

Starting in the first semester 2008 this online-supported course is designed primarily for part-time students working in a child-related field. The 240 point course is ordinarily completed in four years including a thesis in years three and four. Some students may wish to complete only the first four papers, ordinarily expected to take a year, when they may qualify for a Postgraduate Certificate in Arts in Children and Public Policy. Others may wish to exit after six papers, ordinarily expected to take two years, when they may qualify for a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Children and Public Policy."

INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC POLICY THE MASTER OF ARTS (CHILDREN AND PUBLIC POLICY)

Reasons for establishing the course

Key theme: *What is children's place in society? How is it secured and enhanced or limited through public policy? What is the role of processes in families, whanau and communities and in society's structures and institutions in determining children's place?*

The Children and Public Policy major has been designed primarily for people currently doing work with or about children and their families. This includes social workers, teachers, lawyers, nurses and doctors with professional qualifications as well as community workers without professional qualifications. Their employing agencies include central government (e.g. Ministries of Social Development, Health and Education, Te Puni Kokiri), local government (e.g. local authority child and family and community development programmes) the private sector (e.g. childcare businesses, private law, medical and nursing practitioners) and not-for-profit agencies (e.g. Plunket, Barnardos, What's Up). The programme will be of interest to people in these organisations engaged in service provision, management, policy-making, teaching or research.

The programme may also be of interest to students and graduates from other tertiary institutions and across the Faculties of Applied Humanities, Education and Health and Environmental Sciences at AUT who intend to pursue careers in relation to children.

The overall aims of the programme are twofold. First, to increase capacity and capability in these sectors by producing graduates who have (a) a critical understanding of children's place in society and how public policy and institutional structures/processes/ideologies impact on children; and (b) an understanding of social science research and the ways in which research and evaluation are and are not able to inform policy and practice. Second, we aim to contribute to the development of the field of childhood studies in New Zealand and internationally.

By acquiring this knowledge and these skills and sharpening their interest, graduates will be able to independently critique research, public policy and institutional structures/practices/ideologies, critically assess work practices, participate confidently in relevant democratic processes (such as consultation with public service agencies, public debates, select committee hearings) and help improve the responsiveness of their own institutions to children's interests, with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for New Zealand's children.

The proposed Children & Public Policy programme is grounded in the field of childhood studies that has emerged internationally since the 1980s and continues to develop. The current state of the field and its likely further evolution have been described recently (Prout, 2005¹; Lee, 2001²; Moss & Petrie, 2002³). It draws from a number of areas of interest but is distinct from them. Some of its roots are in developmental psychology, the social psychology of childhood, the sociology of childhood, the children's rights movement, political economies as they relate to children, and theory and practice in education. Its literature is to be found in a wide range of disciplines including law, paediatrics, psychology, education, sociology, economics, media studies, indigenous studies, and linguistics. Its distinctness lies in its consideration of children as active participants in the social, economic and political spheres, with their own identity, needs, interests and rights.

The various components of the course will be informed by core theoretical considerations. Theories of childhood have recently been concerned with questioning the distinct categories and boundaries of modernity and conceiving of childhood as a more fluid identity, ranging alongside adults as citizens, rights-bearers, people with expectations and in terms of having age-specific capabilities and behaviours. A second important theoretical theme has been the review of definition of children solely in terms of their impact on adults (e.g. as threats, investments and victims) in favour of a more child-centred view. A third, related theoretical theme is a recognition of the place of children's agency in the ordering of their lives and the distinct children's culture in which they participate. These need to be balanced against an understanding of the ways in which changes in family structure, gender roles and labour markets continue to challenge the adequacy of the current social framework in catering for children.

Policy development and service provision for children is undergoing a revolution based on these changes in understanding of childhood and on children's evolving role. Students participating in the course will be equipped to drive and adapt to these and future changes. The course

¹ Prout, A. (2005) *The future of childhood*. London & New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

² Lee, N. *Childhood and society*. Buckingham & Philadelphia: Open University Press.

³ Moss, P., Petrie, P. (2002) *From children's services to children's spaces: Public policy, children and childhood*. London & New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

itself will remain dynamic in its approach, identifying and responding to change in this rapidly developing field.

In New Zealand, substantive manifestations of the recent emergence of children into the public policy arena have been the establishment of a Children's Commissioner in 1989, the publication of the government's Agenda for Children (Ministry of Social Development, 2002⁴) and inclusion of provision for children's participation in the Care of Children Act 2004.

The field has generated centres and courses of tertiary study throughout the world. They are based variously in faculties and departments of law, education, health and social sciences. Examples are:

- Thomas Coram Research Institute in the Institute of Education and Child Studies Unit in Kings College, both at the University of London.
- MA Childhood in Society, Warwick Institute of Education, University of Warwick
- Children and Public Policy course, Center for Public Policy and American Institutions, Brown University
- Center for Children and Childhood Studies, Rutgers University
- MA in Childhood and Youth Studies, Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago

Some reasons for introducing the programme at this point are:

- Concern about how children are faring in New Zealand. We have, for example, a high rate of child poverty (around 20% in 2004),⁵ high rates of children living in overcrowded homes (around 20% of under-10-year-olds)⁶ and high rates of child abuse and neglect notification and mortality (every day, 20 more children are identified as abused or neglected by child protection services and each year eight are killed),⁷ while Māori and Pasifika children continue to experience relatively poor health.⁸ These statistics represent not only preventable suffering for the children concerned, but a threat to New Zealand's future prosperity. All of society's institutions have a role in reversing these trends and examination of that role is one of the key topics covered in the first year of the programme.
- The need for increased research, evaluation and analytic skills within the not-for-profit and voluntary sector which was

⁴ Ministry of Social Development (2002) New Zealand's agenda for children: Making life better for children. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development

⁵ Ministry of Social Development. (2006) *The social report, 2006: Indicators of social wellbeing in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ministry of Social Development. (2005) Children and young people: Indicators of wellbeing in New Zealand. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development.

