



**UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON  
BUSINESS SCHOOL  
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**Academic year: 2014/2015**

**MASTERS IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)**

**DISSERTATION (40 Credits)**

**MODULE CODE RBP040L002Y**

**MODULE CONVENOR: Dr Leonard Holmes**

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#### **ASSESSMENT DETAILS**

##### **100% Coursework**

- 1. Presentation of dissertation research project proposal (15%): at Masters Student Conference, Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015**
- 2. Dissertation (85%) submission date: Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> September 2015 (or Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> December, for students who started the Masters course in January 2015); submit by 2pm (NB 2 copies printed & bound, plus electronic submission via Turnitin)**

## **RATIONALE**

The dissertation provides students with the opportunity to apply the understanding, knowledge, analytical and conceptual tools and personal skills gained from the taught courses to an in-depth study of a specific strategic problem or situation for management. It consolidates the learning, knowledge and skills that have already taken place as well as developing the capability of the student to undertake and complete an academic dissertation. It can thus be seen as the culmination of the entire programme.

### **1. INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Students who successfully complete this module will be able to:

- negotiate and re-define, if necessary, the purpose and scope of a research project;
- undertake systematic search and review of relevant published theoretical and research-based literature relating to the research project;
- identify, critically evaluate and adopt research methods and intervention strategies that are appropriate and relevant to a specific task or to a research problem;
- establish the planning requirements of a project taking into consideration the management of ethical issues;
- schedule and prepare detailed plans;
- analyse data and relate those findings to the existing state of knowledge of the area studied;
- write a complete, well-structured and clearly argued academic dissertation dealing with the purpose and rationale of the study; the state of existing knowledge; choice of methodology and use an appropriate research design; the findings and ways in which they add to knowledge; and the implications of those conclusions.

### **2. SYLLABUS and LEARNING METHODS**

The dissertation is undertaken primarily as an independent, self-managed programme of study, supported by supervision by a member of academic staff and guidance provided via the dedicated Moodle site.

**Timing:** All students take the module Management Research Methods (RBP020L003A/S) which provides the opportunity and basis for developing the knowledge, understanding and skills required for undertaking a successful dissertation research project.

During the term in which the Management Research Methods module is undertaken, each student must develop an outline proposal for their dissertation research project. They must then seek a supervisor, a member of academic staff who will provide appropriate support during the course of the research project, including guidance and feedback on progress. A list of members of staff who can provide such supervision will be published on the Moodle site for the Dissertation (RBP040L002Y).

The assessment process will be carried out at two stages:

- 1) when the dissertation research project has been designed and planned, prior to the main work: students will present their outline project proposals to an audience of staff and fellow-students, in a Postgraduate Students' Conference;
- 2) when the research project has been completed and the dissertation has been written up as a document: the dissertation document must be submitted by the deadline indicated.

**Approaching a supervisor:** Each student will independently approach preferred/suitable supervisor/s with a draft research project proposal, which will be developed alongside the Management Research Method Module. The supervisor should be chosen according to the fit to your dissertation topic to the research areas of the supervisors. The research areas of each supervisor can also be found on the staff website. Each supervisor has a certain number of students, so make sure you approach your chosen supervisor early enough within spring term. If a supervisor has already agreed other supervisions and is "fully booked" you need to find another supervisor. If your search is not successful you will be allocated to a supervisor. The supervisor is there to assist you with the initial discussion of the feasibility of the proposed study. It is important, however, that you give sufficient thought and undertake appropriate preparation in developing the draft research project proposal.

**Research proposal and methodology:** The supervisor and student will discuss the draft research project proposal as submitted, to ensure that the research area is of sufficient scope for and appropriate to a Masters dissertation project. The project should be concerned with a significant issue relevant to business and management policy and practice and also to business and management research. The term 'business and management' should be taken to include the public sector, and other not-for-profit contexts, and not confined to private sector and commercial enterprise.

By the time that the main work for the dissertation is started, the student is expected to have fully covered the syllabus for the Management Research Methods. The student and their supervisor will consider, at the outset, and at appropriate stages during the work for the dissertation project, further study of, and training in, aspects of research that may be necessary. A dedicated Moodle site (**RBPO40L002Y**) will be used to provide for further support, where appropriate. This will also provide a forum for mutual help and support among the students themselves.

