

UNIVERSITY OF WALES

KENSINGTON COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

MASTERS IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)

**RESEARCH DISSERTATION HANDBOOK
VERSION 1.0**

ACADEMIC YEAR 2010/2011

1. DISSERTATION GUIDELINES FOR MBA STUDENTS

This handbook is not a definitive statement of University of Wales **regulations**. Full copies of the regulations are available in the student handbook and should be referred.

The regulations of the University of Wales for Modular Master's degree schemes that covers the MBA state that candidates must successfully complete Part One of the MBA (the taught stage) before being permitted to proceed to Part Two (the dissertation stage). 'The dissertation shall embody the methods and results of a research project. Its length should not exceed 20,000 words'.

MSc and MBA students will be allocated a project supervisor. The project proposal must be approved and a copy given to Carmen (dissertation office, room 1.5) by the end of term 3. Approved Project Proposal form must be completed and received by Carmen (Room 1.5) by the deadline date. See Web portal or MBA/MSC notice boards.

For MBA students, the dissertation topic must be in the same subject area as the chosen MBA pathway.

Students must attend all dissertation classes in term 4. **Minimum attendance required is 85%.**

All fees must be fully paid before submission of the dissertation.

All students must:

1. **submit two typed and hard bound copies of the dissertation together with 2 CDs (Microsoft Word) and 2 turn-it in reports**
2. **submit a completed signed UOW declaration form (available from the dissertation office)**
3. **confirm their names are correct and in the order that they want them to appear on the award certificate; MBA students to confirm their registered MBA pathway**
4. **Confirm that all contact details and email addresses are correct.**

Exceptional/Mitigating Circumstances

The college may extend these deadlines in **exceptional** cases only and in accordance with the procedure and criteria laid down in Standing Orders of the University of Wales. A reasoned application, supported by appropriate independent evidence, must be submitted by the candidate to the college registrar for consideration by the Mitigating Circumstances Committee.

These applications are subject to scrutiny by the University of Wales which lays down the following limits beyond which candidature will lapse and examination precluded:

- Within two calendar years of the start of candidature .

2. CHOOSING A TOPIC

A wide range of topics are possible for MBA dissertations and students can see the types of titles that have been submitted in the past in the library. Clearly, to be legitimate, the topic has got to be encompassed by the scope of the MBA programme as presented in the various lecture courses in the core and options. In choosing a topic students may well wish to opt for something of particular relevance to their immediate career plans or to build upon an area of particular interest. As the dissertation will involve a considerable amount of work, it is obviously desirable to pick a topic which provides substantial motivation in order to carry it through successfully.

The topic for an MBA dissertation should not relate exclusively to practical problems but should relate such problems to a critical review of relevant literature. It is also the case that an entirely **theoretical dissertation** would **normally be inappropriate** for the MBA degree scheme.

The topic chosen should relate to some body of literature that can have practical significance; indeed the **linkage of theory to practical issues** should be one of the guiding principles in the selection of a suitable topic. Students are reminded that one of the main problems is the time-scale, and therefore it is essential to pick topics which are worthwhile but capable of being researched at an appropriate level for an MBA dissertation within the time provided.

As most of the MBA students are full time students from overseas it might be beneficial to the student, in relation to the criteria above, that their dissertation could be based on their country of origin. They can then select a topic that is relevant to local companies. They can then make contact with local companies where source material is readily available.

The students who are enrolled onto a specific Pathway, must chose a topic area within the pathway domain.

Proposals have to be submitted to your **RESEARCH METHOD SUPERVISOR AT THE END OF THE RESEARCH METHODS COURSE.**

The deadlines will be displayed on the MBA notice boards and can be accessed on the web portal.

The dissertation is equivalent to 60credits. Research Methods is an assessed module within the Dissertation Phase and carries 20 credits

The students will need to make themselves available for Viva if needed.

Once the research aim has been approved following the submission of the proposal, there can be no change in the focus or topic without the submission and approval of a new proposal.

