SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

MA DISSERTATION

Guidance notes

Some of these notes are adapted from a document prepared for the School of Education at the University of Newcastle by Catherine Clark and Patrick Eason. We acknowledge gratefully the permission we have received to use this material.

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C O N T E N T S

1. INTRODUCTION

These notes are intended as support material when you embark on a dissertation within the University of Nottingham School of Education.

The aims are to give you:

- a brief outline of some points to consider when planning, carrying out and submitting your work

- some activities that may help you to decide on an appropriate topic for your dissertation.

The booklet attempts to collect together advice given to individual students over the years and make it available to everyone to use as they wish. Sections 2 and 3 give you an overview and then the rest of the handbook gives you the detail of the process. **It is important that you read this handbook as failure to meet requirements could result in failure of the dissertation.** Clearly, every dissertation will have its own particular challenges and these should be discussed with your supervisor.

The notes do not offer guidance on detailed methodology, or analysis of data. On these matters you need to consult your tutor or attend a research methods course.

Please remember to use information on the Student Intranet to access further important information about the University and the course.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is a 60 credit module for the MA. The formal module descriptor can be found in Appendix 1.

The dissertation module allows you to engage in a substantive piece of independent work which demonstrates scholarship at an appropriate level and in an area relevant to your chosen degree. You will be supported in your work by an academic tutor (the supervisor) and you will continue to have access to your personal tutor on more general matters.

The dissertation should demonstrate the quality of your thinking, your ability to plan and engage in sustained, systematic inquiry, to reflect analytically, to summarise, synthesis and evaluate, and to organise and present your thinking clearly.

You are encouraged to negotiate an area for inquiry with your supervisor which is of relevance and use to your personal and professional development and that of your organisation, where appropriate. As this is an individually determined piece of work, you will need to submit a proposal (see Appendix 2) and devise your own detailed objectives through negotiation with your supervisor. For masters work, it will be 12,000 to 15,000 words long.

Timescales will vary according to the mode of study and to personal circumstances.

Work should therefore be chosen which is feasible in terms of an appropriate timescale and access to the required information.

3. SUMMARY OF THE PROCESS

Preparation Stage (see Section 4 on page 4)

Ensure that you have completed all the prerequisite modules totalling 120 credits for the masters degree.

Think about the topic (including the relevant area of literature). Normally the topic will be something which is of personal interest, of professional relevance and feasible.

Read around the subject.

Planning Stage (see Section 5 on page 6)

Try to focus on a research question. Discuss your idea with your supervisor, a tutor or the Course Leader. Your personal tutor may also be able to offer general advice.

Draft your proposal, obtain the supervisor's signature and send it to your Course Secretary.

Your supervisor will then be confirmed.

Implementation Stage (see Section 6 on page 10)

Carry out the work.

Presentation and Submission (see Section 7 on page 23)

Present the work for assessment, using the appropriate format.

Non submission by the due date will result in 'failure through non-submission'. (Please also see 7.2.3 on page 28 for further information.)

Assessment and Award (see Section 8 on page 29)

Suggested readings can be found in Section 9 on page 30.

4. PREPARATION STAGE

Ideally you should not formally begin the dissertation until you have successfully completed the other course modules. In practice, there may be reasons why you would want to begin to consider the topic earlier than this. Do not be tempted to start early just because you have the opportunity to carry out some empirical work. It is most important that you only do this once you have examined the literature and developed a framework for any empirical work. Students who 'do things the wrong way round' often have a disjointed piece of work in which the literature does not inform the investigation.

DECIDING UPON A TOPIC TO INVESTIGATE

A dissertation is an independent study which will require you to work intensively on one issue. If you are a part-time student, remember that any research enquiry will be added to existing (and probably heavy) professional and personal demands.

Worthwhile dissertations tend to be those that connect with and realistically extend professional work. However, some students also undertake an investigation about a topic which is a contrast to, or different from, their day-to-day experience but which is nevertheless of particular interest to them. It may, for example, arise from an idea in some research discussed in the literature.

Before you settle on an idea or issue, it is wise to keep two or three in mind. Time and effort spent on thinking them over and thinking about the ways in which they are, or might be, expressed in your thinking and practice at the moment will help you to determine which might be the most useful to pursue.

There are a number of ways in which people attempt to judge how worthwhile an idea could be as a basis for a study. The following is a very practical way of making a start. Write down your two or three ideas in the form of statements on identical cards - one statement per card. For example, if you are a teacher they might be:

Card 1 I am interested in the different amounts of time I spend working individually with different pupils in my class and in whether these differences are justifiable or should be changed/improved.

Card 2 I am interested in my use of praise and in particular whether my praise is instructive or not (e.g. "Well done, Derek, your writing is much neater today" vs "Good Derek, well done again") and in whether I could improve it.

Card 3 I am interested in whether in general the boys in my class get more "talking time" in lessons and discussions or whether the girls do, in why that might be and in whether there is any reason for me to try to change/improve this.

Keep the cards handy. At the same time each day (e.g. at the end of the day), take the cards, shuffle them round, and spend three minutes looking back at aspects of your work that day which are relevant to the top card. Think over the relevant episodes in as much detail as possible and try to explain and evaluate each episode. Consider what you might collect as evidence, relevant to each interest.

Spend one minute each on the other two cards. (This method keeps all three issues at work in your mind all day. The point of shuffling the cards is to ensure that the card which comes out on top is random and that you accordingly sustain this intensified 'triple focus' on your work and do not select a single focus prematurely.) At the end of, say, a week, decide which idea seems the most worthwhile one with which you might proceed. Continue to collect notes on that for a bit longer to ensure that the idea seems both important enough professionally and interesting enough personally to be sustained throughout a dissertation.

Activity 1

- carry out the card exercise outlined (ensuring that it relates practically to your own professional environment) or undertake some other activity (e.g. reading of what others have found or tried in similar situations) which will help you decide upon the issue to be investigated for your dissertation; then

- decide on the topic you are going to investigate; and

- sharpen the focus of your dissertation so that it is manageable and realistic in the time available. Many people underestimate the time it takes both to define an enquiry and to write it up in a coherent manner. Furthermore analysis of your data will probably take much longer than collecting it. If you have allowed yourself six months for 'doing' your dissertation this may seem plenty of time but, in practice, it is a very tight schedule for writing a thoughtful, well organised and professionally presented study.

Now read around the topic in order to ensure that you understand the main features. This will be time well spent as much of what you read will be used in the dissertation. However, an important benefit of this 'pre-reading' is that it enables you to realise how wide the topic is and the volume of literature which is available. This will allow you to work out a clearer focus for your work and save you covering too much ground and then having to 'cut down' your dissertation later on.

5. PLANNING STAGE

5.1 FORMULATING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As a Head of Year responsible for Year Seven, I am becoming increasingly concerned about an apparent decline in standards in the last two years' entries.

Finding an issue of interest and concern is important, but it needs to be 'sharpened up' before you can get going on the study. This 'sharpening up' process is usually called formulating research questions. Research questions help you by making explicit the precise area of investigation. In doing so, they

- indicate precisely which aspects of a general area of interest should be examined
- guide you towards possible sources of information
- suggest appropriate ways of collecting information
- direct attention to the kinds of information which are accessible to you in your context eg while working as a full-time teacher (for example, classroom observation in other schools may be unrealistic).

Of course, you may decide to modify or change your research questions as the research develops. That is not unusual, but such matters should be discussed in the methodology section of your dissertation. The process of formulating questions could take the following form:

consider modifying factors

'These comments about standards are coming through staff meetings and head of department meetings. Perhaps I should see if there is any substance here.'

Typical factors that shape an investigation are:-

1. your professional circumstances, which may determine what aspects of the area of concern might be most fruitful to study, e.g. what in particular impacts upon your own professional activities?

   'I am responsible for liaison with feeder primary schools, so I can chat informally with their staff (and, perhaps, interview some of them) to see whether there is confirmation from their side of things.'

2. Colleagues may be more interested in some aspects of the area than others. If your study might demand time or support from them then it helps if it links to expressions of interest.

   'Informal chats with Year Seven teachers and heads of departments give some information suggesting that these views seem to be more common with Science than in other subjects.'

3. Published material, whether in official reports, journals or the press, may suggest ways in which the issue might be tackled.

   'A number of articles in recent issues of the TES suggest that primary and secondary teachers do not have enough time to connect with each other.'

identify the location of your research	This may be either: 1. your own work environment or 2. others' work environments.

Such a decision may well be determined by the practical concern of access.

'Putting these thoughts together it seems as if I will need to look for information within my own school and also in our feeder primaries. I may need to examine school records to monitor performance in Science by feeder schools. I may also have to get information about expectations in Science from the feeder schools.'

Refine the purpose of your research	Amongst other things, this is usually to: 1. explore or investigate phenomena in an attempt to identify important patterns and themes; or 2. describe and explain a particular phenomenon; or 3. investigate the outcome of a particular prediction (or hypothesis).

