MSc IOVS Dissertation Handbook 25/26

Description

IOVS Student Dissertation Handbook 2025/26

Introduction

This handbook provides general information on the dissertation. Your dissertation is an extremely important piece of work, and provides an opportunity to draw on your research skills and expertise developed through earlier course units.

The handbook is not an authoritative guide on writing a dissertation but sets out your options and requirements. Where possible, we aim to be flexible to help meet the needs of the student alongside the University regulations. You should refer to the Canvas space for your dissertation unit for programme specific information.

For some of you, this is likely to be your first experience of research related activity, and we hope it becomes a positive experience. But donâ€™t worry, you will not be left on your own! All students will be paired up with a project supervisor, and if necessary will be further supported by a workplace supervisor and an academic advisor.

Please note that we routinely screen all dissertations for plagiarism and your supervisor may request screening of your drafts.

Key Contacts

Academic Staff

Dr Ketan Parmar	Dissertation Lead IOVS	Email: Ketan.Parmar@manchester.ac.uk

School of Health Sciences Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Staff :

In order for staff to respond as quickly as possible to your request, and to ensure that your request reaches the correct member of staff, we have set-up dedicated email addresses that serve a different function. If your query relates to any of the below, please email the relevant email address.

Email Address	Supports queries about:
	Examination queries
shs.assessment@manchester.ac.uk	Assessment queries
	Assessment submissions
	Resit/reassessment queries
shs.attendance@manchester.ac.uk	Attendance monitoring
shs.dc@manchester.ac.uk	Disability support
shs.mitcircs@manchester.ac.uk	Mitigating circumstances
shs.placements@manchester.ac.uk	All placement queries
	Registration advice and guidance
	Course unit selection and enrolment
shs.programmes@manchester.ac.uk	Timetable queries
	Programme content
shs.wellbeing@manchester.ac.uk	Wellbeing student support, appointments and signposting
shs.hub@manchester.ac.uk	Student Support Hub â€“ general queries and advice not covered by the above teams

As these inboxes are associated with staff supporting multiple programmes, please could you ensure that you always include the following details in your email, which will help us to ensure that your message is dealt with promptly:

Full Name

Student ID Number

Year of Study

Programme

Other contact

Canvas Support Faculty eLearning Team Email: elearning@manchester.ac.uk

IAG/Hub

The Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) team are your first point of contact for any non-academic queries you may have relating to your studies, such as what support is available to you, how to access it, and where to direct any queries which youâ€™re not sure about.

The IAG team can be contacted via email at shs.hub@manchester.ac.uk, over the phone at 0161 306 7811, or in person at the student hub which is located on the ground floor of the Jean McFarlane building.

Dissertation Aims & Objectives

The overall aim of the dissertation year to is to provide students with the knowledge and skills required to carry out research in the field of vision science and ocular health.

The aim of the dissertation is to develop critical faculties in research including:

- Cognitive skills (analysing, synthesising, critical thinking, evaluating and problem solving)
- Creativity (intellectual insight and argument construction)
- Knowledge (about subject area and research methods)
- Personal skills (perseverance, self-reflection, responsibility)
- Self-management (preparation, commitment, time management)
- Professional conduct (ethics, confidentiality, appropriate practices)
- Research management (project planning and delivery)
- Communication (written and oral dissemination)

Through the successful design and completion of a research project the students should be able to:

- Develop powers of critical appraisal, analytical thinking and logical argument.
- Explore ideas and concepts in vision science and ocular health, and the experimental methods and philosophical approaches which are used to investigate them.
- Plan, justify and execute an approach to a research question in the field of vision science and ocular health.
- Write a clear and comprehensive report of the project to include an appropriate analysis of the results and discussion of the results in the context of the existing literature in the relevant field.

The achievement of these Learning Outcomes (and your total mark for this unit) will be based entirely on your final written submission. You will not receive a mark for your experimental performance in the lab/clinic: at least one of the markers is likely to be unfamiliar with the detail of your project and how it was conducted.

Online Resources

You may find it useful to refer online resources on dissertations offered as part of the University Libraryâ€™s award-winning skills programme, My Learning Essentials, before you begin to plan you project.

https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mle/packages/dissertations/

Types of project

Type 1 Empirical research â€“ quantitative and qualitative

This type of project includes **collecting new information/data** (primary research) and might involve collecting biological/environmental samples, or measuring the performance of patients and/or normal subjects.

The stages involved in a dissertation by empirical research are as follows:

- Conduct a critical review of the literature and the current status of research in a chosen field.
- Show critical thinking capacity, including abstraction, analysis and critical judgement to identify and isolate, important aspects of the chosen field
- Identify a gap in current knowledge on this topic and define (or refine) a clearly justified research question that is amenable to solution
- Be familiar with the theoretical and practical basis of research methods and techniques, including, where relevant, laboratory methodologies
- Design an experiment / research protocol that will answer this research question and, where necessary, obtain ethical approval
- Collect and integrate data using carefully designed methodology
- Document the data, analyse using appropriate statistical methods, and critically evaluate in the context of published work
- Draw (and justify) conclusions from the results
- Recommend further research questions that lead on from your findings
- To be successful in the project, you will need to:
    1. Command an appropriate battery of written and spoken communication skills to engage in constructive dialogue with peers and supervisor(s), and communicate your work concisely in writing
    2. Make effective use of library, electronic and online resources, including word processing, referencing software and development of appropriate illustrative materials
    3. Plan time effectively

As a guide, dissertations based on empirical research usually contain the following sections:

Introduction/background

The main aim of the Introduction is to inform the reader of why the area of research is important, and how the project is linked to the research field and/or human health and disease. This section should end with a paragraph that clearly states the overall aims and key objectives of the project.

