

Qualitative Research Methods

Programme Handbook 2026-2027

Postgraduate Study

Preface

This document contains details of important information you will need during your period of study within the School of Social Sciences.

It also should be read in conjunction with the University's Student Charter, which can be found here:

http://www.yoursay.manchester.ac.uk/

Disclaimer

All information relating to the programme(s) in this handbook is correct at the time of publication and we will use all reasonable endeavours to deliver the programme(s) accordingly. However, it may be necessary to make changes to the programme(s) in particular circumstances, including changes which may need to be implemented in response to the significant challenges presented by the pandemic. Please be assured that the University will act in the best interests of students and will take all reasonable and proportionate steps to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on teaching, learning and assessment. Students will be notified of any material changes in a timely and effective manner and students are also encouraged to regularly check My Manchester and the Programme Canvas page.

Introduction to Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods

Welcome to the QRM. This handbook provides an overview of the core training in Qualitative methods offered by The University of Manchester at postgraduate level. Within the handbook you will find:

- key contact details
- course structure
- assessment information
- summaries of the training on offer

The Qualitative Research Methods (QRM) modules have been designed to provide basic quantitative and qualitative research skills in line with the generic training requirements specified by the ESRC and AHRC for research students.

Students studying Qualitative Research Methods take a mixture of optional classes, which will be explained below.

Dr James Hodgson

Qualitative Research Methods Co-ordinator

School of Social Sciences Key Contacts

The administration for the QRM is run through the School of Social Sciences student administrative hub. Within the hub, dedicated teams administer specific areas and will help you with your query. The emails for these teams are listed below.

The key academic contacts for the School of Social Sciences are also listed below. Please note that if you have any questions about your QRM or IQM course units you are advised to contact your course unit tutor, Programme Director or Dr James Hodgson (the QRM co-ordinator) in the first instance.

Academic	
Head of School	**Professor Claire Alexander** claire.alexander@manchester.ac.uk
Director of Teaching & Learning	**Nadim Mirshak** nadim,mirshak@manchester.ac.uk
QRM Co-ordinator	**Dr James Hodgson** james.hodgson-2@manchester.ac.uk
Administration	
All general queries, programme related queries, unofficial transcripts, confirmation letters etc.	soss.hub@manchester.ac.uk
Queries relating to your wellbeing	soss.wellbeing@manchester.ac.uk
Queries relating to course unit selection/enrolment/Canvas pages/timetable	Soss.courseunits@manchester.ac.uk
Queries relating to exams and assessment	Soss.assessment@manchester.ac.uk

Applications for extensions and mitigating circumstances	soss.mitcircs@manchester.ac.uk

Welcome to Qualitative Research Methods in the School of Social Sciences

Coordinated by the School of Social Sciences, the QRM programme is designed to meet the needs of postgraduate research students and ESRC funded students, and the requirements with respect to training in qualitative methods set out in the ESRC's Postgraduate Training Guidelines.

These short courses provide an introduction to a selection of qualitative research methods which you may use to supplement the core disciplinary research skills you acquire through working with your supervisor on your research topic. You will also undertake more specialist training in methods central to your discipline which are provided through courses in your discipline area.

The ESRC and the School of Social Sciences recognise that training in research skills is a continuous process. The short courses have been designed to offer a set of basic skills to postgraduate taught students and postgraduate researchers, and to provide an awareness of where particular methods are situated within the social sciences. The aim is to enable students to begin to use the methodologies in the context of their own research.

In order to do this most effectively you should choose your options in collaboration with your supervisor and the skills audit. You should select methods which are relevant to your proposed research question. If you need additional specialist training please see your supervisor in the first instance to discuss how we can assist you in locating the necessary expertise.

Assessments and exercises on the units are practical opportunities to pilot your own competencies in a particular method. The assignment is an opportunity to get feedback on how you are using a method and a chance to develop your competencies. To make the course work for you, adapt exercises to your research topic, focus on practical skills and build your confidence as a researcher.

The assessments for the course units are important because they structure your practical learning. To get the most from the course units concentrate

on learning through the assignment with a focus on improving your practical skills.

