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**Independent Project: Children and Young
People's Mental Health and ALN**

INDEPENDENT PROJECT HANDBOOK

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. General Information.....	4
3. Aims	5
4. Contribution of the project to your degree	7
5. The project Approval Process & Timescales	8
6. Supervision	9
7. Ethical Practice and Data Storage.....	11
8. Report Structure.....	13
9. FAQs	20
10. Independent Project Oral Presentation	21

1. Introduction

This document has been put together to help you whilst conducting your independent project and presenting this in the form of a written assignment (ethics form and proposal), portfolio and individual presentation.

Research can be very rewarding: learning about an area in detail, finding the answers to questions you are interested in as well as contributing to understanding of an area. It also has frustrations that are felt not only by first time researchers, but also by the most experienced investigator.

Firstly, being uncertain is part of the process. This handbook is not going to remove that – every project brings different challenges. And because research is about finding things out yourself, there won't be anyone who has all the answers for you.

Realistically, the most enjoyable phase, data collection and/or data analysis is a small amount of time relative to the time it will take to submit and receive ethics approval, and recruit participants, if you are carrying out an empirical study. Take care not to underestimate how long it will take to prepare documents to gain the approvals that you need before you can start collecting data.

This guide attempts to anticipate many of the questions you may have and highlight questions you may not have thought of but should ask. Remember though, that for many of these questions there is not a single answer, but it will depend on the project, the target population, and recruitment method, the design etc.

2. General Information

Supervisor Contact Details:

Name	Email
Dr Charlotte Greenway	c.greenway@uwtsd.ac.uk
Alison Rees Edwards	a.rees-edwards@tsd.ac.uk
Darren O'Connor	d.oconnor@uwtsd.ac.uk
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3. Aims

The Independent Project has the following aim:

- To enable students to design, execute, and critically evaluate a substantial independent project that demonstrates advanced research, analytical, project management and problem-solving skills within their discipline/practice.

In order to pass the Independent Project, you must demonstrate the ability to:

- design and justify a coherent and feasible project plan that addresses a complex issue or question within their field/practice;
- apply appropriate methodologies and theoretical frameworks to collect, analyse, and interpret data or evidence (either for an empirical or literature-based study);
- demonstrate transferable skills of project management and problem-solving in the production of an independent piece of work;
- critically evaluate the outcomes of their project, demonstrating originality/ relevance, insight, and awareness of ethical and professional standards.

4. Contribution of the Independent Project to your degree

The Independent Project consists of **60 credits**, and it must be of a suitable standard for the degree to be awarded. It is therefore important to work consistently on the project throughout your course and dedicate time and effort to it.

In the classification of 'Distinction', 'Merit' or 'Pass' as a final grade for your MA degree, your Independent Project mark contributes 50% to the total weighting, with the taught modules contributing the other 50%.

4.1 ASSESSMENT

The Independent Project is essentially a record of the project undertaken by the student. The Independent Project must be of satisfactory literary standard and include appropriate references. It should be used to demonstrate that the student is competent in the appropriate method of research and has developed an adequate knowledge of the field of study.

Assessment Component 1

☐ Written exam ☒ Coursework ☐ Practical

Mode of assessment	Volume	Weighting
Written Assignment	3,000 words	20%

Assessment Component 2

☐ Written exam ☒ Coursework ☐ Practical

Mode of assessment	Volume	Weighting
Portfolio	9,000 words or equivalent	60%

Assessment Component 3

☐ Written exam ☐ Coursework ☒ Practical

Mode of assessment	Volume	Weighting
Individual Presentation	20 minutes	20%

5. The Independent Project Approval Process & Timescales

5.1 Initial Approval/Supervisor Allocation

The Independent Project does not officially start until after the taught modules finishes and the examination board transfers you to the Independent Project. To ensure completion of a robust Independent Project by the deadline, you will approach potential supervisors and agree a broad topic before the end of your final taught module (April time), and submit a draft proposal to supervisors in June, as this then allows you to work on your literature search and review over the summer period.

5.2 Ethical Approval for empirical projects ([Link: ethics form](#))

The availability of the Faculty Ethics Committee has been factored into your Independent Project process for the academic year. It is your responsibility to ensure that you meet the deadlines set out by the Faculty Ethics Committee, as the School has no control over timings of ethics boards. Based upon your coverage of ethics in the taught element of the programme it is expected that students should recognise the requirements and thoroughness needed for an ethics submission at Faculty level. Whilst your supervisor may provide comments on a draft of the ethics form prior to submission (if submitted to the supervisor in good time) it is the students' responsibility to produce a sound ethics approval form. Poor quality ethics forms will not be signed off for submission.

5.3 Ethics for non-empirical projects

Students who are not undertaking an empirical project involving the collection of primary data will be required to complete an alternative assessment in place of the research project. This

assessment is designed to ensure that students demonstrate an advanced understanding of the ethical, professional, and methodological issues associated with conducting research with children and young people.

