



## UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

**Programme Title:** BA (Hons) Advice Studies,  
Certificate in Advice Studies,  
Diploma in Advice Studies

**Awarding Body:** Staffordshire University

**Teaching Institution:** Staffordshire University

**Final Awards:** BA (Hons) Advice Studies

**Intermediate Awards:** Certificate in Advice Studies  
Diploma in Advice Studies

**Mode of Study** Distance Learning

**UCAS Codes:** B940

**QAA Subject Benchmarks:** Where appropriate - QAA for HE subject  
benchmark statements for Social Policy,  
Social Work and Law.

**Professional/Statutory Body:**

**Date of Production:** April 2008

**Date of Revision:** October 2010

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## EDUCATIONAL AIMS OF THE PROGRAMME

- To secure academic recognition for the complex and demanding nature of 'advice work'; its skills of assessment, analysis, problem solving and people- skills of interviewing, negotiation and advocacy as well as the substantive underpinning knowledge for the diverse contexts in which advice is offered.
- To secure an understanding of the importance of advice work in promoting human rights, equality of opportunity and the interests of marginalized and socially excluded people.
- To provide a rigorous academic programme of study to Certificate, Diploma or Degree level, based upon the disciplines of Law, Applied Social Studies, Social Policy and Advice Work.
- To equip students for a successful career in para-legal and advice work and to offer employers of advice workers an effective educational and training portfolio (especially those which find it difficult to mount effective in-house training programmes) benchmarked against key external and nationally recognised quality marks.
- To promote the interests of non-traditional students through a carefully constructed, accessible distance learning programme of study delivered exclusively through a 'virtual learning environment'; a programme of study that gives due recognition to the knowledge and skills that may have been acquired through workplace experience.
- To provide encouragement to mature, disabled and ethnic minority students; to second career returnees to education; and to those who frequently find a pathway to a satisfying career through volunteering in advice agencies.

### **What is distinctive about this programme?**

The award is a unique fully electronic VLE based undergraduate distance learning award, which has been developed by advice professionals for advisers currently working (in a paid or unpaid capacity) in the advice industry and therefore often with significant experience in advice work, and its continues to remain the only award of its kind nationally.

The award specifically targets existing advisers and as such promotes the award in to main ways a) through the magazine The Adviser which has a circulation of 3000 and a readership of 10,000 and b) via the membership list of AdviceUK which has 1500 registered members. The Award has continued to recruit well over the first five years of its life and there are no indications that this is due to change in any major way.

The award has two intakes per academic year which fits well with the Advice industry as the traditional September period can be a difficult time for some advisers. The Award has recruited an average of approximately 50 new students every year since 2004. In terms of gender the Award attracts more than twice as many women as it does men and this mirrors the gender profile within the advice industry. The vast majority (80%) of students are in the age group 30+ again reflecting the age profile of paid and voluntary advice workers.

During the last five years the award team have made several alterations and modifications to the award in direct response to suggestions made by students of the award. (e.g. two new modules have been added, attempts to increase the student interactivity (asynchronous seminars) have been developed).

## PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

What will this programme teach me to do? At the end of your studies you should be able to:

<p><b>Knowledge &amp; Understanding</b> Demonstrate a systematic understanding of key aspects of advice work, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of advice work – legal concepts and system; people skills; and the social and policy context of advice work.</p>
<p><b>Learning</b> Demonstrate an understanding of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge; through an ability to deal with complex and specialised problems.</p>
<p><b>Enquiry</b> Deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry and initiate and carry out projects which may reflect upon clients' problems, projects, and ways of working/delivering advice services, including an understanding of information literacy.</p>
<p><b>Analysis</b> Describe and comment upon current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship and critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements – about advice giving, advice services and social policy.</p>
<p><b>Problem Solving</b> Develop appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem and use decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts – in relation to problems brought to advice agencies and problems experienced by advice agencies.</p>
<p><b>Communication</b> Communicate and analyse information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences to complex situations with complex solutions</p>
<p><b>Application</b> Apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding and devise and sustain arguments, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline in complex situations.</p>
<p><b>Reflection</b> Manage learning, exercise initiative, personal responsibility and demonstrate the learning ability, qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment or further training of a professional advice worker.</p>

## PROGRAMME STRUCTURE, MODULES AND CREDITS

### Programme Title: BA (Hons) Advice Studies

L E V E L  4	Teaching Block 1	Law for Advisers (15 credits)	Benefits Advice I (15 credits)	Debt Advice I (15 credits)	Employment Advice I (15 credits)
	Teaching Block 2	Interview Skills (15 credits)	Consumer Advice I (15 credits)	Housing Advice I (15 credits)	The Adviser in the Agency (15 credits)

All eight modules have an individual value of 15 credits, total **120 credits**. There is no possibility of options or electives at this level.