Course Structure

The QRM (SOCS60230) is structured as follows. Students select three (x 3) short courses on different methodological approaches. These are provided by different departments across the School of Social Sciences. The short courses are listed below (1 to 6, see below).

If you have any questions about this please contact soss.courseunits@manchester.ac.uk.

Short course options

Once students have completed the first mandatory component of the QRM, they will be able to choose from the list of short courses below.

1. SOAN60891 Practicing participant observation
2. SOAN60201 Doing interviews
3. POLI71201 The Photovoice method
4. SOST60232 Internet research
5. POLI70022 Researching elites
6. SOCY60192 Creative methods

Each short course consists of two weeks' of teaching followed by an assessment.

More information about each of these modules is available below.

How to select your options

Students should use the following online form to select their short course options. Please note that this selection must be completed by **9 October 2026** after which the University Timetabling processes are confirmed for the academic year, and no changes can be made.

Topic Selection Form

Contact soss.courseunits@manchester.ac.uk for more information.

You can refer to any course requirements when you complete this form, and if in doubt consult with the QRM co-ordinator.

If you cannot access the form or wish to change your selection, please direct your queries around the short course selection process to: soss.courseunits@manchester.ac.uk

This team will be able to assist you including any changes to course selection you wish to make. Please note that due to the timetabling process, no changes can be made to your choices **after 9 October 2026**.

Timetable 26-27

All live timetabling information, including venue and time, is held on the University's Timetables page. Please follow this link to access it:

https://timetables.manchester.ac.uk/

Please note that while some course information is available in this handbook, the School of Social Sciences Programmes Team will allocate you to your selected courses and this information will be included on your personalized timetable. Please check the University's Timetables page to keep up to date with any changes to your course allocation.

Ethics

Students undertaking Master's dissertations and other Master's research projects (including any projects conducted for the QRM's short courses) must understand that any project that collects data on/from human participants will involve ethical considerations.

The first step for determining what ethics procedure is appropriate is to use the Ethics Decision Tool, found here:

Ethics Decision Tool (manchester.ac.uk)

This will help you work out if your research project needs to secure formal ethics approval from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

Please note that ethical requirements vary from subject to subject. Your project supervisor will be able to provide information on this for you.

Further information about Ethical Issues and Ethical Approval can be found at:

University ethical approval | The University of Manchester

Please note that you will normal not have ethical approval to work with children or minors (under 18s) or vulnerable individuals unless you are undertaking a specific project and have talked to your supervisor about this issue. **Please do not conduct research on children on vulnerable people for your QRM assignments**.

Assessment

Please read the following information carefully.

All short courses are assessed by a 1,500 word assessment, although the format these take may vary across the short courses. The short courses may also require a presentation where necessary. More details are available in the descriptions above and from your course tutor.

Submission of Assessments

Please read the following information carefully.

Assessments must be submitted via Turnitin by the dates specified in the course unit description for your course.

You must use the SOCS60230 Canvas page to submit your assessments. Individual folders have been set up within Turnitin for the specific short course.

Please note that there is not a common submission date for all courses. It is vital that you ensure that you are familiar with the deadlines for your course units.

One copy of the assignment is to be submitted.

Your name must not appear on the assignment itself.

Extensions

Extensions to a submission deadline can only be granted in situations where unforeseeable events, or events beyond the student's control, have made submission in good time impossible. A request for such an extension will only be considered in exceptional circumstances such as illness, bereavement or family crisis, and must be supported by appropriate evidence such as medical certificates plus a statement of support from the student's dissertation supervisor. Requests for extensions based on a student's employment situation will be considered only in exceptional unforeseen circumstances. Requests for extensions based on a student's computer or other equipment failure are not considered grounds for an extension.

Students will not be granted extensions because research has taken longer than expected, or on the basis of personal or financial situations which could reasonably have been foreseen.

Extension applications should be made on the 'Mitigating Circumstances online form' available from the School website at:

Your welfare and wellbeing (sharepoint.com)

All requests for extensions must be submitted to soss.mitcircs@manchester.ac.uk

Disclosure of Marks

Please refer to the Postgraduate Taught Student's Guide for details regarding disclosure of marks.