The assessment requires students to produce a 1,500-word critical evaluation of the ethical considerations involved in conducting a dissertation project with children and young people as participants. Students will be expected to critically examine ethical issues arising throughout the research process, including participant recruitment, informed consent and assent, safeguarding, confidentiality, data management, researcher responsibilities, and the dissemination of findings. The assignment should demonstrate engagement with relevant ethical frameworks, professional guidance, and research governance principles, while critically exploring the complexities, tensions, and dilemmas that can arise when conducting research with children and young people.

5.4 Proposal ([Link: proposal form](#))

As part of Assessment 1, students are required to develop a research proposal that outlines the intended focus, rationale, and approach for their Independent Project. A draft proposal should be submitted in June to enable the programme team to review the feasibility, academic suitability, and supervisory requirements of the proposed project. Following this review, the supervisory team will consider the proposal and allocate a supervisor whose expertise aligns with the topic and methodological approach of the project.

Students will receive feedback on their draft proposal to support further development of their ideas. The final proposal will be submitted in November and will contribute 50% of the mark for Assessment 1. The remaining 50% will comprise

either the ethics application form (for students undertaking empirical research) or the alternative ethics assessment (for students not collecting primary data). Together, these components are designed to ensure that students have developed a robust, feasible, and ethically informed plan before progressing to the main Independent Project.

6. Supervision

In accordance with the Academic Quality Handbook, each student is entitled to a maximum of 18 hours of contact time. This will consist of eight hours of taught sessions throughout the year and individual supervision. The 10 hours of individual supervision will include meetings, feedback, and email exchange. These hours will be negotiated with your supervisor. Meetings that take place should be recorded on the supervision record, GA19, and maintained by the student.

6.1 Role of Supervisor

Academic supervision is provided by a researcher / academic within the Programme Team, occasionally supported by an additional supervisor, if recruiting participants from a specific participant group or as part of a work-based research project. The role of the academic supervisor is the main supervisory role, guiding methods and writing, giving feedback on Independent Project chapter drafts etc.

Supervisor allocation will be based on the capacity, topic and methodological focus of the project to ensure students receive appropriate academic guidance and subject-specific support. Where appropriate, a second adviser may also be appointed.

To support students throughout the dissertation process, a programme of four two-hour workshops will be delivered from October onwards. In addition, students will be entitled to ten hours of individual supervision. This allocation includes face-to-

face or online supervisory meetings, email correspondence, and supervisor time dedicated to reading and providing feedback on draft work.

Reasonable expectations of your **academic supervisor** include:

1. Commenting on the appropriateness of the question posed, providing constructive criticism, and making suggestions for the improvement and development of the research question.
2. Commenting on the research method(s) proposed and making suggestions for the development and improvement of the research methods.
3. Supporting the student in processing the research protocol through all relevant ethics and research panels.
4. Providing support and encouragement for the student during the collection, management and analysis of data.
5. Providing assistance in the write-up of the project, including **ONE** reading (only) of each section and ensuring that the report meets UWTSD regulations for the degree scheme.
6. Agreed contact during working hours.

It is very important that you **discuss any changes** to the research protocol, data collection approaches and data collection tools with **your academic supervisor**.

6.2 Time management:

It is your responsibility to manage your time appropriately so that you meet the Independent Project submission date, and to develop a project timetable in consultation with your academic supervisor that ensures that you can obtain their feedback on draft chapters when you need it. Be sure that you discuss and agree your draft chapter submission and supervision plans with

your academic supervisor **well in advance**.

7. Ethical Practice and Data Storage

All students carrying out primary research are bound by the ethical requirements of the university and the appropriate professional Ethical Code of Conduct (BERA, BPS, BACP). Where there is any doubt regarding ethical practice whilst carrying out research the student **must** contact a member of the Programme Team for advice and clarification.

7.1 Data Management & Storage

“Primary data” is the actual data that you collect. This is likely to be in the form of either (a) audio recordings of interviews or (b) data collected on paper or online questionnaires. The University is responsible for storing your primary data (audio files and completed questionnaires), not you, the student – indeed, you are not permitted to keep this data after the end of the project. This is required under the Research Governance Framework to ensure that research data is not falsified, and the primary data must be stored for a stipulated length of time. The University retention periods for research data (in the absence of any stipulations from funders) are documented at <http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/>

So, once you have either (a) transcribed your audio files and anonymised the transcript or (b) input your questionnaire data into SPSS or Excel, you **MUST** pass the primary data (audio files and completed questionnaires) to the programme team for storage. All audio files must be stored digitally, labelled clearly with your name, year and project title and given to the Programme Director for storage. Completed questionnaires may be stored in paper form and given to the Programme Director, labelled clearly with your name, year and project title. All primary data (audio files and paper questionnaires) should be deleted from your own or any other computers you have used. The data

will be stored securely by the programme team for the requisite time.