1. Overview of the research topic or area, clearly highlighting a â€˜gapâ€™ in existing knowledge.
2. The questions being addressed and why they are important. What is the research need?
3. The purpose of the project; what hypothesis is being tested or questions being asked? Why is the method you will use the appropriate one for the task?
4. Aims/objectives.

Methods

The methods and analysis of the data appropriate to address the research questions/hypotheses should be clearly described. The detail should be sufficient for other investigators to be able to replicate your work. The methods section will include some or all of (and you should discuss with your supervisor which sections are appropriate):

1. Type of study/experimental design
2. Participants/samples/exposures
    1. Inclusion/exclusion criteria & how determined
3. Intervention/controls (as appropriate)
    1. How designed, allocation methods & concealment & attempts to reduce bias
4. A description of the outcome measures or collection of qualitative data (the justification of these methods would be in the Introduction.
5. Equipment; audio recorders/field notes, models/versions, how set up, calibration, experimental methods & materials used
6. Analysis plan
    1. Sample size calculation / proposed informants & estimated recruitment rates
    2. Statistical and qualitative methods, considerations & software used
7. Regulatory issues
    1. Ethics
    2. Data protection
    3. Tissue/sampling handling or recordings / transcripts & storage
    4. Staff & participants health & safety issues/out of hours working/home visits
8. Costings & resources
9. Time plan/gantt chart

Results

A detailed description of the results and findings, divided into sections with a different theme. This section should provide sufficient information to allow the reader to ascertain the aim of each experiment/method and what the result was. The text should be appropriately supported with figures and tables or text boxes containing participant quotes. Tables and figures should be self-contained with an informative heading, appropriate annotation and a concise explanatory legend. Figures and tables must be cited in the text.

Discussion

The discussion is normally headed by a brief summary of how your findings relate to the aims of your project (did you find what you expected?). The discussion should consist of a logical flow of arguments and reasoning that explains and expands upon the results in simple English, and identifies their relevance to published findings, and to the research field going forward. The discussion also provides an opportunity to defend the conclusions, identify how experiments or data collection and analysis could have been improved upon, and to discuss how the project might develop given more time. It is not a â€œnegativeâ€• to identify weaknesses in your project â€“ it shows that you are developing the appropriate critical analysis skills. A final conclusion should be given at the end.

References

The dissertation should be appropriately referenced using a range of sources, including important historical references and the most up-to-date research of relevance, in Harvard Manchester style: https://subjects.library.manchester.ac.uk/referencing/referencing-harvard. References to web pages are acceptable but should be used sparingly, and the date at which the page was accessed noted. Students are encouraged to use a reference management software package such as Endnote or Mendeley.

Appendices

Appendices are useful to include supplementary data without breaking the flow of the dissertation. Please note, appendices should only include supporting information not material vital to the integrity of the dissertation.

Type 2 Analysis of existing data â€“ quantitative

This option takes the format of a quantitative research project. It provides an opportunity for students to work from an existing data set to answer research questions (secondary research). You need to ensure that you have legitimate access and use of the data for the purposes of your dissertation. In some cases you will be asked to provide a formal letter of access from the person/organisation responsible for the data, and ethical approval may be required.

Sources of data are likely to include routine datasets / surveillance information, such as those accessed from the World Health Organisation (WHO) or national surveys such as the Health Survey for England or the British Social Attitudes Survey. You might have access to more locally based sources of data, such as routine statistics from a health or social care provider. It is also possible to use data from an established research project that you might have been involved with.

A quantitative research report for the dissertation is likely to include the following sections:

Introduction/ background

This section will cover:

1. Overview of the research topic or area, clearly highlighting a â€˜gapâ€™ in existing knowledge.
2. The questions being addressed and why they are important. What is the research need?
3. What hypothesis is being tested or questions being asked? Why is the method you will use the appropriate one for the task?
4. Aims/objectives.

Methods & Study Design

Here you will need to provide a detailed description of the existing data set, including how the information was obtained, over what time period, using what methods, who was invited to participate and who actually took part. You will also need to be clear about the aims of the main data set/research project, AND of your specific aims that you are seeking to address in the dissertation. This will be followed by your proposal to answer those questions yourself using all or part of the dataset of choice. In a way, you might be performing a sub-study nested within a much broader and larger information/research project. At some point in your dissertation you will need to give attention to the

integrity of the data, and how reliable it might be.

Analysis & Results

This will form a key part of your dissertation, along with the other sections. You will need to provide a detailed plan, and justification for your proposed methods of analysis. Before starting the analysis, you will need to familiarise yourself fully with the dataset and ensure that you understand the meaning of each variable. You will need to check that the data are free from errors and presented in a workable format for your dissertation. Do not underestimate the time involved in this â€˜cleaning and preparationâ€™ stage. In the analysis you will need to justify any deviations from your original plan and be clear about any assumptions that you make. In presenting your results, think about the most effective ways to present and communicate your findings. Remember that you want to capture key findings from the study in a clear and meaningful way; otherwise the reader will find it difficult to identify what you found. But donâ€™t go overboard with the number of tables, charts and graphs. Stick to presenting what the reader needs to know to understand what you found in relation to your study objectives. A key skill is in knowing what and how much needs to be presented by way of analysis output and results.