GUIDE TO THE COMPLETION OF THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

The following will be partly covered in the research methods course.

1) Initial preparation.

a) WHAT - am I going to do?

The area of investigation.

The issue to be examined.

The problem to be solved.

The question to be answered.

These are only examples of possible starting points and orientation to help solve the 'what' problem. Note that starting your topic with a question to be answered is particularly valuable in determining the focus of your dissertation.

b) WHY - do I want to do it?

Your personal rationale.

An organisational rationale.

A policy rationale.

An academic rationale.

Again these are only examples of the reasons why an area is worth investigating. For a successful MBA dissertation it is useful to have both a practical rationale and one that relates to a theoretical issue.

c) HOW - can I do it?

The sources of data.

The approach to be adopted.

The methods of acquiring data.

The techniques of analysis.

The forms of presentation.

The above are examples of provisional orientations to establishing what the dissertation will cover and include.

Following preliminary consideration of these issues, further discussion with colleagues and tutors and some initial reading, will be required to firm up the proposal into a written form, of 2,500 words (the literature review should represent around 1,500 words) which is assessed as stated below.

2) The proposal.

I) Provisional title.

This should include an initial sentence that clearly encompasses the purpose and aims of the dissertation. It should be in academic language (drawing upon the conventions used on MBA courses). It should be large enough to be worthwhile researching but small enough to achieve an answer.

Uses.

- Provides a focus for the study - keeps your eye on the ball.
- Essential guide to the other stages that follow.
- Can alter or re-define at a later stage but only with extreme care.
- Time spent on this area will not be wasted.
- Try not to be too long - aim for one comprehensive sentence.

II) Brief review of the related literature.

The aim is to have a focused and critical conclusion, NOT a list mentioning everything that you have read. It should represent the bulk of your proposal. The literature **should relate to academic texts, NOT to the company or business sectors in which you will test the academic literature.** It should cover both background and foreground theory and concepts: working from the general to the more specific. Read with an open mind, looking for debates and ideas that challenge your preconceptions.

Uses

- It provides an essential theoretical background.
- It is the source of issues, problems and variables.
- It is essential to clarify the research question and existing debates.

III) Aims and objectives of the research.

These should flow from the focus of the literature review. The aim should be encapsulated in the title. This section should clearly specify your research objectives. Working from the more general and theoretical to the specific.

Uses

- These provide an opportunity to use the results of the literature review to expand on the title and aim.
- To provide a full explanation of **what** is going to be covered and **why**.
- You should use words such as **research, critically evaluate, investigate and analyse.** These will help keep your focus on the objectives and will enable you to measure the achieved result.

IV) Statement of the design and methodology.

The research has to have an overall design drawing from the different logics of validity e.g. internal or external validity. It needs to have a reference to issues of reliability. The justification will need to also refer to your title, aims, objectives together with issues of access and time.

Uses

- Enables a coherent selection of fieldwork methods.
- Ensures a consistency between research aims, objectives, fieldwork methods and forms of analysis.
- Makes explicit the reasons for the selection, enabling the establishment of a confident approach to the detail of fieldwork.
- Avoids confusion at the stage of analysis.

V) Sources and acquisition of data.

It must be shown how these relate to the research title and design. They must provide evidence that access has been negotiated. Indicate that they are adequate for the research e.g. cases and reasons for number and selection; use of sampling frames. Ensure that ethical issues have been considered. Fieldwork methods must be specified e.g. participative observation, documents, non-standard interviews, and questionnaires. The methods must be consistent with the research design.

VI) Method of data analysis.

A clear and reasoned distinction needs to be made between deductive and quantitative and techniques and inductive and qualitative techniques. The selection needs to be consistent with the research design and field work methods. If it is intended to use computer programs these must be mentioned.

VII) Form of presentation.

Usually in written form, but indicating whether it will have illustrations, types of graphs, charts, tables etc.

VIII) Timetable (see example at the end).

This must be presented as a critical path analysis.

