University of Wales
Prifysgol Cymru

Generic guidelines

University of Wales validated taught postgraduate programmes

Part Two: Dissertation

Contents

Introduction

These guidelines present descriptors for University of Wales validated programmes in a generic way so as to assist students in their understanding of what constitutes a dissertation on a University of Wales validated taught programme. They should be read in conjunction with the handbooks of specific University of Wales validated taught postgraduate programmes and they must not be taken as a substitute for the module descriptors of that component on specific University of Wales validated programmes which will always have priority over these generic guidelines.

There will be some variance between module descriptors for this component across different University of Wales validated programmes. But, generally speaking, the descriptors for the dissertation module will have certain aims, objectives, learning outcomes and indicative content in common.

Aims of the Dissertation

Even allowing for the differences between University of Wales validated programmes, for example an MSc and an MBA, the generic aims of the dissertation on a taught postgraduate programme are usually along the lines below.

The aims of the dissertation in a University of Wales validated programme are normally to develop in the student:

- An ability to frame a research proposal.
- A critical understanding of research methodologies and their application.
- An ability to report research results in an appropriate written format to an academic and/or professional audience.
- An ability to plan and manage a project with deadlines.
- Further capacity for critical analysis and independent thought.

Learning Outcomes

Most students undertaking a dissertation as Part Two of a University of Wales validated taught postgraduate programme usually find themselves thinking about the aims above in terms of generic learning outcomes. Upon successful completion of the module, the dissertation should demonstrate that the student has acquired the ability to:

- **Prepare a research proposal that provides evidence**
    - that the topic to be studied is worthy of research;
    - of the formulation of research questions, and understanding of what constitutes a research question;
    - of the formulation of a hypothesis that can be effectively tested;
    - that the way the proposal addresses the topic is both appropriate and feasible in terms of intended activities, outcomes and resources;
    - that the project would have interest to academic and/or professional communities.

- **Plan, manage and execute an in depth research, inquiry or investigation that provides evidence of the**
    - selection of appropriate research methods for answering the identified research questions;

- ability to review published literature critically;
- application of the principles of research design;
- critical evaluation of qualitative/quantitative methods of data collection as appropriate;
- analysis, synthesis, interpretation and presentation of the resulting data.
- presentation of analytical, numerical, literacy, communication and computer skills to enable critical research to be undertaken (and be able to apply those transferable skills to develop research based inquiry in future employment settings).

Overall objectives

On completion of the dissertation students on a University of Wales validated programme will be expected to have achieved the following objectives:

- developed a clear focus for their research, inquiry or investigation and have identified research problems;
- identified the context, boundaries and stakeholder interests;
- considered research perspectives and ethical concerns and procedures;
- completed data collection and analysis;
- shown conceptual and theoretical understanding;
- employed project management skills effectively.

The Module

Although they may follow a variety of formats, students on a University of Wales validated programme can expect from their centre a series of Research Methodology workshops/seminars. Depending on the specific nature of the subject area, the content of these workshops/seminars is likely to consist of:

- The complexities and practical issues of research; independent learning and development; stakeholder interests and ethical considerations; the investigative process; philosophical considerations; the use of theory; the importance of on-going clear communication.

- The importance of clear aims and objectives; project management, learning and reflection, reviewing and assessing.

- Exploring the literature, writing a literature review, reviewing published literature critically, showing conceptual and theoretical understanding, identifying research problems and questions.

- Choosing a research method, data collection and sampling, data analysis and interpreting results, reliability and validity of data, evidence based approach; disseminating findings in a way that is consistent with professional business and management practice; drawing valid conclusions and recommendations.

Indicative Assessment Criteria

The assessment criteria for the dissertation will vary between University of Wales validated programmes, depending on the subject discipline of the programme.

However, in general terms you might think along the following lines:

Learning Outcomes (Dissertation)	To achieve the learning outcome, the student must demonstrate the ability to:
Prepare a research proposal that provides evidence that the topic to be studied is worthy of research; that the way the proposal addresses the topic is both appropriate and feasible in terms of intended activities, outcomes and resources and thus establishes its importance to both academic and professional communities.	Provide a persuasive and convincing research rationale with aims and objectives. Identify the context, boundaries and ethical and resource considerations of the research. Identify the research paradigm, evaluate and justify the choice of research methods. Understand the employment of data collection methods and can justify their use. Evaluate the methods of analysis of data and how the data will be presented.
Plan, manage and execute an in depth research, inquiry or investigation with a business and/or management focus by	Clearly articulate the research question and/or hypothesis. Critically evaluate alternative

