

This document provides detailed information on the module named below. It will be updated as necessary when modifications to the module are approved. Modules are allocated to a Subject Network not a programme, and may be accessed by students studying on different programmes.

RESEARCH DISSERTATION

a Aims

This module aims to provide students with an opportunity to undertake a sustained, rigorous and independent investigation of some aspect of professional practice in relation to their own work, their organisation, their discipline or field of study or their profession as a whole.

The dissertation must consist of original work. It should be informed by the theoretical and practical knowledge and expertise which the participant has developed through other modules and/or in previously accredited learning related to professional development. It should focus on a theme, topic or problem which is relevant to the professional concerns of the participant; the participant's own organisation and/or profession. The resulting dissertation should not only present and interpret the research findings but also critically evaluate the research design and methodology employed and identify the outcomes of the research in terms of actual or planned developments and changes.

In addition, it is also intended that the experience of carrying out the research and writing up the results will provide participants with opportunities:

- to demonstrate their capability for analysis and reflection on practice;
- to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for lifelong professional development;
- to acquire the confidence and capability to progress to a M.Phil. or Ph.D. in their academic discipline or field of study on completion of the Masters programme.

b Intended learning outcomes

Relating to the development of the research proposal:

Participants will be expected to:

- identify a topic, theme or problem for investigation and provide a rationale for its selection;
- identify a series of specific research questions and objectives for the proposed investigation;
- formulate a research design appropriate to the problem or topic identified, which identifies the methods to be used and explains why they have been selected; highlights any potential constraints or likely problems, and sets out a feasible plan of work or timetable;
- negotiate the research proposal with the supervisor, employer and colleagues where appropriate;
- give a presentation defending the proposal.

Relating to the conduct of the research and the writing of a dissertation:

- collect data in a systematic and rigorous way using the chosen research methods in appropriate and ethically sound ways;
- analyse and interpret data in the light of the research questions and hypotheses identified in the rationale; and in the light of any additional research issues and questions which have emerged during the course of the investigation;

- critically evaluate the research design and methodology employed;
- produce an abstract, a bibliography and a dissertation on the investigation.

Relating to the course participant's reflections on the research process and potential applications of the findings:

- identify potential and/or actual applications of the research findings (and potential constraints on effective application);
- identify potential opportunities for further research in the chosen subject area.

c Indicative content

A menu based, and interactive electronic handbook will be available for participants which will provide guidelines and information on: carrying out electronic and library-based literature searches; producing a research proposal; suitable reading on specific research paradigms and methods; negotiation of investigations with institutions and colleagues; codes of research ethics; key issues to be addressed in analysing and interpreting data; layout of the dissertation; effective strategies for dissemination.

For each participant an appropriate tutor will be appointed as dissertation supervisor following discussions within the course team.

It is anticipated that the individual participant will need more tutor support in the initial stages of developing and refining a rationale for the investigation and a research design. This support will be provided primarily through telephone conferencing and electronic mail. It is anticipated that the level of support required will be less during the period when the data is being collected. However, tutors will remain in periodic electronic contact with participants, who in turn will be required to produce and discuss a progress report every semester.

It is envisaged that the average amount of contact time and independent study on this 60 credit module will be:

- independent Study time 540 hours;
- tutor-led online formal;
- and informal supervision up to 60 hours.

d Mode(s) of delivery and support for teaching and learning

Face-to-face	0 hours or	... %
Video-conference	0 hours or	... %
Supported online learning	40 hours or	... %
Self-directed learning	60 hours	... %
Total activity	60	100%

e Assessment

1. participants will be required to submit a research proposal (approximately 500 words) and give a presentation on this proposal before proceeding with the research (20%);
2. participants will be required to submit a bound dissertation of between 10,000 and 12,000 words (80%).

The dissertation will be double marked by the supervisor and another appropriately qualified and experienced tutor drawn from the UHI network.

At the discretion of the Examination Board, the Viva Voce may be used as an additional tool in the assessment of the Dissertation module candidates.

Candidates who are deemed to have failed to achieve a satisfactory standard in their dissertation may be permitted to be re-examined within a time limit set by the Board of Examiners.

Assessment of dissertations (and related documentation such as research proposals, plans of work, critiques of the research design and methodology, and dissemination plan, all of which could be incorporated in the submitted dissertation) would take into account the following criteria:

- the relevance of the literature review;
- the appropriateness of the research paradigm and methods adopted for the project;
- the clarity with which the rationale for the project is explained;
- the correct use of the methodology selected;
- the competence with which the data is analysed and interpreted;
- the clarity with which the findings are reported and the extent to which the weighting given to specific findings reflects (a) the data and (b) their relevance to the research problem(s) identified in the proposal or the investigation.

The extent to which the investigation and the dissertation demonstrates:

- conceptual and methodological understanding;
- breadth and depth of reading;
- integration of the knowledge and skills learned on the course as a whole;
- respect for professional values and an appropriate code of research ethics;
- the appropriateness, relevance and insightfulness of the conclusions and the discussion of the professional implications (at the level of the individual, organisational and/or profession);
- the insights demonstrated in the critical evaluation of the research design and methodology employed;
- the relevance, feasibility and appropriateness of the dissemination plan;
- the detail, relevance and currency of the bibliography;
- the clarity and appropriateness of the writing style and the use of appropriate formats (e.g. for footnotes, page numbering, line spacing, bibliography, appendices, etc).

Although the assessment will be heavily weighted towards the dissertation it is recognised that, in the context of continuing professional development where the ability to further utilise these research skills and to recognise the potential for transference on to new contexts is important, some recognition should also be given to the processes involved in the research, as well as the product. These processes include, for example, critically reviewing research-based and theoretical literature; identifying the appropriateness of different research methodologies and paradigms to the problem or area they have chosen to investigate; effective and efficient project planning; identifying possible applications of the research findings and/or the research skills they have acquired. Candidates may choose to submit documentary evidence of development in these areas separately (eg in an accompanying portfolio) or as sections or appendices to the Dissertation.

f Key learning resources

Reading List

The texts and journals will vary from participant to participant according to the specific topics and themes selected, but the following literature may prove to be useful:

Phillips, E. M., & Pugh, D. S., 2005, *How to get a PhD: A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors*, 3rd Edition. Open University Press: Buckingham.

Bryman, A.M., 2004, *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2nd Edition. ISBN 0-19-926446-5.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M., 2001, *How to Research*. The Open University Press: Buckingham, 2nd Edition. ISBN 0-335-19452-4.

Babbie, E., 2003, *The Practice of Social Research* 10th Edn. Wadsworth: Belmont, USA. ISBN 0-534-57491-2.

Preece, R., 1994, *Starting Research: An Introduction to Academic Research and Dissertation Writing*. Sage, Newbury Park, C A.

Prior to the Research Methods Workshop they will be expected to have read relevant sections of:

Greenfield, A., 1996, *Research Methods: Guidance for Postgraduates*. London, Arnold.

g Additional background information

Tutorials will be supported by web-based learning resources and guided study provided by on-line contact (individual e-mail and computer conferencing).

h Specialist resource requirements

- internet access to web and e-mail facilities;
- access to a PC and printer;
- access to on-line library resources.