

# **Dissertation Handbook**

## **Master in Education Studies**



## **Marino Institute of Education**

**2019-2020**

## **Programme Content, Year Two**

### **Dissertation Module, 30 ECTS**

This module comprises 750 student effort hours and takes place during the second year of the Master in Education Studies. These effort hours are distributed between direct contact time in research seminars and supervision sessions, online research tutorials, personal study, and writing the dissertation.

#### **Rationale**

A critical component of the MES is the development of the necessary practical skills required for the completion of a research dissertation. In Year 2, students will be provided with a comprehensive introduction to the research methodologies most commonly employed by researchers in the field of education. Quantitative and qualitative approaches will be explored in detail. Central to this module will be the application of these research paradigms to the critical examination and exploration of educational research and policy nationally and internationally. The module aims to ensure that students have the practical research techniques/skills to undertake their research dissertations. It further aims to familiarise students with the current theoretical and ethical debates in educational research and to equip students with the necessary research skills to undertake future independent research projects.

#### **Aims of Dissertation Module**

The module aims are as follows:

- To build on the work carried out in Year 1 by introducing students to the opportunity to carry out their own empirical or conceptual research in their area.
- To foster, through research and critical self-reflection, the development of a positive school / organisational climate for all students and the extended community.
- To facilitate access to the knowledge required for a robust and targeted small scale research project.
- To enable students to acquire the skills necessary to engage in an ethically informed piece of practice-based research resulting in positive change.
- To facilitate students in carrying out their research dissertations with appropriate guidance from their supervisor.

#### **Learning outcomes**

On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

- Identify and select appropriate methodologies for research projects both current and future.
- Defend and justify these choices in the light of current debates and discourses.
- Compare and contrast the efficacy of their choices against other research paradigms.
- Construct valid arguments in the light of the data collected and analysed.
- Evaluate their own research process through active and informed reflexivity.
- Devise, develop and complete a substantial, intellectually challenging research project related to their particular field of study, within a set time-frame, and with appropriate guidance from a supervisor.
- Assimilate and selectively apply concepts, theories, methods and subject-specific terminology appropriate to their particular field of study.
- Sustain a coherent argument that draws on engagement with and critical appraisal of existing knowledge relevant to their research project.

- Relate their specific research topic to wider issues, debates and concerns in the general field.
- Reflect on and self-critically manage their own learning in the context of limited access to constructive feedback.

## **Outline of Dissertation Module**

Research Methods Course: Seminars and tutorials; preparation of research proposal

Dissertation of 20,000 words

Students will be required to submit a research proposal during Term 1, indicating their research question, an overview of some of the literature they intend to review, proposed methodologies, ethical considerations and preliminary bibliography. This will comprise approximately 2,000-3,000 words and will be assessed by the Proposal Assessment Committee on a Pass / Fail basis.

## **Dissertation**

The Master's dissertation offers students the opportunity to demonstrate the following:

- Knowledge and understanding that is founded upon, extends and enhances that associated with the Bachelor's level, and which is at the forefront of education.
- A critical awareness of current issues and new insights, new tools and new processes in a particular aspect of the field.
- Application of their knowledge and understanding, their critical awareness and problem-solving abilities, within the context of research, or in the development of professional skills, related to an aspect of the field.
- The ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, to reflect on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements within the field.
- To communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge, the rationale and processes underpinning these, to wider audiences, in Ireland and overseas.

## **Choosing a research area**

During the Michaelmas term of Year 2, students will be supported by members of the supervision panel in identifying a suitable research topic for their dissertation. Members of the panel will meet with the Master's Degree students, and will work with them in identifying possible areas of study. Students will be encouraged to pursue areas of study within the field which are compatible with the areas of expertise of the panel.