applying the principles of research design to the formulation of a research question including, where appropriate, formal hypotheses that can be tested and the selection of appropriate research methods for answering these questions.	methodologies and justifies fit in terms of the research purpose. Demonstrate understanding of the principles of research design.
Critically evaluate the appropriateness of qualitative/quantitative methods of data collection, in combination as necessary, to analyse, synthesise, interpret and present the resulting data and the applications of those methods by other researchers in other contexts.	Critically evaluate the use of specific qualitative or quantitative methods of data collection and/or triangulated methods and justifies the choice of method. Demonstrate clearly how the data was collected. Assess the validity and reliability of the data obtained.
Demonstrate the ability to conduct research under supervision in a business and management context including the ability to review published literature critically, show conceptual and theoretical understanding, identify research problems, use project management skills if applicable, handle data, interpret results and write up findings in a way that is consistent with academic and/or professional practice and the normal principles of research ethics.	Explore and review the literature critically showing both conceptual and theoretical understanding. Recognises explicit research problems and limitations and provide where possible appropriate solutions. Apply normal principles of research ethics. Manage the research process and produce the dissertation on time.
Exhibit the analytical, numerical, literacy, communication and computer skills to enable critical research to be undertaken.	Employ appropriate analytical and/or statistical techniques and interprets the results accurately. Communicate sound argument and honest reporting while avoiding misrepresentation and accusations of plagiarism and intellectual theft. Employ a critical and evidenced

	based approach to arrive at conclusions. Make appropriate recommendations and reflect on learning.

General Advice

Plagiarism

The University of Wales regards plagiarism as a serious academic offence. Plagiarism is the act of claiming the work of others as your own. The work of others could include the work of fellow students, authors of books, journal articles, and internet material.

In order to ensure that you do not fall foul of plagiarism unintentionally adopt a style of writing that fully and consistently follows academic referencing and citation conventions. These include the clear use of quotation marks to indicate instances where you directly quote from an author and the employment of bibliographic citation whenever you quote verbatim from, or paraphrase, another piece of work of another individual in any way.

Time Management

The planning of a dissertation must be carefully considered, as the completion of the project can be demanding process. You may find it useful to formulate a timetable of work on a weekly and monthly basis in order to ensure that you meet specific deadlines set by your supervisor and institution. As an independent piece of research, the dissertation tests your self-motivation, organisation skills, and your ability to work without close supervision in order to achieve your award.

Supervision

What does it mean for you to have a 'supervisor'? A supervisor is a kind of tutor. Best supervision consists of providing supervisees with advice and commentary on a research project while avoiding involvement in the work. A candidate can expect the supervision of a thesis to include:

- Advice on the suitability, feasibility, and scope of the research topic and its subsequent lines of enquiry.

- Guidance on bibliographic resources.

- Guidance on the implementation of research techniques.

- Monitoring of progress, including providing commentary on draft material.

- Advice on presenting the research.

- Providing an environment which fosters a collegiate platform to exchange ideas between students and staff.

Supervision refrains from modifying or adjusting the content within the project, ensuring that the independence of the student's work is not compromised. Thus, supervision does not go beyond the points outlined above, and does not include proof-reading of work, nor re-writing of drafts.

Literature Survey and Bibliography

Prior to commencing your research, it is essential for you to undertake a survey of existing academic literature on your chosen area. The University of Wales Online Library (www.wales.ac.uk/library) provides you with access to a variety of bibliographic databases and journal access through which to begin your research. There are also many other resources available which you will have been introduced to through your Part One modules. It is essential that you keep an accurate bibliographic record of the works that you consult throughout your project. Your center will be best placed to advise you on which form of bibliographic referencing you are expected to adopt, dependent on your discipline, which may include the Harvard, Chicago, or Oxford method.

Once you have compiled your own bibliography of academic literature, you will be in a better position to define your own area of research and plan the direction of your dissertation.

The literature review provides the groundwork of your dissertation, and will likely form the core of your introduction and influence the hypotheses which you will formulate and test through your research, including the research methods and methodologies that you will employ. The literature review demonstrates:

- An ability to understand and critically analyse the academic literature associated with your topic of research.

- An ability to select and prioritise information consistently to provide a context and framework for your research.

- How your own dissertation relates and contributes to established thinking in your chosen field.

- An ability to draw on evidence to formulate your own arguments and research conclusions.

Approaching the literature review can sometimes appear to be an arduous task when faced with a wide range of topics. You may wish to start out by broadly identifying the overarching topics before focusing on the more specific topics that interest you. Once you

have done this you will find it easier to chronologically list the works, writers, and arguments more closely relevant to your interests.

It is important within the literature review to engage critically with the texts that are relevant to your research topic. They will form the platform from which you will make connections between academic literature, established academic thinking, and your own hypotheses. The texts will provide an opportunity for you to engage in a dialogue with the work of academics who have published in your area of focus

Your literature review should achieve some of the following objectives:

- Provide a context for your research.

- Provide an overview of the current research in the field that you are researching.

- Identify and define specific concepts and hypotheses which inform your own research.

- Identify and define the terminologies that you will use in your research.

- Evidence how your work contributes to addressing issues that have been identified within your subject area.

