

QUALIFICATIONS IN GENEALOGY

Personal Experiences

University of Strathclyde, PGCert/PGDip/MSc in Genealogical, Palaeographic and Heraldic Studies

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The University of Strathclyde offer these courses as a sequence to work towards a Master's degree. All three courses can be attempted over one or two years, requiring a commitment of around 20 or 14 hours a week respectively.

In the PGCert, the emphasis is on UK genealogy, with additional focus on Scottish records, but there is also coverage of Irish, US and Canada records, armed forces and DNA. Palaeography and heraldry are introduced, to a lesser extent than may be implied in the title of the course, but a good grounding is gained in both, as well as Latin, which is invaluable for both disciplines.

In addition, the PGCert introduces professional methodologies in research, sourcing, citations and business conduct, as well as some other interesting topics such as historical measures and currency.

Teaching material is delivered as a set of pre-recorded lectures with an accompanying transcript. Some of them include learning exercises, but the bulk of the learning is in the form of independent reading and research from the reading lists at the end of each transcript.

Each topic has an associated assignment, with simple pass/fail marking, and each module has a more in-depth assessment exercise. One of the assignments is a group exercise, requiring interaction and project management.

The final such assessment may be, at the student's choice, a client report, a palaeography exercise, or a heraldry exercise.

Each student is assigned a tutor to answer questions and mark assignments, but there are no set tutorials as may be expected in a university course. Tutors give detailed, constructive feedback to all submitted work.

Progress through the course is managed at the student's own pace, although the assignments and assessments have fixed due dates. I have found them flexible and understanding if personal circumstances interfere with my studies. Students are expected to keep a learning log, including their reflections on the course, and submit this at the end of each part of the course.

In all, the PGCert represents an excellent introduction to professional genealogy for the keen amateur, and students will leave the course with a broad range of skills and a more professional outlook.

The PGDip builds more on these skills, and although it represents the same time commitment, is somewhat more involved.

Roughly half of the PGDip course is lecture-based, building on DNA and UK, Irish and American research, and also introducing Jewish, European, antipodean and British Empire

records. Assessment takes the form of a series of 6 études, which are more in-depth assignments; again, one of these is a group-based exercise. Some of the études relate directly to the lecture material, but a migration study, a house history, and a client report, all with topics to be determined by the student, are also required.

The PGDip also includes a 5000-word research project, to the standard of an academic paper, again on a topic chosen by the student.

Constructive feedback continues, but it reflects the higher expectations of this course, and there is also the option of face-to-face time with tutors to discuss étude and project topics.

The PGDip is considerably more challenging than the PGCert, with higher standards set for quality of research and professionalism, but its outcomes include a greatly increased skill set, including some of the more esoteric disciplines of genealogy such as house histories.

Successful completion of the PGDip permits progression to the MSc degree course, which requires a full research dissertation of around 14,000 words.

Enrolment allows access to all the facilities of the university; even the library may be used remotely via a mail order service. There is a series of forums for discussion of course materials, as well as more general genealogical chat.

Across all levels, the university makes the effort to organise archive visits to London, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Although the current pandemic situation made these impossible, they instead organised a virtual student event over Zoom.