

MPH & MRes Dissertation Handbook 2025/26

Description



Dissertation Handbook

Masters in Public Health and

Masters of Research Public Health/Primary Care

Academic Year 2025/26

This handbook is for those of you embarking on the 60 credit dissertation of the MPH or the 90 credit dissertation of the MRes in Public Health/Primary Care. Use this handbook in conjunction with the Programme Handbook, [SHS Student Handbook](#) and Faculty/University [regulations](#).

Important Contacts

	Course Unit Lead
Dr Andrew Jones	andrew.jones@manchester.ac.uk
	Programme Director
Dr Paula Whittaker	mph.director@manchester.ac.uk
	Student Support teams

Examination queries

Assessment queries

Assessment submissions

shs.assessment@manchester.ac.uk

Resit/reassessment queries

Attendance Monitoring

shs.attendance@manchester.ac.uk

Disability Support

shs.dc@manchester.ac.uk

Mitigating Circumstances

shs.mitcircs@manchester.ac.uk

All Placement queries

shs.placements@manchester.ac.uk

Registration advice and guidance

Course unit selection and enrolment

Timetable queries

shs.programmes@manchester.ac.uk

Programme content

Wellbeing student support, appointments and signposting

shs.wellbeing@manchester.ac.uk

Student support hub – general queries and advice not covered by the above teams

shs.hub@manchester.ac.uk

Introduction

This handbook accompanies the main MPH/MRes Programme Handbook and other programme and University information. It is essential that students understand the requirements and expectations as set out in these documents, to support their academic studies. Please be aware that the requirements, pathways and options regarding the dissertation have changed for **existing and new students at the start of September 2025**. These changes are included in this Handbook. Additional resources provided in Canvas.

Online Resources

An [introduction to the dissertation](#) is given as part of the programme **induction**. There is a section in **Canvas** that provides further information and resources with regards to the dissertation. We strongly recommend **ALL students explore** the range of resources that we have created for them in Canvas.

Online Tutorials/Webinars

Students starting their dissertation are encouraged to attend a programme of Masterclasses which will run across the academic year. The dates for these will be found in the Dissertation Skills section in Canvas.

MPH vs. MRes

To complete the requirements for an MPH or MRes, students need to accomplish a pass across 180 credits. The balance between dissertation and course units required is shown below:

	Number of taught units	Dissertation	Total credits	Word count
MPH	8 (=120 credits)	60 credits	180 credits	10,000 to 12,000
MRes	6 (=90 credits)	90 credits	180 credits	15,000 to 17,000

Intended Learning Outcomes

Category of outcome	Students should be able to:
A. Knowledge and Understanding	A1 Describe in detail a specific context, setting and/or problem and establish a coherent research-related question that forms the foundation of the written dissertation report/manuscript B1 Construct a meaningful synthesis and critical interpretation of
B. Intellectual Skills	existing and new information, obtained as part of the dissertation process C1 Apply appropriate methodology to obtain the data or information
C. Practical skills	C2 Use a justified methodology to analyse the data and/or information collected
D. Transferable skills and personable qualities	D1 Demonstrate the ability to be a reflective and self-directed learner, to accomplish a substantial piece of academic work

What is a Master's Dissertation?

A master's dissertation is a focused, critical and reflective body of writing that seeks to add to the understanding and knowledge of a particular problem or question. It is an opportunity for you to expand your knowledge and expertise in an area of study. To pass your dissertation, you will need to show your

ability to provide in-depth, critical and reflective thinking, relevant to the focus of the dissertation. It is your own work and not that of your supervisor. The role of your supervisor is to support your learning experience but not to do the thinking for you. Information on supervision is given later in this handbook.

In the UK, the requirements for a master's degree are defined by the Quality Assurance Higher Education Agency. The following insert includes those sections of particular relevance to your dissertation. You will see the emphasis on the need to demonstrate critical application and reflection.

Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a. A systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
- b. comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- c. originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
- d. conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - o to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
 - o to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- a. deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- b. demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- c. continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

Holders will have:

The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

- the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
- decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
- the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

HEA. *Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards. Chapter A1: The national level*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk> Accessed June 2012.

Types of Dissertations

The MPH/MRes programme aims to address the needs of public health professionals now and in the future. Reflecting this, and incorporating previous student feedback, the dissertation unit includes a number of different options with regards to the type of dissertation students can select. Students are

encouraged to consider utilising opportunities from both quantitative as well as qualitative research methods. The different approaches (sometimes referred to as options or framework) are:

1. Primary research study (i.e. collecting new data)
2. Analysis of existing data
3. Academic public health report / outbreak report
4. Systematic review (see note below)
5. Research grant proposal

More details regarding the requirements for each dissertation format are given in the Appendices. Students need to read about all of these to help decide on the best option for their ideas.