Thus researching existing practice or implementing and monitoring new practice are both common and valid themes for dissertations.

'If I can produce the factual data on performance in relation to feeder schools and their Maths. schemes, this should provide colleagues with reliable information to set against their own views. If there are 'real' issues we will have to decide on appropriate courses of action. I think, therefore, that I ought to:

- *establish valid data on pupils' attainment in maths in their first year of the secondary school; and*
- *establish valid data on pupils' attainment in maths in the last year of primary school.*

produce specific research questions	Specific research questions relate to the purpose of your study and the type of information that interests you. Sometimes you can identify very precise questions at an early stage, often you have to start with more open questions and refine your questions as the work develops.

Here are some specific research questions related to the example described in this section.

1. *How are the Year Seven secondary pupils' attainments in science measured?*
2. *Are the attainments measured in the same way from year to year?*
3. *How are primary pupils' attainments in science measured at various stages in each of the feeder primaries?*
4. *Are these attainments measured in the same way from year to year?*
5. *Is there a pattern linking pupils from particular primaries to high and low Year Seven science attainments?*

consider ethical implications	You need to consider your ethical responsibilities to: 1. the research profession 2. the participants in your research i. the general public ii. funding agencies, authorship rights in publication 3. your host institution. Further advice on research ethics can be found in Revised *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2004 and in the web-based handbook under Research Ethics (and see Appendix 3).

Activity 2

Work through the procedure above and keep a note of your thinking at each stage, viz:

1. factors influencing the chosen issue
2. proposed location of research
3. intended purpose of research
4. specific research questions. You may wish to identify a key question and a set of sub questions. You may find that you need to identify two or three questions in order to get started on the research but be prepared to go back and refine them as work progresses.

5.2 PROPOSAL FOR YOUR DISSERTATION

At the end of the taught element of your programme you will need to complete and return a 'dissertation proposal form' (see Appendix 2). When you reach this stage please consult the appropriate tutor. You will then need to discuss the agreed topic area.

The form contains guidance about the type of information to put in each section. It asks for a proposed title, a structure and, if it research based, some possible research questions and some ideas about how you might collect data.

In the box below is an example of the way in which work based upon empirical data may be structured. Depending upon the nature of the subject, the dissertation should be divided into chapters and sections, each with appropriate titles or headings. It is important to emphasise, however, that the organisation of the dissertation should be appropriate to the kind of study undertaken. You should discuss this with your supervisor.

1. Outline of the inquiry and statement of problem (i.e. context and purposes)
2. Critical analysis of pertinent literature
3. Discussion of methods of data collection and issues around them
4. Presentation of data
5. Interpretation and discussion of results
6. Discussion of issues and conclusions reached
7. References
8. Appendices

When you have completed the proposal form, you and the tutor will need to sign it. It should then be returned to the Postgraduate Office (or School Office at UNMC).

6. IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 THE ROLE OF TUTORS

6.1.1 THE SUPERVISOR

Each MA programme team will offer a variety of ways in which students are prepared for the dissertation stage. Although individual students are normally entitled to three hours of face-to-face supervision, or the equivalent via email or Skype, this may be reduced if group preparation is the preferred approach of the course team.

All students will be assigned an individual supervisor who has expertise in the topic area of choice and who will offer detailed feedback on an early draft of at least one chapter. The main job of the supervisor is to advise you and answer any questions you may have about your research and the writing of your dissertation.

To make best use of your supervisor, talk to or write to/email her/him about your ideas for research; remember it is important to follow your own personal and professional interests. The proposal must be approved by your supervisor.

Although your supervisor will provide appropriate support and guidance on request in the preparation, process, and writing-up stages of your work, s/he will not expect to be asked to approve full drafts.

6.1.2 THE PERSONAL TUTOR

You will still have access to your personal tutor for general support.

6.2 THE OUTLINE OF THE ENQUIRY

In the first section of your dissertation, you would outline the area which you are investigating, the research question, your own reasons for being interested in the topic and the current situation in the area. This may involve a discussion of current and proposed policy or practice, difficulties/challenges in the area under investigation etc. The section would probably end by outlining the structure of your dissertation so that the reader knows what to expect. You will probably have to reconsider this section when the study is complete so that it ties up with what you have actually done! If you have difficulty writing this chapter, it would suggest that you are not sufficiently clear about the research question or you do not have a good enough grasp of the relevant literature. Do not be dismayed. Go back and refine your question and do some more reading around the area and then you should find it easier to write this chapter.

Appendices 4 (Types of Research) and 5 (Glossary of Terms) may help you as you get started.

6.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE

Having worked out the nature of focus of your study, you will then review the existing work in the area or in related areas. The purpose of a literature review is to set your own work into a wider context of what others have done and/or written in relation to your topic. The relevant research literature can give you ideas in relation to either the content of your research or the methodology through which you might further your own investigations (or, indeed, both). It also focuses your mind and prevents you from making naive mistakes.

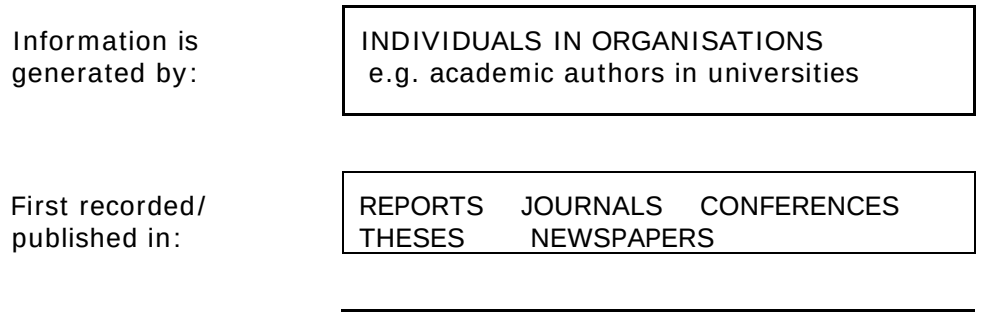
To achieve success, it is important to consider the assessment criteria by which your work will be assessed. You are expected to analyse, synthesise, compare and contrast the work of different authors/researchers etc. (see assessment handbook). Do not allow your literature chapter(s) to be a 'cut and paste' of the work of different authors. When selecting quotes, use those which are pertinent (and not too long) and ensure that you link the quotes into your discussion, rather than just inserting them. Take especial care to do this when several quotes are used in quick succession.

The chapter will usually end with some form of summary/construction of a model/checklist etc. which you can use as a framework as your work progresses.

You may feel that no one has written about your area before. If it is a topic that has arisen recently, there may be work in journals or conference proceedings but not yet in books. You should also look more creatively e.g. if your study relates to performance-related pay for teachers in England, you could look at systems in America or you could look at the business literature or at literature on motivation and so on.

6.3.1 Searching for Information

The diagram below gives an indication of the main information sources available to you and roughly how they relate to each other. In general, approaching sources at the top of the table can prove difficult in terms of accessibility but usually results in up to date information in detailed form. However, you do have access to many books, journals and other materials – in both print and electronic form. Progressing down the table the information becomes more conveniently organised in wide subject areas, but more out of date. The usual place to start is with the reference materials shown in the middle of the table and found in libraries.



Digested/summarised/ brought together in:	BOOKS ENCYCLOPAEDIAS HANDBOOKS DICTIONARIES
Referenced in:	ABSTRACT/INDEXES BIBLIOGRAPHIES ELECTRONIC DATABASES
Sorted out/signposted in:	LIBRARY CATALOGUES SUBJECT GUIDES
Stored in:	LIBRARIES ELECTRONIC REFERENCE SYSTEMS

Information about information sources can be found in **Indexes** such as:

1. *British Education Index* which indexes about 120 British Journals
2. *British Humanities Index* which indexes about 350 British Journals
3. *British Education Thesis Index*, 1950-1983 LISE (microfiche)
4. *ASLIB: Index to Theses*, 1950 onwards

and in **Bibliographies**. These are useful if you want an idea of the books available on a given subject or wish to trace full details of half remembered books.