## **Research proposal**

Students will be required to submit a research proposal during the Michaelmas term. This should include the following information: a provisional title (subject to change), the general area of investigation, the aims and objectives of the proposed study, an overview of relevant literature along with a preliminary bibliography, an overview of the proposed methodology, and reference to any ethical considerations involved.

## **Assessment of research proposals**

On submission of research proposals in the Michaelmas term, Year 2, the course coordinators will convene a meeting of the Proposal Assessment Committee in order to assess the quality of the proposals and to allocate supervisors to students.

Ethical considerations of the proposed research topics will be discussed at this forum. Any research proposal which is deemed not to be of the standard required for a Master's dissertation shall be

returned to the student concerned and a re-submission will be requested to the Committee before the first supervisory meeting takes place.

Ethical considerations are particularly important given the context in which the research will be carried out, as it will, for the most part involve children, parents / guardians and teachers. Some of the proposed research participants will be drawn from minority ethnic communities and from minority language groups. It is essential that ethical issues are given due consideration in students' research proposals and that arrangements are made, for example, for translation of documents into minority languages, and also that provision of interpreters for interviews, where necessary, has been factored into the proposals.

### **Individual supervision**

The primary focus for this module is to design and complete a research dissertation. Consequentially, much of the mediation of this work will involve guidance being offered by individual supervisors. Regular supervision meetings will be organised in order to provide guidance to students during the research process. As this work progresses, the students will be offered formative critiques of their evolving research projects.

### **Research tutorials**

The research proposal sets the foundation for further planning and realisation of the research project. A research seminar will be organised for students focusing on analysis of data.

### **Module assessment**

The module will be assessed by a practice-based research dissertation of 20,000 words, offering the student the opportunity to work on his/her particular field of interest.

The research dissertation will be assessed by an internal examiner and a second reader (who is the student's supervisor) according to approved criteria. This allows for an independent critical evaluation of the study. A third-marking will be arranged by the course co-ordinator in the event of a discrepancy between the readers.

A student who fails the dissertation will be permitted to re-submit for the supplemental court the following September. The student will receive formative feedback to inform his/her re-submission.

The pass mark for the dissertation is 50%. The dissertation must be passed. Students cannot compensate with marks from Year 1.

# Research Dissertation<sup>1</sup>

## **Preamble**

The following guidelines for supervisors and Master's Degree students in MIE are extracted broadly from the University of Dublin, Trinity College Calendar Part 2 for Graduate Studies and Higher Degrees 2010-2011, from the Good Research Practice Guidelines 2002, issued by the Graduate Studies Office, Trinity College, and from the Best Practice Guidelines on Research Supervision for Academic Staff and Students, 2006, also issued by the Graduate Studies Office in Trinity College.

## **Introduction**

A dissertation of 20,000 words is submitted at the end of Year 2. The dissertation module represents a substantial component of the Master's programme and all students must achieve a pass in the dissertation in order to receive the Master's Degree.

## **Role of Proposal Assessment Committee**

The Proposal Assessment Committee shall comprise the programme co-ordinator and/or the assistant course co-ordinator, a member of the Ethics in Research Committee, the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) and a member of the course teaching staff.

Ethical considerations in the proposed research topics will be discussed at this forum. If the Proposal Assessment Committee has ethical concerns about a research proposal, the proposal may be referred to the Ethics in Research Committee where this will be considered in more detail.

## **Role of supervisors**

Supervisors have responsibility for guiding their students in the choice of topic and in the identification of a viable research question.

## ***Relationship of supervisor to student***

The relationship of supervisor to student is best thought of as one of mentorship or apprenticeship, which depends on professional competence and trust between the partners. Supervisors will be available to students for consultation, advice and assistance. The supervisor shall provide support and assistance to the assigned student throughout the period of study. Meetings between supervisor and student shall take place on a regular basis until the dissertation has been submitted. It is the student's responsibility to maintain adequate contact with his / her supervisor(s).