Students who complete three short courses as part of the Qualitative Research Methods course unit should note that, for the purposes of the PGT Programme Regulations and examination conventions, an average of the three workshop marks is used when calculating the overall result.

Example:

QRM Unit 1	QRM Unit 2	QRM Unit 3
47%	63%	70%

Overall average = 60% (15 credits)

The individual mark for each course unit will appear on your academic transcript.

Feedback



All sociology courses include both formative feedback – which lets you know how you're getting on and what you could do to improve – and summative feedback – which gives you a mark for your assessed work. This course uses the following mechanisms for feedback:

- Informal feedback during online and face-to-face discussion. Preparing adequately and participating fully in discussion will make this feedback as useful as possible.
- You may email the course lecturer with an essay plan for discussion. This should be at least two weeks before the deadline. You should then book an office hour session by email to the course lecturer to discuss your essay preparation.
- Formal written feedback will be available for coursework essays and should help you plan both for your exams and for future coursework essays in other subjects.

Your Feedback to Us

We're continually working to improve our teaching practices – for that we need your feedback. Towards the end of the semester you'll be asked to fill out a Unit Survey for each of your modules – please do! The survey is designed to be very short and easy to fill out but the results are really valuable for our monitoring of teaching quality. We want to hear from you whether your opinion on the course was good, bad or indifferent.

All of your Unit Surveys are available via Canvas – simply go to 'Unit Evaluation' on the left hand menu of the Canvas website to begin. Alternatively, you can download a smartphone app called EvaluationKit to fill out Unit Surveys for all of your course units.

Referencing

The lack of a proper bibliography and appropriate reference in assessed essays will potentially greatly affect the mark for the work and may be considered plagiarism, which is a serious offence. All essays must employ the scholarly apparatus of references and a bibliography. There are different acceptable referencing styles. In sociology we recommend use of the Harvard system of referencing, which is described in detail here: Referencing support (The University of Manchester Library)

In short, Harvard referencing means that you refer to the author and date of publication in brackets within the text, wherever you are referring to the ideas of another writer. Where you quote an author you must always include quotation marks and a page number in the reference.

All essays must include a References List which lists your sources in alphabetical order by author's surname. This should include all (and only) the sources you have directly referenced in the text. Whatever your source is, you need to provide a full set of publication details as described in the guide linked above. All academic texts you read will include bibliographies and these should give you plenty of examples of what information to include.

KNOW HOW: Cite it Right



You can learn how to reference properly in 15 minutes – head to the online tutorial, Citing it right, at: Referring to other people's ideas in your work - Overview (manchester.ac.uk)

Plagiarism

The University defines plagiarism as 'presenting the ideas, work or words of other people without proper, clear and unambiguous acknowledgement.' It is an example of academic malpractice and can lead to very serious penalties up to exclusion from the University. You should read the University's guidelines here: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=2870

KNOW HOW: Avoiding Plagiarism



You can learn how to avoid plagiarism in 20 minutes – head to the online tutorial, Original Thinking Allowed, at: Avoiding plagiarism through good academic practice - Overview (manchester.ac.uk)

Postgraduate Taught Programmes Marking Criteria

Sociology PGT student's work is assessed into different categories by using the following criteria:

70 +	This mark means that the student is producing work that fits within a distinction profile. Structure: This is excellent work that answers the question fully in a coherent and focused manner. Knowledge, understanding & analysis: There should be clarity of analysis, argument and expression. The work should demonstrate very good knowledge of relevant literature and points of excellence with respect to the following criteria: • insight and depth of understanding of the material • the exercise of critical judgement Communication and presentation: The writing should be clear and the referencing/bibliography accurate (though some lapses are permissible). Presentation should usually be according to guidelines in the course outline. Work of **80+ is outstanding**, constituting or approaching publishable standard.
60 – 69% (Merit at MA level)	Work that is competent, touching very good work at the top end of the range. At the **upper end (65-69) work is very good**. Structure: It should provide a well-organised and almost/full answer to the question. Knowledge, understanding & analysis: The work can be expected to indicate the following qualities: • clarity of analysis, argument and expression • good knowledge of relevant literature • insight and depth of understanding of the material