Uses

- This ensures that the work has been planned.
- Guide to the amount of work to be done.
- Guide to how much time should be spent on each section - time limitation can be a reason for the selection of certain methods.
- Guide to when to start on sections.

MBA Dissertation Procedures:

The MBA dissertation is the main opportunity for students to put the theory they have developed over the part 1 of the programme into management/business practice (the QAA guide lines for MBA programmes focuses on **Theory of business into practice**).

Dissertation Supervision Procedures:

(1) In order to support students in the dissertation, students will be allocated to a supervisor in one of the supervision blocks. These blocks will normally be immediately following the completed part 1. The blocks will run 4 times per year.

Jan – Mar

April – Jun

Jul – Sep

Oct - Dec

(2) The student **MUST** meet at arranged times with the supervisor.

(3) Students **MUST** hand in their dissertation at the end of the block. Dead lines will be available on the web portal and on MBA notice boards

(4) If a student does not submit the dissertation at the end of the allocated block, he/she will normally be considered to have **failed through non-submission**.

(5) A student who does not interact with the supervisor, **WILL NOT** be able to hand in the dissertation.

(6) It may be necessary for students to leave the UK for a period of 2 weeks to collect primary data for their research; permission must be obtained from their supervisor prior to absence and notified to the MBA Dissertation Co-ordinator in advance.

One of the greatest problems in successfully carrying out a project through to writing and submitting a dissertation for the MBA is the time scale on which this has to be executed. It is therefore imperative that students develop a programme of work suitable to carry out the project successfully and agree this with the supervisor at an early stage.

It is imperative that this programme allows sufficient time at the end for a rigorous checking of the finished work for content, style and English as well as typographical errors. It is the student's duty to ensure that the manuscript can be typed and bound in sufficient time to meet the deadline for the degree scheme.

Note: In many cases students do not leave themselves enough time for the analysis and writing up of their dissertation and hence do not do justice to the data they have collected. Careful planning and a strict adherence to target dates are vital to avoid this.

A STUDENTS GUIDE TO DISSERTATION PRESENTATION.

1 Structure and contents.

There is no best way of writing a dissertation or one model for an appropriate format. However, certain aspects are conventionally found in a dissertation and should only be varied after discussion with the supervisor for good reason. These are:

1) *An opening section* which should contain the following separate pages: Title page, declaration and statement, supervisors statement, acknowledgements, abstract(a summary of fewer than 300 words, which should summarise all sections of the dissertation:THIS MUST BE INCLUDED), and table of contents.

(2) *The first chapter* should be an introduction to the dissertation which should state very clearly the purpose of the project on which the dissertation reports, the results, **a background to the study and any preliminary scene setting that may be necessary.** A brief outline of the subsequent chapters of the dissertation. (Note: it is usual, somewhat paradoxically, to write the introduction after most of the dissertation is complete in order that a student has a clear idea of what is being introduced).

3) *Chapter two* should be a review of the relevant **academic** literature on which the dissertation builds, in a critical way, the relevant theoretical ideas and concepts.

4) *A chapter on methodology* used, **what** was used, **why**, what methodologies are considered, what was selected and why. **Justification for the final methodology selected and the sampling techniques, sampling framework, the size and type of any appropriate survey, should be included. (If a case study methodology is used then the justification for the organisation used in the dissertation).**

5) *One, or possibly two chapters that report on the research findings*, both secondary and primary, clearly described, using as themes, **what** you have discovered and proposing reasons **why** this may be. **This section should use any appropriate graphical representation that adds to the clarity of your findings.**

6) *Clear conclusion chapter* setting out the main findings of the dissertation linking your **literature reviews** with the **research findings** so that a clear thesis can be identified through the whole work. On this information you can make your argument and assess the question you posed in your initial title. Remember to include what your findings contribute to both the general literature on the subject and the specialist field, and/or practical problems which you have covered empirically. Include those results which surprised you and which may appear, at first sight, counter-intuitive to others. Make sure that you address all the objectives of the study. Do not forget to identify further avenues of development.