The supervisor will provide advice and guidance on matters relating to the student's chosen area of work and shall support the student in ensuring that the quality of work reaches Master's level. This involves commenting constructively and promptly on a student's written work.

Supervisors will also advise students on college regulations. All reasonable written requests shall be responded to without undue delay.

Students who reside outside Dublin are expected to attend MIE for at least two face-to-face supervision sessions during the year.

## ***The supervisor shall assist with the following:***

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that due to an organisational review which is being implemented for the first time in the academic year 2019-2020, some of the roles named here may be replaced by other roles as these changes are applied across all policies and procedures. As policies are changed, they will be published in the relevant fora. If you have any queries, please contact the module co-ordinator.

- Ensuring that the proposed research project is manageable, and that the chosen methodology is appropriate for answering the research question.
- Ensuring that ethical issues have been planned for and attended to appropriately.
- Supporting the student in setting up achievable goals within an agreed timeline.
- Guiding the student on how to source relevant literature and how to engage with same in a critical and investigative manner.
- Supporting students in presenting their arguments in a logical and coherent manner.
- Reading drafts of students' work and providing timely feedback.

It is the student's responsibility to ensure that work is presented in line with academic conventions and is proof-read and edited to the required high standard.

### ***Supervision Panel***

MIE supervisors are academically competent in their supervisory role and act within their area of professional and academic competence. Every student will have access to a supervisor from the supervision panel.

### ***Complaints concerning supervision***

Complaints about the adequacy of supervision should normally be made first to the course coordinator. If this person is unable to resolve the problem, or if the course coordinator is the supervisor concerned, the student should contact the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) (or another senior faculty member nominated by the Registrar if the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) is supervising the student). The Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) should attempt to resolve the problem through consultation with the student. If this fails, the student should make a formal complaint in writing to the Registrar. Complaints about the adequacy of supervision will not be entertained once the dissertation has been submitted for examination.

### ***Appeals procedure***

Students, who wish to appeal either decisions or grades, should in the first instance do so in writing to the MES coordinator. The grounds for the appeal should be clearly stated and supported where necessary by documentary evidence. The coordinator will discuss the request with the relevant parties and attempt to find a resolution.

If the problem is not resolved, the co-ordinator can refer the case to the Institute's Postgraduate Appeals Committee, none of whom has sat on the court of examiners for the MES. This Committee consists of

- A senior lecturer in MIE (Chair)
- A lecturer on another Postgraduate programme in MIE
- A postgraduate student or a student representative on the Governing Body

This Committee shall convene as and when necessary. Appellants should submit their case in writing to the Chair of the Committee outlining the grounds for the appeal and supporting documentation on the Academic Appeal Form.

If students do not consider the matter satisfactorily resolved after that, they have the right to appeal the decision to a Institute's Appeals Committee, none of whose members are involved in the Postgraduate Appeals Committee or the court of examiners for the MES. This committee consists of:

- A principal lecturer in MIE (non-voting Chair)

- A senior lecturer in MIE
- A postgraduate student or a student representative on the Governing Body
- A member of MIE governing body

Such an appeal can be presented on three grounds:

1. The student's case is not adequately covered by the ordinary regulations of the College;
2. The regulations of the College were not properly applied in the applicant's case;
3. *Ad misericordiam* grounds.

The student cannot make an appeal other than on *ad misericordiam* grounds against the normal application of College academic regulations approved by the University Council.

### **Procedure for examination of research dissertations**

A dissertation submitted for a Master's Degree must show evidence of rigour and discrimination, in-depth knowledge of the chosen topic, and an appreciation of the relationship of the subject to the wider field of knowledge. It must make some contribution to knowledge and scholarship; it must be clear, concise, well-written, and must be the student's own work.

### **Research Integrity**

Research integrity covers many issues including research misconduct, plagiarism, and research ethics. MIE has an Ethics in Research Committee which oversees matters regarding research ethics (section 9.4).

#### ***Research misconduct***

This is defined as but is not limited to fabrication, falsification or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results.

