



UNIVERSAL CONVENTIONS AND PROCEDURES

Academic Year 2023/24

Dissertations and Research Projects

1 Status of the Conventions

The Conventions are reviewed annually and apply for the academic year 2023/24. A revision was made in March 2024, with permission from Senate, to add Clause 3.5 concerning students who fail a preliminary task/ proposal.

2 Conventions specific to Masters Dissertations ONLY [or Equivalent]

2.1 The Nature of Masters Dissertations [or Equivalent]

- 2.1.1 The choice of dissertation topic should reflect in some way the content of the taught part of the course, so that the dissertation always represented a progression from earlier components. In order to facilitate this, students should select their dissertation topics from lists, compiled by staff, which comprise topics that build on the taught curriculum and reflect staff research expertise.
- 2.1.2 The dissertation [or equivalent] should demonstrate an understanding of the subject that reflects a precise use of knowledge and principles in the subject.
- 2.1.3 The dissertation [or equivalent] should build on and add to the body of knowledge of the taught elements of the Master's programme being undertaken.
- 2.1.4 The dissertation [or equivalent] should utilise, and justify, methodology appropriate to the discipline and/or area of application.
- 2.1.5 The dissertation [or equivalent] should demonstrate a fluency of expression and argument germane to the subject. This should use an appropriate discourse, and demonstrate a familiarity with the canon of the discipline and the main principles of it.
- 2.1.6 The dissertation [or equivalent] should advance a significant thesis in the subject, demonstrating how this relates to the contemporary relevant literature in the subject.
- 2.1.7 The dissertation [or equivalent] should indicate future lines of enquiry and study deriving from the study.
- 2.1.8 The dissertation [or equivalent] should be a substantial piece of work. It is not appropriate to specify a rigid word count irrespective of the academic discipline. However, as a rule of thumb, the dissertation should demonstrate academic effort broadly in line with that involved in a 15,000-word library-based dissertation in the Humanities, on the understanding that in some cases, such as where the student

has adopted a “Practice as Research” model, the product of the student’s effort may be very different in size and nature from a library-based dissertation.

2.2 Registration, and Submission Deadlines

2.2.1 When a student has passed everything expect the Dissertation, the Board will:

- confirm that the student has “Passed All Taught Modules”.

2.2.2 The submission deadline should reflect the credit rating of the Dissertation. However, a standard 60-credit Dissertation would normally be completed:

- in one-term [or the summer vacation] by full-time students;
- in two-terms by part-time students.

2.2.3 There is no formal progression point between taught modules and the Dissertation. Dissertation submission is normally expected as follows

- October and January Full time entrants, who have no retakes or interruptions, submit their dissertation 12 months later according to the schedule detailed in 2.2.4 below
- October Part time entrants, submit their dissertation in February of year 3 of their studies according to the schedule detailed in 2.2.4 below
- February Part time entrants, submit their dissertation in the October of year 3 of their studies according to the schedule detailed in 2.2.4 below

Full time students

Studies Commence	Credits taken			
	October – February	February – May/June	May/June – October	October – February
October	60 Taught	60 Taught	60 Research	N/A
February	N/A	60 Taught	60 Research (Submission February)	60 Taught

Part time students

Studies Commence	Credits taken								
	Oct–Feb	Feb–May/June	May/June – October	Oct - Feb	Feb - June	May/June - October	Oct- Feb	Feb- June	May/June to October
October	30 Taught	30 Taught	N/A	30 Taught	30 Taught	60 Research		N/A	N/A
February	N/A	30 Taught	N/A	30 Taught	30 Taught	N/A	30 Taught	60 Research	

2.2.4 Given the constraints outlined above, Boards should select one of the following submission deadlines, as appropriate:

- Last Friday before the start of Term 1 (This date will change in 2024/25)
 - marks for these Dissertations would be considered at CABs in November, enabling graduation in January;
- First Friday of Term 2
 - marks for these Dissertations would be considered at CABs in April, enabling graduation in July.
- First Friday in May

- marks for these Dissertations would be considered at CABs in June, enabling graduation in July.
- 2.2.5 Requests for extensions/deferrals will be handled using the Mitigating Circumstances Policy. Deferral requests that move submission dates past those detailed in 2.2.4 above will be referred until the next formal point detailed above.

2.3 Starting the Dissertation [or Equivalent]

- 2.3.1 To enable students to begin their dissertation as soon as possible, topics should normally have been selected, each student's supervisor and provisional title formally agreed, and ethical approval formally granted, as soon as possible after the final teaching week for the final taught module. [Where students, such as January starters, are allowed to undertake their Dissertations before attempting their final taught modules, topics should normally have been selected, each student's supervisor and provisional title formally agreed, and ethical approval formally granted, no later than the final teaching week before the proposed Dissertation period.
- 2.3.2 All students must obtain ethical approval before beginning their study, as appropriate. Where a student was explicitly required to obtain ethical approval, they must not proceed without such clearance having been granted. Students must not violate any condition imposed in writing as part of granting ethical approval for the project nor should they amend the study design without obtaining relevant approval.

2.4 Formal Recording of Titles and Supervisors

Where a Continuation and Award Board confirms that a student has passed the dissertation, the Board should formally note the agreed title and supervisor [this is needed for the graduation programme].