**Supervision time, availability of supervisor, form to be completed:** The main form of supervisor support will be about four hours (normally) of face-to-face individual supervision supplemented by an appropriate amount of e-mail support. The student will be provided with the opportunity for guidance at all key stages of the project, including: selection of topic; approach to the study; choice of methodology; literature review; design of fieldwork and presentation of findings and conclusions. Such guidance from the supervisor will normally be in response to initiative being taken by the student, and provided in the context of dialogue and discussion.

On one of the first meetings two forms have to be completed: 1) The agreed meeting schedule (see appendix) and 2) the Ethics discussion and agreement. In regards to form one: It is important to agree on a series of meetings at an early stage of the process. Please

remember that there might be weeks during the summer period in which your supervisor is not available or only available via Email. Please make sure you bring a hardcopy version of those two forms to the first meeting, so that you and the supervisor can sign them. A student is expected to maintain contact with his/her supervisor, to produce draft work by agreed deadlines, and to attend agreed appointments. Please note that a supervisor may not be able to provide an additional time slot for a supervision meeting, if the student fails to attend an agreed appointment. A supervisory record has to be filled out after every meeting (see form in the appendix).

**Feedback:** The student should produce written work on a regular basis, as agreed with the supervisor; this should be word-processed. The supervisor will provide what they consider to be appropriate feedback and guidance, to enable the student to progress with their project. The supervisor will NOT, however, assess the work before it is formally submitted. The student should ascertain from the supervisor the last opportunity for sending a draft version of the dissertation for comment. Normally, this will be *at least* 10 days before the deadline. Any feedback should be taken as indicative of areas for improvement; it is the student's responsibility to apply such guidance across the whole of the dissertation.

### **3. ASSESSMENT**

Each student will be assessed individually. Assessment will be undertaken in two modes.

- 1) Presentation of proposed dissertation research project (15% of overall grade, including 5% for peer-assessment) (on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015)
- 2) Submission of the completed dissertation (85% of overall grade): the deadline for this is 2pm on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2015 (or 2pm on Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> December, for students who started the Masters course in January 2015).

#### **1) Presentations (Postgraduate Students' Conference)**

Each student will present their proposed project to a small audience of academic staff (supervisors) and fellow-students. This will be undertaken within a conference format (Postgraduate Students' Conference), to be held on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May (in the week immediately following the end of the exam period).

The presentation will be assessed by the academic staff present, and the grade awarded will count as 10% of the overall dissertation grade. Further guidance on the arrangements for the Students' Conference will be published on the Moodle site for Dissertations. There will also be guidance on the format for the presentations, and on the criteria used for assessment.

The fellow-students present in the session will also (individually) assess each presentation, and the collated grade awarded to a student will count as 5% of the overall dissertation grade.

## 2) Dissertation

This is a substantial piece of written work with a range of 10,000 to 12,000 words (excluding bibliography and a modest number of endnotes and essential appendices). The dissertation must provide a clear link to important and interesting issues of business and management policy and/or practice, and to business and management research. The dissertation must include an engagement both with relevant academic publications in relation to the research topic and with empirical data. A range of approaches may be adopted, including the original analysis of existing (secondary) data but it is likely that most students will undertake primary data collection. Empirical data may be quantitative or qualitative, or combination of both. Whatever form that is adopted, an appropriate justification must be provided for the choice(s) made.

The dissertation will be assessed by two members of academic staff, one of whom will be the supervisor. Their agreed grade will count as 85% of the overall dissertation grade. Their academic judgement will be guided by a set of assessment descriptors, a copy of which is available on the relevant Moodle site. A sample of marked dissertations, together with assessors' comments based on the assessment descriptors, will be viewed by an External Examiner.

The assessment of the dissertation will be based on the following areas (with weightings shown in brackets):

- Introduction, Context, Research Objectives (10%)
- Literature Review (25%)
- Research Design and Methodology (15%)
- Results, Analysis and Evaluation of Findings (30%)
- Conclusions and Recommendations (10%)
- Presentation, Structure and Writing (10%)

Two printed and bound copies of the dissertation must be submitted to the Business School Office, and an electronic copy must be submitted through Turnitin, via the link on the Moodle site, by the deadline set.

