

Online Chat Event Transcript 20th May 2008
International Primary Health Care

This is a transcript of the online chat event that happened for International Primary Health Care on 20th May 2008. Personal information about participants has been removed for data protection purposes. Jill and James are two of the course tutors who work on the course, whilst Will and Brendan both work for the University in an administrative capacity.

Who	Quote
Will	Information about the International Primary Health Care qualifications can be found on our website at the following address: http://www.londonexternal.ac.uk/prospective_students/postgraduate/ucl/health_care/index.shtml
Participant 2	What kind of degrees I will receive after the studies?
Will	Hi Participant 2. On completion of this programme you will receive a University of London qualification. The standard of which is identical to those qualifications awarded to students who have studied in London.
Participant 3	Who are the course tutors?
Jill	The course director is Professor Trisha Greenhalgh, with a world wide reputation in primary health care. You can read details of her recent textbook on primary care, which is also a core text book for the course here: http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/book.asp?ref=9780727917850 . The course team comprises approximately six course tutors, from a variety of clinical and other backgrounds, all with academic posts at University College London who work together as a close team providing all the teaching and support for the course. You can read more about individual tutors on our Open Learning Unit website: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/openlearning/
Participant 1	How many people are on the course at any one time?
James	The number of students varies from year to year, but currently there are generally between 20 and 30 students in each year. They usually come from a wide range of different professional and national backgrounds and this variety is an important part of the learning environment. For collaborative working, we find that smaller groups work better. So for the virtual seminars in the first year, we generally divide the year into 4 groups, based on their particular clinical interests.
Participant 1	While the course is spread over three years part time. Is it possible to take modules early?
Jill	Hi Participant 1 Most students take a minimum of three years to complete as they are combining studying with full or part time work. There is some flexibility in discussion with course tutors to take modules early, depending on individual circumstances.
Will	Information about the modules available can be found at: http://www.londonexternal.ac.uk/prospective_students/postgraduate/ucl/health_care/structure.shtml
Participant 1	Hi, I am interested in the third year of the course and how structured the modules are. Are we allowed to choose what our dissertations will be about?
Jill	Hi Participant 1 the third year dissertation modules are a hybrid between the structured taught modules in the first two years of the course and completely independent study of preparing a dissertation that you come across on some courses. So there are online group discussions, suggested reading lists and recommended dates for submitting drafts of your dissertation, but at the same time it is very much up to individual students to choose the topic of their dissertation, plan their study and ensure a project timetable to complete the work on time. There are four dissertation modules you can choose from - a research dissertation, a service development dissertation, a teaching and learning dissertation or a systematic review dissertation. You can read more about

	each of these modules in the course brochure.
Participant 1	All of the elective modules seem interesting. Can we get a taster of them a little nearer to when we need to choose which ones we would like to take part in?
James	Hi Participant 1 During the first year, students develop a feel of what they may want to study in subsequent years and there is a prospectus available for each elective module. They are encouraged to discuss their choices with their tutors and also have the opportunity to ask students in years 2 and 3 in the student cafe about the elective courses.
Participant 4	My first question was to do with the Research Methods module and the content of the quantitative and qualitative research sections of the course. Will we use computer packages for analysing data? If so, which ones? And, if not, then what is the exact content of this course i.e. what can we be expected to do at the end of it! Thanks!
James	Hi Participant 4 Thanks for the first question. The research methods module runs for about 6 months (including breaks) and has to cover a lot of ground. We aim to give you the important theories of each type of research method, provide you with examples of good (and bad) papers and offer you the chance to design your own protocols. We start off with a general introduction to academic research and literature searching as many students have not considered this formally before. This is often quite a challenge in its own right. We then move on to a unit on qualitative research, covering interviews, focus groups, and other methods. The next module is about questionnaire design, piloting and implementation, and the final one covers quantitative methods. Each of these contains a significant amount of reading and collaborative working to consolidate the information learnt and it is a very busy course. While we introduce the principles of analysis we do not teach the detailed analysis of quantitative data as this would merit a course lasting several months alone. We aim to give you the background and overview of analysis. Increasingly in academic primary care researchers rely on professional statisticians for the analysis and we aim to prepare students for this working relationship.
Participant 4	Ok - second question: At present, I do not work in primary health care. I work for an international development consultancy. Whilst we don't have a "health" practice area, part of the work we do for larger "livelihoods" projects concerns health. I am very keen to begin a career in primary health care in the field of international development and was wondering whether this course was for me – seeing as I might have problems in "bringing" primary care knowledge to the seminars etc... My problem is that I can't get a job in primary health care and development without a qualification...but many qualifications insist that you have some prior experience. A little bit of the chicken and egg scenario. So, I guess my question is: Do you think I will be able to participate actively without working specifically in primary health care?
James	That is a good question, Participant 4. We do have several students on the course who are not clinically trained, but who work in service development and we are very keen to encourage a better understanding of what primary care can offer to people working in your type of environment. From what you say, I suspect you would not have a significant difficulty in fitting into the course and participating actively.
Participant 5	I have some more queries: 1. How long will does the MSc usually take. 2. Is there any final assessment / exams 3. What is the teaching and learning dissertation