Discussion

Here you will reflect on the relevance/importance of your research question, the quality of your research findings, and set these into the current context of existing knowledge. You can bring in some of the wider literature/evidence to develop arguments to highlight the internal and external generalisability or strengths and weaknesses of your research and show what value can be placed on your actual findings. It is important to discuss the value of the existing data source and to consider alternative / superior ways to answer your research question in future. The discussion section usually includes consideration of the implications of your findings, particularly to current policy and practice. In other words, what recommendations might arise from your work. It is not uncommon to find dissertations and academic papers finishing with the phrase â€œmore research is requiredâ€• â€“ this obvious statement conveys little information to the reader about what you actually know about the subject. If questions remain unanswered then provide some direction in terms of how they might be answered.

Other sections

Other sections are likely to include references, appendices etc. Please note, appendices should only include supporting information, not material vital to the integrity of the dissertation.

Type 3 Qualitative research focused dissertation

This form of dissertation provides an opportunity to develop skills in working with qualitative data and could include one of the following approaches:

1. Qualitative study using primary data
2. A theoretical/narrative review
3. Policy analysis or discourse analysis/content analysis
4. A critical review of a policy using framework analysis.

A qualitative research report for the dissertation is likely to include the following sections:

Introduction/background

This section needs to show:

1. Why this particular research needs to be done or outline the impetus for the study.
2. Why resources should be dedicated to this topic and the gaps in knowledge the research seeks to address.
3. How improvements in a particular setting/context/population/policy framework might be achieved.

These actions help contextualise the study, demonstrate its relevance and build an argument for what you want to do and why. This section will include a detailed critique of existing literature and/or other information to highlight the case and generate support for your analysis of the topic. You will also need to acknowledge and critique existing studies/data sources and explain the problems that have arisen when others have used different methods to investigate the topic to discuss how previous work has shaped your own ideas.

Study design/methods

You need to develop a review methodology appropriate to your research question. Structure of the review is likely to include although it is not exclusive to the following: Clearly defined research question; Statement of intent outlining what you want to achieve as part of the investigative process; Inclusion/exclusion criteria for the studies/texts/policy documents/data sets being analysed; Definition of study population; Methods for assessing study quality; Methods of analysing/summarising (secondary) data; Sources of data arranged into themes outlining their appropriateness ready for presentation in the results section.

Results

Generate and present themes from the data to demonstrate where ideas originated. **OR** Highlight themes following analysis of the policy/theory/empirical data sources to generate alternative ways of considering the findings.

Discussion

This is where you will reflect on the relevance/importance of your analysis, and quality of your conclusions set in the context of existing knowledge. You can draw on wider literature/evidence to highlight the robustness, transferability or strengths and weaknesses of your analysis; to show what value can be placed on the conclusions you derived from the generated/reanalysed data. It is important to discuss the value of existing data sources and what you would have done differently if starting again. The discussion needs to explore the implications of your findings, particularly related to health and social care policy and/or practice by highlighting any recommendations arising from your work. If questions remain unanswered you need to demonstrate how they might be addressed and outline the focus of any future research. It is important to reflect on the implications of the research to demonstrate what future health and/or social care policy/planning interventions or practice improvements might

ensue and benefit potential service users and/or users of your findings. A conclusion will need to draw the debate to a close by synthesising the main points highlighted by your research. This final section could also include a clear dissemination policy of your findings.

Other sections

Other sections will include references, appendices etc. Please note, appendices should only include supporting information, not material vital to the integrity of the dissertation.

Type 4 Full or adapted systematic review or scoping review

The option of completing a rigorous review provides an opportunity for students to develop their skills in systematically collating, assessing and summarising existing sources of evidence.

A **systematic review** attempts to collate all empirical evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria in order to answer a specific research question. It uses explicit, systematic methods that are selected with a view to minimising bias, thus providing more reliable findings from which conclusions can be drawn and decisions made.

The key characteristics of a systematic review are:

- a clearly stated set of objectives with pre-defined eligibility criteria for studies
- an explicit, reproducible methodology
- a systematic search that attempts to identify all studies that would meet the eligibility criteria
- an assessment of the validity of the findings of the included studies
- a systematic presentation, and synthesis, of the characteristics and findings of the included studies

Meta-analysis is the use of statistical methods to summarise the results of independent studies. Many systematic reviews contain meta-analyses, but it is not essential that they do. By combining information from all relevant studies, meta-analyses can provide more precise estimates of the effects of health care than those derived from the individual studies included within a review. They also facilitate investigations of the consistency of evidence across studies, and the exploration of differences across studies.

Guidance for how to carry out a systematic review can be found from the Cochrane Collaboration: https://training.cochrane.org/handbook

Adapted systematic review

A Systematic review is a major undertaking with the amount of work involved being greatly influenced by the number of studies to be included in the review. For the purposes of this dissertation, students can limit the number of studies in their review (see below) to ensure that the dissertation can be completed within the time/resources available.

Dealing with too many studies

Good quality search strategies for some research questions can identify hundreds, sometimes thousands of potentially eligible studies to be reviewed. Students are unlikely to have sufficient time

(and do not have support from a second reviewer) to suitably deal with this. It is possible to limit the number of studies for the dissertation. This could be done for example, by limiting the years of publication in the search strategy, or only including UK studies (or for that matter non UK studies), or limiting studies by population such as just women, or by a specific age group. If you use one of these approaches then it needs to be clearly stated in the methods, results and discussion section.