Fabrication is making up data or results and recording or reporting them.

Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing, distorting, dishonestly misinterpreting or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is interpreted by MIE as the act of presenting the work of others as one's own work, without acknowledgement. Plagiarism is considered as academically fraudulent and an offence against University discipline. MIE considers plagiarism to be a major offence and subject to disciplinary procedures.

It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that he/she does not commit plagiarism.

#### ***Why plagiarism is regarded as such a serious offence***

It is clearly understood that all members of the academic community use and build on the work of others. It is commonly accepted also, however, that they build on the work of others in an open and explicit manner, and with due acknowledgement. Many cases of plagiarism that arise could be avoided by following some simple guidelines:

- (1) Any material used in a piece of work, of any form, that is not the original thought of the author should be fully referenced in the work and attributed to its source. The material should either be quoted

directly or paraphrased. Either way, an explicit citation of the work referred to should be provided, in the text, in a footnote, or both. Not to do so is to commit plagiarism.

(2) When taking notes from any source it is very important to record the precise words or ideas that are being used and their precise sources.

(3) Although the Internet often offers a wider range of possibilities for researching particular themes, it also requires particular attention to be paid to the distinction between one's own work and the work of others. Particular care should be taken to keep track of the source of the electronic information obtained from the Internet or other electronic sources and ensure that it is explicitly and correctly acknowledged.

### ***How can plagiarism arise?***

Plagiarism can arise from deliberate actions and also through careless thinking and/or methodology. The offence lies not in the attitude or intention of the perpetrator, but in the action and in its consequences.

Plagiarism can arise from actions such as:

- (a) Copying another student's work in full or in part and presenting it as one's own
- (b) Submitting the same work as a peer without having sought the approval of the lecturer and without having sufficiently individualised the work
- (c) Enlisting another person or persons to complete an assignment on the student's behalf
- (d) Quoting directly, without acknowledgement, from books, articles or other sources, either in printed, recorded or electronic format
- (e) Paraphrasing, without acknowledgement, the writings of other authors.

### ***Is information available about plagiarism?***

Advice about how to avoid plagiarism is available from the librarians, lecturers, teachers and supervisors. Advice is also available about the appropriate methodology for students to use for their work.

It is the students' responsibility to make sure their work is not used by others without acknowledgement. The student whose work is used unreferenced by another is considered an accomplice in the act of plagiarism.

### **Policy and procedure for inquiring into allegations of research misconduct**

If research misconduct is suspected, the following actions will be taken. First, an informal meeting will take place between the programme coordinator and the student. If issues are not resolved at that stage, there will be a meeting with the student, their supervisor and the course co-ordinator with the Registrar and two members of the MIE Ethics in Research Committee (who are not involved in the programme) to give the student a chance to answer. The student may bring a representative from the Students' Union with them instead of their supervisor.

If the Registrar and the members of the MIE Ethics in Research Committee decide that research misconduct has been committed, they must inform the President, in writing, and include all the information about the case as well as suggestions as to how the problem can be rectified. The President will interview the student if there is any disagreement. The Registrar shall then follow the following steps e.g. the student shall be returned as Fail by the Board of Examiners and shall be required to re-submit work as determined by the Board of Examiners. The grade of the second attempt allowed shall not exceed 40%.



Only those directly involved in the inquiry should be aware that the process is being conducted or have access to any information during the course of the investigation.

### **Ethics in Research Committee, MIE**

The Ethics in Research Committee in MIE is comprised of six members of the academic staff of Marino Institute of Education. The Ethics in Research Committee shall be represented at the Proposal Assessment Committee in evaluating the research proposals from students on the course (section 5.1).

### **Presentation of the dissertation**

The dissertation should be 20,000 words in length. You are required to submit **two bound copies** of your dissertation.