7) **Clear recommendations or procedures** that are to be recommended that come out of your dissertation and research.

8) *Bibliography*: There should be a complete *bibliography* of all works which are referenced in the dissertation whether as part of the literature review or as sources of information. This should be done in a standard Harvard format listing works alphabetically by author. It should be noted that one of the routine sources of presentational problems comes in mistakes in the bibliography and therefore students should take considerable care in the compilation of the bibliography and ensure that every work referred to in the texts is in fact listed in the bibliography. **The bibliography should be ordered in the form of Books, then Journals/Articles and finally any Web sites with their full URL address.**

9) *Appendices* to the dissertation are legitimate but should be kept to an absolute minimum.

10) *Footnotes* should normally be avoided.

It is important that the dissertation should be as much the student's own independent work as a formal examination script. A dissertation should not merely consist of a patchwork of other people's thoughts and interpretations stitched together with a few threads of the student's own devising.

The **OVERALL LENGTH** of the dissertation (excluding appendices) must not exceed 20,000 words and in practice the length of a dissertation would normally be expected to be within a range of 15,000 to 20,000 words.

2. Presentation:

All copies shall be presented in permanent and legible form in typescript or print and the characters shall be not less than **12 pt**. Typing shall be of even quality with clear black characters, and capable of photographic reproduction. **1.0 spacing** shall be used in typescript but for the Summary and indented quotations single spacing shall be used. Drawings and Sketches shall be in black ink; unnecessary detail should be omitted and there should be at least 1 mm between lines. Page margins for both left and right side should be set at 3cm. Copies produced by xerographic or comparable permanent processes are acceptable.

The Cover:

The volume shall bear on the spine the **surname and initials** of the candidate, the **full or abbreviated title** of the dissertation, the **name of the degree** for which the dissertation is being submitted and the **date of submission**. This information shall be printed along the spine in such a way as to be readable when the volume is lying flat with the front cover uppermost.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment will be carried out in two stages. The first will use the criteria in A. The mark will be then be moderated by the application of B which will assess the overall integration and standard of the work.

A. Weightage of different sections of the dissertation

1. A clear statement of the purpose of the dissertation: - Rational (reasons and motives) for the investigation; setting the research, statement of problems; purpose of the study. **15%**
2. Critical review of the literature:- use of relevant literature and evidence of understanding the ideas expressed. A clear indication of the full theory behind the topic area. **20%**
3. Appropriate use of methods:- reason for using type of methods; description of the methods; appropriateness and extent of application. **15%**
4. Data presentation:- which company and why, presentation of the results and analysis of findings. **20 %**
5. Interpretation/conclusion and recommendations: - analysis of findings with reference to purpose of study; issues from the literature review; practical application and areas for further research. **20%**
6. Presentation: - structure, language, grammar, visuals, logic and coherence. **10%**

If further clarification, is required, it can be obtained from the remainder of this document, or from your dissertation supervisor.

Note as a Guide only:

The word count for each chapter should normally be:-

Introduction	2000 – 2500 words
Literature Review	5500 – 7500 words
Methodology	1500 – 2000 words
Data and Analysis	3500 – 4500 words
Conclusions	2000 – 2500 words
Recommendations	1000 – 1500 words