Note that you are not expected to complete a meta-analysis for the dissertation though you can include one if appropriate.

It may be more appropriate for your research question to complete a scoping review. A scoping review is a relatively new approach to evidence synthesis and differs from systematic reviews in its purpose and aims. **The purpose of a scoping review is to provide an overview of the available research evidence without producing a summary answer to guide clinical decision-making.** Scoping reviews are a form of knowledge synthesis, which incorporate a range of study designs to comprehensively summarise and synthesise evidence with the aim of informing practice, programs, and policy and providing direction to future research priorities. The general purpose for conducting scoping reviews is to identify and map the available evidence. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies are likely to be less specific than those for a systematic review, so it may be an option if it appears like your systematic review search will only produce a very small number of papers.

Introduction/background

You will clearly formulate the problem setting it in context of scientific and/or theoretical debates. You need to show how it is relevant to trying to improve the health of a particular group of people or locality. This section will include a detailed critique of existing literature relating to the topic and bring in other information to highlight the importance of the issue. It is important to reflect on the implications of the proposed research in terms of future healthcare policy/planning or interventions and how it might benefit potential users of your findings. Thus you could include at some point in the dissertation a clear dissemination policy/impact statement for your findings.

This section needs to show:

1. Why does this particular research need to be done?
2. What recommendations will arise? Or gaps in knowledge will be identified?
3. How might it lead to an improvement in a particular setting/context/population?

Study design/methods

You need to develop a suitable review methodology appropriate to your research question. The structure of the review is then likely to include:

1. Clearly defined research question
2. Definition of intervention
3. Criteria for inclusion/exclusion of studies
4. Definition of study populations
5. Primary and secondary outcomes for the review
6. Methods of analysis/summarising data
7. Methods for assessing study quality

8. Search strategy & sources of literature/information

Results

1. Flow chart of search process/included & excluded studies
2. Summary of data extraction
3. Summary of included studies
4. Assessment of methodological quality
5. Summary of treatment effects

Discussion

This is where you will reflect on the relevance/importance of your analysis, and quality of your conclusions set in the context of existing knowledge. You can draw on wider literature/evidence to highlight the robustness, transferability or strengths and weaknesses of your analysis; to show what value can be placed on the conclusions you derived. The discussion needs to explore the implications of your findings, particularly related to health and social care policy and/or practice by highlighting any recommendations arising from your work. If questions remain unanswered you need to demonstrate how they might be addressed and outline the focus of any future research. It is important to reflect on the implications of the research to demonstrate what future health and/or social care policy/planning interventions or practice improvements might ensue and benefit potential service users and/or users of your findings.

Other sections

Other sections are likely to include references, appendices etc. Please note, appendices should only include supporting information, not material vital to the integrity of the dissertation.

Dealing with too few studies

In some cases, you might find less than a handful of potentially eligible studies for your review or none at all. This does not rule out conducting a systematic review for your dissertation though it can make it more challenging. You could still complete all of the sections outlined above until the results section. You could then explore possible strengths and weaknesses of your search strategy, or inclusion/exclusion criteria for example, before providing a more narrative review of some of the â€˜weakerâ€™ forms of evidence that did not pass your criteria. It is unlikely that nothing has been published on your research question at all. You could then conclude with recommendations about what research was needed, what form this might take, and why it was important. These are just ideas and students taking this option will be able to enter wider thinking with their supervisor.

Setting up a project

Project supervisors will have developed an outline of the project, but the student is expected to be fully aware of the following factors:

1. The relevance of your proposal to the programme disciplines
2. Demonstration of an academic approach

3. A general understanding of the overall topic, with detailed understanding of critical research methods
4. The suitability of the chosen research methods & study design (in comparison to alternative approaches).
5. The scope and time scales of the study.

Generally, the main reason why dissertations are not successful is because of inadequate attention to points 4 and 5 above. From experience, we know that students are more likely to produce a successful dissertation once they have done some initial groundwork and made themselves aware of the factors listed above.

Research Passport

Postgraduate students may require a research passport dependent on the nature of their study. For example, you may need a research passport if you are undertaking work in an NHS setting. Speak to your supervisor in the first instance to find out if you need one.

Research passports are ultimately issued by hospitals, but they require information from the University: https://www.bmh.manchester.ac.uk/doctoral-academy/essential-information/research-passports/

Attendance & Engagement Monitoring

The following guidance outlines the requirements of the School of Health Sciences in relation to the monitoring of attendance and engagement for PGT students during the research component of a Masters level degree. This is in accordance with the Universityâ€™s expectations in monitoring attendance (Regulation XX, http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=1895).

1. For full time students, the Schoolâ€™s expectation is that there is a minimum of one contact point per week. This can be via email, telephone, Skype, face-to-face etc.
2. The attendance/engagement of PGT students must be recorded by the main supervisor.
3. The Programme Administrator will request confirmation from the main supervisor on a monthly basis that the PGT student has adhered to the required attendance/engagement points.

Where a student fails to attend/engage on two consecutive weeks (FT students only) or where a pattern of non-attendance/engagement becomes apparent it is the main supervisorâ€™s responsibility to notify the Programme Director and Programme Administrator immediately.

Where students are identified as meeting one of the above trigger points, the process as outlined in section 4 of the Universityâ€™s â€˜Policy on Recording and Monitoring Attendanceâ€™.

