

Studying Person-Centred Education at the University of Sussex

MA in Education Studies

The Guerrand-Hermès Foundation (GHFP) is collaborating with the Sussex School of Education to offer an innovative programme in the study of Person-Centred Education (PCE) leading to an MA Education Studies.

The MA is part-time and will accommodate candidates who have busy working and family lives. There are two twilight study sessions and one intensive weekend session each term. In between, there will be one-to-one tutorial and online materials to support participants' work.

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What is Person-Centred Education?

Person-centred education is concerned with the development and flourishing of the whole person and the expression of a person's full potential. It is based on the premise that learning is an active search for meaning and understanding, through engaging in a set of positive human relations within a community. Person-centred education is realised not only through an academic programme, but also through a transformative process of encounter, participation, dialogue and inquiry.

Why study Person-Centred Education?

Person-centred education is increasingly being recognised, as a philosophy and as an intellectual framework in both mainstream and alternative education. The introduction of this new programme is in part a response to the increased demand for personalised learning in British schools. Personalisation is an innovative educational framework that intends to take into account of learners' personal needs and nurture their unique talents. However, despite the best intention, what it means to be a person and what it entails to provide personalised learning experiences yet remains to be examined.

There is a growing need for research and for building a knowledge base in this area of education, and concerns about how to conceptualise whole-person learning and education, its pedagogical implications, and how to integrate the values of person-centredness in day-to-day educative encounter. Opportunities are scarce at postgraduate level for in-depth investigations, critical reflection and innovation in diverse approaches for engaging learners in person-centred ways.

MA in Education Studies programme is designed for educators who have a need to reflect upon and deepen their understanding of learning, thereby developing critical thinking and ideas for educational innovation. Participants on the person-centred education programme will explore the notion of person-centredness in depth, in terms of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, the educational pedagogy and the practice. The programme will be structured so that participants can learn to integrate PCE in their own teaching, learning and ways of being, and be empowered to make a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge and understanding of PCE. This will be achieved through processes of dialogue, critical reflection, and empirical investigation.

What are the programme activities?

The programme combines the MAES elements, such as seminars, one-to-one tutorials and independent study, with additional support elements offered by the GHFP. These include a termly

intensive group study weekend, invited speakers, a supportive and committed learning community, online learning materials, forums and discussions, with personal learning logs and so forth.

The PCE programme is itself intended to be person-centred in its values, approaches and intellectual content. In so doing it will be grounded in a community in which learners and facilitators relate to each other as ‘persons rather than as role occupants’ (Fielding 2000:52). The programme draws on the commitment of each participant to a dialogic process of inquiry and shared meaning-making.

One way to approach shared meaning and understanding is narrating and writing a ‘learning biography’ (Donimicé 2000). The learning biography, which has a long tradition at Sussex, is an interpretation made by the learner about his or her life journey in and through learning. Participants will use this understanding to inform their ongoing experience of learning.

Accordingly, the programme provides no fixed modules, and the intellectual content is collaboratively identified and developed in order to integrate individual participants’ learning needs, goals and purposes. A list of recommended elements may be used as guidelines to help participants determine and construct their own learning trajectories.

Distinctive features

In summary, the main innovative features include:

- A. it offers a programme that strives to integrate person-centred values into its intellectual intentions and into its own educational approaches.
- B. there is no pre-determined syllabus, so participants will determine their own learning trajectories, based on personal, professional and institutional background and needs.
- C. the programme of study emphasises both independent work and group-based inquiry.
- D. each individual’s learning biography is used to inform an approach to identifying learning goals and developing a learning plan
- E. the key approaches involve dialogue with peers and educators and one-to-one supervision with a tutor who has expertise in the participant’s area of interest
- F. there are a range of seminars and study sessions, most of them taking place on weekday evenings or at weekends

Programme structure

Overall programme structure is in accordance with the MA in Education Studies design. That is to say that the programme is part time and requires that participants accumulate a total of 180 M-level credits.

The programme is broadly divided into four parts:

Part 1 Understanding learning and meaning

Year I Term 1 – reflect on personal learning biography and identify individual learning goals, needs and learning plan.

1st project – Learning biography and learning plan

Part 2 Investigating the landscape of PCE

Year I Term 2 – explore and critically engage with philosophy, theories, concepts and approaches of PCE.

2nd project – Review of current literature on PCE

Part 3 Planning for individual inquiry

Year I Term 3 – become familiar with diverse research methodologies, plan for individual inquiry, and prepare for embarking on individual journey of research inquiry.

3rd project – Individual research proposal

Part 4 The journey of inquiry

Year II – explore field-based research inquiry, reflect on research experience, and integrate conceptual framework with learning from practice.

Final project – research project and dissertation

Participants will take two years to complete the study. It is acknowledged that the conventional MA in Education Studies does allow students to take up to five years to complete the programme. However, as this programme highlights the significance of establishing a community of learners, it is anticipated that through being part of a study group, participants are more likely to complete their studies in two years.

The requirements for the MA are set out in the Sussex University programme handbook for an MA in Education Studies. This programme intends to integrate these requirements for assessment in ways that enable the participants to see and understand the meaning and relevance of written projects. The overall assessed projects for the participants studying PCE are provisionally scheduled as above, although the final decision will be made by the learning group when it meets at the beginning of the programme.

Research Project and Dissertation

Dissertations may be project oriented, independent research, or enquiry at participants' own work place. The following are examples of potential questions for investigations:

- co-operative learning
- integrated learner-centred curriculum
- schools as person-centred learning communities
- formative assessment
- person-centred learning within large state schools
- emotional intelligence and respectful communication in primary schools
- philosophical underpinning of person-centred education
- student voice
- teachers' life histories and professional development

Participants

The programme provides opportunities for participants' professional advancement and for enhancing the quality of learning within their institutions. Persons likely to benefit from the programme are those who are interested in whole-person education, and personalisation in learning and other innovative pedagogical approaches.

Entry requirements

Normally, applicants must be honours graduates with at least three years of professional experience or, in the absence of this experience, have at least an upper second honours degree. However, applicants will be considered who do not meet these criteria but who can demonstrate relevant experience in education and sufficient academic proficiency.

This programme will appeal particularly to teachers, lecturers, teacher trainers, home educators, adult educators, HE staff, therapists, health educators, and others who have an interest in person-centred education. Teaching experience is desirable, but applications are also welcome from those just beginning or planning to embark on their educational careers.

Fees and scholarships

Details of the programme fees are available on request from the MAES programme convener and from the MA handbook and university's website.

Participants are expected to be self-funded or funded by their employers. Those who are financed by their place of employment would be encouraged to conduct research relevant to that institution.

The Guerrand-Hermès Foundation has a number of grants for participants who have difficulty in paying the full fees. The grant, to be applied for, is to contribute towards partial tuition fees.

How to apply

To request an application form or for further information for the MA in Education Studies at the University of Sussex, contact:

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