B. Overall Marks

Mark	Description
90 - 100	An exceptional and outstanding submission, providing original insights which add to the discipline area or academic area and, with some editing, could be published as a study in its own right. In addition to the next section, a submission in this range would be distinguished by superior organisation and comprehensiveness, given the maximum word limit and time scale.
80 - 89	A submission that demonstrates an excellent understanding of the question and issues under consideration and of the complexity of the issues involved. Theoretical considerations are used to underpin the overall design and the relevance of factual information. There is some measure of original and creative thinking. There must be evidence of wide reading with a critical focus.
70 - 79	This range will cover a submission that has a number of original insights and also provides a comprehensive and accurate coverage of the question and issues under consideration with a high level of consistency throughout the dissertation.
60 - 69	The submission will show evidence of ability to maintain a personal position in original terms and show a command of the accepted critical positions with some attempts at innovation. There is a demonstration of the dissertation question being clearly put and understood in relation to the complexities of the issues involved. There is a sound use of relevant factual knowledge and theoretical issues.
50 - 59	The submission shows a reasonable ability to defend a position on the basis of use of evidence. It shows evidence of evaluation of the ability to use information and synthesis of generalisations from it. There is clear evidence of selection of appropriate material, research design, logical structure and argument but with lapses of integration. The answer demonstrates an understanding of the major basic issues, both factually and theoretically.
40 - 49	The submission demonstrates some understanding of the major or basic issues in the question. There is less than average evidence of a level of analysis and judgement, use of criteria and an attempt to use a logical structure and argument. There is evidence of effort and significant data collection.
30 - 39	There is little or no evidence of understanding the basic issues. There are significant factual errors and contradictions. The submission is poorly planned and integrated with little evidence of a clear train of thought or development of argument. Some evidence of ability to collate information and construct generalisations, but with little discretion.

20 - 29 The submission does not clearly specify a basic question and shows little logical development or structure. There is no evidence of criticism, synthesis or evaluation.

0 - 19 Little evidence of getting beyond the proposal.

MARKS.

Part Two (the Master's dissertation).

70% and over	:	Distinction level.
40 - 69%	:	Pass.
0 - 39%	:	Fail.

In order to gain a Master's Degree with Distinction, a candidate shall achieve a distinction level performance in each of Part One and Part Two of the MBA. A candidate may be awarded a masters degree with distinction in the dissertation, when the dissertation (Part two of the MBA) is awarded a distinction mark but the candidate has not achieved a distinction grade in the Part One of the MBA.

REFERENCES AND PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is defined as "deceiving or attempting to deceive the examiners by passing off as the candidate's own written work the work of another writer" and is regarded as an unfair practice. Using other students' work, previous UWIC dissertations or those of other universities and colleges without appropriate acknowledgement or referencing is a clear instance of plagiarism. **SEVERE PENALTIES MAY BE IMPOSED ON STUDENTS WHO ARE FOUND GUILTY OF PLAGIARISM. THESE INCLUDE EXPULSION FROM THE UNIVERSITY.** In order to avoid inadvertently committing plagiarism the following should be observed:

(1) Each use of the ideas or words of another must be individually acknowledged. In addition each work consulted must be listed in the bibliography. The recommended referencing system used is the Harvard System and the recommendations that follow are based on this system.

(2) Any use of the exact words of another must be acknowledged by indenting them in italic font and by stating their source. For example:

'One may be ill and die without producing a ripple on the surface of common life.'

(Hayner 1929, p113)

(3) You may wish to alter the words being quoted so as to fit them into the context in which you are using the quotation or to overcome the problem that the quotation may not make sense when taken out of its own context. Omitted words should be dealt with by three dots. Any words added should be enclosed in square brackets. For example:

The different actors and sub-agencies will deploy different and perhaps even competing conceptual apparatuses of calculation and assessment ... a more 'political' mechanism is required to offer the ground for a decision and an attempted reconciliation ... such political mechanisms will fulfil the function of interrupting the diverse calculating practices operating within the entity of the [organisation] ... in order for a decision of some sort to emerge.

(Hindess 1987,p147)

The words in square brackets have been added so that the quotation makes sense and to avoid quoting a longer passage than necessary simply to set it in its context.

- (4) A series of dots at the end indicates that the quotation has been truncated. For example:

The effect of the observer's 'scientific' detachment frequently reduces the observed to the status of objects and this objectification of women is also secured by the ability of the male observer to both share and collude in the male chauvinism of pub cultures....

(Hey 1986, p42)

- (5) If you do not have access to the original source of a quotation but have found it quoted in the work of someone else, you should give the original source (which the author you have found should have quoted) and the reference to the work where you found it.