L E V E L  5	Teaching Block 1	Discrimination, Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Advice (15 credits)	Negotiation and Advocacy (15 credits)	Benefits Advice II (15 credits) Understanding Disability I (15 credits)	Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Immigration Advice (15 credits) Housing Advice II (15 credits)
	Teaching Block 2	Social Policy and Social Problems I (15 credits)	Social Welfare Law and Practice (15 credits)	Understanding Community I (15 credits) Personal and Family Advice (15 credits)	Debt Advice II (15 credits) Employment Advice II (15 credits)

The shaded modules are core and the non shaded are options. In order to undertake the Benefits Advice; Housing Advice; Consumer Advice and Employment Advice modules at level 5 students must have successfully completed the Level 4 modules first. Also the two 'Understanding' modules can only be studied at level 5 **or** level 6 and **not at both**

L E V E L  6	Teaching Block 1	The Management of Advice Services (15 credits)	Social Policy and Social Problems II (15 credits)	Benefits Advice II (15 credits) Understanding Disability I (15 credits)	Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Immigration Advice (15 credits) Housing Advice II (15 credits)
	Teaching Block 2	Research Methods (15 credits)	Specialist Portfolio (15 credits) Dissertation (30 credits)	Understanding Community I (15 credits) Personal and Family Advice (15 credits)	Debt Advice II (15 credits) Employment Advice II (15 credits)

Therefore students completing the Diploma will be able to choose four out of eight (or seven if they have already completed Understanding Community or Disability at level I) allowing for some degree of specialisation and for those completing the Honours six out of eight enabling a wider degree of specialisation.

## HOW WILL I BE TAUGHT AND ASSESSED?

### Teaching and Learning

In general terms, staff working in advice giving agencies both volunteers and paid workers are often very experienced and knowledgeable through in house, 'on the job' learning and short courses.

The Advice Studies award seeks to capture that knowledge and experience by acknowledging that students are almost entirely adult learners and by acknowledging that that this has major consequences for teaching, learning and assessment. Teaching and learning will emphasise what students have to contribute; and assessment will attempt to recognise effective learning where it has already happened through means which embrace APL and AP(E)L.

The Advice Studies award uses electronic means almost exclusively, with some additional small element of face-to-face contact during induction programmes for each level. In addition, some paper-based materials are also distributed during induction and in one case before the commencement of a particular module. (This specific material is simply not available in an electronically communicable format)

Prior to September 2004 all modules were delivered via the VLE, Lotus Learning Space. Following the Universities decision to change VLE's, all modules at all levels are now delivered through the VLE, Blackboard. This VLE provides students with access to all the materials that might otherwise be located in lectures/seminars or workshops – that is, an exposition, appropriate to the level of study, the key features of the discipline/sub-discipline in question and an exploration of key debates, concepts and contrasting perspectives, paradigms or theories. These expositions/explorations entailed mapping the intellectual territory and suggesting how the territory relates to and interrelates with adjacent fields/modules.

### E-learning strategy

A key feature of the award is the method of electronic delivery of all undergraduate modules studied wholly online. The Award leader has developed an Award Specific Portal which contains a wealth of information both about the specific award and also the support available via the wider University.

([www.staffs.ac.uk/courses/gateway/advice\\_studies](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/courses/gateway/advice_studies))

Students have a choice of subjects to study and they also have the flexibility of where and when to study within the structure of the award and the timescale of the specific module. This is particularly welcomed by those for whom full time campus attendance is difficult, giving greater flexibility and equity in providing learning opportunities for all.

Online study enhances students' IT skills and promotes independent learning and self-directed enquiry. Within the VLE, students are able to interact with tutors/students and receive formative and summative feedback. They contribute to directed online asynchronous assessed and non-assessed discussions with other students all of whom are advice work practitioners in a wide variety of advice settings at the forefront of the field.

The teaching material is studied online. The VLE facilitates the transmission of information, providing direct links to other resources where appropriate. It also

enables student activity, which can be self-assessed, and student interaction via discussion forums. Tutors are available by email; by actively participating within the module and via the telephone.

The Award team have developed a significant amount of expertise in delivering online modules, and are constantly seeking to develop this in innovative ways to achieve increased effectiveness. To this end, blogs, webquests and podcasts are currently being investigated and if appropriate will be further incorporated into modules in the future, where direct benefits to teaching and learning can be envisaged.

Technology enhances our ability to deliver student-centred teaching. Web-based learning can incorporate a range of different formats, which can appeal to different learning styles. We use the VLE to provide guided reading and research to enable student interaction via discussion forums, and to promote enquiry and independent learning. We acknowledge the need for student support and this award is provided both via direct email and telephone contact with students.

