

MA Education (Wales) Dissertation Handbook



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Dissertation Handbook

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Introduction to the Module

The dissertation module is designed to support you to undertake a small-scale piece of research or enquiry related to your educational practice. It builds upon the Advanced Research and Enquiry Skills module, in which you explored education research approaches, and gives you a chance to put your skills and knowledge into practice. This handbook provides advice on how to carry out your project and also explains what you can expect from your dissertation supervisor.

This module aims to support you to:

1. Plan and conduct a small-scale piece of research/enquiry that is relevant to your educational practice.
2. Engage critically and ethically with research design and data collection processes.
3. Critically appraise contemporary research methodologies and enquiry approaches within the social sciences
4. Undertake a piece of empirical investigation independently.
5. Present your research in different forms and to different audiences.
6. Refine your research skills so that you can independently research and lead others through an enquiry/research process.

By the end of the module, you should be able to:

1. Identify an issue or question that is suitable for a small-scale piece of research/enquiry and formulate a suitable research question/or research questions.
2. Undertake a critical review of the literature of relevance to the selected focus of research/enquiry.
3. Articulate an appropriate research/enquiry methodology within the design of your study.
4. Undertake appropriate planning of research so that it aligns with BERA ethical guidance.
5. Plan, execute and present a small-scale piece of research/enquiry.
6. Reflect critically upon your experience of conducting a research/enquiry project.
7. Disseminate your research in a way that is relevant and accessible for different audiences.

Using your ARES Proposal to inform your dissertation

Writing your research proposal for the ARES module gave you an opportunity to explore a project idea and get feedback. You can use the proposal as a basis for your dissertation but be mindful that you should avoid self-plagiarism from the proposal in your eventual write-up.

A few points to consider:

- Your research questions may be transferred from proposal to dissertation.
- You can use the sections of the proposal as a framework but reword them in light of feedback and how you want to develop your ideas in the dissertation.
- It is fine to use the same references that supported your proposal but be prepared to adapt and develop the discussion in the dissertation.

How will the module be delivered?

The module runs over **1 academic year** and is delivered in a blended manner.

You will be allocated a supervisor to support you with your research project.

The majority of your time will be spent **working independently** on your research. **Four (4) hours** have been allocated for supervision and it is important that you use this time wisely.

In addition, there will be the following optional drop-in sessions to support your progress.

Dissertation Session 16:30 – 17:30	Dissertation Session Topic
14.11.24	Welcome and ethics briefing (HEI specific)
04.12.24	Methodology
16.01.25	Pulling together the literature review
05.02.25	Analysing qualitative data
06.03.25	Analysing quantitative data
29.04.25	Presenting findings
20.05.25	Developing conclusions and recommendations
18.06.25	Writing up
25.09.25	Submission (via your local institution)

Allocation of supervisors

The module coordinator from your HEI will allocate supervisors based on the following criteria:

1. Expertise of supervisor (topic and/or methodological approach).
2. Requirement for ALN and Leadership pathway students to be working on topics linked to their chosen route.
3. Requirement, as necessary, for Welsh medium supervision.

Planning your supervisory meetings

It is important that you work with your supervisor to create a work schedule for your dissertation including supervision meetings. This should include an opportunity to discuss one draft chapter (see 'Formative Feedback' on Page 6). Please also see Appendix 3.

Topics for discussion in supervisory meetings;

- Ethics
- Planning your research and structuring your dissertation
- Establishing your research question(s)
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Feedback on draft chapters
- Disseminating your research



Roles and Responsibilities

The relationship between supervisor and student should be seen as one of partnership and should take note of the relative roles/responsibilities of supervisor and student. In general terms, supervisors should act as guide, mentor, and critical friend to the student and take a keen professional interest in the student's work.

Roles and Responsibilities	Supervisor	Student
Discuss both content/substantive issues and deviations from the agreed timetable for the dissertation	✓	✓
Understand that the supervisor's role is to guide and support a student and that the primary responsibility rests with each student with regard to the eventual success or failure of work submitted	✓	✓
Keep a record of supervisory meetings and actions agreed	✓	✓
Discuss any concerns about the supervisory process	✓	✓
Ensure that any ethical or procedural problems associated with the research are discussed	✓	✓
Initiate early contact	✓	✓
Ensure that adequate time is set aside to supervise students	✓	
Ensure that students are aware of the MA regulations and requirements with respect to all aspects of the dissertation	✓	✓
Ensure that student is aware of the criteria for the assessment of dissertations	✓	✓
Guide the student at the key stages of design of proposal, field work and dissertation writing	✓	
Discuss any concerns about the student's progress with the student	✓	
Ensure that the dissertation is submitted correctly		✓
Ensure that adequate time is devoted to the dissertation	✓	✓
Discuss their expectations with respect to dissertation supervision and the type of guidance they feel will be most helpful		✓
Be receptive to advice and critical discussions with the supervisor		✓
Take responsibility for an ongoing self-evaluation of work		✓
Inform the supervisor if they are unable to proceed with their dissertation for an extended period		✓
Comply with MA regulations and requirements with respect to all aspects of the dissertation		✓