Both works should be listed in the bibliography. For example :

It is a thin line from that's interesting to that's in my best interest.
(Weick, 1989:528 cited in Noon 1992:25)

- (6) If you are not using the exact words of another, but making use of one of his or her ideas and the name of the author occurs naturally in the sentence, the year is given in brackets:

Johnson (1990) describes...

Or if the author's name is not part of the sentence, the name and date are placed in the brackets:

In a recent study (Johnson 1990) ...

Or if there are two or more authors, both surnames are given before the date. If there are more than two authors, the surname of the first and "et al" may be used:

(Singleton, Hovden, 1987)

(Hinings et al, 1989)

(7) **Bibliographies**

A list of all books, journals, etc. utilised should be appended to your word. The following pattern should be followed.

Books

Author, date title of book, publisher and place of publication, e.g.
Davies, D.L.(1998) *French Music*, A.S. Barnes & CO, Cranbury NJ

Articles

Author, date, title of article, periodical title, volume number, pages the article is on e.g.

James, C.K. and Evans, P. (1999) Cavitation, Engineering, Vol. 40 No 3, pp-82-84.

Web pages

Should be cited in the text as (Web 1), (Web 2) etc with a fresh number for each reference. The bibliography should then list them separately as: Web 1 = <http://www.bbc.co.uk>. If the same Web page is used on different dates as a regular source of information then the date should also be included in the reference e.g. (Web 1, 22/3/01) then (Web 1, 24/3/01) on subsequent occasions. They need not be alphabetical order.

Bibliography details

The bibliography might therefore read as follow: -

Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales. (1988) *Performance review in local government; a handbook for auditors and local authorities. Action guide*. HMSO.

Armstrong, M. and Murliss, H. (1988) *Reward Management: A Handbook of Salary Administration*, London: Kogan Page.

Bevan, S. and Thompson, M. (1991) 'Performance Management at the cross-roads', *Personnel Management*, November: 36-9.

Brindle, D. (1987) 'Will performance pay work in Whitehall', *Personnel Management*, August; 36-9.

Brown, W. (1963) *Piecework Abandoned: The Effect of Wage Incentive Schemes on Managerial Authority*. London: Heinemann.

Charam, R. (1982) 'How to strengthen your strategy review process', *Journal of Business Strategy*, 3 (1): 16-24.

Graphs, charts and tables

Graphs, charts and tables should be numbered in sequential order with the data source shown beneath them. For example:

Table 1.1 Percentage of unemployed builders in Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire 1999-2001

<i>Year</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>
Carmarthenshire	23 %	27%	19%
Pembrokeshire	14%	38%	8%

Source: Welsh Employment Statistics (2002)

A BRIEF GUIDE TO DISSERTATION PRACTICE

Purpose of the Research

Once the general topic area has been decided it is vital that the purpose or purposes of the research are defined as accurately as possible and as clearly as possible. This must be done very rapidly in order that other work may continue. The purpose should be agreed with the Dissertation Convenor on the basis of a written submission from the student.

In some cases the aim may need to be changed during the course of the research. However, it is dangerous to do this and almost certainly disastrous to do it too frequently. When further consideration of the literature or of the practical problems of carrying out the research or indeed other factors cause the student to believe that a redefinition of the purpose or purposes is required, they should discuss this immediately with their supervisor and submit a new proposal. Further refinement of the aims, and more particularly the objectives, without a complete change of focus and purpose, is more common, but must involve full discussion with your supervisor.

It is important that the purpose is defined with sufficient clarity to guide the work of the student and, when finally incorporated in the introduction to the dissertation, to guide the reader in assessing the student's work. It is also important to state the purpose in a way that is capable of fulfilment within the confines of an MBA dissertation. There are many projects which may be interesting and potentially valuable which are totally unsuitable for MBA projects as they would require far too much time and/or resources. **This is a dissertation not a thesis.**

Defining an Approach

The purpose of a dissertation will in large measure dictate the range of possible approaches available. Other variations or combinations of approaches are of course possible. In deciding the approach to be adopted the student should be guided partly by consideration of the purpose, partly by consideration of studies already reported in the literature (including previous dissertations) and partly by discussion with the

supervisor in deciding the approach to be adopted. The student should translate this into a timing sequence in order to ensure that it can be carried through at an appropriate level within the defined time scale.