But there are also very good online sources for checking such details. The most widely available online sources to check details are:

a. COPAC: http://copac.ac.uk/
   Copac is a freely available library catalogue, giving access to the merged online catalogues of many major UK and Irish academic and National libraries, as well as increasing numbers of specialist libraries. Copac has c.32 million records, representing the merged holdings

b. WORLDCAT: http://www.oclc.org/uk/en/global/default.htm
   OCLC WorldCat database is the OCLC online catalog. It contains over 61 million records describing library holdings, including books, maps, audio-visual material, musical scores and Internet resources

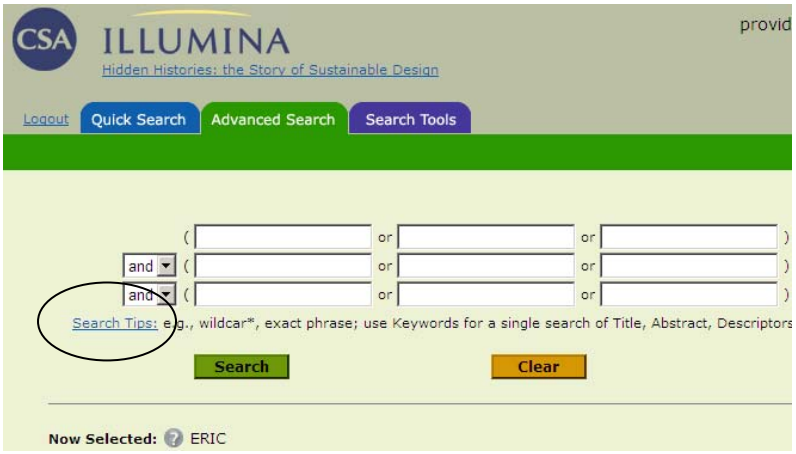
c. LIBWEB: http://lists.webjunction.org/libweb/
   This service allows you to connect to thousands of library catalogues all over the world.

6.3.2 Using Sources: Printed Sources

In general, work backwards from most recent issues to older issues. Look for annual and other cumulative indexes when consulting periodicals or abstracting and indexing services.

a. Layout: both print and electronic sources are quite difficult to arrange for the convenience of every user. If using printed resources look at the contents table, indexes and any instructions for use. Ask a librarian's advice if necessary. Allow for variations in alphabetical order depending on the effect of word breaks and words such as 'of', 'the', etc.

If using electronic sources always look at links that will tell you something about the coverage of a database (e.g. to see what journals it might index or abstract; or how far back it goes), and look at **Help** screens since these will give you important information on how best to search the database. The screen shot below is taken from **ERIC** – clicking on **Search Tips** would give you guidance on how to search the database effectively.



b. Subject headings: in using printed indexes and abstracts select subject headings under which different aspects of your study might be found, and the more detailed key words for which you might search. Allow for synonyms and near equivalents which may appear as alternatives. Look for broader and narrower terms.

More often you will use electronic resources to find information. In using these select precise keywords or phrases that represent the subject that you are researching. There is more guidance on this later.

c. Recording the Results of A Search
If using printed resources you must note where you have looked and where you found useful material.

- **Recording references**: record all likely references fully and clearly. The information is needed for your own reporting purposes and also for obtaining loans if necessary. Make a brief note of the references they contain or use Endnote (or the WORD facility on Office 2007).

- **Books record**: author, title, edition (if mentioned), place of publication, publisher, date (on reverse of the title page) and inclusive page numbers for a paper in a collection.

- **Articles record**: author and title of article, title, volume and issue number of journal, and page numbers.

- **Reports record**: author, title, issuing organisation, date, report number (most useful).

- **Web references**: you will need the URL of the site and date accessed as well as actual details of the title etc.

6.3.3 Using Sources: Electronic Resources

More often than not when you are looking for information for assignments you will use electronic databases – some of the sources, for example, listed under the Education section in the eLibrary Gateway.

When looking for information, approach it in a systematic and methodical way. This is important irrespective of whether or not you are looking for information in printed or electronic resources. Systematic searching for information on a research topic is often referred to as *literature searching*.

A typical sequence of steps in doing a good literature search is depicted in the Fig. Systematic Approach to Literature Searching.

If you approach a subject systematically then you may find the following may benefits for your work:

- you will acquire a greater understanding of the literature of the subject and this will enhance the quality of your own thoughts and views on the subject

- systematically looking at the subject may throw up thoughts, ideas, arguments etc that had never occurred to you. These may lead you to redefine/review your approaches to the subject
- planning your research strategy means you will be more efficient and effective – being organised, thinking of ways to represent the subject in keywords and phrases for searching, constantly reviewing your results means you will waste less time and will retrieve more relevant sources.

Although you will probably concentrate on the electronic resources under the Education heading in the eLibrary Gateway remember that there are many resources under the other subject categories which might have relevant materials. Also do not forget that you can use many broader categories, so for example:

- **Statistics**: statistical sources might provide useful statistical background for any topic you are researching

- **Official Publications**: UK Government publications might be very important to your subject so consider looking at the electronic resources available to find such materials

- **Newspapers**: newspaper articles can be useful sources of information. The Newspapers category on the eLibrary Gateway provides access to current and historical UK and overseas newspapers.

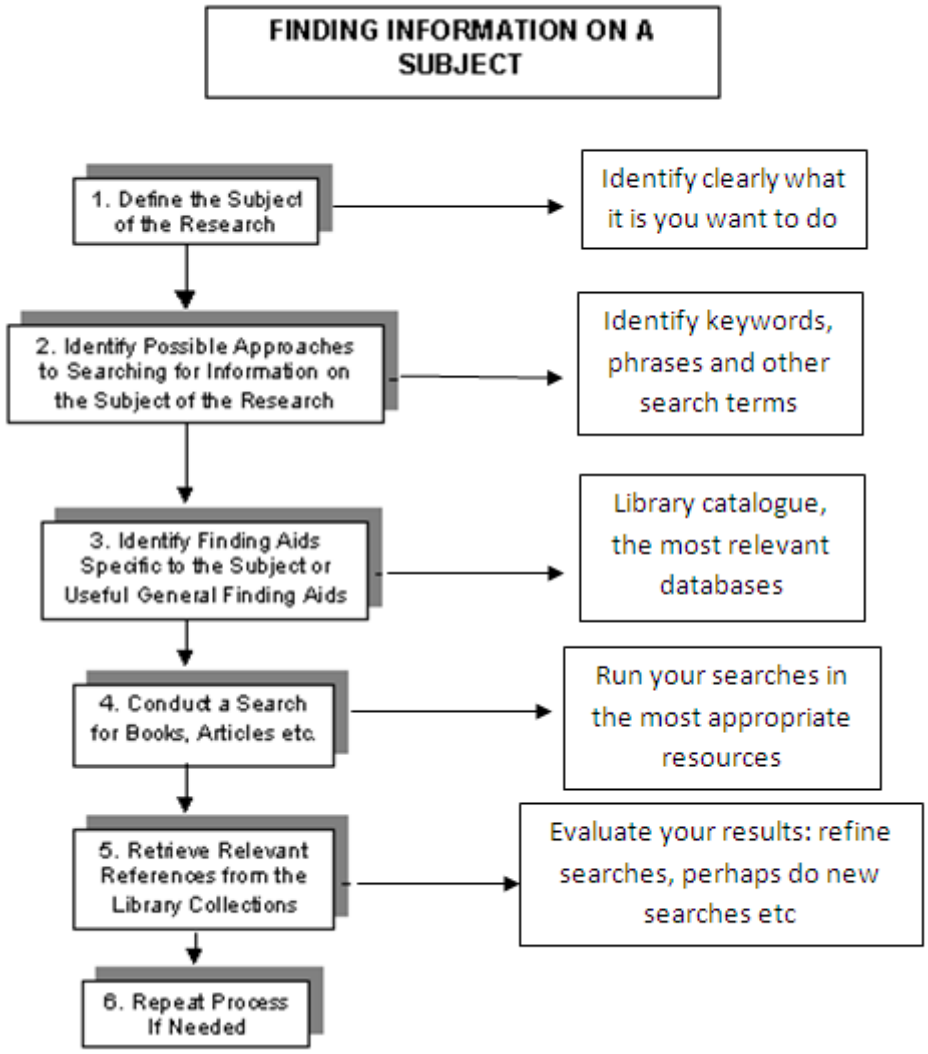


Figure: Systematic Approach to Literature Searching

Some Tips on Using Electronic Resources
The following are some tips which might help you in using electronic resources:

a. **Keywords / Phrases**: Keywords are *significant* words or phrases which can be used as search terms to retrieve records relevant to your topic. Keywords can be found in the title, subject headings, contents notes, abstract or full text of a record in an online catalogue or database.

   Keywords are useful when searching for general information about a topic or subject as they allow a broad range of information to be retrieved. Think about your assignment topic, and break it down into its key components.

Think about the different **concepts** involved, then spend some time thinking of key ways of expressing these concepts. Consider alternative terms, synonyms, broader and narrower terms, common and technical terms and potential spelling variations. Examples of keywords could be:

- education
- teachers
- disability
- higher education
- special needs

b. **Fields**: On electronic databases a field search is a search that looks for the occurrence of a term or terms in a specific category of data, or field. Common field searches include:

- Author
- Title
- Abstract
- Journal title

c. **Combining keywords/Phrases**: Boolean operators are used to broaden or narrow the results of a search. The most common Boolean operators are:

- **AND** – refines a search. Searching for **graduate AND careers** will find records containing both of these terms. It is essential for combining different concepts.