***N.B** the MPH refers to an adapted systematic review, rather than full review. See specific information in the Appendices*

Marking Framework

At the beginning of the unit, it is helpful for students to understand the marking criteria and allocation of marks for a completed dissertation. This will enable them to develop a better sense and understanding of what they need to produce in order to pass, and achieve a higher mark. This information applies to both MPH and MRes students.

There is a generic Faculty-level marking framework (sometimes these are referred to as a rubric) from which those specific to the MPH/MRes are then derived. There are then different marking frameworks depending on the type of dissertation format taken.

Students need to familiarise themselves with the correct marking framework once they have decided their choice of dissertation format. Copies of the dissertation marking frameworks are included in the Appendices.

External Partner Project Opportunities

Each year there are a limited number of opportunities for MPH or MRes students to undertake a dissertation project with a researcher at The University of Manchester, or one of our external partners. The partner project initiative is coordinated by Greg Williams (greg.williams@manchester.ac.uk) and Christine Greenhalgh (christine.greenhalgh@manchester.ac.uk). If you are interested in working with a researcher, or an external partner for your dissertation then please contact both of them at the earliest opportunity. There are only a limited number of places available each year and these **cannot be guaranteed**.

Researchers or external partners may be able to provide you with research ideas, data and/or access to expert practitioners. **You will still be allocated a University of Manchester supervisor** to oversee your dissertation and must follow all guidance as outlined in this handbook in addition to the standard university regulations as part of your programme as a whole.

To give you an example of the kind of opportunities that may be available, our external partners over the past few years have included:

- Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership / Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust
- Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- UK Health Security Agency (previously Public Health England)
- [The TRUUD Consortium](#)

Opportunities to get involved with research being carried out by colleagues associated with the MPH/MRes will be announced as and when they arise. It is the intention for additional partners, including international partnerships to be added in due course. Information on these will be available through the usual student communications. We are also happy to look for potential partnerships based on your interests/skills, where we may **already** have an ongoing relationship.

Partnership projects – things to consider

It is worth considering that, depending on the partner and the project proposal, some additional, potentially time-consuming, requirements may need to be addressed. For instance, a data sharing agreement, data storage needs, and/or ethical approvals. While none of these issues would preclude you from undertaking a project, they may mean that such a project is not right for you.

Although the partnership projects can be a great opportunity for you to make external connections and produce work that is of value beyond your dissertation, it is important to remember that your dissertation is the number one priority. **This means that any unforeseen circumstances, such as delays in data collection, must be thought about in your planning and cannot be used as mitigating circumstances.**

Remember that organisations may have different competing priorities to yours and timescales might end up being different to those initially agreed. **Therefore, students need to ensure that they will be able to adopt their initial ideas into a suitable dissertation, even if changes in the partnership relationship and priorities change over this period.** The academic supervisor can help guide and suggest possible solutions such as recommending a change in the format of the dissertation to accommodate any challenges and necessary changes.

Please make contact with Greg Williams (greg.williams@manchester.ac.uk) and Christine Greenhalgh (christine.greenhalgh@manchester.ac.uk) to discuss this further.

Academic-suggested topics

Every year we ask academics associated with the programme to suggest ideas for projects, and areas of investigation that may fit with the different types of dissertations on offer for the MPH/MRes. This limited information is contained in a spreadsheet which is available in Canvas, and is updated throughout the year. Please do not rely on this list because it is variable and depends on what work an academic might be currently involved with. Please note that it is still imperative to ensure that any project or ideas suggested by an academic then become the responsibility of the student – in other words, the person suggesting the question/title etc, will not be responsible for ensuring that it is then workable as a full dissertation. Whilst in many cases that person will become the supervisor, this is not always guaranteed.

Research Ethics and Governance

ALL dissertation students and their supervisors need to adhere to correct research governance, and research ethics. Detailed information is given on the University website at [University ethical approval | The University of Manchester](#)

Students and their supervisors are responsible for ensuring that the correct governance (including ethics) approval has been secured and is adhered to across the research project. Some of these requirements are not just for students collecting new data (primary research), and can apply to the analysis of existing data too. Students writing a 'Research Grant Proposal' will also need to include a section in their dissertation about research ethics and governance, but will not need to make an actual application.

Three sources for external information include:

- [Information Commissioner's Office](#)
- [NHS Health Research Authority](#)
- [Medical Research Council information on good research practice](#)

Research Ethics Online Decision Tool

All students need to use the **online ethics decision tool** to determine if their work will require ethical approval. A screenshot of the final decision from this decision tool (it does not produce a document) needs to be taken and included in an Appendix in the submitted dissertation: 'UREC Decision Tool' (https://www.training.itservices.manchester.ac.uk/uom/ERM/ethics_decision_tool/story_html5.html)

Students also need to submit evidence that they sought permission to access and use any data and information from within a specific organisation, even if formal ethical approval is not required. This applies if the information is not in the public domain (but see the sections above if it is to do with NHS or equivalent data, or data considered to be 'sensitive' in nature). This needs to be from a Director / senior manager, on letter headed paper, signed and sent as a PDF to the student's academic supervisor. It is good practice for a copy of this to be included in an Appendix in their dissertation.