The dissertation should be printed on A4 paper (29.7cm x 21cm) using double spacing and font size 12. Typing must be on one side of the paper only. The margin on the 'binding side' must not be less than 3.5cm and not less than 2cm on the other three sides, both for typescript and diagrams. The typed copies should be read carefully, and any errors made in copying should be corrected, making sure that corrections are made in all copies.

The pages must be fastened together firmly and bound using spiral binding, so that the dissertation can be opened and read in comfort and does not fall to pieces when handled.

Two bound copies of the dissertation are to be handed in to the **Education Office on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2020**.

In addition, you are asked to submit an electronic copy of your dissertation. This can be emailed to [mesdissertations@mie.ie](mailto:mesdissertations@mie.ie) and **must be received by 4.30pm on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2020**.

## Guideline Criteria for Marking: Research Dissertations

	FAIL 0-49%	PASS 50-69%	DISTINCTION 70%+
Introduction 10%	The student does not clearly outline the focus of the study. Links between the purpose of the study and the specialist field are weak. Context is not well established.	The focus of the study is clearly articulated. The purpose of the study is related to the specialist field. The research context is well established.	The focus of the study is excellently articulated. The purpose of the study is very clearly related to the specialist field.
Review of Literature 25%	The literature is unacceptably narrow, lacks focus in terms of the research topic and omits key texts and contributors. The author fails to demonstrate understanding of relevant theory. There is no critique of the literature	The chosen literature is sound in terms of its relevance to the research question. The author demonstrates command of relevant theory. The paper contains good critique of the literature, with some critical evaluation of alternative positions. The literature is up-to-date and is comprehensive in terms of breadth and depth.	The literature is excellently chosen in terms of relevance to the research question. The author demonstrates an excellent command of relevant theory. He / she engages with the literature in a critical and authoritative manner. Alternative positions are critically evaluated. The literature is up-to-date and is outstanding in terms of breadth and depth.
Research Methodology 20%	The methodology is inappropriate in terms of the research topic. Scant attention has been paid to the methodology literature and there are serious gaps in terms of the limitations and ethical implications of the methodology. Researcher positionality is not addressed. Data analysis processes are omitted.	The methodology has been well chosen in terms of relevance to research topic, taking into consideration a sound range of methodological literature. The arguments made in support of the choice of methodology are logical and well made. Researcher positionality is clearly explained. The data analysis processes are cogently explicated. Pertinent ethical issues are coherently discussed.	The methodology has been excellently chosen in terms of relevance to research topic, taking into consideration a wide range of methodological literature. A comprehensive argument is made in support of the choice of the methodology. Researcher positionality is very clearly explained. The limitations of the methodology are clearly outlined. The data analysis processes are excellently explicated. All pertinent ethical issues are excellently discussed.

Findings, Analysis and Discussion 30%	The data are presented in a confusing manner. The author fails to use the literature in critiquing the data. Conclusions are inappropriate in terms of the data presented.	The data are presented clearly and cogently. Very good use is made of the literature in order to offer critical examination of the data. A range of insightful arguments are made within the discussion and solid links are established between the conclusions and the data. Some original thinking is evident in places.	The author presents the data in an excellent manner. Superb use of the literature is used to critically examine the data. The author is highly insightful in terms of the arguments made within the discussion and there are excellent links between the conclusions and the data. There is evidence of original thought emerging from the analysis of data.
Presentation and Format 15%	Academic conventions are generally ignored. The dissertation is disorganised. The reference list is weak and references are inaccurate or absent. Length requirements are not observed.	The author displays skilled use of academic conventions with format and structure followed consistently throughout. The dissertation is systematically organised. The author has paid attention to the accurate formation of the reference list and referencing system. Competent control of length. Some minor errors in evidence.	The author displays skilled use of academic conventions with format and structure followed superbly and consistently throughout. The dissertation is systematically and clearly organised. The author has paid excellent attention to the accurate formation of the reference list and referencing system. Competent control of length.