Ethics

It is a fundamental requirement of the University that all dissertations involving university staff or students undertaking research directly using human subjects, must receive approval either from the Universityâ€™s Research Ethics Committee (UREC) or from the HRA (NHS Research Ethics Committee) before they start. You should discuss the ethics requirements of your project with your supervisor. Your supervisor will have begun the ethics application process, or already have ethical approval in place.

The type of ethical review and approval required for your project can depend on the nature of the project (in terms of risk to researchers and participants), your modes of recruitment, how you will obtain data and where you will be conducting the research. There are 5 possible routes of ethical review and approval:

1. Division/School Review: Low riskstudent projects only
2. Proportionate University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) Review: Low risk staff or student projects
3. Full University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) Review: High risk staff or student projects
4. Health Research Authority (HRA) Approval (including NHS REC)
5. Both HRA and UREC approval

Full details and guidance about each of these routes, as well as the Universityâ€™s policy can be found at: http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics/

It remains the supervisorâ€™s responsibility to complete in full any ethics procedures. It is expected that the supervisor will fully engage with the ethics review process to assess which form of documentation is required and ensuring that disciplinary norms are adhered to in all instances. The supervisor is responsible for assessing the level of ethical risk with the student, reviewing all ethics documentation prior to submission (and offering suggested improvements if necessary) and signing off on the final application. The supervisor is also required by the University to be the data custodian for the project and should be listed as such on the ethics documentation.

Students must not commence work on their dissertation until they have received formal email confirmation (including a PDF letter) of a favourable ethical opinion. Please note that ethical approval cannot be given retrospectively and commencing work on a dissertation without confirmation of ethical approval is classed as **an ethics breach** and will be reported as such to the Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity.

To confirm that ethical approval is required, students in conjunction with their supervisors should first complete the Ethics Decision Tool.

Ethics Decision Tool

The tool is designed to help students to determine whether their research requires ethical review and if so, by which ethics review body: UREC or HRA (NHS REC).

Students are required to complete this on-line tool and submit a copy of their final concluding page, with the breadcrumb path showing, to their supervisor before the start of the project. You can find the breadcrumb path by clicking in the upper right hand corner of the outcome page.

It is important that students and supervisors retain a copy of the Decision Tool outcome as this provides the only paper trail proving compliance with the University Ethics Policy and procedures. To do this, click the â€˜Printâ€™ button located on the final decision page, and use the option to save as a PDF. Please ensure that the breadcrumb path is showing when you save this page.

See Appendix A for more details on ethics.

Teaching, Learning & Assessment

You will be given guidance on writing your dissertation by your academic supervisor, but you should also familiarise yourself with the Universityâ€™s Presentation of Dissertations Policy, which can be found at: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=2863.

To summarise:

- All dissertations must be written in English, although quotations may be given in the language in which they were written.
- Dissertations are submitted electronically but students can produce bound versions for their own purposes if they prefer. The University of Manchester Library is an agent for the commercial online binding service called Hollingworth and Moss Ltd. Other companies are available and some will print, bind and post the dissertation on your behalf. Services in the UK can be found using an advertising directory such as yell.com. The University is **not responsible** for any aspects of printing, binding and submitting your dissertation, nor any costs incurred.

Word Count

The following word limits have been agreed by the Faculty Dissertation Working Group in an attempt to standardise the amount of student effort for a 60, 90, and 120 credit dissertation, therefore:

Dissertation Credits	**Word limit range (+/-10%)**
60	10,000 (9,000 -11,000)

Marking of the Dissertation

After submission, your dissertation will be read by 2 internal University examiners who will make an independent judgement of the suitability of your work for the award of MSc. This stage of the examination process usually takes up to 12 weeks (allowing for administration and marking). **Please note, your dissertation will only be marked after you have passed all taught modules.**

Your dissertation may also be selected for External Examiner moderation, as part of the marking process (this is always the case if the internal examiners disagree, or if the work is judged as fail/ borderline/ worthy of distinction). External Examiners are individuals from another institution or organisation who monitor the assessment processes of the University to ensure fairness and academic standards. They ensure that assessment and examination procedures have been fairly and properly implemented and that decisions have been made after appropriate deliberation. They also ensure that standards of awards and levels of student performance are at least comparable with those in equivalent higher education institutions.

External Examinersâ€™ reports relating to this programme will be shared with student representatives and details of any actions carried out by the programme team/School in response to the External Examinersâ€™ comments will be discussed. Students should contact their student representatives if they require any further information about External Examinersâ€™ reports or the process for

considering them.

Postgraduate Taught degrees at the University of Manchester are based on the National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This framework requires students to achieve credit at masterâ€™s level in order to get an award. For a standard postgraduate taught Masterâ€™s programme this will normally mean passing 180 credits. Please refer to your student handbook for further information about postgraduate taught degree regulations, with regard to the taught part of your programme. This should be read in conjunction with the applicable university policies and guidance.

You And Your Supervisor

The initiative for requesting supervision lies entirely with you, the student. The supervisorâ€™s role is to give advice and help on the nature and standard of the work and direct you to useful literature and appropriate methodology. But remember, the ultimate responsibility remains yours. Do NOT expect your supervisor to read a re-draft of every little piece of work and, above all, do NOT embarrass your supervisor in the latter stages by asking whether you will be successful.

After your initial meeting, supervisions should almost always be based on something written by you, so that the supervisor can give you feedback on your ideas and proposed methods, for example. Remember also that every time you give your supervisor something to read, they will need time to read it and prepare a response.