Assessment and submission

The module runs over 3 terms, and the submission date is **25th September 2025**. The length of the dissertation is 15,000 words and should be structured in the following format:

Section	Pagination	Word count (approx.)
Title Page	N/A	N/A
Declaration	Roman numerals starting from page II (e.g., II, III, IV, V)	
Acknowledgements		
Abstract		
Table of Contents		
List of Figures & Tables		
List of Appendices		
List of Abbreviations		
Introduction	Arabic numerals (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4)	1,200 words
Literature review		4,500 words
Methodology		2,250 words
Results Analysis Discussion (might be separated into results and then discussion)		5,250 words
Conclusion		1,200 words
Critical Reflection		600 words
References		N/A
Appendices		

Ethical Approval

Before you can carry out any data collection your project must have ethical approval from your HEI. The importance of this was explored in the Advanced Research and Enquiry Skills module. Make sure that you are familiar with the BERA Ethical guidelines [Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fifth edition \(2024\) | BERA](#) and the requirements of your university. The ethics application and consent form template should be included in the appendices of your dissertation

Formative Feedback

Your supervisor will provide you with formative feedback on one chapter of your dissertation. Work must be submitted in good time for supervisors to read the chapter and for you to have enough time to further develop the chapter in the light of your supervisor's comment. See Appendix 3 for the guidance. You are also part of a professional community of researchers who are all doing a dissertation and you can use this opportunity to share your work with them too. Once all research proposals have been finalised, you will have access to a list of all the projects being undertaken by topic and research approach. Please use this list as an opportunity to contact other researchers on the course.

Submission

The module runs over 3 teaching periods from November 2024 to September 2025. The final version of the dissertation should be submitted by the 25th of September 2025. The dissertation will be submitted via Turnitin on your University VLE.

Your supervisor will be able to complete a light-touch check of your dissertation before submission, but you must allow sufficient time for this, no less than 4 weeks. See Appendix 4 for the checklist they will use.

Reassessment of Dissertation

A candidate who fails in the first attempt to satisfy the Board of Examiners in the assessment of the dissertation may re-submit at the discretion of the Board of Examiners. This will be subject to a charge of £124.

Academic integrity

Academic integrity is a basic expectation of your dissertation and can be defined as “the expectation that teachers, students, researchers and all members of the academic community act with honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility” with teaching learning and assessment (TEQSA, 2023)

Conversely, academic dishonesty includes ‘a range of behaviours involving intention violation of academic rules for personal gain, such a plagiarism, lying and falsifications’ (TEQSA, 2023)

Plagiarism can be defined as using without acknowledgement another person’s words or ideas and submitting them for assessment as though they were one’s own work, for instance by copying, translating from one language to another or unacknowledged paraphrasing.

Examples of plagiarism include:

- use of any quotation(s) from the published or unpublished work of other persons, whether published in textbooks,
- articles, the internet, or in any other format, where the quotations have not been clearly identified as such by being placed in quotation marks and acknowledged;
- unacknowledged use of another person’s words or ideas that have been slightly changed or paraphrased to make them look different from the original;
- summarising another person’s ideas, judgments, diagrams, figures, or computer programs without reference to that person in the text and the source in the reference list;
- use of services of essay banks and/or any other agencies;
- use of unacknowledged material downloaded from the internet;
- re-use of one’s own material;
- listing sources in the reference list that have not been read;
- using text generated by AI without attribution or acknowledgement.

Collusion can be defined as when work that has been undertaken by or with others is submitted and passed off as solely the work of one person. This also applies where the work of one candidate is submitted in the

name of another. Where this is done with the knowledge of the originator both parties can be considered to be at fault.

Fabrication of data is making false claims to have carried out experiments, observations, interviews or other forms of data collection and analysis, or acting dishonestly in any other way.

Accessing Library resources

The university where you have enrolled will provide you with access to their specific resources.

All universities provide access to a number of electronic reference sources, databases and journals. The databases provide bibliographic information and full-text journal articles, conference papers, books and other literature published in specific subject areas. These services can be accessed via your HEI's VLE.