Will	<p>Hi Participant 5,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Most students take 3 years. 2. Compulsory core and elective modules are assessed by one 90-minute unseen written paper and two 3,000 word assignments. The only exception to this is the compulsory core module 'The academic study of primary care', which is assessed by one 90-minute unseen written paper and one 3,000 word assignment. The dissertation module is assessed by one 90-minute unseen written paper and a dissertation of between 13,500 and 16,500 words excluding appendices. Examinations take place once a year, normally in June. Examinations are normally held in a student's country of residence in one of over 650 examination centres worldwide. 3. The teaching and learning dissertation is as it sounds - a dissertation option for those that are interested in the teaching of primary care.
Participant 6	<p>Hello everyone sorry I'm late but I am at work. I am tempted to do PG cert at this moment as I have just finished a Masters course which I paid myself and cannot afford to do another one at the moment. I am about to start on refugee health which is something new for Malta, in fact I am working on a proposal.</p>
Brendan	<p>Hi Participant 6, welcome to the chat event.</p>
Participant 4	<p>Another one...If we do not take one of the modules, is it still possible for UCL to give students the reading list and seminar notes/questions from this module for our own personal and private study?</p>
James	<p>Hi Participant 4, Most of the course materials are available online so if you sign up to the course, you should have full access to the modules you are not studying as well as those you are. We also send out books and readers in the post for each module, and these would not be available to you if you did not sign up to that particular module. However, most of these are available through online bookshops and we could provide you with the reading list if you wished for it.</p>
Participant 6	<p>May I pay by semester instead of right at the start of the course?</p>
Will	<p>Hi Participant 6, You can chose to pay your fees as you progress through the programmes. There is a registration fee which you will need to pay when you begin and you pay fees for each module as and when you wish to register for them. For the Certificate the initial registration fee is £105.</p>
Participant 6	<p>If I decide carry on to do PG Dip after I finish PG Cert, would that be possible?</p>
Will	<p>Certainly. You must obviously satisfy the Examiners in the two core modules that you will have taken as part of the Certificate before you can progress.</p>
Will	<p>In terms of fees. When you progress to the Postgraduate Diploma from the Certificate you will need to pay the difference in the two registration fees and the relevant module fees.</p>
Participant 4	<p>A more logistical / administrative question now. Despite this being a distance-learning course, I live in London and will probably live in or at least near London for the duration of the course. I was wondering whether we would be able to: (i) visit lecturers and seminar tutors in person for the more "traditional" type of student-lecturer support!?! And (ii) attend the actual classes, seminars, or lectures held by UCL health lecturers if we are available to attend?</p>
James	<p>Hello again. As you can study anywhere there is an internet connection, London will obviously be fine! However, we do not offer face to face teaching on the course, so this traditional format is not available, I'm afraid. The course software platform provides a very good environment for students to learn not only from tutors but also each other, and we strongly encourage students to participate fully in group discussions rather than engage in private communication with tutors. However, we are very keen to meet with any student who is able to visit us and would be delighted to meet you</p>