In deciding the approach to be adopted it is vital that the student has sufficient knowledge of the methods required for data collection/analysis and searching library sources of information. Students should also take account of the availability of materials, the possibilities and difficulties of gaining entry to situations where data can be collected, and all other factors relating to the conduct and timing of the project and dissertation writing.

Reviewing the Literature

Any MBA dissertation should, at least in part, be based on a knowledge and appreciation of the previous literature relevant to the purpose of the dissertation. Advice should be taken at an early stage from the supervisor concerning likely literature sources.

In most cases it is sensible to commence the literature review with a consideration of textbooks which are likely to be immediately relevant to the topic. You should then move on to more specialist books and journals. The latter should be systematically searched starting with the most recent issue and going back for at least a five year period. Where material is found relevant to the purpose of the dissertation, this should be read and a note taken of any references which appear to be of importance, which should be followed up in turn. By proceeding in this way the student should quickly get a picture of the relevant literature by working back through references suggested by current authors. It should be noted that an MBA dissertation does not require an encyclopaedic review of literature but an appreciation of the key current issues. For the most topics, sufficient material should be available in the on line Library. It should be noted that references to previous dissertations should generally be rather limited as these will not have gone through the refereeing process imposed by academic journals.

Notes on the literature reviewed should be made systematically. It is vital that students keep a full bibliographic reference for any work they may wish to refer to in the final dissertation, in order to save the time needed to look up references again at the end of the writing process. Most students find it convenient to do this either on a computer database or by a card index to allow a rapid re-ordering of references at the end. Make sure that the literature does not consist of outdated and obsolete material. Doing this will bring the mark significantly down.

Empirical Research

In carrying out empirical research it is important that a number of simple guidelines are followed. Firstly, approaches to any individuals or organisations external to the School of Management should be discussed with the supervisor prior to contact being made and **approval** received for the contact and for the general approach to be adopted. Secondly, it is imperative that in approaching outside individuals or

organisations you explain the purpose of the research, making clear your status as an MBA student at Kensington College. doing the UOW MBA. You should make totally clear at the outset the extent to which any communications will be treated confidentially and whatever is agreed shall be followed exactly. In dealing with outsiders it is imperative that you remember that Kensington College is often judged by the conduct of its staff and students and you should therefore at all times act in a professional manner.

It should be noted that gaining access to individuals or organisations in order to collect data can often be problematic and it is therefore essential that the work is planned and contacts made well in advance to avoid significant delays preventing the satisfactory completion of the dissertation. It is recommended that if primary empirical data is to be used, this is based, where possible, upon your own workplace so that access problems can be minimised and depth maximised. It is recommended that students think of a back up plan in advance. **Problems with gaining access for primary data will not be considered as an excuse for delayed submission.**

Students wishing to send out questionnaires or conduct interviews of Focus groups as part of their research should ensure that they discuss in detail the nature of the questionnaire or interview guide with the supervisor and ensure that they have the supervisor's approval before going forward.

Data Analysis

For many dissertations it will be necessary to analyse data using computers. There are a wide variety of statistical packages available which make data analysis relatively straightforward although many students will find that a spreadsheet is more appropriate to their level of expertise and data handling requirements. Students wishing to analyse data in this way should ensure that they obtain appropriate advice from their supervisor, or others suggested by the supervisor, well in advance to prevent delays and problems at a later point. It is wise to allow a significant period to complete the data analysis to allow for necessary checking and further analysis based on the initial outputs, as well as for time lost by mistakes.

It is obviously the case that if data is fed incorrectly into a computer the results are likely to be meaningless or misleading. It is therefore essential that every stage of data analysis, and particularly the data input, is checked with great care to avoid misleading or meaningless results.