Additional resources

- 1) Self-Evaluation structure (Appendix 1)
- 2) Dissertation structure (Appendix 2)
- 3) Formative feedback guidance (Appendix 3)
- 4) 'Light touch' checklist (Appendix 4)

Dissemination of Research Findings

A requirement for all students is that, as part of the planning process for your dissertation, you reflect on how you wish to disseminate the findings of your research – and who you think an appropriate audience for this might be (LO7). This activity might be quite modest in scale – however, with foresight and planning regarding your choice of topic and how it addresses a common problem in the field and/or a gap in the literature, you may find your work has the potential to impact in a more significant way on theory, policy or practice within your field of work. The dissemination activity should be included in the appendix of the dissertation in the form of a plan, PowerPoint link, or link to a video of you presenting the slides.

You may be asked to present your dissertation at the MA student conference, and this will offer you one possibility in terms of a platform for dissemination of your research findings.

Indicative Reading

Essential Reading

Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2016), *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. London: Pearson Higher Ed

Thomas, G. (2023), *How to do your research project (4th Ed)*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Recommended Reading

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2022), *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Buckler, S. & Moore, H. (2023), *Research Methods in Education*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2018), *Approaches to Quantitative Data Analysis*. Abingdon: Routledge

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2018), *Research methods in education* (8th ed). Abingdon: Routledge

Danermark, B., Ekström, M., & Karlsson, J. C. (2019), *Explaining society: Critical realism in the social sciences*. Abingdon: Routledge

Kumar, R. (2019), *Research Methodology*. 5th ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Kvale, S., (2007), *Doing Interviews*, London SAGE Publications Ltd

Silverman, D. (Ed.). (2016), *Qualitative research*. London SAGE Publications Ltd

Appendix 1: Self-Evaluation Structure

Introduction

Guiding questions	Complete?	Additional work needed (summarise here)
Is the problem stated and defined? Are the hypotheses to be tested or questions to be answered clearly stated?		
Is the problem researchable? Are the logical or practical limitations of the research and its scope considered and discussed?		
Is the problem significant/important? Will the solution or exploration of this problem contribute to knowledge or practice by potentially addressing a gap in the field?		
If you have made any assumptions, are these clearly stated?		
Is the problem or gap described in the context of its background or historical development?		
Do you introduce your objectives, aims, research question, and explain how they emerge from an issue in practice and/or gaps in the existing literature?		
Do you provide an outline of the dissertation?		

Review of Related Literature

Guiding questions	Complete?	Additional work needed (summarise here)
Is the review a critical analysis and synthesis (not descriptive summary) of the existing literature on the specific topic or field of study providing an overview of the main theories, concepts, methods, findings and debates related to the topic?		
Is the emphasis on literature pertinent to the problem?		
Is the relationship between the previous research on the problem and the current research described?		
Did you review and synthesise research and literature in your discipline and in related disciplines that might have implications for the present study?		
Does the review culminate in a critical argument for the problem/gap selected and how it should be addressed?		

Research Methodology and Methods

Guiding questions	Complete?	Additional work needed (summarise here)
Is the research methodology used appropriate for exploring or addressing the problem?		
Is the sampling approach appropriate and has the sample been identified?		
Have ethical considerations, choices and procedures been thoroughly explored and explained?		
Are the research procedures clearly described and justified?		
Are all variables that might influence the study recognised and (where appropriate) controlled?		
Have you discussed how you formulated your research instruments in a way that targets your research questions/problem/gaps in the field?		
Are you confident that the research instruments are valid and reliable? Or if qualitative that your research design is trustworthy and high-quality?		
Have you demonstrated care and accuracy in recording and summarising the data?		

Are appropriate methods used in analysing the data, and are the methods correctly applied, explained, and evidenced?		
Have you considered your positionality as a researcher and acknowledged it?		
Have you signposted your reader to relevant appendices? (e.g., a copy of the ethics application, questionnaire, interview schedule).		

Discussion of Findings

Guiding questions	Complete?	Additional work needed (summarise here)
Are the main findings of the study discussed in reference to the research question(s)?		
Are the findings and conclusions clearly stated and supported by the data presented?		
Are the findings interpreted, evaluated and discussed in relation to the review of literature, drawing out their significance?		
Have issues of bias and positionality been considered in the reporting of the findings?		

Conclusion

Guiding questions	Complete?	Additional work needed (summarise here)
Does the conclusion provide an overview of the study and its significance?		
Are limitations considered and suggestions for future research made considering these limitations?		
Are the implications of the study for practice or policy clearly explored?		
Have you critically reflected on the experience of conducting a research/enquiry project?		