3 Conventions Applicable to Masters Dissertations [or Equivalent] and also to Undergraduate Dissertations and Undergraduate Research Projects

3.1 Word Counts

3.1.1 60-credit Masters Dissertations [or equivalent]

- The dissertation should demonstrate academic effort broadly in line with that involved in a 15,000-word library-based dissertation in the Humanities, on the understanding that in some cases, such as where the student has adopted a *Practice as Research* model, the product of the student's effort may be very different in size and nature from a library-based dissertation.
- The expected word count should normally include footnotes.
- The expected word count should normally NOT include reference lists, bibliographies or appendices.

3.1.2 30-credit Undergraduate Dissertations

- The dissertation should demonstrate academic effort broadly in line with that involved in an 10,000-word library-based dissertation in the Humanities, on the understanding that in some cases, such as where the student has adopted a *Practice as Research* model, the product of the student's effort may be very different in size and nature from a library-based dissertation.
- The expected word count should normally include footnotes.
- The expected word count should normally NOT include reference lists, bibliographies or appendices.

3.1.3 15-credit Undergraduate Research Projects

- The project should demonstrate academic effort broadly in line with that involved in a 5,000-word library-based project in the Humanities, on the understanding that in some cases, such as where the student has adopted a *Practice as Research* model, the product of the student's effort may be very different in size and nature from a library-based project.
- The expected word count should normally include footnotes.
- The expected word count should normally NOT include reference lists, bibliographies or appendices.

3.2 Supervision Norms

3.2.1 60-credit Masters Dissertations [or equivalent]

- [a] Students should normally expect to have approximately 4 formally recorded meetings with their supervisor, from the point at which they begin formally working on the Dissertation [or equivalent] to the point at which the final version is submitted. Where appropriate, one or more of these meetings may be a joint meeting between a supervisor and several students.
- [b] A Supervisory Log should be held, written by the student, and signed off by the supervisor, indicating, for each session, a summary of:
 - progress made since the previous meeting,
 - the main points discussed in the meeting, and
 - agreed action points before the next meeting.
- [c] All students should receive supervision on a regular basis.
- [d] Supervision arrangements should be managed by the Head of School/Department or nominee particularly when students are expected to undertake research in the summer vacation, Supervision may be conducted virtually where appropriate.
- [e] All supervisors should receive within School training in supervision and in the University's expectations for Masters Dissertations or equivalent.

3.2.2 30-credit Undergraduate Dissertations and 15-credit Undergraduate Research Projects

- [a] Students should normally expect to have *the equivalent of* approximately 4 formally recorded meetings with their supervisor, from the point at which they begin formally working on the Dissertation [or equivalent] to the point at which the final version is submitted. Where appropriate, one or more of these meetings may be a joint meeting between a supervisor and several students.
- [b] A Supervisory Log should be held, written by the student, and signed off by the supervisor, indicating, for each session, a summary of:
 - progress made since the previous meeting,
 - the main points discussed in the meeting, and
 - agreed action points before the next meeting.
 - The dissertation/project should normally only be assessed when accompanied by the Supervisory Log.

3.3 Feedback on Drafts

3.3.1 60-credit Masters Dissertations [or equivalent]

Students are entitled to receive comments on draft chapters. However:

- [a] supervisors should not comment on more than one draft of any chapter;
- [b] supervisors are not expected to
 - rewrite for the student, or
 - provide so much feedback that the student is in effect no longer the sole author, or
 - become so closely involved with writing the dissertation that awarding a poor mark would create a conflict of interest.

3.3.2 30-credit Undergraduate Dissertations and 15-credit Undergraduate Research Projects

- [a] Before submitting a 30-credit Dissertation or 15-credit Research Project, undergraduate students are entitled to receive from their supervisors, as appropriate, *either* comments on draft chapters, *or* other appropriate feedback, in accordance with the guidelines in “b” to “e” below.
- [b] Each School/Department should specify, in the Dissertation/Project Handbook, the means by which comments/feedback are to be provided. Illustrative examples [not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive] are:
 - commenting on draft chapters of library-based Dissertations;
 - providing feedback on proposed research methodology during supervision sessions for empirical projects;
 - providing feedback on any chapter except the Discussion chapter.
- [c] In the case of Integrated Dissertations, the two School/Departments should agree how feedback/comments is to be provided.
- [d] Where draft chapters are read, supervisors should not comment on more than one draft of any chapter, and School/Departments may specify one or more chapters for which it would be inappropriate to provide comments on drafts.
- [e] Irrespective of the mechanisms used to provide comments or feedback, supervisors are not expected to
 - rewrite for the student, or
 - provide so much feedback that the student is in effect no longer the sole author, or
 - become so closely involved with writing the Dissertation or Research Project that awarding a poor mark would create a conflict of interest.

3.4 External Examining

The normal rules about external examining apply to dissertations. In other words, the external is moderating standards, not acting as a third marker. This means that adjusting marks as a result of reflecting on external examiners comments should, therefore, only be done if:

EITHER the external has in fact seen all dissertations [or all dissertations in a specified mark category];

OR the external examiner’s comments are used to review marks awarded to all relevant dissertations, not just those in the sample sent to the external examiner.

3.5 Students who fail a preliminary task

Students who fail a preliminary task such as a dissertation proposal submitted in advance of the dissertation should be granted a representation opportunity for a maximum bare pass outcome. If the remains a non-compensatable fail, and the student subsequently achieves a pass overall for the dissertation block, the failed preliminary task will be compensated to a bare pass to enable award completion. This rule is not applied if academic misconduct has taken place.