Research

The undertaking of research at master's level is much more intensive than what you may have experienced at undergraduate level. It is therefore important to consider whether your choice of research methods and methodologies that you intend to use are the most suitable for your subject area, your specific research questions, and hypotheses. Research methodology will inevitably have an impact on the direction and achievement of your dissertation. It is, therefore, important to choose your research methodology carefully, and be able to justify your choice of one particular method over another. It is important that the choices that you make are evidenced and discussed at the outset of the thesis, including an evaluation of why a particular method is more appropriate to your study than another. For this, you may also refer to your literature review for examples of how the literature informing your own research has influenced your choice of research methodology that you have followed, developed or departed from, with due acknowledgment to, published and current work.

At each point within your work, you will be required to justify the development of your research methodology and the decisions that you have taken. You will wish to provide evidence of the choices that you have made in the relationship between primary and secondary research.

Some useful questions to consider when developing your research methodology are as follows:

- Why have you chosen your particular research and methodologies?

- How do the particular forms of research you have chosen benefit your specific study against other methodology that you may have chosen?

- How have you developed the methodology for your dissertation?

- How will you analyse the data that you have researched?

- Are there any ethical issues that you need to address?

Writing Up and Structuring

The writing up stage of your dissertation requires careful planning and time-management. It is essential that you plan goals and stick to them in order to ensure that you complete your dissertation within the expected time limit.

Planning the structure of the dissertation is an important element of the project. The planning of the dissertation should ensure that your thesis is presented to the reader clearly and in a logical manner with supporting evidence. The structure of the dissertation will likely contain and utilise traditional dissertation elements which can include:

- Introduction

- Literature Review

- Research Methodology

- Research Results

- Discussions of Findings

- Conclusion

However, the above elements may be split across one or more chapters depending on the direction of your research.

You will have likely drafted your dissertation plan at the outset of the project. Having undertaken research on the topic, you may well consider that there is need to adapt some aspects of your plan. This is a usual part of the process.

Be prepared to review and revise your work and allow for plenty of time for this so that your dissertation is as clear and coherent as possible. In order to facilitate this, seek guidance on adopting an appropriate academic style from your center. Revise your drafted work regularly throughout the project in order to hone your skills and crystalise the thesis within your dissertation.

Abstract

The dissertation abstract is a short representative summary of the research and findings of your dissertation. It is a device used to provide others with an overview of the content of the dissertation and what it has achieved without the need to read through the full work. Abstracts provide other scholars and researches with a quick reference guide to these so that they may decide which works may be relevant to their own interests. A well written abstract is sometimes difficult to achieve within the short word length required and is likely to be the last aspect of the dissertation you draft, as it must sufficiently summarise the indicative content of your work. Some of the points that you may wish to consider including in the abstract are:

- Aims of the study

- How your dissertation of your chosen field contributes and related to other works that have preceded it

- Method and methodologies that you have employed

- The results of your research

- The conclusions that you have drawn from your research

Presentation

The dissertation will have to be presented in a professional manner. You should seek advice from your center on specific guides related to the formatting and layout.

When reviewing your dissertation, you may wish to think about the following:

- Is the formatting consistent across chapters, headings, titles, subheadings, and paragraphs?

- Are quotations incorporated into the text and those separated from the text presented consistently?

- Are footnotes/endnotes/references consistent across the document?

- Are tables, figures, graphs, and images correctly labeled?

- Are you consistent in the use of spelling, punctuation, grammar, diacritics, and nomenclature?

Further Reading

Students on a University of Wales validated programme are likely to be referred to one or more of the following texts:

Anderson, T. and Kanuka, H. (2006) *E-research methods, Strategies and Issues*, London: Allyn and Bacon.

Bell, J. (2005) *Doing your research projects*, 4th ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Collis, J. & Hussey, R. (2009) *Business Research, A Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Post Graduate Students*, London: Palgrave.

Cresswell, J. (2002) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, London: Sage Publications.

Davies, M. (2007) *Doing a successful Research Project*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Hart C (2004) *Doing Your Masters Dissertation (Essential Study Skills series)*, London: Sage Publications.

Easterby-Smith, M. (2002) *Management Research: An Introduction*, London: Sage Publications.

Finn, M. Et al (2000) *Tourism and Leisure Research Methods*, Harlow: Longman.

Gregory, I. (2003) *Ethics in Research*, London: Continuum.

Grix, J. (2004) *The Foundations of Research (Palgrave Study Guides)*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kane, E. and O'Reilly-De Brún, M. (2001) *Doing Your Own Research*, London: Marion Boyars.

Kinnear, P.R. and Gray, C. D. (2007) *SPSS 15 Made Simple,* Hove: Psychology Press.

Krippendorff, K. (2004) *Content Analysis*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Maylor, H. and Blackmon, K. (2005) *Researching Business and Management*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2006) *Action Research*, London: Sage.

Oppenheim, A.N. (2000) *Questionnaire Design and Attitude Measurement*, London: Continuum.

Pallant, J. (2007) *SPSS Survival Manual,* 3rd ed., Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Sapsford, R. and Jupp, V. (2006) *Data Collection and Analysis*, London: Sage.

Saunders, M. *et al* (2006) *Research Methods for Business Students*, Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Rowntree, D. (1991) *Statistics Without Tears: An Introduction for Non-Mathematicians*, London: Penguin.