

Faculty of Humanities

Guidelines on the Supervision of Dissertations

Background

The dissertation forms a substantial component of Masters' level Degree Programmes, the bulk of which will be independent study. Regulation XIX – Academic Appeals states that a student may make an appeal on grounds alleging 'that the supervision or training of the student in respect of research for a dissertation or thesis or equivalent work was unsatisfactory to the point that his or her performance was seriously affected.' It is, therefore, essential that we ensure that our students are adequately supervised.

Detailed below are the expected responsibilities of the supervisor, student and School in relation to the dissertation / project element of the Masters' degree programme. Although practice on the supervisor-student relationship varies between Schools, the principles to be applied are the same, whether individual or group supervision.

1. The Supervisor's Responsibility:

The role of the dissertation supervisor is to provide guidance and advice. Dissertation supervisors are not responsible for proof-reading student's work. They may or may not read individual draft sections, but are not obliged to read or approve the whole dissertation. Feedback from reading students work is formative and does not predetermine or prejudge the final examination of the submitted dissertation.

Responsibilities of the dissertation supervisor normally include:

Administration of Dissertation Process:

- establishing a clear relationship between all parties if there are two (or more) supervisors
- maintaining contact through meetings (specifying how many the student is entitled to)
- informing the student of any periods of holiday or work-related absence during the supervision period
- being accessible at other appropriate times e.g. by email or during office hours
- informing the student if he / she cannot make a supervision that has been arranged, except where circumstances make this unfeasible
- maintaining a suitable record of supervision meetings, including dates, action agreed and deadlines set

Choice:

- discussing the choice of dissertation or project topic with the student to make sure that the project / research is feasible within the time available
- advising on the writing of any outline and proposal required and the selection and submission of a title

Planning:

- discussing the design and adequacy of methods
- giving guidance about the nature of the dissertation / project and, where possible, suggesting dissertation / project reports of former students as examples

Execution:

- giving guidance on search techniques and on necessary reading

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- giving guidance on the planning of empirical work
- giving guidance on the development of chapters
- giving guidance on conventions of dissertation writing
- assisting the student in managing the timetable of the project
- assisting the student in identifying when problems are liable to be encountered and how they might be tackled
- identifying any health and safety requirements related to the project which must be adhered to and to ensure proper risk assessments are conducted where required
- making the student aware when progress on the dissertation is below the standard expected and giving guidance on how the problem should be rectified
- informing students who require additional help with language skills, where such help can be sought
- drawing to students attention policies and regulations relating to the conduct of research, including ethical considerations

Writing-up:

- responding to first drafts of chapters in reasonable time with constructive feedback, normally within three weeks of receipt
- ensuring that the student is aware of policies and regulations relating to the reporting of research and the implications of misconduct and plagiarism

Completing:

- giving advice on the necessary completion dates for successive stages of the work so that the dissertation may be submitted by the published submission date
- advising the student about the need to submit formal requests for interruptions/extensions as required

2. The Student's Responsibility:

Students should note that they are responsible for their work and that the role of the supervisor is to provide guidance and advice. Students may NOT expect their supervisors to provide detailed feedback on more than one draft of each chapter or to correct spelling, grammar, punctuation etc. It remains the sole responsibility of the student to ensure that all requirements of the dissertation are met.

The responsibilities of the student normally include:

Administration of Dissertation Process:

- arranging meetings with his/her supervisor(s) (taking account of any periods of holiday or work-related absence during the supervision period)
- keeping appointments with his/her supervisor(s), or informing his/her supervisor(s) where this is not possible
- discussing with his/her supervisor(s) the type of guidance and comments s/he finds most helpful
- ensuring a professional relationship with his/her supervisor is maintained at all times
- maintaining a suitable record of supervision meetings, including dates, action agreed and deadlines set
- preparing adequately for meetings with his/her supervisor(s)

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- attending and participating fully in any courses related to the dissertation element of the programme provided by the School
- discussing issues arising from feedback and taking appropriate action
- maintaining the progress of the work as agreed with his/her supervisor(s)
- raising problems or difficulties with his/her supervisor(s)
- making his/her supervisor(s) aware of any circumstances likely to affect his/her work
- giving his/her supervisor(s) due warning and adequate time for reading any drafts
- being familiar with University / Faculty / School regulations and policies that affect him/her
- submitting the masters' dissertation title and ethical approval form to the relevant office by the due date specified
(<http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/infoforstaffstudents/academicsservices/pgteaching/ethicalapproval/>)

Writing-up:

- ensuring that the final dissertation is written in accordance with requirements relating to the correct use of English language and presentation of tables, references, figures etc.
- where necessary, arranging for the completed dissertation to be proof-read, ensuring that this is done in adequate time to allow submission by the required date
- checking the completeness and accuracy of the text of the dissertation / project submitted
- ensuring that submitted work is their own (i.e. avoiding plagiarism)
- ensuring adequate time for the binding of the dissertation

Completing:

- submitting the dissertation to the appropriate office by the submission date specified
- informing his/her supervisor of the need for formal extensions or interruptions to the period of study and to ensuring that such extensions or interruptions are applied for in the appropriate way

3. Responsibilities of the School include:

Administration of Dissertation Process:

- establishing the minimum number of formal 'supervisory sessions' a student is entitled to
- publishing in handbooks relevant information about supervisory practice
- providing information about the procedures by which a student may make representation if they feel that the work is not progressing satisfactorily for reasons outside their control
- establishing and disseminating a mechanism whereby a student is able to request the possibility of changing the supervisor if an effective working relationship is not established, or if the supervisor is unavailable for long periods of time e.g. due to illness, sabbatical leave, if the supervisor moves to a new post at another institution etc
- liaising with supervisors and resolving, where possible, any individual difficulties
- resolving difficulties, which are the responsibility of the School (e.g. major equipment breakdown)
- ensuring Research Council guidance is followed, when appropriate, in respect of facilities to be made available (study space, library, appropriate research environment, etc).
- having in place published procedures for the consideration of ethical declarations
- ensuring assessment procedures have internal consistency

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- handling any appeals from a student alleging inadequate supervision in accordance with the University's appeals procedure (<http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/staffnet/policies/academicappeals/>)

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