- **OR** – broadens a search. Searching for **teachers OR instructors or lecturers** will find any records containing any of those three terms. **OR** is useful for searching for alternative ways of representing a concept or subject that interests you

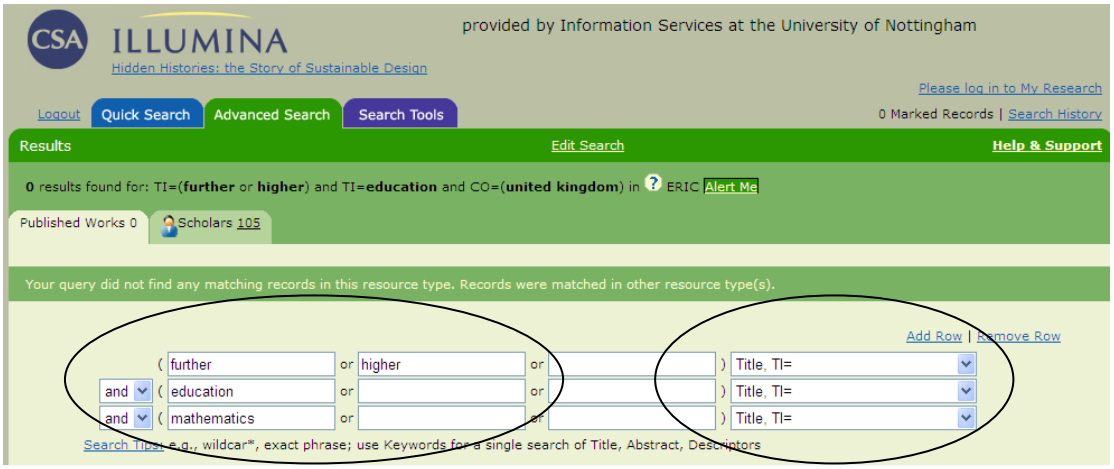
- **NOT** – narrows a search. Searching for **autism NOT asperger** will find records about **autism** but not if they contain any reference to the word **asperger**. **NOT** can be used – but cautiously – to weed out aspects which are not relevant to your subject of research

d. **Truncation**: If you are searching using keywords, you may find that you need to search for more than one version of the same word. For example, if you need information on the **environment**, it might also be helpful to search for **environmental**, **environmentalist** and **environmentalism.** Free-text searching only looks for exactly what you put into the search box so in this case you would have to do four different searches to look for all four words. Truncation allows you to search for them all at the same time. It is a way of finding words that share a stem but have different endings. The symbol most commonly used for truncation is *. So instead of searching for **environment**, **environmental**, **environmentalist** and **environmentalism** you can use **environment*** and the database will search for all of these words.

e. **Wildcard**: This replaces a letter within a word. For example, **wom?n** would pick up **woman** and **women**. The symbol used for wildcards varies between different databases: some may use * while others use ?. Check the **Help** pages of the database you are using before you begin.

f. **Proximity Searching**: Proximity searching allows you to search for words that are near to each other. This is particularly useful when searching full-text databases or documents. There are different ways of representing proximity in databases – again check the **Help** screens for any database you are using. **W / n** (where **w** stands for **within** and **n** stands for a number that you specify) is one way.

You can use **w / n** to find words that are close to each other. If you search, for example, for **universities and reform** in a full-text document, you will get instances of both words but not necessarily together. However **universities w / 3 reform** will search for information about **university reform** or **reform of universities**. The words can occur in either order but always must be within 3 words of each other. By tying key concepts together you are more likely to find relevant sources.



In the example above you can see how you would use **keywords**, **fields** and **Boolean operators** in the **ERIC** database. The search form helps you to think of how to construct your searches. The keywords are:

- **further**, **higher**, **education**, **mathematics**
- the search is being conducted on the **Title** field (the title of articles)
- the **OR** operator is being used to find articles relating to **further OR higher [education]**
- the **AND** operator on the left hand side is combining the concepts so that the search will find anything to do with mathematics in further or higher education. Further keywords could be added to narrow the search – for example, adding a row and putting teaching in the title field would find only articles that are likely to be about the teaching of mathematics in further or higher education.

Electronic databases have many useful search features – refer to the **Help** screens, tutorials and other guides that come with them and these will increase your information research seeking skill

6.3.4 PREPARING CRITIQUES OF OTHER PEOPLE'S RESEARCH

Your literature search will involve you in relating your own work to other research in the area. The claims made by researchers must not be taken at face value, but subjected to careful scrutiny. Consequently when you read reports of research, think carefully about what the researchers are claiming to have found, how well their evidence supports their claims, what other evidence might be necessary and what other interpretations of the evidence are possible. This is not easy to do well. Most of us have to read the same article or section of a book two or three times before we have fully grasped an argument and assessed the strength of it.

The concepts with which you need to work when considering a piece of research are 'descriptive validity' and 'explanatory validity'. The following notes provide a brief reminder of these ideas.

Descriptive validity

Essentially this is about whether what the researcher has used as evidence really describes what (s)he intended to describe. Is it, for example, appropriate to describe a pupil's reading by the number of words recognised? Or might 'reading' be described in ways that demand different and perhaps more appropriate evidence? Such issues become particularly important when evaluative or prescriptive claims about teaching and learning are based on research findings.

Achieving accurate descriptions in research is, anyway problematic. Even at the simplest level of observation inference is involved; the more complex the phenomena a researcher seeks to describe, the more difficult it becomes to describe it accurately. Some kinds of events might be identified with little chance of error (e.g. the number of sums tackled by a pupil). There are, then, a number of aspects of educational life of interest to researchers that are difficult to identify accurately - 'learning', 'teaching style' and 'classroom ethos' being some of the more obvious ones - and 'descriptive validity' is concerned with assessing the extent to which the researcher has identified, studied and accurately described whatever (s)he has chosen to focus upon.

Explanatory validity

Essentially this is about whether the explanation offered by a researcher (for particular actions, events and so on) is most plausible. As explanations always involve descriptions then clearly descriptive validity is an important part of this. In addition you need to consider whether the explanation is internally consistent and matches the evidence provided. Ideally you would want to consider whether there were alternative, more plausible interpretations of the evidence although often there is insufficient information to do this.

Seeking 'validity' in unpromising circumstances

Perhaps it is worth noting that educational literature contains much that attempts to synthesise and interpret the research of others. Often such works provide little information about how the original research was done and the kinds of evidence that were used. Clearly this type of literature is limited by both the quality of the original research and the way in which it is used. There is also some educational literature that consists of no more than unsupported assertions. Try to ensure that your own work cannot be criticised on these grounds.

6.4 ISSUES TO BEAR IN MIND WHILE WORKING ON THE DISSERTATION

6.4.1 WRITING UP YOUR WORK

Writing up your research can take longer than you anticipate. To get to grips with it, try making mind maps or 'tree diagrams' to get an overview of the study itself and of each chapter before you start writing.

If the study is going to be coherent, it is likely that you will go a long way towards completing one chapter before moving on to the next. For each chapter, you may need to do two or three drafts of your material:

- the first should be concerned with getting your thoughts onto paper. Don't worry about style. All you are interested in is the sense (or otherwise) that you have made of the investigation;
- the second draft should be concerned with intellectual coherence. The sequencing and interrelating of ideas, evidence and literature become the prime objective;
- the third draft should be concerned with style, convention and so on. It should turn interesting material into readable material.

The introductory chapter will need to be checked and amended at the end.

Two tips for word processing:

1. If you aren't an expert on sections and numbering, you might want to keep your pre-pages in a separate file from the main work.
2. There are various functions in Word for referencing, templates for layout etc but, if you plan to use them, find out about them from the start. They can save time at the end.

6.4.2 ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE ON A COHERENT STRUCTURE

The work should be preceded by an **abstract** of not more than 200 words. This will explain the area of study, the work which you have carried out and your conclusions/recommendations.

Breaking up a text into headed **sections** not only makes it easier for the reader to see the development of ideas, it also makes it easier for you to check that each section contains material that is relevant and that sections follow each other logically. Many writers of academic texts break down larger sections - of, say, three pages or more - into smaller sections in order to make the movement from one topic to another even more transparent. How far you go in this direction is a matter of judgement: if there are too few subsections the argument can be difficult to follow; if there are too many (or if they are very short) they can make the text seem fragmented. It is acceptable to number headings and sub-headings. Arabic numbers and decimal points (2.1 and 2.1.1) are most convenient for this purpose. Do not overdo the numbering (as in report style).

It is worth paying particular attention to two aspects of work commented on by our external examiners:

(i) Every research-based dissertation should include, as standard, a **methods section** on the 'how' and 'why' of the research as well as a short autobiographical piece on the 'who', so that the status of the evidence presented may by assessed in these contexts.

(ii) Additionally, the **final chapter** should be more personally and professionally assertive. A 'learning' summary should be included which includes reflective sections which consider such questions as, 'What have I gained?', 'Do I still have doubts or qualifications concerning the work?' and, 'How might I have done it differently?' You may also suggest areas of work for those researchers who follow you by working in the same area or areas in which you would like to continue to research yourself.