	• the exercise of critical judgment Communication and presentation: The writing should be clear and the referencing/bibliography accurate (though a few lapses are permissible). Presentation should usually be according to guidelines in the course outline. At the **lower end (60-64) work is good**. Structure: It should provide a well-organised answer to the question though some issues may be excluded or addressed superficially. Knowledge, understanding & analysis: The work is expected to indicate the following qualities: • clarity of analysis, argument and expression • at least selective knowledge of, and critical engagement with, relevant literature. • a good understanding of the material Communication and presentation: The writing should be clear and the referencing/bibliography accurate (though some lapses are permissible). Presentation should usually be according to guidelines in the course outline.
50 – 59% (50% = Pass at MA level)	This represents the minimum performance required on a Masters course. Structure: It should provide a fairly well-organised answer to the question though some issues may be omitted or addressed superficially. Knowledge, understanding & analysis: the work should • provide a competent discussion of relevant material • demonstrate an awareness of relevant literature and consistently evidence arguments/assertions by reference to relevant literature/research. • provide some evidence of critical/analytical thought

	Communication and presentation: The writing should be generally clear and the referencing/bibliography accurate (though some lapses are permissible). Presentation should usually be according to guidelines in the course outline.
40 – 49% (40% = Pass at PG Diploma level)	Work should be at a postgraduate level although not reaching the level required for a Masters course. Structure: It should provide a reasonably well-organised answer to the question though some key issues may be omitted or addressed superficially. • Knowledge, understanding & analysis: work should • provide a competent/adequate discussion of relevant material, although this may be largely descriptive and lack critical/analytical depth • demonstrate an awareness of relevant literature. Communication and presentation: The writing should be generally clear and the referencing/bibliography accurate (though some lapses are permissible). Presentation should usually be according to guidelines in the course outline.
30-39% Fail (marginal) at PG Diploma level	Work does not meet the standards for a Master's programme or Diploma. Structure: Some of the material presented is relevant to the question, but the relevance may not be established clearly. The structure is weak. Knowledge, understanding & analysis: The work is almost wholly descriptive and does not manage to sustain a coherent argument. There may be some discussion of relevant concepts, but this discussion may well be confused or unclear. There is an awareness of some relevant literature. Communication and presentation: The style and presentation will be very poor, though communication maybe maintained.

Short Course Outlines

QRM 2026-2027

The following outlines provide a brief summary of the short courses you can take within the QRM programme. If you have specific questions please direct them to the Tutors listed at the top of the outline.

Participant Observation

Tutor: Nina Kurglikova

Email: nina.kurglikova@manchester.ac.uk

Course code: SOAN60891

Semester: 1

Over the course of the two workshops, our aim is to explore methods of data collection known as 'participant observation', a key component of ethnographic research. Relevant to all social scientists, participant observation is primarily used by anthropologists, who carry out sustained fieldwork to generate new knowledge of human beings living in a myriad of social and cultural contexts. Participating in—and making observations on—the daily life of the people we study produces deep, holistic understanding of the issues we wish to confront. The course will explore participatory and observational forms of fieldwork practice: what it means to 'learn to see' and the kinds of embodied knowledge that emerge through 'learning by doing'.

In these workshops, you will gain theoretical and practical experience with participant observation. You will discuss in class the merits and shortcomings of this research method and consider how it may be paired with other methods. You will hear stories from the field and gain tools for keeping up with the all-encompassing nature of 'the everyday'. You will carry out your own small project and critically reflect on your experience both in class and in your writing. Students moving toward the PhD will have the opportunity to practice writing participant observation into the methods section of their research proposals

Assessment

This 2-part workshop will be assessed by a 1000-word essay.