Dissemination of Findings

Guiding questions	Complete?	Additional work needed (summarise here)
Have you indicated how you intend to disseminate your findings?		

Final Checks

Guiding questions	Complete?	Additional work needed (summarise here)
The title is clear, complete and concise		
The structure of the dissertation is logical and clear		
Is there a consistent and coherent link between the research question(s), objectives, aims, literature review, methodology, analysis, findings and conclusions?		
Ethics form and consent forms are included		
The dissertation has been checked for typing, spelling and grammatical errors		
All references are appropriately formatted, and the reference list is complete		

Appendix 2: Dissertation Format & Structure

The dissertation must include:

1. A title page
 - Title of dissertation
 - Student's name
 - Title of course
 - Statement that the Dissertation is being submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree.
 - Year of submission
 - Name of university
2. A declaration signed by the student certifying that the dissertation submitted is the result of their own research and work and that the work of others is duly noted in the references contained in the dissertation; that the work has not already been accepted in substance for any other degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any other degree. If AI has been used this should be acknowledged and the nature of the use of AI described. Copy and paste of text from AI is not allowed unless accompanied by a citation.
3. An acknowledgements page giving details of individuals and bodies who have assisted the student in the research and the production of the completed dissertation.
4. An abstract of 200 - 300 words summarising the dissertation. This should include an outline of key words, aims, methods, results, conclusions and implications of the study. It should be single line spaced and fit onto one page.
5. A contents page with chapter headings and page numbers.
6. Agreed structure with supervisor including: Abstract (see above); Introduction; Literature Review; Methodology; Findings; Conclusions/Recommendations; Critical Reflection.
7. Appendices.

Appendix 3: Formative Feedback Guidance

Your supervisor will be able to read one full chapter from your dissertation. You are able to choose the chapter which your supervisor will review but you must ensure that your supervisor receives the chapter on a mutually agreed date.

Your supervisor will be able to do the following:

- Comment on structure and flow of the chapter
- Comment on the content of the chapter
- Comment on the critical analysis and evaluation
- Suggest areas for development
- Discuss the feedback with you in one of your supervisory sessions

Your supervisor will not be able to:

- Correct all typographical and grammatical errors
- Assign a grade to the chapter
- Give any indication of a potential grade for the chapter
- Review a revised draft of the chapter

Appendix 4: 'Light Touch' Final Checklist

When you have completed a full draft of your thesis your supervisor will work through this checklist to ensure that all required elements of your dissertation are present. Your supervisor will not mark any chapters at this stage and will only provide comments on elements of the dissertation that are missing.

Section	Completed	Comments
General		
Title Page		
Abstract		
Contents Page		
Pagination (and on Contents Page)		
List of Figures		
Introduction		
Description of the Project		
Reasons for Choosing Project		
Outline of the Dissertation		
Literature Review		
Overview of key literature		
Aim & Rationale		
Research Question/s		
Methodology		
Research Design & Instruments		
Participants & Sampling		
Ethical Considerations		
Data Analysis		
Results & Discussion		
Analysis and Evaluation of the Research Question/s		
Data presented for the Research Question/s		
Findings evaluated with reference to existing literature		
Conclusions		
Summary of findings		
Strengths and limitations of the study		
Potential areas for future research		
Critical reflection on experience of conducting research		
Reference to dissemination plan/product		
List of References		
Appendices		
Dissemination plan/product		
Examples of anonymised ethics documents		