⁸ Ibid

emphasised during a recent consultation exercise undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development.⁹ The consultation report additionally noted the need for “professional development for managers and leaders so they can get fresh ideas and continue to innovate and develop services”. Providing students with these skills in research, evaluation and analysis and the opportunity to apply them to a contemporary policy/institutional issue is the main focus of the second year of the programme.

- Since 2005 the development team have run a successful level 7 paper on children and public policy through the School of Social Sciences. Reflecting on this paper and student feedback, the development team are clear that the core elements of the paper comprise a relevant, coherent and stimulating “whole” amenable to adaptation and augmentation to conform to postgraduate-level standards.

Goals of the programme

The programme aims to enable students to develop an appreciation of children's place in society and how it can be secured and enhanced or limited through public policy and the processes of society's institutions. Students will learn how they and their agencies can contribute to the well-being of children, their families and communities and thus to the wider society.

These goals will be achieved by maintaining a unifying children's interests perspective from which the influences and instruments by which public policy is made and executed will be viewed. This perspective will be organised within theoretical frameworks of children's agency and their changing identity in public and private realms. These frameworks will be informed by constructionist, poststructuralist, ecological, life cycle and other influential theories that contribute to an understanding of them.

In addition to these overall goals relating to children's interests and place, specific areas of thinking about children, children's experience, service provision and policy development will be taught. Key components will be:

- the children's rights and human rights framework and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- the public policy environment, children's place in political paradigms, the law as it relates to children, including the Children,

⁹ Family & Community Services, & Office for the Community & Voluntary Sector (2005). *Building Organisational Capacity in the Community and Voluntary Sector: A Summary Report on Needs and Opportunities*. Wellington: Family & Community Services and Office for the Community & Voluntary Sector.

- Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989, Care of Children Act, 2004, Family proceedings Act 1980 and Adoption Act 1955.
- children's place in ecological and economics theory and their importance to economic and social sustainability.
 - the public health framework as a means of measuring children's well-being and provision of services to them.
 - The school and social service systems and other systems that have a major impact on children's lives.
 - The diversity of children's backgrounds and experiences. Pakeha, Maori, Pasifika, Asian and other world views. The effects of and public policy remedies for marginalisation, poverty and social exclusion
 - children's culture. Communication and entertainment.
 - the origins and prevention of maltreatment of children. Juvenile offending and justice.
 - advancing children's interests; advocacy; NGOs; structures for developing public policy for children; visions of children's place.

Prescriptions for new papers

109001: The Place of Children

This paper explores the changing nature of childhood and the place of children historically and in the modern world. Reference will be made to constructionist, post-structuralist and ecological theoretical models. Children's place will be viewed from the perspectives of children themselves, their families and the institutions of society including government, investigators and commentators. The topics will include the history and ecology of childhood; the children's movement and an introduction to children's rights. There will be an emphasis on the diversity of childhood including the place of children in Māoridom and in other cultures of the Asia-Pacific region.

109002: Public Policy

This paper offers a critical examination of public policy in New Zealand and selected OECD countries. Public Policy as advanced in this paper is primarily concerned with economic and social development with the ultimate measure of 'development' being the way in which policy serves 'the public interest'. Emphasis will be placed on the relationship between public policy and models of political economy including public policy processes and outcomes¹⁰.

109003: Facilitating Children's Inclusion

Students will learn practical skills to enable them to communicate effectively with children individually and in groups. Participants will learn listening skills, accessing free narrative from children and techniques of consultation with children in various contexts. At the end

¹⁰ Candidates enrolled in the Children and Public Policy programme will write their major written assignment on some aspect of public policy for children.

of the paper, students will be more confident in enabling children to be heard and to meaningfully participate in consultation processes.

109004: Children in Challenging Circumstances

This paper considers adverse influences on the lives of children. These include; systemic issues such as poverty, inequality, social exclusion and civil and military conflict; and family issues such as domestic violence, family disintegration and dysfunction, and individual issues such as adult and child disabilities. The means by which these influences can be overcome, alleviated and/or prevented will be considered. There will be an emphasis on the relationship between research, policy and practice, roles of government and the methods and tools of advocacy. Children's fortunes and the policies that influence them will be viewed from both immediate and life cycle perspectives.

109005: Children and Professional Practice: Special Project

Students will undertake a supervised project of relevance to their workplace or another suitable agency. The project topic will be negotiated jointly by the student, lecturers and agency. The project will be supervised by an appropriate lecturer and staff member of the agency. Topics might include developing a well-researched discussion document to inform an agency's position on a given issue, analysing existing agency data to identify ways of improving practice and/or designing a data capture system to allow this.