students instant access to current module materials, including the assessment tasks known as “e-tivities”, electronic journals and other materials provided by

the Online Library. Students will have a direct link to their dedicated Associate Tutor who will be the main point of contact between SOAS and the student. The Associate Tutor will facilitate student learning by helping students to structure their learning and by being available to assist students with any questions that they may have about the academic content of the programme. A member of the administrative staff is also available to answer questions about the administrative aspects of the student's studies. A technical team may also be called upon to help with any difficulties in accessing the VLE. A key component of the student experience will be peer to peer learning, and so students will be enrolled in bespoke discussion forums.

Each module, with the exception of the dissertation module, has six online assessments (e-tivities), which take the form of written work prepared in response to a task or tasks specified by the Programme Director. E-tivity 6 for all modules (except the dissertation module) is a 4,500-5,000 word assignment submitted online.

The e-tivities provide formative and summative feedback to students, highlighting areas in which they can improve. E-tivities also act as a means of monitoring student progress. Timely and concise feedback for each e-tivity will be provided by either the Module Convenor or the assigned Associate Tutor, as appropriate. The Board of Examiners will be the final arbiter of the above regulations and a student's completion of these criteria.

Students will also undertake a dissertation that relates to the named award. The dissertation module is divided into four dissertation development stages; one stage is completed at the end of each module. Appropriate research methods are taught in each of the four stages to allow completion of the module as a whole through the submission of the dissertation. At the end of the second stage, students submit a research proposal counting for 15 % and at the end of the fourth stage their dissertation counting for 85% of the overall dissertation module mark.

The purpose of this is to enable the student to develop and demonstrate their capacity to carry out a substantial piece of independent academic work on a selected topic. Students will be assessed on their capacity to define a topic, to articulate a coherent scheme for examining the topic, to gather necessary information and to analyse and present this information in a way that satisfactorily assesses the topic.

Assessment criteria for the programme take into account the level at which these skills have been achieved.

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## **Assessment methods**

Both the core and elective modules are assessed through a series of e-tivities culminating in the online submission of a written assessment, e-tivity 6, of 4,500-5,000 words (excluding footnotes, endnotes, bibliography and figures).

The dissertation is assessed by the submission of a written dissertation of approximately 15,000 words, excluding the bibliography and appendices, which will account for 85% of the mark awarded for the module. The remaining 15% of the module mark will be based on the mark obtained for a 1,500 word research proposal.

Full details of the dates of all examinations are available on the <a href="#">website</a> .
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## Student support and guidance

The following summarises the support and guidance available to students:

- The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE): This gives access to materials (including lessons, activities and assignments) for each module studied.
- The VLE also includes a range of additional study resources such as:
  - Online student café and discussion areas which allow students to communicate with each other.
  - Past examination papers and Examiners' commentaries; these provide generic feedback from assessment.
  - Employability skills module; guidance on how to manage your career in the future.
- Module subject guides for each module studied; these introduce and develop the topics.
- [Programme Regulations](#).
- [The Online Library](#): This provides a range of full-text, multidisciplinary databases where journal articles, book reviews and reports can be found.
- [The SOAS online library](#).
- University of London library: Registered students may use the resources located within the Senate House library.
- A University of London email account and web area for personal information management.

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## Quality evaluation and enhancement

The University of London delivers the majority of its flexible and distance learning programmes through a collaboration between the University of London Worldwide and member institutions of the University of London. However some of the flexible and distance learning programmes draw solely on academic input from the University of London, and are delivered without academic lead by a member institutions. The policies, partnerships (where applicable) and quality assurance mechanisms applicable for the programmes are defined in the following key documents: The Quality Framework, the [Quality Assurance Schedules](#), [Guidelines for Examinations](#), [General Regulations](#) and, for each programme, [programme specific regulations](#).

### Awards standards

All University of London awards have to align with the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) to assure appropriate awards standards. In addition, every programme that is developed by a member institution of the University of London (or a consortium with representation by more than one member institution) will be developed to the same standard as would be applied within the institution concerned. Proportionate and robust approval procedures, including external scrutiny and student engagement are in place for all programmes. Learning materials are written and all



assessments are set and marked by academic staff who are required to apply the University's academic standards.

### **Review and evaluation mechanisms**

Some of the key mechanisms in place to assure the standards of all University of London awards and the quality of the student experience, include:

- Annual programme reports: produced for all programmes in order to review and enhance the provision and to plan ahead;
- Independent external examiners: submit reports every year to confirm that a programme has been assessed properly and meets the appropriate academic standards;
- Annual student information statistics: prepared for all systematic reporting within the University of London;
- Periodic programme reviews: carried out every 4-6 years to review how a programme has developed over time and to make sure that it remains current and up-to-date.

Improvements are made as necessary to ensure that systems remain effective and rigorous.

### **Student feedback mechanisms**

The principal channel for collecting feedback from students is the Student Experience Survey. Carried out every two years, this collects feedback from the student body on a range of topics relating to the student lifecycle. The results are analysed externally and then considered in a number of different ways, including by the programme team, principal committees and the senior leadership team. Details of any resulting actions taken are published on the Virtual Learning Environment and the Student Portal.

Additionally, on completion of their programme of study students will be invited to take a survey that seeks to measure what they have gained from their studies.

There are also opportunities for students to get involved in governance. An undergraduate and postgraduate student member is appointed by the University to the majority of committees through an annual appointment round. Some programmes also recruit student members at the programme level. Students are frequently invited to take part in quality review processes such as Periodic Programme Reviews, Programme approval, Thematic Reviews, MOOC review panels and ad hoc focus groups. Opportunities such as these are advertised through social media and on the website. More information can be found on the [website](#).

Students can also apply to join the Student Voice Group, which meets four times a year to consider initiatives for enhancing student experience. Notes from these meetings are published on the Student Portal.

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## **After graduation**

### **Further study**

Successful completion of the programme can allow students to progress to a higher level award in the subject area.

## **Graduate employment routes**

Students who choose to study with the Department of Development Studies do so as it provides them with an opportunity to merge a strong theoretical understanding with equally rigorous practical skills that equip them to go out into the workforce with both knowledge and the ability to deliver. The Department of Development Studies use an intricate combination of SOAS expertise, cutting edge research and practical skills which makes its students attractive to employers.

The Department of Development Studies programmes provide sound intellectual and skills training, which are useful for analysing and designing solutions to many of today's global problems. Graduating students have gone on to a variety of professions where they have been able to utilise the knowledge and skills they learned while studying at the Centre.

## **The Alumni Community**

Upon finishing a course of study, graduates automatically become part of the University of London alumni community, a diverse global network of more than one million graduates in over 180 countries, providing lifelong links to the University and to each other.

Alumni are encouraged to keep in touch after they graduate and to become active members of the alumni community; in return they receive a number of benefits and services, including an extensive programme of events and engagement opportunities.

More information is available on the alumni [webpage](#).

Follow the alumni community on social media: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#)