	<p>over lunch in Archway once you're enrolled on the course. As the course is offered through the University of London, you will officially be registered with them and entitled to the same access to facilities as they offer to all their external students. It may be worth looking at their website for more details. Regarding UCL, there are many opportunities to attend academic seminars that take place on campus. Prof Trish Greenhalgh, for example, is often giving lectures and key note speeches which you would be welcome to attend. The Dept of primary care also offers frequent lunchtime seminars (not directly related to the MSc, but often very interesting and stimulating) which you would be able to attend if you are interested.</p>
Participant 5	<p>How much focus is on the UK primary care in the course</p>
James	<p>Hi Participant 5 and welcome to the chat. We try and maintain a very international perspective in our teaching as only a minority of the students are from the UK. Therefore, although the tutors have a background that is set in the UK, and will sometimes draw upon our own experiences of primary care, we are very aware of different models and healthcare needs. For example, in IP03 (Research Methods) when we are organising virtual seminars, we offer several different topic groups to students, to reflect interests and concerns from students in different settings. However, in IP03, it is the principles of the research, rather than the topic of the research itself, that we are teaching.</p>
James	<p>Further to my reply to Participant 5 above, I would also like to add that there is a specific module on International Comparisons in Primary Health Care available in year 2 which is taught by Geoff Wong. It provides an insight into many different health care settings and uses examples from around the world</p>
Participant 4	<p>Next question: Will we have full access to the UCL (or University of London) library facilities as part of this course? What does this entail exactly? I.e. can we borrow books from your library? Can we access e-journals etc?</p>
James	<p>The course aims to be accessible from anywhere in the world, so all the materials you need should be available either from the course website itself, the university's online library, free access on the internet or a physical course reader (books and other non-electronic resources that are sent to every student). In practice, borrowing books, is unlikely to be necessary. For some resources, where students have difficulty obtaining certain electronic resources, tutors are happy to assist them. In general, students are well provided for, but we are looking at improving this further so that you can obtain the widest possible range of library materials.</p>
Will	<p>In terms of borrowing books, any registered External student is entitled to full borrowing membership of the Senate House Library on payment of the Internal University of London membership fee. This is currently £100. Alternatively students can access the library for reference only purposes at a reduced rate.</p>
Participant 4	<p>Thanks James</p>
Participant 4	<p>Hi James - thanks for that last answer - for my undergraduate degree, I found access to e-journals very important in helping me with writing my essays for each module. Subscription to on-line health journals and hardcopy journals, as you know, is pretty expensive and as such I was hoping that the course fees would cover these things. Would you be able to confirm that either UoL or UCL can provide this access or would I have to find out from the London External people? Many thanks</p>
James	<p>Hi I agree that online access is vital. I think I have probably sent you an answer which has crossed with you posting this question, but to summarise, we expect students to be able to find all the resources they need without paying for extra access, as the online library should provide this. For</p>

	occasional vital papers not available online (and these are relatively few), tutors can usually help you obtain them using other channels.
Participant 8	Where is the exam centre for Malaysia?
Brendan	In Malaysia - we use the British Council who have exam centres in across Malaysia.
Brendan	Further information about Malaysian exam centres are available at: http://www.londonexternal.ac.uk/current_students/general_resources/exams/exam_centres_os/asia_middle_east.pdf
Participant 4	Might seem like a bit of a ridiculous questions, but is the MSc in International Primary Health Care available as a taught masters course as well? I thought it was just as a distance learning course?
James	No, this is not ridiculous - the world of online courses can seem confusing at times. The course is only available as a distance learning degree. All students are in the same position in being distance learners. This still qualifies us as a taught MSc, but the teaching is online rather than face to face. Don't forget, that there is also a significant dissertation component in the 3rd year where students can opt to conduct a research project as their project.
Participant 7	I was advised that on campus study might suit me better. What would you say to this?
Will	The study experience is obviously different if you chose to study on campus as you would receive physical lectures and seminars. However if you study with the External System your studies will be fully supported by an online learning environment. You will also be allocated a personal tutor, a module tutor, and you will be able to communicate with other students from all over the world. In terms of quality, the standard of the qualification you will receive at the end of your studies is identical. If you would like to get an idea of how the External System works there is a Taster Module you can access at the following address: http://www.londonexternal.ac.uk/iphc/taster.shtml
Will	This specific International Primary Health Care programme is not available on campus
Participant 4	Thanks everyone - very helpful!
Participant 3	How do I apply?
Jill	If you are interested in applying for the course please download the application form (link on right hand side of this page). If you have any further questions about applying you can email the course administrator, Marcia, on m.rigby@pcps.ucl.ac.uk
Brendan	It looks like the final responses have just been made. So I'll be closing the chat-room shortly. Thanks again for your participation.