Researching Elites

Tutor: Dr Louise Thompson (Politics)

Email: **Louise.thompson-4@manchester.ac.uk**

Course code: POLI70021

Semester: 1

Political science research regularly encompasses the study of elite actors – either as individuals or as key actors within institutional settings. Researching these elites therefore helps us to understand the what, why and how of decision making and policy change and institutional decision making. Researching elites also offers insight into the workings of institutions themselves, and often cannot be disentangled from broader research into institutional cultures, rules and activities.

This short course focuses on how we can best research elites, drawing on the use of official documents and records, interviews, ethnography, websites and other written material. It draws on the extensive experience of the module leader in researching UK parliamentarians, government ministers and senior officials, but is applicable beyond this group of actors. Students are encouraged to draw on (and contribute) their own experiences of researching elites. Topics covered include:

What is elite research and what methods might we use?

What challenges does it pose? (e.g. access, instability, transparency, institutional rules, secrecy and archival rules, accuracy of information, high or low volumes of material, ethical issues etc)

How can we mitigate or overcome these challenges?

The course runs through two 3 hour workshops. In the first workshop we will consider precisely what constitutes elite research. Who are elite actors and where do we find them? We will go on to consider what (if anything) makes elite research different to other types of research. In the second half of the class we will look in more detail at some of these methods and challenges, drawing on practical examples from my own research into UK political elites. We will consider how these issues may affect your own (current, past or future) research and the ways in which we must consider and reflect on them in our own research practice.

Before the second workshop you will need to have carried out some preliminary research on an elite actor and data source of your choice. This should be something that you would like to use as the basis for your written

assessment. The research you choose may be related directly to your masters or PhD research, or it may simply be based on a topic of interest to you. It does not really matter who the actor is, so long as you have something that you are able to reflect on in the second workshop and in your assessment.

Assessment

The assessment for the module is based on a 1,500-word reflective report on an issue raised by elite research which we have discussed in class.

The Photovoice Method

Tutor: Dr Dan Silver (Politics Department).

Email: daniel.silver@manchester.ac.uk

Course code: POLI71202

Semester: 2

Since its development in the mid-1990s by Caroline Wang and her colleagues (Wang, 1999; Wang and Burris, 1994), the community-based participatory research method known as photovoice has been put forward as an approach that can produce knowledge for social justice. The photovoice process typically progresses through a number of stages: the first stage tends to be based on identifying a community issue. Participants are trained in the photovoice method and use of cameras. Next, the group identifies the photo assignment(s) or "photo-mission," which is followed by discussion of the photographs that are taken. The meaning of these photographs is explained, either through interviews with participants about their photographs, or by qualitatively analysing writing about the photographs that has been produced by participants. Photovoice provides the space and opportunity for people to be able to reflect on social issues in creative and transformative ways (Carlson et al., 2006; Strack et al., 2004). Unlike many social research approaches where participants are asked for an immediate response, photo-voice enables time for reflection leading to the production of different kinds of data (Guillemin and Drew, 2010).

Photovoice was designed with an 'orientation to social change' and to support 'critical dialogue with policymakers or those in positions of power' (E-J Milne and R Muir, 2019: 282) Sanon et al (2014) identify three key reasons that have been proposed for the use of photovoice: firstly, to document the strengths and challenges of a community; secondly, to empower individuals by providing a collective platform; and thirdly, to develop critical dialogues to influence policy-making. Through surfacing community perspectives, policy makers can be exposed to issues that may otherwise be hidden from view (Chilton et al, 2009).

Course Aims

The short course aims to:

1. Introduce the photovoice method
2. Explain the methodological roots of photovoice

3. Demonstrate how photovoice can be used in social research

By the end of the course, students will be able to write about the methodological roots of photovoice, will have gained experience of using the method, and be able to develop their own photovoice projects.

Assessment

One 1500-word essay

The assessment is a critical reflection of trying out the photovoice method. You will present your findings, reflect on the practice of trying out the method, and then explore on how you might develop a research project that engages with one of the methodological foundations of photovoice.