You and your supervisor should have a minimum of 6 face-to-face meetings during the project period, either virtually (e.g., via Zoom) or in person. See *Appendix B* for a template meeting form to record the details (including discussion points and agreed actions) of each meeting. The impetus for arranging meetings rests with you rather than your supervisor.

Remember that supervisors can only guide your writing and rescue you from major inadequacies if they have seen the text! We advise **very strongly** that you send your supervisor sections of your document, with a note indicating stage of completion and draft contents, as soon as you complete them and the whole draft **at least two weeks** before the final submission date. Ideally you should send your chapters as you go along. Please note, supervisors can only review complete sections once.

Please note that supervisors are **not** to be expected to proofread or correct spelling/grammar.

More information on the roles and responsibilities of students and supervisors can be found in Appendix C.

Important information

Possible Problems & How To Avoid Them

Careful advance planning pays dividends in the success of any research. **Remember** â€“ your research should be small scale but high quality and make a (modest) contribution to scientific knowledge. Be realistic â€“ do not expect to answer fundamental questions about the universe!

If you experience problems with your research project contact your supervisor as soon as possible. They may either be able to suggest ways of overcoming problems or advise on alternative arrangements.

Even if all goes smoothly with your research you are likely to hit the â€œwhy am I doing this â€“ is it all worth it?â€• phase at some point. Donâ€™t give up! Persevere â€“ if you need encouragement to bolster your flagging motivation, contact us; a friendly voice sometimes helps enormously in overcoming the feeling of isolation which is often the root cause of the despair. The longer your research and writing up takes, the more likely you are to become disheartened. This is one of the main reasons we encourage you to get on with your dissertation and submit it as early as possible.

Dissertation milestones

Deadlines concerning key milestones are available on the Canvas Research Dissertation site.

Successful completion of a dissertation requires attention to planning and time management. It is important that you plan ahead and work towards agreed milestones with your supervisor. Successful completion represents your academic abilities AND practical skills including time management and planning. The following is a list of general milestones during the dissertation period. You may identify additional milestones unique to your project.

- Project selection
- Initial meeting with supervisor
- Complete literature review
- Develop project methods
- Project presentation
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Dissertation writing
- Submission of draft dissertation to supervisor
- Final edits and submission of dissertation for marking

Monitoring

Students and supervisors are required to jointly complete records that serve to monitor the progress of the projects and production of the dissertation. This is an important part of the student-supervisor relationship and a requirement of the University.

The monitoring records aim to highlight any problems/concerns with the studentâ€™s progress that may have been overlooked. It helps you keep your supervisor and the Programme Director updated about your progress. The monitoring form will be used to inform any grievances relating to the student-supervisor relationship.

The Faculty Student Guidance booklet describes how the University expects monitoring to be undertaken. It also provides a different format to a monitoring form which could be used.

Recording Progress

It is good practice to keep a notebook to record your progress and data and a record of feedback from your supervisor. This can also help us if we need to find you another supervisor mid way through your work, in case of sickness for example. Students will be expected to keep track of their own progress and to initiate contact/support from their supervisor.

Appendix A: Ethics

Routes of Ethical Approval

Before being asked by the ERM to input details of your project, you will identify the appropriate route for ethical review of your work. There are two essential options â€“ NHS ethics committee review and University ethics committee review â€“ which you should have resolved during the Decision Tool completion. You should be aware, however, that there are, infrequently, studies which require both UREC review and HRA approval; and, if you believe that you research falls into this category you should seek further advice and discussion.

You will also be asked to make the decision as to whether your research requires a full committee review or whether it would meet the criteria for a proportionate review. You must make a prior decision on this using the university guidance and discussion with your supervisor.

Once the route of ethical review is confirmed, an ethics application should be made to the appropriate ethical review body.

If approval from the HRA or NHS REC is needed, the student and supervisor will need to create an IRAS application, which can be accessed here: https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/. You should read the Guidance on Applying for HRA Approval of the University ethics website for further information before commencing this process.

If approval from UREC is required, there are two different routes currently available: Proportionate UREC (for low risk projects) and full UREC (for high-risk projects). Details of the requirements for each of these routes are available on the Research Ethics webpages: http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics/

If approval from both the HRA and UREC is needed the student and supervisor will need to complete applications in both the ERM and IRAS system. In these instances, advice should be sought via the Research Governance team in FBMH (FBMHethics@manchester.ac.uk).

It is imperative that both the student and supervisor read the information available on the Research Ethics web pages before deciding on which avenue of ethical review is needed. Supervisors are co-responsible for student projects and also must be listed as the data custodian on the data management plan. A Data Management Plan is required to go alongside the ethics application for any project involving data collection. This can be completed using a standard template on: https://dmponline.manchester.ac.uk/

The University Ethical Review Manager (ERM)

For both routes of UREC approval, the student and supervisor will need to create and submit an application using the ERM system via the following link: https://submission-ethicalreview.manchester.ac.uk

To login to the ERM system you will need your standard university username and password.

Guidance information on using the ERM system is available in the below link: http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics/new-online-system-for-ethics-review-erm/

Before logging in to the Ethical Review Management System it is imperative you have been through the **Ethics Decision Tool** as this will help you make an informed decision as to whether or not your project does need independent ethical approval. You should only proceed to the ERM system if directed by the Decision Tool.