6.4.3 EVALUATING YOUR WORK

Criteria for assessing dissertations are shown in your assessment handbook and you may wish to discuss these with your supervisor. It is worth trying to evaluate and improve your work before it is assessed. In general terms, examiners are particularly concerned with:

(i) Intellectual clarity

In other words, being "on top of" your subject. However, whilst good ideas and good understanding are a necessary condition of a good dissertation, they are not sufficient. If the structure of the writing is so complex that those ideas and understanding cannot be recognised, then you will not get credit for them. The study should convey precisely what the research was about. Stream of consciousness writing might be therapeutic for you but it may not be so for the examiner. If your writing seems to stray from your topic then ask yourself whether it should stay in the text.

As your dissertation nears presentation, it is helpful to look through the work in draft form and try to put yourself in the position of an examiner. You might like to ask yourself questions such as:

- does it make a good 'read'? If not why . . . and can I remedy it?
- at each stage, is the place of that part of the reporting/discussion in the overall structure clear?
- have I stated clearly my intention for the research?
- have I explained clearly why I believe the chosen research method to be appropriate?
- are statements and arguments linked clearly to evidence?
- has the problem of 'validation' been explicitly addressed?
- is reference made to other studies in reporting my own findings?

(ii) Validation

In other words, the extent to which we can rely upon and trust the findings of the research. Thus, the writer ought to have considered and attempted to deal with possible methodological objections to the work. For example:

- might the research procedures distort the situation being researched?

- does a test, questionnaire or other research instrument really measure what was intended? In other words, how reliable is it as a measure?

- have cross-checks been made by using more than one source of data ('data triangulation') or research method ('method triangulation') or researcher ('researcher triangulation')?

- has the possibility of bias on the part of the researcher been discussed?

(iii) Presentation

It should be presented correctly (see Section 7). It is very distracting for an examiner to note typing errors, incorrectly referenced quotations, unnumbered pages and so on. If you wish to create a favourable impression with those who mark the dissertation then at least eradicate all the unnecessary 'failings' of the study.

Word processing has brought many advantages but it is still important to proof read the final version carefully. The spell check will not pick up such slips as 'there' for 'their', 'it's' for 'its' or 'practise' (verb) for 'practice' (noun) and spell checks don't know how to spell people's names. It is also surprising how many mistakes you don't see on the screen, so it is important to print out a draft version and proof-read that.

(iv) Length

It should keep to length. It is easier to ramble on way over length than it is to express ideas concisely. The latter takes discipline and skill. It also appeals to examiners.

The limits are set for specific reasons: at the upper end they are intended to ensure that there is comparability of workload to gain credit points and at the lower end that the work is of sufficient depth. (We recognise, of course, that there is not necessarily a relationship between length and time spent, nor for that matter between length and depth.) Setting limits, however, also ensures that no student gains an advantage by writing considerably more than another. Before submitting your work you must check that it falls within the limits specified and write the number of words on the dissertation cover sheet.

It is much easier to work to a plan indicating the number of words per chapter than to cut work later. Editing may be hard to do but, if your writing demands it, then attack it with the editing knife. Get rid of the padding that crept in when you were thinking about what on earth to write next. Reduce it down from the complete life and times of yourself and cut out gratuitous opinion that bears no relationship to the research.

7. PRESENTATION AND SUBMISSION OF THE WORK

7.1 PRESENTING THE DISSERTATION

It is expected that the presentation of all assessed work shall be of a high standard. Work should be typed or word-processed using a good quality printer. Care has to be taken to ensure that typing errors and mis-spellings are corrected during proof reading, and that quotations and references are correctly presented in accordance with accepted conventions. Work can be failed if the standard of presentation falls below that which is expected.

This section explains the format to be used when the work is submitted. **If you are not typing the work yourself, do ensure that your typist is fully conversant with these requirements.**

Word length	12,000-15,000 words You are reminded that exceeding the guidelines on word-length by an excessive amount may incur a penalty in its assessment.
Anonymity	It is unusual to use real names. In general, take every precaution to ensure anonymity of pupils, schools, teachers, etc. This is, of course, essential if you have promised anonymity.
Paper size	A4
Margins	Left hand margin of one and a half inches (3.8 centimetres) Right hand margin of one inch (2.5 centimetres) Top and bottom margins of one inch at least (2.5 centimetres) (both for typescript and figures)
Typing	One side of page only, double spaced for main text, single spaced for indented quotations (indented from both sides) Line between blocked paragraphs
Page numbering	Be consistent about position. Use i, ii etc for prepages.
Title page	Include full title, as well as qualification for which work is submitted, and the candidate's name.
Organisation	Title page (see p. 23) Acknowledgements Abstract/synopsis Table of contents, showing the first page of each chapter and section List of tables and figures (if appropriate) Main text, consisting of headed CHAPTERS, and formally divided into headed and numbered SECTIONS References Appendices (if necessary) If enclosures or appendices which cannot be bound in the main body of the work are included, these should be placed in a special pocket.

Tables and figures	Each table of figure should be placed immediately after the paragraph in which it is mentioned. If it has a separate page, this page should be the one following the page on which the table/figure was first mentioned.
Abbreviations	A number of abbreviations are commonly used in academic writing. *et al* (and others): used to avoid unnecessary repetition when there are three or more authors or editors. This abbreviation should not be used for works by only two authors. All authors/editors should be included when the work is first mentioned and in the list of references. *op.cit.* (work mentioned): avoids repetition of the date of a work previously mentioned. This abbreviation should not be used if more than one work by the same author is included in the list of references. *ibid* (the same): indicates that a quotation is taken from the same page of a work just mentioned. This abbreviation should not be used if another work has been referred to since the previous quotation.
References	In the text, give the surname and date in parentheses, e.g. (Edwards, 2010). At the end of the study, provide a section headed 'References' in which the references are listed alphabetically by family name. Include references for electronic sources of information e.g. web pages. For further detail, see Appendix 6. The following examples show the most common citations (a book, a journal article and a chapter in an edited book). These follow the Harvard system. Note the punctuation and the type of information provided. You can choose whether to <u>underline</u> or *italicise* titles of books and names of journals. Munn, P. and Drever, E. (1990). *Using Questionnaires in Small-Scale Research. A Teachers' Guide*. Edinburgh: Scottish Council for Research in Education. Gilroy, D. and Day, C. (1993). The erosion of INSET in England and Wales: analysis and proposals for a redefinition. *Journal of Education for Teaching* 19:2: 141-157. Maingay, P. (1988). Observation for training, development or assessment. In Duff, T. (ed.) 1988. *Explorations in Teacher Training: Problems and Issues*. London: Longman. 118-131.
Secondary Sources	If you have not yourself read the work you are referring to (the primary source) and are therefore referring to a secondary source, both sources should be referred to in brackets e.g. (Williams 2008, p. 173, cited in Rost 2010, p. 110). Since you have not consulted the primary source (Williams), only the secondary source (Rost)

	should be included in your list of references. Do not include too many secondary sources. If the primary source is an important work and easily available, it is expected that you will have read it. You could be misled if a secondary source has made selective use of the primary source!
Quotations	Short quotations (a line or two) should be enclosed by quotation marks and included in the main text. They should normally be followed by author, date and page number, all in parentheses (e.g. Edwards, 2010, p. 23). Longer quotations should form indented paragraphs, in which case, quotation marks are not needed.
Appendices	Appendices should be lettered in the order in which they are referred to in the text. Place copies of unpublished research instruments in appendices. (If you wish to include non-text materials, e.g. CDs or DVDs, discuss this with your supervisor.)
Proof reading	This means comparing the final copy with the original draft, not merely re-reading the final typescript. It is very important that errors are detected and corrected. External examiners frequently comment either adversely or favourably on this point. Poor proof reading can detract from the impact of your work and may even cause it to fail.
Presenting	Instructions about the manner of presenting are as follows: (i) Dissertations should contain a Title page giving details as follows: Mentoring in the Secondary School by John Robinson, B.A. Dissertation submitted to the University of Nottingham in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the (give title of award, i.e. Degree of Master of ****, (month) (year).
Number of copies	You should submit your dissertation via WebCT in the same way as you have submitted your assignments. Two hard copies should also be submitted via the Reception at the School of Education. These may be brought in or posted in. Hard copies should be firmly held together eg thermal or comb bound. You may decide to have additional copies, bound or unbound, for personal use. At the Malaysia Campus you are required to submit a soft copy (preferably pdf) to the library once you have passed at the Examination Board. You are advised to keep your electronic files safe so that if the Examinations Board should recommend alterations to the submitted text followed by re-submission, you can make the recommended alterations.