Appendix 5: Assessment Rubric

Dissertation Learning Outcomes	Distinction (100%-70%)	Merit (69%-60%)	Pass (59%-50%)	Fail (49%-0%)
LO1: Identify an issue or question that is suitable for a small-scale piece of research/enquiry and formulate a suitable research question/or research questions. (10%)	Sophisticated and compelling rationale for the research. Incisive and well-crafted research question(s). The research is very pertinent to the discipline and the research question functions very effectively.	Rationale is detailed and articulated persuasively. Research question(s) framed effectively. The research is appropriate to the discipline and the research question functions effectively.	Rationale for the research is clearly articulated and research question(s) suitably matched to scale and scope of project. The research is within the scope of the discipline and the research question functions adequately.	Rationale for the research is under-explored. Research question(s) poorly linked to scale and scope of project. The research has limited relevance to the discipline and/or the research question does not function effectively.
LO2: Undertake a critical review of the literature of relevance to the selected focus of research/enquiry. (30%)	Impressive range of reading. Highly focused and judicious selection of sources. The selected literature is highly relevant to the topic, there is clear and very effective critical synthesis used in the review with consistent and highly relevant links to the research question.	Good range of reading. Sources highly relevant. The literature has been reviewed comprehensively with most relevant literature present. It is evident that effective critical synthesis is used effectively with clear links to the research question demonstrated.	Sound range of reading. Largely relevant with little diversion. The literature has been reviewed satisfactorily and there are links to the research question. However, on occasion, there is relevant literature omitted and the critical synthesis is adequate.	Limited or narrow range of reading, with some tangential or less relevant aspects. The literature has been reviewed without adequate synthesis and there are gaps evident. The research is a little peripheral to the discipline and has limited links to the research question.
LO3: Articulate an appropriate research/enquiry methodology within the design of your study. (10%)	Sophisticated presentation of methodology with thorough referencing. Provides a highly effective critical rationale of selected methodology that is fully aligned with the research project.	Very effective research methodology presented with helpful referencing. Provides an effective critical rationale of selected methodology that is aligned with the research project.	Some appropriate research methodology clearly articulated with some referencing. Some justification of the chosen methodological approach and the methods used which are broadly aligned with the research project. However, there are some misconceptions or omitted aspects evident.	Research methodology is undeveloped with limited reference to methodological texts. No justification of the chosen methodological approach and the methods used. Unclear account of the process. May be misalignment between methods and project.
LO4: Undertake appropriate planning of research so that it aligns with BERA (2018) ethical guidance. (10%)	Excellent, nuanced understanding of research ethics. Detailed consideration in terms of own project. Implications fully explored. The implications of research ethics are thoroughly explored and are consistently applied at each stage of the research from a theoretical and practical perspective.	Thorough discussion of research ethics. Understanding applied purposefully to own research. Consideration of ethics is well explored both theoretically and applied practically in research design.	Clear understanding and application of research ethics. Key aspects in terms of research approach covered adequately. Consideration of ethical issues are addressed and there is adequate exploration and application throughout the research design.	Limited consideration and discussion of research ethics and/or some key aspects under-explored. Research ethics may be mentioned but not fully considered or applied. There is minimal consideration and application of ethics throughout the research design.

LO5: Plan, execute and present a small-scale piece of research/enquiry. (25%)	Rigorous and detailed planning evident. Precise and highly focused findings. Very strong and valuable deductions and conclusions. Highly pertinent and valuable recommendations. Very effective use of appendices. Excellent integration of results and ideas from the wider literature with considerable insight. Very perceptive appraisal of implications.	Good planning evident. Detailed and engaging presentation of findings. Strong and well substantiated deductions and conclusions, firmly based on evidence. Effective and valuable recommendations. Good use of appendices. Good interpretation of results which are generally well integrated with ideas from the wider literature. Implications of the findings have been appraised.	Solid planning evident. Clear presentation of relevant findings. Sound deductions and conclusions which are substantiated. Sensible use of appendices. Clear recommendations. Results are interpreted logically. Discussion draws together the main findings which are contextualised. Limited exploration of implications.	Uneven planning evident. Limited presentation of findings. Weakly related or underdeveloped deductions and conclusions. Limited use of appendices. Limited recommendations. Minimal discussion of results and very few links made to ideas from the wider literature. Minimal recognition of the implications of the research findings.
LO6: Reflect critically upon experience of conducting a research/enquiry project. (5%)	Evidence of thought-provoking, resonant, multi-layered reflections of experience of conducting project.	Evidence of engaging, detailed and relevant reflections on experience of conducting project.	Evidence of clearly articulated and sensible reflections on experience of conducting project.	Limited and/or underexplored reflections on experience of conducting project.
LO7: Disseminate research in a way that is relevant and accessible for different audiences. (5%)	Precise and incisive dissemination product with very strong understanding of audience. Very comprehensive, coherent, and appropriate presentation of results, consistent with research design. The product and the methods used to disseminate is highly relevant to audience.	Effective and informative dissemination product with focused sense of audience. Detailed, appropriate and clear presentation of results with justification of chosen output based on audience.	Clear dissemination product aimed at a relevant and suitable audience. Results are clearly presented in an appropriate format. There is limited consideration of how the product is disseminated to the audience.	Weakly focused and/or brief dissemination product. Limited sense of audience. Lack of clarity or inconsistency in the presentation of results. Inconsistent with research design, little or no consideration of the audience the product will be aimed at.
Scholarly Practices (5%)	Harvard referencing is excellent and used correctly and consistently throughout.	Harvard referencing practice is good and used throughout to acknowledge sources clearly.	Harvard referencing practice is broadly sound.	Harvard referencing practice is poor, with sources acknowledged in an inconsistent manner.