Submission of the completed form by the supervisor

The form is completed by the supervisor, in conjunction with the student. They will need to ensure that the studentâ€™s details are listed in Section B of the form. For best practice, the supervisor should use the â€˜shareâ€™ button to allow the student to review the content as appropriate. Once the final version is ready the supervisor will then need to electronically sign the form in Section S under the heading of â€˜Individual Completing this Formâ€™. The student will not be required to sign the form. Once the supervisor has signed, the form will automatically be submitted.

Once the form has been submitted:

- it will be screened by the Research Ethics Team in the Faculty
- the reviewer may request changes to the studentâ€™s application before forwarding to UREC for consideration (in which case the student and supervisor will be notified via email of the required changes)
- it can only be changed once the reviewer has returned it to the student/supervisor in the ERM system

Review Process

Once the application has been pre-screened for completeness and forwarded for UREC review, the student and supervisor will be notified via email.

If applying for Proportionate UREC, the review process will take 10 working days and will be performed by a digital committee. Any required changes will be communicated via email with the application being returned to the student/supervisor in the ERM system. Once any required changes have been made, the revised documentation will be reviewed by the Chair and the final decision will be communicated via email with a copy of the formal letter of ethical approval (in PDF format) attached.

If applying for full UREC review, the student/supervisor may receive a formal invitation to attend a UREC committee meeting and should respond to this invitation by following the instructions as outlined in the email. **Attendance at the meeting is mandatory and therefore the student/supervisor should liaise with the Research Ethics team to ensure that the meeting time and date are suitable for their schedules. In exceptional circumstances, the UREC will allow attendance via telephone conference but an adequate justification must be provided.**

Supervisors must accompany students to the UREC meeting or send a suitably qualified member of staff in their absence. The UREC will not permit students to attend the meetings alone.

After attending the UREC meeting the student/supervisor will be informed of the outcome within 7 working days.

The possible outcomes of UREC review are as follows:

- favourable
- provisional favourable subject to required revisions
- unfavourable

In the case of a provisional favourable outcome, the student/supervisor will be provided with comments from the UREC and be required to make specific changes to the proposal, which will then be resubmitted for further consideration.

NB this is NOT classified as a â€˜re-submission of a project that has previously received an unfavourable ethical opinionâ€™.

Appendix B: Template Meeting Form

Dissertation Supervision Form

This form is an example record of the meetings between staff and supervisor for the Masters dissertation. There should be a minimum of 6 face-to-face meetings during the supervision (approx. 30 mins), with the option to conduct these virtually (e.g., via Zoom). Regular contact should also be maintained through email.

STUDENTS ON A TIER 4 VISA ARE REQUIRED TO MEET WITH THEIR SUPERVISOR AT INTERVALS OF NO LONGER THAN 4 WEEKS TO SATISFY THE REQUIREMENTS OF THEIR VISA.

It is the responsibility of the student to contact the supervisor(s), and to arrange meetings as required.

It is the responsibility of the primary supervisor to inform the programme administrator/director whether students have been uncommunicative or failing to progress between meetings as soon as possible.

Please keep a record the date of each meeting. Also keep notes outlining the key points of each meeting, and the agreed points of action for the student. You can use the template below to maintain meeting records.

Student Name:

Primary Supervisor Name:

Date of meeting Signed Student Signed Supervisor

Meeting 1 â€“ Date:
Outline of points discussed:
Student actions:

Meeting 2 â€“ Date:
Outline of points discussed:
Student actions:

Meeting 3 â€“ Date:
Outline of points discussed:
Student actions:

Meeting 4 â€“ Date:
Outline of points discussed:
Student actions:

Meeting 5 â€“ Date:
Outline of points discussed:
Student actions:

Meeting 6 â€“ Date:
Outline of points discussed:
Student actions:

Meeting 7 â€“ Date:
Outline of points discussed:
Student actions:

Meeting 8 â€“ Date:

Outline of points discussed:
Student actions:

Appendix C: Introduction to Dissertation Supervision

Here we outline some of the key roles for student and supervisor. Supervision needs to be flexible to help meet the needs of the student and to account for the other roles of your supervisor. Therefore different supervisors may do things in different ways. This usually works out to the advantage of the student. It is important that supervisors and students clarify ways of working (in particular, methods of communication) at the start.

What is supervision?

At a postgraduate level, a dissertation supervisor aims to guide you or point you in the right directions. Supervisors are not expected, nor should they be doing work directly on your dissertation. A supervisor helps you plan your dissertation and to guide you through a period of learning associated with the topic area. They aim to help you complete a dissertation to the standard that you are capable of. Supervisors are not always â€˜expertsâ€™ in the topic of your dissertation but have experience of research and dissertation writing and support, usually in related areas. Supervisors are not expected to carry out data analysis, statistical analysis or reference checking! However, they are expected to provide feedback on initial drafts of your dissertation.

At a postgraduate level, a key to learning is to be able to identify oneâ€™s own learning and support needs. Therefore students are encouraged to discuss these with their supervisor. The supervisor can then work to meet those needs directly or suggest someone else for you to contact, or other ways of meeting your needs. This can include self-directed learning, reference to particular text books, or a suggestion to contact a topic expert.

Hours of Support

The Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health advise that:

A 60 credit postgraduate taught dissertation is expected to involve a student in 600 hours of study (10 hours per credit).

A supervisor of a 60 credit dissertation (10,000 â€“ 15,000 words) will normally provide 20 hours of supervision.

Keeping track

Students and supervisors complete monitoring/progress forms during the course of the project. The forms can be downloaded from Canvas and completed jointly between the student and supervisor, before being returned to the Programme Administrator.