The key message 'all students need to ensure they understand and adhere to the international principles of good research conduct. Therefore students need to read the information on ethics and governance on [the main university webpage](#) and then complete the UREC Decision Tool.

(<https://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/environment/governance/ethics/>),

For a list of contacts who can advise further please see the Research and Ethics teams [details here](#).

When must students start the dissertation unit?

Full-time students start along with the individual taught units, towards the beginning of the academic year. Students often spend a few weeks settling into the programme, before submitting ideas for the dissertation (see Section Submitting Ideas).

Part-time students on the 2-year route start in their second year.

Part-time students on the 3-5 year route will normally start their dissertation after successful completion of their taught units (8 units for MPH and 6 units for MRes).

Deadline for submitting the completed dissertation

All students must submit their completed dissertation in the first week in September at the end of the academic year within which they registered to start the dissertation unit. Note that the academic year runs from September to September. Therefore, full time and part time students starting the dissertation in the academic year September 25/26 must meet the **final submission date which will be in the first week in September (specific date to be announced)**.

Students must recognise the considerable amount of time that they need to dedicate to their dissertation, in order to submit their completed dissertation on time. Therefore, they are encouraged to submit their Dissertation Title Form earlier rather than later. This will give more time with their supervisor, and more time to plan their studies as a whole.

Process Flow Chart

The following diagram shows the route through the dissertation year. Note that once a student registers to start the dissertation unit, they **must** submit by the forthcoming September.



Developing Ideas

A core skill in research and evidence-informed public health, lies in developing a focused area of investigation – taking a general theme/topic, and focusing it down to a clearly defined research question, aim, and objectives. Students need to consider a variety of factors to help with this and when selecting the dissertation format. In other words, deciding on the question and the methods. This will include:

- The modules/topics students have studied on the MPH/MRes or previously
- The topics they really enjoyed studying so far
- The topics they excelled in academically and / or found that they had a more natural affinity towards
- Experience gained from their work/professional development
- Their career/research aims

Students are not required to have passed any particular modules to be able to carry out a particular type of dissertation. We expect students to consider their own academic skills and abilities, and how they might respond to further training as they continue throughout the course. For example, it makes sense not to take on a challenge of analysing existing quantitative data if the student knows they struggle with statistics, despite having tried in the past; or not to try and design and implement a qualitative study if they have not studied qualitative research in the past. In other words, be realistic, and play to your existing strengths, whilst keeping open opportunities to expand your learning and development.

Students need to think about

- The extent that any meaningful research has already been published on the topic (students need to select a topic, particularly if they are not doing a primary research study, that has enough published research to inform their own dissertation. It is extremely difficult to write a dissertation if there is little available literature). Therefore, it is important to spend time exploring the literature

and what exists, as part of the topic/idea development stage.

- The extent that the research has already been done in exactly the same way. Students are not expected to carry out original/new/novel research. However, in their dissertation they must demonstrate their core academic skills, including the ability to develop, apply, critique and interpret a set of problems/scenarios and data. The dissertation must be their own work and not simply a repeat of what others have done before.
- Their ability to carry out statistical and narrative analysis and to use relevant software.
- The timescales, support and practical considerations, to minimise any risks of missing deadlines.

It is vital that all students think about the need for ethical approval, and that they can demonstrate legitimate use of any existing data that they might use (see earlier section on Ethics). Ethical approval from the University and from external organisations does take time, especially if modifications/repeat applications are needed. This in and of itself **cannot** be used as mitigation for missing/needing to change a submission date for the completed dissertation.

Title Form Submission and Dates

Students need to complete a short Title Form to indicate the title and a brief outline of what they intended to focus on. This information is used to monitor student progress and to allocate supervisors. There are **five fixed dates** when students can submit the Title Form. Title Forms will not be processed between these dates. These dates reflect the academic timetable, and help account for assessment times and holidays. **The Canvas area for the Dissertation will include the dates/deadlines** for each of the opportunities you have to submit your Title Form.

Academic Supervision

Students will be informed by email of their allocated supervisor, soon after each of the above closing dates. They need to contact their supervisor to introduce themselves and start establishing the supervision process.