Binding	We no longer require a black hard cover copy but you may want to use the following if you require such copies for personal use. (i) The sheets would be whip-stitched and bound with white end-papers and linen joints into a full cloth or buckram cover. (ii) The spine would be lettered in gold in such a way as to be readable when the volume is lying flat with the front cover uppermost. It would show the award for which the dissertation is produced, the year and the name of the candidate, as follows: M.A. 2010 J Robinson (iii) The title of the dissertation should be lettered in gold on the front cover in a position above the centre as follows: Mentoring in the Secondary School We recommend two bookbinders but if you are not in the UK, look for reputable companies who know how to bind university dissertations. Libris Book Binders, 173 Stanley Road, Forest Fields, Nottingham Telephone. 0115 978 2863 The Print Quarter, 251 Exchange Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham Telephone. 0115 945 2070

7.2 SUBMISSION OF THE DISSERTATION

7.2.1 SUBMISSION FOR ASSESSMENT

You are required by the Regulations to submit a dissertation in accordance with the information on assessment provided earlier in this booklet and any other regulations from the Course Handbook which are applicable. You are advised to check the regulations on plagiarism (including self-plagiarism i.e. submitting, as opposed to following up, work which has previously been assessed). Submission dates for Examination Boards are:

For full-time students who commenced their studies in September:

- **1st September *(***

following the completion of the taught element of the programme.

For part-time students who commenced their studies from September 2010 onwards:

Either 1st September following completion of the taught element of the programme **or** the following 31 January.

Part-time students who commenced their studies before September 2010 should check with the Postgraduate Administrator to clarify their submission date.

Students who fail to submit the dissertation by the required date without good reasons, or **in an inappropriate format**, will be deemed to have failed.

You should submit your dissertation by the due date via WebCT and at the same time submit TWO hard copies to Reception or posted to the ***School of Education***. On receipt you will receive an acknowledgement. When submitting the work you will need to complete a '**cover sheet'**. **A** c**opy of this form can be found in Appendix 7**. The purpose of this cover sheet is to ensure that certain technical requirements have been met.

7.2.2 LENGTH OF PERIOD OF STUDY

Please consult the Course Regulations and the administrative staff for clarification.

7.2.3 DEFERRED ASSESSMENT

You will be expected to submit your dissertation by the dates set out. **Only in exceptional circumstances (e.g. medical reasons) may an extension may be requested in writing using the appropriate form, giving full details of the reason for the request**. This then needs to be formally approved by your supervisor and the Administrator for your course (or Director of Studies at UNMC).

Failure to submit work by the due date **without sufficient cause will result in a fail grade (known as 'Failure through Non- Submission') being recorded. You will then have only one more submission opportunity.** Permission to submit work after the dates set out in this booklet **will not be given without**

prior negotiation and indication of late submission.

If you find that it will not be possible to submit the **dissertation** by the due date, you should complete an Extension Request Form, which is available from the School Intranet.

8. ASSESSMENT AND AWARD

8.1 MARKING CRITERIA

The criteria against which your work will be assessed are shown in the assessment handbook supplied earlier.

8.2 ORAL EXAMINATIONS

Students may be required to have an oral examination at the discretion of the internal or external examiners.

8.3 FEEDBACK

When the work is marked, the feedback sheet will be returned to you. The written comments will include the unmoderated grade (i.e. subject to confirmation by the Examinations Board). You may wish to contact a marker to obtain fuller feedback on the work but it is advisable to wait until after the Board when final decisions have been made.

8.4 AWARD OF THE DEGREE

The degree is awarded on the recommendation of the Board of Examiners which looks at the total profile of assessed work and makes a judgement as to whether the standard is commensurate with that deemed appropriate at the level for which the student is registered. Graduation ceremonies take place in Nottingham in December and July of each year and in Malaysia in January/February and July.

9. SOME SUGGESTED READING

Bell, J. (2005) *Doing your Research Project. A Guide for First time Researchers in Education, Health and Social Science*, *(4th edition).* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Bell, J. and Opie, C. (2002) *Learning from Research. Getting More from your Data*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2004) *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*
http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/ETHICA1.PDF

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. and Tight, M. (2001) *How to Research, (2nd edition*). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bloor, M. and Wood, F. (2006) *Keywords in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Brett-Davies, M. (2007) *Doing a Successful Research Project: using qualitative or quantitative methods.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Bryman, A. (2008) *Social Research Methods, (3rd edition).* London: Sage.

Christensen, P. and James, A. (2008) (eds.) *Research with Children: perspectives and practices (2nd Edition).* London: Routledge.

Clough, P. (2002) *Narratives and Fictions in Educational Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press

Clough, P. and Nutbrown, C. (2002) *A Student's Guide to Methodology: Justifying Enquiry.* London: Sage.

Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (1994) *Research Methods in Education (4th Edition).* London: Routledge.

Connolly, P. (2007) *Quantitative Data Analysis in Education*. London: Routledge.

Cryer, P. (2000) *The Research Student's Guide to Success (2nd edition)*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Darlington, Y. and Scott, D. (2002) *Qualitative Research in Practice: stories from the field*. Maidenhead: Open University Press

Denscombe M. (1998) *The Good Research Guide*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Field, A. (2005) *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS (2nd edition)*. London: Sage.

Fielding, J. and Gilbert, N. (2006) *Understanding Social Statistics*. London: Sage.

Gibbs, G.R. (2007) *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Sage .

Gilbert. N. (2001) (ed.) *Researching Social Life (2nd Edition)*. London: Sage.

Gorard, S. (2006) *Using everyday numbers effectively in research*. London: Sage.

Gorard, S. and Taylor, C. (2004) *Combining Methods in Educational and Social Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press

Hart, C. (1998) *Doing a Literature Review. Releasing the social science research imagination*. London: Sage.

Hart, C. (2001) *Doing a Literature Search. A comprehensive guide for the social sciences*. London: Sage.

Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently.* London: Sage.

Johnson, P. and Duberley, J. (2000) *Understanding Management Research*. London: Sage.

Kvale, S. (1996) *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* London: Sage

Kvale, S. (2007) *Doing Interviews*. London: Sage

Marsh, C. and Elliot, J. (2008) *Exploring Data (2nd edition)*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: a Sourcebook of New Methods. (2nd edition)*. London: Sage.

Miller, R. and Brewer, J. (2003) *The A-Z of Social Research*. London: Sage.

Moon, J. (2008) *Critical Thinking: An exploration of theory and practice*. London: Routledge.

Muijs, D. (2004) *Doing Quantitative Research in Education with SPSS*. London: Sage.

Phillips, E. and Pugh, D. (2000) *How to Get a PhD (3rd edition)*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Potter, S. (ed.) (2002) *Doing Postgraduate Research*. London: Sage.

Pring, R. (2000) *Philosophy of Educational Research*. London: Continuum.

Ratner, C. (1997) *Cultural Psychology and Qualitative Methodology: Theoretical and Empirical Considerations*. New York: Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publishers.

Robson, C. (1993) *Real World Research*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Silverman, D. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research: a practical handbook*. London: Sage.

Thomas, G. (2009) *How to do your research project. A guide for students in Education and Applied Social Sciences.* London: Sage.

Thomson, P., (ed.) (2008) *Doing Visual Research with Children and Young People*. London: Routledge.

Wellington, J. (2000) *Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches*. London: Continuum.

Wisker, G. (2001) *The Postgraduate Research Handbook.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Woods, P. (1999) *Successful Writing for Qualitative Researchers*. London: Routledge.

APPENDIX 1: DISSERTATION MODULE OUTLINE

1 Module code:

2 Title: Dissertation

3 Number of credits: 60

4 Level: 4

5 Pre-requisites: Successful completion of 120 credits in course modules

6 Co-requisites: None

7 Target Group: All masters students in the School of Education

8 Content: The researching and writing of a substantive piece of scholarship within the field of the MA. The dissertation should be between 12,000 to 15,000 words.

9 Method, frequency and timing of classes: Supervision will be arranged between the supervisor and students as appropriate.

10 Methods and timing of assessment: 100% course work

11 Module Convenor:

12 School offering module: School of Education

13 Module aims and objectives: The Module aim allows the student to engage in a substantive piece of scholarship on a subject related to their MA chosen in consultation with the supervisor and under one to one tutorial guidance.

14 Transferable Skills: Critical analysis, independent study skills, theoretical and empirical research skills, report writing and presentation.

APPENDIX 2: DISSERTATION PROPOSAL FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL FORM

Name of student.....

Date of entry to course.....

Date of submission of dissertation

Name of supervising tutor.....

Proposed title of dissertation.....

.....

Brief outline of dissertation (please give details, where appropriate, of background reading, research question, outline of research approach which might be used, sources of material, proposed chapter headings, etc. Continue on separate page if necessary, but statement should not exceed two sides.)

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Signed (supervisor).....
...

The completed form should be returned as soon as possible to the School of Education (soft copy if you are at the Malaysia Campus so that it can be forwarded to the UK if necessary)

APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL PROCEDURE

The School of Education has adopted the British Educational Research Association's *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2004). The guidelines can be viewed by going to http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications and clicking on *Research Guideline*.

If you are planning to undertake any data generation for your dissertation, you will need to:

- familiarise yourself with the BERA Guidelines
- discuss the ethical implications of your proposed work with your supervisor
- complete a 'Statement of Research Ethics' form (available under "Useful Forms" on the intranet).