### **Mechanisms for determining progress**

There are some differences between modules in the extent to which they fulfil the task of exposition/exploration within the module materials. Some require students to undertake more *external* tasks to investigate other websites or materials in books/journals or indeed, for example, (as with the level one module in the Adviser in the Agency module), to find answers. Others provide more 'answers' *within* the presented material where much of the material is technical in nature (the modules on Debt Advice, for example). However, these are matters of degree or emphasis and they reflect teaching styles or the need to be more reflective/discursive with some topics/issues rather than more substantial differences in pedagogy.

### **Research methods and dissertation**

At the Honours level the induction period permits the introduction of the research methods module and the dissertation through teaching and initial detailed briefings, together with attendance at the University for a taught Dissertation Day.

Dissertation guidance and support is provided through the mechanism of the online module. Students are provided by dissertation structure, design guidance via the online module. They are encouraged to start to think about their specific dissertation during the research module, they are then required to post their dissertation plan into the online module for tutor and peer feedback. They subsequently attend University for a one day intensive teaching/support session where they are allocated a specific supervisor. They are subsequently required to post a dissertation synopsis into the module again for peer and supervisor feedback. They are then encouraged to maintain contact with their supervisor via the appropriate module forum.

### **Consolidating and developing learning**

Learning is consolidated through a variety of means :-

- some modules require students to complete tasks where answers are 'hidden' – students are thus able to complete self assessments of progress;
- in addition or alternatively, students may contribute to and reflect

upon online asynchronous seminar/discussion contributions which may or may not be assessed;

- tutor comment/feedback (via email or telephone) in relation to individual enquiries from students – academic guidance/personal tutorials/feedback on essay or assignment plans;
- tutor comment/feedback upon online asynchronous seminar contributions, both assessed and non-assessed;
- guided reading or suggested additional activities/exercises; detailed guidance in the appropriate sections of a module.

## **Assessment**

Assessment methods are designed to encourage students to demonstrate that they have achieved the range of learning outcomes appropriate to specific modules. The use of a VLE does however have to be considered when choosing assessment methods, as they have to be able to function within the framework of the VLE.

Assessment of many advice modules is based upon real-life scenarios, and assessment will therefore test students' ability to perform activities relevant to advice work. In some of the non-advice-specific modules more conventional essay based assessment is incorporated. Asynchronous online discussion forums are also included in all modules, where increasingly modules are incorporating assessed discussion forums which contribute to the overall mark for a module. This method of summative assessment gives students the opportunity to interact with each other and thereby contribute to the development of a learning community.

Students are provided with written assessment criteria along with each piece of assessment, and information about generic marking criteria is provided via the Advice Studies portal.

## **Formative Assessment**

Opportunities exist within the structure for formative assessment. This may be through self assessment (comparing student answers with 'hidden' answers) through work conducted within the on-line seminars or through the completion of a variety of short 'tasks' or 'activities' contained within modules. Feedback is given to individual students and to the whole group via email and the appropriate online seminar. Feedback may also be given by personal tutors and/or module tutors individually, either following summative assessment, or during the course of a module by email or within discussion forums.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **Entry Requirements (including IELTS score or equivalent)**

Students whose first language is not English require IELTS score 7 or equivalent

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### **What qualifications would I need to join this programme?**

The entry requirements for the award are normally:

- Students must be working in a voluntary or paid capacity in the ‘advice sector’.
- Those under 21 are subject to standard University entrance requirements. A typical two or three A-level offer would be between 180 and 240 points, but those with other qualifications will be considered individually.
- Mature students are particularly encouraged to join this award, and will be assessed on an individual basis.
- Applicants who have completed an Access course approved by the Staffordshire Access network, or equivalent, are welcomed.

Because this is a distance learning award it is possible to be a little more adventurous in making offers by allowing students to enrol for one or two modules only in the first instance as ‘taster’ modules.

**Disability Statement**

Staffordshire University operates a policy of inclusive teaching and learning to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to fulfil their educational potential. Details about how to apply to have your needs assessed can be found at: [http://www.staffs.ac.uk/study\\_here/disabled\\_students/index.jsp](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/study_here/disabled_students/index.jsp)

**AWARD SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

**Further information about the award can be found in the relevant Student Handbook and on the University Website. This includes information about optional modules, learning outcomes at levels below honours, student support, and academic regulations.**

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## **ADDENDUM FOR DELIVERY AT A PARTNER INSTITUTION**

This section should record any matters within the programme specification which do not apply to the delivery at the partner. It should also note any differences in delivery, course content, module choice etc.

**Name of the partner:**

**Admission requirements (including IELTS score or equivalent)**

**Date of approval**

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