“Secondary data” (interview transcripts, questionnaire responses in SPSS/Excel) should be stored in anonymised (de-identified) form with a key to indicate which identifier corresponds to which participant. You can keep the anonymised data, but you must ensure that any data that you keep protects the confidentiality of your participants.

7.2 Boundaries and safe practice

Be conscious of how the role of a researcher is different to that of any other professional or training role you may have had. Safe practice is just as important in research as it is in clinical practice. Your research participants may be vulnerable; care must be taken not to cause distress unnecessarily, and not to provide misleading information. Research participants may still become distressed in an interview, or when filling in a questionnaire, just because they are reminded of very distressing events that may have occurred. You must have plans in place to safeguard participants who do become distressed, or who have information needs e.g., by providing them with an opportunity to discuss their concerns with you. It will be important to discuss this with your supervisor before you start collecting data.

7.3 Approval

No collection of primary data in any form should be carried out without confirmed approval from your supervisor, and if appropriate, Faculty Research Ethics Committee approval. Breaches of this process may lead to data being disregarded and sections of the thesis being disregarded in the marking process, as well as potential disciplinary action at a university level.

8. Portfolio Structure: assessment two

- Word count should aim to be about 9,000 but up to 9,900 is acceptable. Remember there are penalties for work that is more than 10% over the word limit, resulting in a deduction of marks.

8.1 Title Page

- Title of Project.
- Author's name.
- Name of degree
- University of Wales Trinity Saint David School of Childhood, Youth and Education
- Year of presentation.

8.2 Declaration

On the first page (after the cover) you must include a signed declaration of the following

- That the Independent Project does not include work accepted for any other degree or professional qualification (unless a clear statement is made as to the precise extent of the work so included).
- That the Independent Project has been composed by you and is your own work.
- AI statement: You are expected to include this acknowledgement in a separate page at the beginning of your submission.

Basic Acknowledgement format of AI tool use

I acknowledge the use of [AI Tool] [(AI Tool url)] on [Date] to [Purpose my work]. I used the prompt(s):

1. *[Prompt]*

2. *[Prompt]*

3. *[Prompt]*

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

If you have not used AI tools If you have not used AI tools, whether because it is not allowed or because you have chosen not to use AI tools at all, you need to include the following acknowledgement.

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

8.3 Acknowledgements

The acknowledgement page should recognise those people who have helped you in either carrying out your research or making your research possible or have given you advice and support during the project.

8.4 Table of Contents

The contents page should list each section and main headings within each section. Numbered sections can make reading the thesis easier. A page number for each should be given.

The same format should be given for tables, graphs and diagrams.

Note that Microsoft Word has the capacity to convert headings into an automatically generated table of contents – making this much simpler.

8.5 Portfolio: Empirical project

The research paper should start with an abstract setting out the topic area and aims of the project, a summary of the methods used, a couple of sentences on your main findings and conclusions or implications of your work. This may be either structured into headings (e.g., aim, method, results, conclusions) or unstructured. This abstract should be up to 250 words.

The introduction and literature review should provide a clear rationale for the study and demonstrate a critical understanding of the relevant research, theory, policy, and practice relating to the chosen topic. It should clearly define the focus and scope of the study. Explain the significance of the research and justify why the topic warrants investigation. Identify the overall aim of the study and present the research question(s) and/or objectives. Provide an overview of the structure of the study. The literature review should demonstrate comprehensive engagement with relevant and contemporary academic literature. Critically evaluate key theories, concepts, policies, and empirical research relevant to the study. Compare, contrast, and synthesise existing evidence rather than simply describing previous studies. Identify areas of agreement, disagreement, strengths, limitations, and gaps within the literature. Demonstrate how the proposed study builds upon, extends, or addresses limitations in the existing evidence base. Develop a clear rationale for the research design and methodological approach where appropriate. Lead logically to the research question(s) and objectives,

showing how they emerge from the literature reviewed.

The method section should include a justification for the approach chosen as well as a description of the recruitment, data collection and data analysis methods. References should be provided for methods and any modifications made. Cross-referencing to appendices is allowed here. This section should illustrate that you understood what you were doing and made sensible decisions, rather than blindly following a particular method 'recipe'.

The results section should demonstrate the way that the research questions have been answered. As well as the results of data analysis, a description of the participants and response rate (etc.,) should be included. Remember that your sample is a "result" of the sampling method you used to recruit from your target population. The order that the results are presented in should be logical and subheadings may be useful, if appropriate.