If you opt to analyse secondary data for your dissertation, then you need to think of the following questions and issues:

- *Is the data likely to be reliable?*
For instance would data supplied by the Tobacco Industry on the extent of under-age smoking likely to be very reliable?
- *Are there any biases in the data?*

Many data-bases exclude small firms. In the UK even surveys which the law demands to be answered, do not receive 100% compliance. All data can only refer to a specific period.

- *What is the most appropriate method of data analysis?*

At the very least **you should employ such elementary tests as t-tests and chi-square** if appropriate. Your supervisor, the dissertation convenor or Programme Director can supply advice on the appropriate methodology.

Writing up

Because of the time scale within which the dissertation must be completed it is useful to start the writing up process early and in many cases it should be possible to do a first draft of the literature review before starting on the substantive research. Interim drafts during the research can make the final writing-up easier. It is however crucial that sufficient time is left after all the data has been analysed to allow for considerable thought and work to go into the writing-up of the various sections. Different students have different ways of working but generally it is sensible to try and develop a first draft as rapidly as possible and then work on improvements.

Ethical issues to consider when undertaking research

Ethical concerns are an important point to bear in mind in the way you undertake your research. The appropriateness and acceptability of your behaviour as a researcher will have important implications on your empirical research. You should always provide a clear account of why you wish to gather the data. At the same time you must maintain your objective attitude towards the subject area and those being researched. It is also important to be polite at all times.

Individuals who respond to your research normally do so on the understanding that their responses will remain confidential. Written permission should be gained from the organisation, which states the scope of the study and its permission to take part in it.

Privacy is therefore one of the key ethical issues in undertaking research. The use of this data should protect the individual's right to anonymity. You should respect the individual's right:

1. Not to participate;
2. Not to be harassed or be offered inducement to participate or to extend the scope of participation beyond that freely given;
3. Not to be contacted at unreasonable times or at home (where the scope of research is connected to an organisational setting);
4. To determine, within reason, when they will participate in the data collection process;
5. To expect the researchers to abide by the extent of consent given and not to find that the researcher wishes to widen the scope of the research without first seeking and obtaining permission;
6. Not to be subject to any attempts to prolong the duration of the interview or observation beyond that previously agreed unless the participant freely proposes this as an option;

7. Not to answer any question, or set of questions, or provide any related data when requested;
8. Not to be subject to questions that create stress or discomfort;
9. To expect agreed anonymity and confidentiality to be strictly observed both in relation to discussions with other research or organisation participants and during the reporting of the findings (including from those who gain subsequent access to data).

The above nine points have been taken from *Research Methods for Business Students* by Saunders et al (2006), published by FT/Pretice Hall. Students should examine the sections on Ethical Research in this book before undertaking their research.

Deceptive and Covert Research

- While it is recognised that there is a continuum of covert-overt research (and therefore difficulty in defining research simply as entirely covert or overt), researchers should endeavour, wherever possible and practicable, to avoid the use of deception in their research methods, as this violates the principle of informed consent and may invade the privacy of those under study, particularly in non-public spaces.
- Any researcher considering deceptive methods in research must seek approval from the School's Research Ethics Committee. The burden of proof will rest on the investigator to show that no alternative methods are possible, and that the data sought are of sufficient value to over-ride the issues of free and informed consent. Where approval has been given, the potential implications arising from publication must be fully considered.
- Covert research in non-public spaces (that is, where persons would not normally expect to be under observation), or experimental manipulation of research participants without their knowledge should be a last resort when it is impossible to use other methods to obtain the required data. It is particularly important in such cases to safeguard the anonymity of participants.
- If covert methods are approved and employed, and informed consent has not been obtained prior to the research, every attempt should be made to obtain this *post hoc*.

Dealing with problems

If you have a problem in understanding the handbook or need help with your dissertation, you should consult:

- (a) the Research Methods module tutor during the dissertation proposal stage;
- (b) the dissertation supervisor once you have started the dissertation.

You should always read the Dissertation handbook first, which has the answer to most of your queries.