Role of the Supervisor

The role of the supervisor is to support a student's academic development. Remember the dissertation is the work of the student and not that of the supervisor. Students will have different needs for support and guidance. Some of the areas a supervisor can help with include:

- Helping students to develop meaningful time plan for the months ahead
- Supporting the development of the structure of the dissertation in terms of sections and themes that it includes
- Giving constructive feedback on sections of written work/preliminary drafts. This includes feedback on the general style of writing, appropriate use of references, and the depth of critique/appraisal that the work contains and relevance to the original aims and objectives of the work

In addition:

- Supervisors aim to give feedback to students within 2 weeks of submitting drafts. As a result, it is important that students plan their time and allow for the return time for feedback on their work
- Please do not expect supervisors to be able to give feedback very close to the submission date. Also, this would not provide enough time for students to respond to their comments

Supervisors are expected to provide up to 20 hours of support for dissertation students. This includes reviewing student drafts and individual meetings.

N.B Students need to be aware that many staff at the university take annual leave in August. Therefore, they need to take this into consideration when planning their work.

Maximising Supervision

Students are encouraged to maximise the opportunities for support from their academic supervisor. A few suggestions to facilitate this include: â??

- Send supervisors an email as a way of introduction, a time plan, and any immediate concerns/support needs
- Identify specific queries or questions as a way of preparing for a discussion/meeting with the supervisor
- Have a good awareness of the marking template used to assess the final written work (see end of document). Knowing the assessment criteria helps guide a studentâ??s work and supervisory discussion
- Make the supervisor aware of any difficulties affecting the ability to study. Students do not need to specify the detail, but enough to help the supervisor signpost the student to other sources of support. At the same time, it is helpful for any students with issues impacting on their studies, to contact appropriate support using the contact details/emails listed on the front page of this document
- Raise any issues associated with supervision by contacting Roger.Harrison@Manchester.ac.uk or Andrew.Jones@Manchester.ac.uk

Additional support

All students are encouraged to utilise the [My Learning Essentials](#) package provided through the online UoM library. There are also helpful resources provided in Canvas relevant to both the dissertation and the Critical Literature Review.

Milestones

Students are encouraged to draft and share a plan for the academic year with their supervisor. This will help them to develop a realistic understanding of the amount of time required to achieve key milestones over the months ahead.

Always let your supervisor know of issues impeding your studies so that they can provide support.

Word Counts

The dissertation has a word count limit, specified as a range. This differs for the MPH and the MRes as shown below:-

Programme	Word count range
MPH Dissertation (60 credits)	10,000 to 12,000
MRes Dissertation (90 credits)	15,000 to 17,000

The student needs to indicate the final word count of the whole dissertation, minus the excluded sections/components. The word count needs to be clearly visible on the front page. Word count penalties apply at 10% over the maximum number of words, shown above. Further details of penalties and how they are applied to a dissertation can be found described in the SHS Student Handbook. for the dissertation will be applied as described in the SHS Student Handbook at [SHS Student Information](#)
[Home \(sharepoint.com\)](#).

Two abstracts are needed for any type of dissertation

1. Lay abstract 300 words, and
2. Scientific abstract 300 words

Inclusions, Exclusions & Penalties

Detailed information about word counts, what is and is not included, marking penalties and the marking framework used for assessment, is given in the SHS Student Handbook at [SHS Student Information](#)
[Home \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Dealing with your own publications/presentations

Students are encouraged to disseminate work associated with their academic studies, including the dissertation. This can include publications in printed and online journals, blogs, textbooks and conference presentations. However, steps need to be taken to avoid academic malpractice. Before submitting a dissertation, it is important for students to reference any publication (or work formally accepted for publication) that directly relates to the dissertation. This means students will need to reference their own published/presented work, if aspects of this are included in the dissertation. Failing to do so puts the student at risk of academic malpractice, including plagiarism. Furthermore, students must not directly copy and use the same material in their dissertation that is presented in a publication

Use of Appendices

Information in the appendices **is not marked** by the examiner and is not included in the word count. Therefore, whatever you include in the appendices must not form a considerable component of the dissertation itself – it will not influence the marks.

However, for a dissertation, it can be of general interest to include items that are indirectly related to the main body of the dissertation. For example:

1. A copy of the complete data analysis output (such as from Stata/SPSS) (but this would not be marked)
2. A copy of the full search strategy as used in Ovid, Pubmed, etc. (but this would not be marked). However, students will still need to put the results of your actual search in the main part of the dissertation. This is to show how successful your search was, the type of information/studies retrieved, and the number. This is especially important when conducting a systematic review, but applicable to other dissertation formats too.

As the appendices are not marked, students must ensure that information central to the dissertation is included in the main part of the written sections. Therefore, with regard to the examples in the list above, more specific detail and explanation might be better placed in the main part of the dissertation, otherwise it would not be included in the formal marks.