Your 'Statement of Research Ethics' form, together with a draft information sheet and consent form to be used with prospective participants, must be approved by your tutor/supervisor ***before you seek to arrange any fieldwork***. Guidance on what should be included in the participant information sheet and consent form is also available on the Research Ethics part of the intranet, together with a generic consent form which you may adapt to fit your needs.

Please note that, depending on the nature of your proposed research, it may not be possible/practicable for you to comply with all (twenty-two) clauses of Section 4(b) of the 'Statement of Research Ethics' form. However, for any/each statement that you are not able to tick you will need to provide a clear and convincing explanation in order for your plans to be approved by your tutor/ supervisor. (Most clauses relate to the BERA (2004) Ethical Guidelines).

Where you intend to conduct your fieldwork (or some of your fieldwork) in a country outside of Great Britain, you should still abide by the BERA and School of Education Guidelines, although you should also adhere to any additional requirements made of educational researchers in the country in which you will be conducting the fieldwork. Any potential conflicts between our guidelines and protocol in countries in which fieldwork will be conducted should be discussed with your tutor or supervisor and addressed in your 'Statement of Research Ethics' form.

When you have completed and signed the 'Statement of Research Ethics' form, you should pass this on to your tutor/supervisor, who may ask you to make some revisions prior to approving your research plans and signing the form.

Statement of Research Ethics (Masters Students) can be found using the following link.

http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/educationstudentintranet/researchethics/index.aspx

When your tutor/supervisor has approved your plans and signed the form s/he should pass it on to your Course Secretary, who will then provide copies to yourself, your tutor/supervisor and the Course Leader (NB Your 'Statement of Research Ethics' does not need to be approved directly by the Research Ethics Coordinator).

Students whose data generation involves working with children or vulnerable adults in the UK will also need to apply for clearance through the Criminal Records Bureau – this applies to both home and international students. CRB application forms are available from your Course Secretary.

APPENDIX 4: TYPES OF RESEARCH

These notes are to remind you of some of the methods available to you for undertaking your study. Each method has weaknesses as well as strengths in relation to investigating a problem.

An important part of the early stage of your study is to determine the most appropriate for both your research question and your own circumstances.

Action Research

Action research is designed to deal with a particular problem in a specific setting. Its purpose is to improve through change. If, for example, you decided to introduce daily sustained silent reading into your classroom with a view to improving interest, habit and enjoyment in reading, then action research would be an appropriate approach for your study. Thus 'action' taken in relation to an identified problem is 'researched'. This monitoring may be done in a variety of ways such as diaries, interviews and/or questionnaires.

Case Study

A case study is an intensive investigation of a particular example of the phenomena (whether it be a child, a class, or school or whatever). If you are interested in, say, investigating the impact of an advisory teacher upon the teaching of science within a primary school, then case study could be a way of tackling your study. In order to do that you might use a number of techniques including observation (participant or non-participant) and interviews.

Experimental Design

In experimental research there is systematic control and manipulation of conditions which determines the events of particular interest. If you wanted to study something such as finding out the effects on levels of disruption in the classroom of ignoring inappropriate behaviour and praising appropriate behaviour, then you might consider experimental design. It involves the use of an experimental group which receives the designed programme and a control group which does not. These groups have to be made equal in all respects as groups by matching characteristics. One approach which might be undertaken is the exact replication of previously reported experiments to increase the reliability or otherwise of reported findings.

Historical Record

This type of research is concerned not with collecting new data in the way that, say Action Research does, but with generating research ideas and testing them entirely on the basis of existing secondary sources. If you were interested in, for example, the behaviour of teachers under various kinds of pressure (e.g. payment by results, close inspection of their work) or the development over time of a particular concept (such as maladjustment) then you might consider going to the historical record. The past can be a source of ideas, a way of investigating change over time and an antidote to the 'parochialism of presentism' (Thernstrom, 1967, p. 167). Thus, historical material of both a quantitative and qualitative nature might be used to provide insight into current problems.

Survey

The survey requires a sample of respondents to reply to a number of fixed questions under comparable conditions. If you wanted to study something such as teacher definitions of unacceptable classroom behaviour, then you might use a Survey. Thus questionnaires, tests, or interviews may be used with a sample of a defined population. Surveys might well be small-scale (e.g. within one school) or large scale (e.g. gathering information across schools of LAs). The main concerns of the survey researcher are representatives (of the sample used) and clarity (questions must have the same meaning for each respondent).

It is, of course, possible to use more than one method to investigate your research question so that the strength of one method can offset the limitations of another.

APPENDIX 5: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

These notes are intended as a reminder of some of the key terms used in research.

classification The process of fitting raw data (e.g. 'events' from an observation) into categories e.g. 'on task/off task'. When the categories are assigned numbers or letters they are often called **codes**.

correlation The extent to which two variables vary together. This will be measured by a statistic called the correlation coefficient, of which there are various typed. Nearly all types of **correlation coefficient** vary between +1.0 and -1.0. A **positive correlation** indicates that the variables vary with each other in such a way that high scores on one tend to be associated with high scores on the other and low scores with low scores. **Zero correlation** means no relationship, while a **negative correlation** means that high scores on one variable tend to be associated with low scores on the other and vice versa. A correlation of +1.0 is known as **perfect positive correlation**, and one of -1.0 called **perfect negative correlation**. In both cases, given the value of one variable, the value of the other can be predicted with absolute certainty. For values between +1 and -1 this is not the case, and the closer the value is to zero, predictions made from one variable to the other are less precise. Correlation does not necessarily prove **causation**, e.g. some research has found that on average, children in larger classes do better in reading tests than children in small classes. There are, however, several other factors related to class size which may offer alternative explanations to that of class size *per se*.

data Raw data refers to the observations as originally collected before being grouped or manipulated or summarised in any way. Data can also refer to the structure which a researcher imposes on the raw observations so that general inferences can be drawn.

deduction Refers to the arguments and procedures whereby one uses a set of logical rules to deduce from a set of premises that certain conclusions follow. It proceeds from theories to specific hypotheses, and then to the testing of hypotheses by observations. To be distinguished from **induction** which moves from particular observations to empirical generalization and on to theories.

ethnography This used to mean the study of the institutions and customs in small, well-defined communities in simpler societies. It is now generally used to refer to the detailed study of small groups of people (e.g. in classrooms, or schools) within a complex society. The emphasis is usually on forms of social interaction and the meanings which lie behind these. As a style of research, it uses a wide range of methods of data collection including in-depth interviews, observational techniques and analysis of documents, e.g. the study of the amalgamation of an infant school and a junior school into a primary school might use an ethnographic approach.

evaluation At its simplest this is concerned with describing something that happens and judging its value. In turn this raises issues such as what exactly should be described, how this might be done and the criteria use for making judgements, e.g. a curriculum innovation might be the subject of an evaluation study.

experiment A study, predominantly in psychology, in which all the relevant variables are controlled and manipulated by the experimenter (so as to be able to specify causal relationships), rather than simply observed in their natural setting. **Experimental treatment** is a systematic, carefully controlled change made by the experimenter in the environment of the experimental group. The **experimental group** is a group of people to whom the experimental treatment is given and who will be compared with a **control group** who have not received the experimental treatment, e.g. an investigation into the teaching of grapheme-phoneme correspondences might use an experimental research design.

generalis-ability The extent to which research findings are true for subjects or settings other than the ones which the researcher used.

hypothesis An untested idea or assertion put forward to explain some natural phenomenon. Although an hypothesis may be very general, the term is frequently used in a narrower sense to refer to the specific statement which an experiment is designed to confirm or disprove, e.g. "good readers read for the purpose of getting details and the general impressions with equal success: poor readers read with more facility for the purpose of getting details than the purpose of getting general impressions".

ideographic enquiry The study of all relevant characteristics and their interconnections for a single case with the focus on its unique features.

illuminative evaluation A form of evaluation which draws its main inspiration from ethnographic research strategies rather than those of experimental science. The emphasis is on describing the curriculum via the perspectives of the different participants (teachers, children, parents) and on gaining understanding of the processes of teaching and learning that are occurring rather than on assessing particular products against pre-specified goals.

indicator An observable and measurable entity which serves to define a concept in a practical way. E.g. 'Increased interest in books' might be 'indicated' by such things as 'taking books home', 'swapping books', 'requests for particular authors' and so on. The indicator is linked to the concept by rules which are known as **operationalisations**.

measurement At its simplest, this is a procedure for classifying individuals, groups or other units and putting them into previously designed **categories**. This is categorical or qualitative measurement. Where a number can be applied to each category indicating order it is known as quantitative measurement.

nomethetic enquiry The study of universal characteristics in order to establish general laws about their relationships.