Good ideas

1. Confirm how often to contact your supervisor and how;
2. Be clear about how your supervisor prefers to work and to make most efficient use of their time;
3. When sending supervisors work to comment on, identify any specific queries or questions you might have;
4. Do clarify with your supervisor how much time they need to comment on substantive pieces of work;
5. Do let your supervisor know of any personal circumstances that are or are likely to interfere with your progress;
6. Do mention any concerns you have about the supervision process with your supervisor.

Not such good ideas

1. Donâ€™t send your supervisor constant emails about relatively minor things;
2. Donâ€™t expect your supervisor to respond immediately;
3. Donâ€™t expect your supervisor to know the answer to everything â€“ their role is to guide and support you;
4. Donâ€™t expect your supervisor to edit your dissertation;
5. Donâ€™t ignore your supervisorâ€™s advice without at least discussing it with them. Itâ€™s unlikely you will want to do everything your supervisor might suggest, but it is helpful for you both to acknowledge your reasons for this.
6. Donâ€™t expect to keep your supervisor if you do not contact them for many months or you go past the completion date without having had this agreed in advance.

What do you do if you have concerns about your supervision?

Most students have a positive experience of working with their supervisor. It is uncommon for significant problems to arise. If students and supervisors are clear about their roles and responsibilities from the beginning then this can usually be avoided. Similarly, it is important that you raise any concerns with your supervisor before they develop into a bigger problem.

If you do have any concerns about your supervision that have not been addressed adequately by your supervisor then you need to contact the dissertation lead for your programme or the Programme Director.

Roles and Responsibilities of Supervisors

The responsibilities of Supervisors include:

1. Taking a major role in any ethics application required. Ethical approval should be fully in place before the start date of the experimental work.
2. Meet with the student regularly (a minimum of once per week).
3. Giving guidance about the nature of research and the standard expected, the planning of the research programme, literature and sources, attendance at taught classes where appropriate and about requisite techniques (including arranging for instruction where necessary);
4. Maintaining contact through regular meetings (the frequency of meetings being appropriate to the research being undertaken and agreed in advance);
5. Being accessible to the student at other appropriate times for advice and responding to difficulties raised by the student;

6. Giving detailed advice on the necessary completion dates of successive stages of the work so that the thesis may be submitted within the agreed timescale;
7. Requesting written work or reports as appropriate and returning written material with constructive criticism and in reasonable time;
8. Ensuring that for degrees where an oral examination is required the student is adequately prepared by arranging for the student to present his or her work to staff.
9. Ensuring that the student is made aware when progress is not satisfactory and facilitating improvement with advice and guidance;
10. Establishing at an early stage the Supervisorâ€™s responsibilities in relation to the studentâ€™s written work, including the nature of the guidance and comments to be offered as the work proceeds and on the draft of the thesis before it is submitted. It must be made clear to the student that research for a higher degree is undertaken within the general principle that a thesis must be the studentâ€™s own work;
11. Making students aware of other researchers and research work in the department and Graduate School;
12. Encouraging the student to publish the research;
13. Providing pastoral support and advising students, where appropriate, of University support services;
14. Bringing to the attention of the students the health and safety regulations and academic rules, regulations and codes of practice of the University. More detailed guidance on Health and Safety is available in the Universityâ€™s Health and Safety Policy Notice UMHSP 33, available from Health and Safety Services, which interprets and applies the CVCP Note of Guidance N/93/111, â€œHealth and Safety Responsibilities of Supervisors towards Graduate and Undergraduate studentsâ€•. Guidance on specific situations is available from the staff of Health and Safety Services.
15. To recommend examiners for the studentâ€™s thesis after discussion with the student to ensure that the proposed examiners have not had a significant input into the project, a significant personal, financial or professional relationship with the student, or that there is not other good reason to doubt the suitability of the recommendation

Responsibilities of the Student

The responsibilities of the student include:

1. Pursuing the programme with a positive commitment, taking full advantage of the resources and facilities offered by the academic environment and, in particular, contact with the Supervisor, other staff and research students;
2. Discussing with the Supervisor the type of guidance and comment believed to be most helpful, and agreeing a schedule of meetings;
3. Ensuring that they are aware of the health and safety regulations and academic rules and regulations and codes of practice of the University;
4. Successfully completing any training programme arranged within the prescribed time period;
5. Taking the initiative in raising problems or difficulties, however elementary they may seem, bearing in mind that prompt discussion and resolution of problems can prevent difficulties and disagreements at a later stage;
6. Maintaining the progress of the work in accordance with the stages agreed with the Supervisor, including in particular the presentation of written material as required, in sufficient time to allow for

comments and discussion before proceeding to the next stage. Where possible, students will be given details of the work programme for the academic year at the beginning of the year;

7. Agreeing with the Supervisor the amount of time to be devoted to the research. Students should avoid taking holiday between June and September. Students are usually required to be in Manchester for the duration of the project. Any absences will have to be agreed by the supervisor and the programme director.
8. Checking the completeness and accuracy of the text of the thesis submitted; failure to check the thesis carefully may result in the thesis being failed or cause a delay in the award of a degree;
9. To disclose, in discussion with Supervisors concerning potential examiners for the thesis, any information that could significantly affect the suitability of the proposed examiner(s). Such information may concern a significant input from the examiner(s) into the project or a significant personal, financial or professional relationship they may have had, with the student.