Formatting/layout

Adhering to a clear and consistent presentation format can facilitate the marking process and students can lose valuable marks if their presentation is poor. The examples of previous dissertations, included in Canvas, can help direct students to appropriate styles to use.

The University has a number of important requirements regarding the way in which the written dissertation is laid out. For the main text, **1.5 spacing** with a font size of at least 11 is preferred; single-spacing may be used for quotations, footnotes and references. A number of preliminary pages need to be included, specific to the programme of study. The preliminary pages including the student declaration, must be included. A template for these is included in Canvas, Dissertation Skills, or you can view a [downloadable template here](#) (University of Manchester login required).

In addition, it is helpful for students to include their Student Number as well as their name, on the Title Page.

Referencing

The use of referencing will be assessed by the examiners. On this programme, the preferred referencing style is **Harvard**. However, **Vancouver** is acceptable. Students must correctly reference their work. Poor approaches to referencing can suggest academic malpractice. **Guidance** can be found on academic writing and referencing in the Study Skills course within Canvas and from the University My Learning Essentials.

Students should still review the reference list to ensure it is complete and correct, and not rely on software to do this perfectly.

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

We urge students to be cautious when using a chatbot or AI tool within their learning. Chatbots and AI tools can be useful, but there are a number of risks associated with using them. Please ensure that you are aware of what is permissible use of AI for each assignment. You can utilise AI to generate ideas, key themes, and plan your assessment but not to write your assessment. Do not use AI to generate text, or partial text for use in your assessment unless the assignment brief explicitly states that this is permitted, otherwise use will be deemed academic malpractice. This is academic malpractice because the words and ideas generated are not your own and not an accurate reflection of your learning. Further to this, the words and ideas generated by the chatbot or AI tool may make use of other, human authors' ideas without referencing them, which is plagiarism. Where a chatbot or other form of AI has been used, make sure you acknowledge that use. Information on how to cite can be found here: <https://manchester-uk.libanswers.com/teaching-and-learning/faq/264824> Some units, for example those on AI and technology, permit the use of AI. However, they require you to sign a code of conduct which must be adhered to. Make sure you understand and follow these codes. If you are unclear on what is permissible, speak to the unit lead.

Where and when to submit the completed dissertation

Students need to submit one electronic copy of the dissertation through Canvas (similar to a course unit assignment). Printed copies of the dissertation **are not needed**.

MPH and MRes students need to **submit the electronic copy on the submission date which will be in the first week in September (specific date to be announced)**. Students can submit earlier than this, but they will not get their mark any earlier.

- Students need to submit work as .PDF or .DOC file.
- Ensure that the saved document has the correct formatting and layout, including the generated reference list. If working on a Mac computer, please save the document to a Word or .PDF format.
- Use the same format for saving and submitting the file, as for the assignments, i.e. student ID number then unit code.
- The submission box in Canvas will become available nearer to the final submission date.

What next?

All students are encouraged to consider ways to disseminate aspects of their work. This can include a blog post, presentation, or more formal dissemination such as a publication in an academic journal. This can also enhance a student's CV and contribute to their career development. A publication

could take on any number of formats including:

- A commentary/editorial
- A study report
- A case report
- A letter to the editor

Publishing/presenting your work

Students can discuss potential publication with Roger Harrison/Andrew Jones. They will have ideas about the suitability of the student's work, the relevant journals, and what aspects could be focussed on. Students can also ask if their supervisor could help with this work, although that is outside of the main supervision role. Students are asked to acknowledge in any dissemination that the work was associated with the MPH/MRes. We are always keen to know what/how students do in relation to their MPH/MRes. Therefore, please send information regarding any successful publications, even if that occurred after graduation, to roger.harrison@manchester.ac.uk.

Appendix I – A New Research Study/Project

The dissertation provides an opportunity for MPH and MRes students to collect new, primary data (i.e. conduct a research study/project). This is of particular interest for students who intend to pursue a research-focused career, or one with a strong element of this within. The research study can be based on any suitable methodology but one which is agreed by the student's supervisor

Embarking on a new research study/project can be a practically challenging task. All students need to do background work to ensure that the study can be completed within the timescales of the dissertation.

Students are responsible for establishing their own research study. However, this can be part of the partnerships, as discussed earlier in this handbook, or students can join an existing research programme that is running elsewhere.

Identifying and if relevant, gaining research ethical approval is a key criteria, and students will not be able to proceed unless this has been secured where needed. This will include ethical approval from the University of Manchester, in addition to that which might be needed outside of the university setting (e.g. for research within the context of the NHS).

Students wishing to pursue a primary research project will need to discuss their ideas and approach with Greg.Williams@Manchester or Christine.Greenhalgh@Manchester.ac.uk in advance.