operationalis-ation Concepts in the social sciences (e.g. social class, intelligence) are abstractions which cannot be seen by the researcher because they are not observable. But a concept can be defined in such a way that the rules for making observations and for saying when an instance of the concept has occurred can be laid down. This is done by linking the concepts to observable indicators and the rules linking the two are called operationalisations. To **operationalise** a concept, then, is to translate it into something which can be observed and measured. The latter would be known as an **operational definition**. An **operational hypothesis** is an

hypothesis stated in terms which make it capable of being tested by making appropriate observations or measurements of the variables to which the hypothesis refers.

participant observation This is a method of investigation, particularly associated with the ethnographic style of research, which involves the researcher **joining** a group of people, participating to a greater or lesser extent in what they are doing, observing patterns of social interaction, and talking informally with them. The investigator shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities of those (s)he is studying so that (s)he can understand the actors' meanings and perspectives within their normal social context. The group may or may not know the true purpose of the observer's presence.

progressive focusing In the ethnographic research style this is the development, refinement and perhaps redirection of one's research ideas in accordance with what is discovered as field work progresses. It often involves greater selectivity in observation and analysis around a set of emerging research ideas and themes. E.g. moving from an examination of teacher behaviour and pupil response in the classroom to patterns of open and closed questions and statements.

reactivity This refers to the effect which a researcher has on that which (s)he is trying to study. For instance, in an interview it may refer to the way in which a respondent's answers are influenced by the interviewer, his or her characteristics, by what the respondent thinks the interviewer might like to hear and by the interview situation itself. In an experiment it may refer to distortions of the subject's behaviour because of the influence of laboratory conditions or because of the subject's expectations of what is required.

reflexivity The researcher's explicit awareness of himself or herself as an observer and as a participant in the research setting, which must be cultivated in order to avid misinterpreting what is happening and is documented in the research report.

reliability The extent to which a test would give consistent results if applied more than once to the same people under standard conditions. In ethnographic work reliability relates to the extent to which two observers would produce a consistent analysis of a particular aspect of the same social situation. This is dependent on the accurate recording and checking of observations. Replication, one way of assessing reliability, as difficult in ethnographic research because of the reliance on natural settings.

sampling A sample is a group selected from a larger population so that we can make statements about this population as a whole.

theoretical sampling Theoretical sampling selects groups and cases in order to discover meaningful categories and to develop theory. Some groups may be selected with maximum differences on some variables and others with minimal difference. When new ideas and theoretical revisions are no longer emerging the process is terminated.

triangulation The use of different methods or sources of data to examine the same problem. If the same conclusions can be reached using different methods or sources then no peculiarity of method or source has produced the conclusions and one's confidence in their validity increases. **Data**

triangulation refers to the collection of varied data on the same phenomena, e.g. from different participants, different phases of fieldwork. **Investigator triangulation** similarly involves collection of data by more than one researcher (preferably through adoption of different roles in the field) and **method triangulation** involves the collection of data by different methods which entail different threats to validity.

validity Validity refers to the extent to which a test, questionnaire or other operationalisation is really measuring what the researcher intends to measure. A test or questionnaire is said to have **concurrent validity** if it correlates well with other measures of the same concept; it has **content validity** when it samples adequately the domain which it is supposed to measure and **predictive validity** as they both evaluate the test or questionnaire against some criterion assumed to be valid. **Construct validity** refers to the extent to which the test appears to conform to predictions about it from theory. Validity in ethnographic research refers to the extent to which the actors' expectations, perspectives, meanings, etc. are accurately represented and reported in the research report. Validity is checked (e.g. by triangulation) throughout the research process. Validity is also used in a more general sense to refer to the validity of a piece of research as a whole (as opposed to the validity of particular measurements). In this respect it is concerned with the extent to which one can rely on and trust the published findings of some research and involves an evaluation of all the methodological objections that can be raised against the research.

variable A variable is an entity which can take two or more values. E.g. reading age, school attendance, etc. Some people use the term to refer to the property denoted by a concept whereas others use it to refer to the observational categories which result from operationalising the concept. So, in practice, social scientists use 'variable' both as a concept and as an operationalisation of a concept.

APPENDIX 6: REFERENCES

In text referencing

The School of Education normally uses the Harvard system, under which reference to a particular work is made using the author's surname, followed by the date: e.g. Wallace (1998) makes a distinction between …. However, you can use another recognised system e.g. APA, so long as you are consistent. Do not just copy the style used in a book as they can be idiosyncratic.

Where there are two authors, both names should be given, e.g. Brandes and Ginnis (1986); in the case of three or more authors, all should be listed on first mention, but subsequent references can be abbreviated using et al; e.g. Guiora *et al* (1972)

In cases where a statement is followed by one or more sources, the brackets will be in a different position: e.g. Recent years have seen an increasing emphasis on learner centredness in language teaching (Nunan, 1988; Ellis and Sinclair, 1989; Campbell and Kryszewska 1992; Tudor 1997). In such a case, the authors should be listed in date or alphabetical order but you need to be consistent across your work.

Any quotations should be included within single inverted commas, and the page from which the quotation is taken included in the reference: e.g. 'Programme evaluation in the field of open and distance learning is relatively underdeveloped' (Calder, 1994: 19). (N.B. it is correct to use the format (Calder, 1994, p. 19 as well).

Quotations of three lines or longer should be indented single spaced but not in inverted commas.

If you have not yourself read the work you are referring to (the primary source) and are therefore referring to a secondary source, both sources should be mentioned, e.g. (Williams, 1987: 173, cited in Rost, 1990: 110). Since you have not consulted the primary source (Williams), only the secondary source (Rost) should be included in your list of references. The use of secondary sources should be rare. If the primary source is an important work and easily available, it is expected that you will have read it.

The suffixes **a**, **b**, **c**, etc are used to differentiate references within a text to works by the same author in the same year. The references should appear in the same form in your list of references. Do not use **a** or **b** simply because you have found it in someone else's list of references: Nunan (1991a) is the first of Nunan's 1991 publications referred to in *your* text.

A number of abbreviations are commonly used in academic writing. These include *et al* (see above), *op.cit*. and *ibid*.

op.cit. (work mentioned): avoids repetition of the date of a work previously mentioned. This abbreviation should *not* be used if more than one work by the same author is included in the list of references.

ibid (in the same place): indicates that a quotation is taken from the same page of a work just mentioned. This abbreviation should *not* be used if another work has been referred to since the previous quotation.

See a dictionary or reference book on academic writing for further abbreviations.

List of References

The list of references should contain all and only works referred to in your text. Examples of layout for different types of reference are given below. These follow the Harvard system. Note the punctuation and the information provided for journals and books. Underline or italicise titles of books and names of journals, and give inclusive page numbers for items in journals or edited collections.

Examples:

Munn, P. and Drever, E. (1990) *Using Questionnaires in Small-Scale Research. A Teachers' Guide.* Edinburgh: Scottish Council for Research in Education.

Gilroy, D. & Day, C. (1993) The Erosion of INSET in England and Wales: analysis and proposals for a redefinition. *Journal of Education for Teaching.* 19.2: 141-157.

Maingay, P. (1988) Observation for training, development or assessment. In Duff, T. (ed.) 1988. *Explorations in Teacher Training: Problems and Issues*. London: Longman: 118-131.

Electronic sources

There are some excellent web sites explaining how to cite materials from electronic sources such as web pages. The University of Sheffield guidance http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/intro/ (is very good. If you have trouble with the reference, go to the library pages and find it from there via their excellent list of guidance documents.

An American recommendation is as follows:

Author's last name, Initial(s). (Date of work, if known)
Title of work. Title of complete work.
[protocol and address] [path] (date of message or visit)

To cite files available for viewing or downloading via the web, give the author's name (if known), the year of publication (if known and if different from the date accessed), the full title of the article, and the title of the complete work (if applicable) in italics. Include any additional information (such as versions. editions, or revisions) in brackets immediately following the title. Include the full URL (the http address) and the date of the visit

Burka, L. P. (1993). A hypertext history of multi-user dungeons. MUDdex. http://www.utopia.com/talent/lpb/muddex/essay/ (accessed 13 Jan. 1997)

APPENDIX 7: COVER SHEET

NAME:……

COURSE:……

DATE SUBMITTED:……

MARKING TUTOR:……

Tick boxes on the right to show that you have checked each of these features before submitting.

I have stayed within length specifications. The number of words (excluding references and appendices) is ……	
I have included a Title page, which contains the necessary information	
I have included a Contents page, which is appropriately laid out	
I have divided the work into sections with headings	
The references in the body of text follow academic conventions	
The references list is complete and follows academic conventions	
The work has been wordprocessed/typed	
I have proof-read the work carefully	
I have made use of the tutorial support available to me	
My supervising tutor has approved the title of my work	
I give permission for this dissertation to be held in the Library, should my supervisor wish	

I have read the paragraphs on plagiarism in the Course Handbook and this piece of work conforms to those requirements.

Signed:……

APPENDIX 8: MASTERS PROGRAMME SUPPORT TEAM

At the Malaysia Campus, please consult your normal contact person.

In the UK, the members of this team deal with all on-course administrative matters.

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