Internet Research

Tutor: Kingsley Purdam

Email: kingsley.purdam@manchester.ac.uk

Course code: SOST60232

Semester: 2

The course will provide students with insights into digital social research methods such as on-line ethnography, on-line interviews, focus groups, blog analysis and on-line surveys. The course will help develop the students' skills in using the Internet as a source of data – 'the field' - including: communities on-line, non-participant observation, covert studies, social media data analysis such as blogs, X/Twitter, TikTok, Facebook and on-line consumption data and the sampling and representation challenges that such data pose. In addition, the course will highlight research ethics when using the Internet and digital methods for social research and provide guidance on good practice.

The course will be organised around two 3-hour work sessions combining lectures, practicals and group work as well as linked follow-up resources. The first session will provide an overview of Internet based research methods and data types. This will include: digital methods (on-line ethnography, interviews and surveys), data access, sampling, representation issues and ethics. The second session will involve taster practicals in using on-line research methods and gathering data. The group work will involve a discussion of data types and ethical issues such as privacy and will provide signposts to ethical good practice guidelines. No previous knowledge is assumed.

Assessment

One 1,500 word essay.

Creative Methods

Tutor: Radhika Mathrani Chakraborty,

Email: radhika.mathranichakraborty@manchester.ac.uk

Course code: SOCY60192

Semester: 2

This course consists of two workshop sessions. Workshop 1 introduces creative methods, with a focus on a range of different creative methods. In-between workshops, students will undertake a creative methods task. During Workshop 2, we will discuss approaches to analysis and students' experiences of their creative methods task. **The course aims to i**ntroduce students to creative methods both as an approach, and as a means of generating social science research data. The course also aims to inculcate in students a critical awareness of issues involved in choosing creative methods and including them in a research project design.

Intended Learning outcomes:

On completion of this unit successful students will be able to demonstrate:

A critical appreciation of a range of creative methods, spanning those involving (a) elicitation, (b) making and creating and (c) mobile methods

An understanding of the types of research question and project that creative methods are particularly suited to, and issues involved in their inclusion in a research design, as well as their limitations

A critical awareness of the kinds of knowledge that creative methods can produce

Practical experience of the use of a creative method, and the capacity for critical reflection on their own methodological practice

A critical appreciation of analytical strategies appropriate to creative methods

Assessment

One assessed essay with a maximum limit of 1,500 words makes up 100% of the overall course mark. The word limit allows for +/- 10%, i.e. in the range 1,350 and 1,650 words.

Doing Interviews

Tutor: Gaudenz Metzger

Email: gaudenz.metzger@manchester.ac.uk

Course code: SOAN60201

Semester: 1

Interviews offer a vital means of generating new knowledge about people's everyday activities and their social, cultural and moral worldviews; about people's social relations and interactions; about their past experiences, current circumstances, anticipated futures and much else besides. Interviews are one of the principal methods for gathering information and obtaining data when carrying out research with or about human subjects.

More than providing the researcher with information, however, interviews may be used to research and obtain a better understanding of the entire spectrum of human experience and activity—from habitual and routine practices to extraordinary life changing events and moments of crisis—so as to learn about the commonalities and differences that exist between persons, groups or communities. Interviews offer a defined, ritualised, intersubjective moment in which researcher and interlocutor may reflect on the connections between an individual's experience and broader social and cultural phenomena.

The aim of Doing Interviews is to explore the interview as a way into the complexity of these phenomena. We will take a practical approach, giving us all the opportunity to engage with a range of theoretical and practical ways of thinking about, planning, carrying out, analysing, and incorporating interviews, that are aimed to be of use and relevance across different disciplines and research contexts.

Students will conduct their own extensive interview, collaborate with others to analyse and write up, and reflect independently on their developing interview practice.

Intended Learning Outcomes

- Students will consider a wide range of approaches to interviewing as a method for generating knowledge, including classic techniques, audiovisual methods and different experimental approaches.

- Students will arrange, perform, and transcribe their own interviews.
- Students will develop a critical, practical and reflexive understanding of how to plan and carry out interviews for the purposes of research.
- Students will relate the forms of knowledge interviews generate directly to social science research themes, gaining the necessary skills to incorporate interviews into research proposals at the doctoral level.

Assessment

One 1,000 - 1,500 word essay.