Various approaches can be taken with regards to an actual research project. You really need to have some idea regarding the general approach you wish to take (for example, a cross-sectional study, a qualitative study, and so on) before embarking on this approach. Your supervisor will guide you to suitable reading on study design, and the university library has a range of text books on 'research design'. One priority is to consider how realistic your ideas are. Remember that you have less than 12 months to design, implement and complete your research along with the full write-up for the

dissertation. Similarly, in the vast majority of cases, you will need to have obtained ethical approval and regulatory approvals too. Information on the processes/requirements are given on the University Research Ethics section on the website. That being said, students have completed some excellent research projects in the past.

Appendix II – Analysis of Existing Data

This option takes the format of analysing existing (sometimes referred to as secondary) data (including quantitative and qualitative) from an existing data set to which they can access. You must still check and demonstrate permission to access and use the data for the purposes of the dissertation. This might include a copy of a formal letter from the organisation/data custodian, or information about the particular data-sharing agreements advertised. You will also need to provide assurance that any original consent attached to the data does not preclude you from using the data for your dissertation.

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. In some circumstances, you might have access to more locally based sources of data, such as routine statistics from a health care provider. It is also possible to use data from an established research project that you have been involved with.

The course units Practical Statistics for Population Health, Fundamentals of Epidemiology, Evidence Based Practice, Qualitative Research Methods and Economic Evaluation in Healthcare may be of particular relevance to this option

A research report for based on existing data will often include the following sections. These are usually presented in the form of individual chapters:

1. **Introduction, Background & Critical Review of Existing Literature.** These sections will cover similar issues/areas to those highlighted in the Case for Support in the option of Research Grant Proposal, on the previous page.
2. **Methods & Study Design.** You will need to provide a detailed plan, and justification for your proposed methods of analysis. In addition, you will need to provide a detailed description of the 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. In a way, you might be carrying out a study nested within a much 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.
3. **Analysis & Results.** This will form a key part of your dissertation, along with the other sections. Before starting the analysis, you will need to spend time exploring and examining the data.
4. You will need to check and report on data quality and any management required to present them in a workable format for your dissertation. Do not underestimate the time involved in the data cleaning and preparation stage. In the analysis you will need to justify any deviances to your

- original plan and be clear about any assumptions that you make. In presenting
5. 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. However, there is a balance to be had in terms of the number of tables, charts and graphs. Focus on presenting what the reader needs to know and understand in relation to the original objectives. A key skill is in knowing what and how much needs to be presented by way of analysis output and results.
 6. **Discussion** The discussion section is one of the most important parts of any dissertation. 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 health 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 ‘‘more research is required’’• ‘‘ 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 are likely to include references, appendices etc.

Appendix III ‘‘ Academic Public Health Report

Many public health professionals will be expected to produce public health reports in relation to a particular issue/subject. On the MPH/MRes, these are prefixed as ‘‘Academic’’ Public Health Reports, to ensure that students appreciate the need to apply scientific and evidence-based rigour, with academic critical and reflective argument throughout, and clear justification for approaches considered. This may differ to less detailed organisational reports at times. The course units Practical Statistics for Population Health, Fundamentals of Epidemiology and Evidence Based Practice will be of value for this option, but not restrictive to just these.

The format for an academic public health report will vary according to the topic/focus and primary objectives. The following acts as a general guide:

Aims: students need to demonstrate their appropriate understanding, application and critical reflection of theories/models and existing knowledge to inform a specific public health question, often focused on a particular locality/setting and to consider future interventions and policy direction.

Types of Reports: In most (but not all) situations, an academic public health report will be used to address certain aspects associated with an existing or pending problem in a specific area or context. The types of public health reports likely to be presented for a dissertation include:

- Health needs assessment / health impact assessment
- An audit / evaluation of service delivery
- Option appraisal
- Policy evaluation
- An outbreak report (see further on)

Structure & objectives: The specific structure and objectives of the academic report will be influenced by its focus / initial public health question. But in all academic public health reports, students need to demonstrate their ability to appropriately use and understand the main skills and principles that have been covered across the MPH course. Students are encouraged to critically present and reflect on any existing or proposed policy relevant to the focus of the report.

Thus, students need to be able to challenge the status quo or proposed policy direction set by organisations, local, national or international bodies & government.

The content of an academic public health report is likely to cover material from the following sections:

Burden

- To clearly identify, describe and present a public health issue, often focused on a particular locality / setting or population
- To present an analysis of the issue
- To use available data sources where possible to describe the actual possible burden or impact of the issue, including historical, current and future impact and to set this in relation to other key population characteristics and health issues.
- Data and information need to be presented in a meaningful way and appropriate to the focus of the report. Recognising that there might be limited information on the specific issue in this setting, students need to find other sources of data to inform and estimate the possible circumstances. Rarely does a locally based public health problem arise without any suggestive or interpretative information from elsewhere which can then be used to inform the local picture.