No new data should be presented in the Discussion section. Rather, this section places the results in the context of the literature (and/or practice) and elaborates on issues arising from the findings. Avoid the temptation to simply reiterate the findings in an abbreviated form. It is a waste of words. The examiner will be looking for a discussion of the place of your findings in the context of current literature, strengths and weaknesses, implications of your findings for research and practice, suggestions for further research, and concluding remarks. The conclusion should return to your aims / research questions and demonstrate to what extent these have been achieved / answered. All of the threads of the project should be clearly brought together.

8.6 Portfolio: Non-empirical project

Students undertaking a practice-based project (e.g., a Work-Based Resource/Guidebook, Educational Resource, Infographic, Intervention Design, Training Programme Development, or Reflective Practice Portfolio) are required to submit both the practical output and an accompanying academic report. The practical component must be underpinned by a critical review of the relevant literature and a clear rationale for its development.

Whilst the exact structure will vary according to the nature of the project, submissions should typically include the following elements:

Introduction: Introduce the topic and context of the project. Outline the aims and objectives. Provide a clear rationale for the chosen focus and intended audience.

Literature Review: Critically review and synthesise relevant research, theory, policy, and professional guidance. Identify gaps, needs, or challenges that justify the development of the practical output. Demonstrate how the project is informed by the existing evidence base.

Practical Output: Present the completed resource, intervention, training programme, guidebook, portfolio, infographic, or other approved output. Ensure the output is professionally presented and appropriate for its intended purpose and audience.

Critical Discussion and Evaluation:

Critically evaluate the development of the project and the decisions made throughout the process. Discuss the strengths, limitations, and potential impact of the output. Consider issues relating to implementation, feasibility, accessibility, inclusivity, and future development. Reflect on how the literature informed the design and content of the output.

Conclusion: Summarise the key points arising from the project. Evaluate the extent to which the aims and objectives have been achieved. Provide recommendations for future development,

implementation, or research.

At Master's level, students are expected to demonstrate critical analysis, synthesis of evidence, and a clear link between the literature reviewed and the design of the practical output. The submission should evidence both academic rigour and professional relevance.

8.7 Reference List

Reference lists are not included in the 9,000 word limit. Harvard referencing conventions to be followed at all times.

8.8 Appendices

Appendices are not included in the 9,000 word limit. Appendices should include the ethics form, the information and consent sheets used in the study, full transcript of a sample of interviews (if relevant), questionnaires (if relevant), the interview guide (if relevant) etc. For Qualitative data, you should consider including a section of coded transcript to illustrate your coding.

The precise content should be decided by you, bearing in mind what you think is important for readers to be aware of or assess for themselves.

FAQs

8.9 How strict is the word limit?

Conciseness is a key-skill in academic writing, and the 9,000 word limit is to encourage you to write a Master's Independent Project that does justice to your work, and that demonstrates all the key skills outlined in the marking grid. Keep in mind that there are university regulations for word limits which can result in penalties for work being over 10% of the word count.

8.10 Are quotes included in the word count?

Yes, they are, so use them judiciously. For example, thematic analysis does not need every quote to be provided but a representative quote will suffice. If you are doing a thematic analysis and find yourself using a lot of individual quotes, be certain that these are in fact representative of common themes, rather than individual quotes that make statements that you see as important. Some research papers present a description of themes and sub-themes with representative quotes in tabular form (tables are not included in the word limit), with appropriate cross-referencing. Avoid using a lot of quotes at the cost of clarity of research method or discussion.

8.11 When are the Report Submission and Presentation dates?

Please check Moodle for submission dates for this academic year.

8.12 Am I able to pay participants or purchase materials for my research?

UWTSD is unable to contribute to the costs of conducting the Independent Project project, or of presenting and submitting the Independent Project. Thus, the scope of the project needs to reflect the fact that this is unfunded work

9. Independent Project Presentation

Assessment Component 3 consists of a 20-minute presentation of your Independent Project portfolio to an academic audience and contributes 20% of the overall module mark.

The presentation should provide a clear and concise overview of your project and reflect the structure of your portfolio. The specific content will vary depending on the type of project undertaken. For empirical projects, presentations will typically include the introduction and literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion. For practice-based projects, presentations should include the rationale and literature review, the practical output, critical evaluation, and conclusions.

Your presentation should:

- Introduce the topic and explain the significance of the issue being investigated or addressed.
- Summarise the key literature, theories, policies, and evidence that informed the project.
- Clearly explain the methodology or project development process.
- Present the main findings, outcomes, or outputs of the project.
- Discuss the conclusions, implications, and recommendations arising from the work.
- Reflect on the research or project development process, including key learning experiences, challenges encountered, limitations, and how these were addressed or could be addressed in future work.

Students are expected to prepare an appropriate academic presentation, making effective use of visual aids where relevant. The presentation should communicate the key aspects of the project in a clear, engaging, and professional manner within the allocated 20-minute timeframe.