Context

- To set the issue in a relevant policy context, be it a specific local, national or international setting.
- To critically review literature relevant to the focus of your public health report. This can include critical reflection of evidence relating to epidemiology, interventions and policy. You will need to describe how you sourced or searched for evidence and information, why, and what methods you used to critically appraise the information
- To identify and examine possible policy drivers and what or how these could influence the current/future situation; in some reports this may require the use of a formal policy review framework.

Interventions & recommendations

- The report must include a section examining possible interventions, changes to practice, or policy directions, which need to reflect on the principles of evidence based practice. The possible impact/expected change from these recommendations needs to be explored in relation to the specific issue.

- All interventions and recommendations need to be clearly linked to earlier sections in the report and you need to show what gaps/problems/ or issues, identified earlier, that they aim to resolve.
- To consider and propose relevant surveillance/monitoring or research to meet gaps you have identified and show how this could then be used to address / inform the issue.

Other sections are likely to include conclusion, references, appendices etc.

Writing style

A number of different styles or frameworks can be used to present your academic public health report. Typically your work needs to follow a structured approach, making use of clearly labelled sections, headings and sub-headings. These will help you signpost the reader to various parts of the report as the work progresses, showing how different aspects are linked

- Academic public health reports need to finish with a clear summary of the main features/points in your report and recommendations must clearly reflect the main body of the report.
- Students are not expected to carry out a full systematic review of the existing literature. But they do need to carry out a sensible and robust way to provide
- Evidence on the burden, context, and possibly evidence of interventions, amongst other things. A description of the approach to source relevant literature needs to be included in the main part of the dissertation, and often this includes a summary of the search strategy from an online database.
- You need to explain and critically reflect on any methods used throughout your report. This includes those relevant to data/information seeking, appraisal, impact and review. Thus highlighting the relevance and strength of the information, to inform the specific issue.
- Think carefully about the structure and order of your report. There needs to be a common thread throughout the report and all sections need to be clearly linked to the initial issue presented.
- Avoid over use of bullet points and use complete sentences to present most of your work. Use meaningful charts, tables and figures but there needs to be a clear reason for including these and a link to relevant text.
- **A scientific and lay abstract** are still required, as with all of the dissertations. You may want to name the scientific abstract as **Executive Summary**, because reports often contain one of these.

Outbreak Report

To be read in addition to the guidance on writing an Academic Public Health Report, in the previous pages. This option might be of interest to students working in a public health setting with an interest in examining a particular event or outbreak. A common approach would take:-

Introduction, background & setting: aims of the report; contextual information. Population profiles, surveillance data and a description of the site, area or facility under investigation.

Literature review including a description and critique of previous outbreaks

Outbreak methods:

1. How was the outbreak discovered/reported?
2. Steps taken to confirm it?
3. What was known then?
4. Why the investigation was undertaken?
5. What were the objectives?
6. Management of the outbreak?
7. Who assisted in the investigation?
8. What control measures were taken?

Results

Discussion including: a critique of the outbreak investigation and methods; comparisons with similar outbreaks and previous studies; relevance of the results in the local context and other settings; recommendations and justification for any action needed.

Other sections are likely to include conclusion, references, appendices etc.

Appendix IV â?? Full or Adapted Systematic Review

This can be of quantitative OR qualitative data

There are two core differences between the requirements for MPH and MRes students:

1. MPH students are **not** expected to complete a full systematic search and review of the literature, largely because they have less time than MRes students. An adapted review refers to ways to produce a manageable amount of references (or potential references) for a single student to deal with in a less amount of time than MRes students
2. MRes students **are** usually expected to complete a full systematic review.

Rationale for the â??adaptedâ?? approach

The option of completing an adapted systematic review provides an opportunity for MPH students to develop their skills in systematically collating, assessing and summarising existing sources of evidence. The amount of work involved can be influenced by the number of studies potentially eligible if it were a full, in-depth review (e.g. Cochrane Collaboration style). Consequently, for the purposes of this dissertation, MPH students can limit the number of studies in their review (see below).

The course units Practical Statistics for Population Health, Fundamentals of Epidemiology and Evidence Based Practice will be of particular relevance to this option.

Introduction/background: This is similar to the Case for Support described earlier in the Grant Proposal option.

Study design/methods including: 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

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

Results including:

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 likely to cover some of the areas/issues described in the proceeding dissertation option – Quantitative Research Report•

Other sections are likely to include conclusion, references, appendices etc.

Dealing with too many or too few studies in a review (MPH students)

Good quality search strategies for some research questions can identify hundreds, sometimes thousands of potentially eligible studies to be reviewed. MPH students are unlikely to have sufficient time to suitably deal with this. Consequently, it is possible to incorporate sensible approaches within the study design to limit the number of studies for the dissertation. For example:-

Limiting the range of time (years) that publications will be considered eligible. For example, running a search from 2018-2023, as opposed to 1980-2022 (or whatever range would be used for a full and complete review).

Restricting to a specific country/region (such as UK, or sub-Saharan Africa etc) Limiting to a specific population (e.g. just women, or by a specific age group).

The use of these approaches should be justified in terms of your review question. For example, an appropriate reason for date restriction could be to assess new evidence published since a Cochrane review or guideline, restricting to a specific country or group of countries could be justified by population demographics or healthcare structure and access. If you use one of these approaches then it needs to

be clearly stated in the methods, results and discussion section.

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. However, it can make it **much more challenging** to demonstrate to the examiner that you can apply appropriate methods etc. Therefore, we encourage students to explore the available literature before making a commitment to their final dissertation topic and format.

Working with a second reviewer (MPH and MRes)

You may know that a high quality systematic review is usually carried out by at least two reviewers. The main reason for this is to carry out independent screening and data extraction, as a way of confirming results and reducing selection bias.

Some students might be in a position to recruit someone to act as a second reviewer. This would be necessary if the student wanted to publish their work. It can also provide an opportunity to enhance a student's research and facilitation/team work skills. If this approach is taken, it is essential that this is transparent across the dissertation, and that the student is able to clearly identify what is their own academic work. In other words, whilst the second reviewer is largely carrying out task-based functions, the core of the dissertation itself needs to be the work of the student.

Appendix V Research Grant Proposal

This option is likely to appeal to students who have identified the need for a particular area of research or those keen to develop a research project after completing their postgraduate degree. It may also be helpful for students looking to start a research focused course of study in the future (such as a PhD). Some aspects of this option will reflect the requirements for formal proposals such as those to the Medical Research Council (MRC) or the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC). Remember that you will be assessed against the marking framework included as an appendix in this handbook. Therefore, your dissertation will need to contain appropriate critical appraisal and reflective thinking at appropriate sections in the dissertation.

This can apply to **Quantitative AND Qualitative** methodology and likely to consist of three broad sections, broken down into individual chapters.

A. Lay and scientific abstract

B. Case for support. This section needs to show:

- Why does this particular research need to be done?
- Why should resources be dedicated to this topic and what gaps in knowledge does the research seek to address?
- How might it lead to an improvement in a particular setting/context/population?

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 case for support. You will acknowledge and critique existing studies or data sources and explain the problems with these – in other words, why more research is needed. 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 of your findings.

C. Research/study methods. The detailed study design must be directly related to your stated primary and secondary objectives and capable of answering the proposed research question. Whilst you are not asked to go on and do the actual study, the proposal must be related to current circumstances and existing evidence – it must be a study design that could actually be carried out in practice. You will give a clear rationale for the particular elements of the research project, using appropriate references to support specific parts of your study design. For example, your methods of sampling (if relevant) and evidence to support the sample size for the project need to be clearly justified.

Similarly you need to justify your choice of data collection methods/measurement tools, and what can be expected in terms of response rates. Part of the study design will include an analysis plan of your collected data. It is not sufficient to just say that – methods suitable for continuous data will be used –

- for example – you need to give a detailed plan and again support your methods.

1. **A section on resources/costings is required.** Here you need to provide information on the direct costs to carry out the research project. For example, how many community workers will interview people and how much will it cost to employ them? This section must be realistic, set in a particular context/country and where possible, supported with evidence. This will coincide with a detailed time plan which can be helpful to present as a Gantt chart.
2. **All research needs to follow accepted ethical principles** such as the Declaration of Helsinki and research governance. Whilst these may vary across different countries, remember that your final postgraduate award (if successful) is from the University of Manchester – as such you would be expected to show your understanding and application of research ethics and governance expected from research conducted in the United Kingdom and apply this as appropriate to your own setting. This will include an assessment of risks to different stakeholders and how you tried to minimise, including contingency plans, in your research design.

D. Discussion. The discussion section is one of the most important parts of any dissertation. Here you need to reflect on the relevance/importance of your research question and of your proposed research design. This can bring in some of the wider literature/evidence to develop arguments to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of your proposed research. You can discuss and reflect on some aspects of the study design, including a critique of your methods, and show how you have tried to use rigorous methods for your research that reflect the body of existing knowledge in that area. Research rarely goes to plan and you can show how you have considered some of the potential difficulties in completing the research and how you have tried to overcome these in your proposal. Whilst you will not have any actual findings to discuss, you can postulate what these might be and the implications of a positive or null-finding from your research in terms of service delivery/health policy for example.

Other sections are likely to include references, appendices etc.

Appendix VI Core Contacts

Programme Administration

Programme Director

Dissertation Unit Lead

Please refer to the Important Contacts section of this handbook.

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