NB the normal rules apply with regard to deadlines and mitigating circumstances. Supervisors and the Module Convenor are not authorised to extend the deadline. If you feel that you have good grounds for claiming mitigating circumstances, please follow the procedure and guidance shown on StudentZone and in the Programme Handbook.

## Assessment Criteria

The overall assessment of the dissertation will be based on the general assessment criteria used as guidelines for the assessment of all types of written assessed work including essays; reports; audits; critical reviews; research proposals; and the dissertation.

<i>Mark</i>	<i>Description</i>
80-100% Distinction	Superlative analysis, synthesis and evaluation of material. Imaginative and original approach to study. Complete understanding of all material dealt with. As good a piece of work as could be expected at this stage of development of a near publishable quality.
70-79% Distinction	Excellent analysis, synthesis and evaluation of material. Imaginative and original approach to study. Thorough understanding of all material dealt with.
60-69% Pass	Clear analysis, synthesis and evaluation of material. Imaginative approach to study. Good understanding of most material dealt with.
50-59% Pass	Sound analysis and evaluation of material. Appropriate approach to study. Good understanding of most material dealt with.
40-49%	Weak analysis and evaluation of material. Some understanding of some of the material dealt with.
0-39% Fail	Rudimentary analysis and evaluation of material. Superficial understanding of most material dealt with.

Further details about the assessment criteria will be provided on the Moodle site.

The Moodle site will also provide a handbook on various aspects of the production of the Dissertation.

## 4. FURTHER GUIDANCE

Further guidance will be provided on the Moodle site. This will become 'live' at varying times, so students should check the site frequently and be alert to messages indicating that new material has been posted.

In addition, students should make effective use of the relevant sections of the Essential Text for Management Research Methods:

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Jackson, P. (2012) *Management Research* (4th edition), London: Sage.

Students are also encouraged to make use of other textbooks on key aspects of the process of undertaking a research project for a Masters dissertation, including:

Fisher, C. (2010) *Researching and Writing a Dissertation: An Essential Guide for Business Students* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), Harlow, Essex: FT Prentice Hall.

Hart, C. (2001) *Doing a Literature Search: A Comprehensive Guide for the Social Sciences*, London: Sage.

Wallace, M. and Wray, A. (2006) *Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduates*, London: Sage.

## 5. APPENDICES

The appendices section contains the following forms, which need to be completed where required and/or appropriate:

1. **“Dissertation Topic Outline”**. This form needs to be completed to demonstrate that you have found a supervisor and a topic and to record that for administrative purposes.
2. **“Agreed Meeting Schedule”**. This form needs to be completed by every student at the beginning of the supervisory process. Supervisor and the student should retain a copy.
3. **“Supervision Record”**. This form should be completed by every student at each supervisory meeting. Supervisor and the student should retain a copy.
4. **“Ethics discussion and agreement”**. This form needs to be completed by every student after the agreement with the supervisor (see above) and bound into your dissertation that is handed in.
5. **“Letter of Access”**. This letter is optional and depends on the methodology chosen for the research project for your dissertation. The sample letter relates to interview methodology. Students are required to discuss their letter of access with their supervisor before contacting any organisations.
6. **“Research Participant Agreement form”**. This letter is optional and depends on the methodology chosen for the research project for your dissertation. Students are required to discuss their letter of access with their supervisor before contacting any organisations

**DISSERTATION TOPIC OUTLINE**

Student Surname:

Student First Name:

Student ID Number:

Email address:  
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Course programme/pathway

Academic Year  
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Proposed dissertation title (be as specific as possible):

If your work has a geographical focus, please state here:

If your work focuses on a specific organisation, please give the name:

Do you think you will need to obtain ethical approval before you can start this dissertation?  
(e.g. work set in NHS, research with/ on vulnerable groups)

Yes / No / Don't know  
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Please describe below the main focus/objectives of your dissertation:

Signature (supervisor)

Signature (student)

*Once you have discussed this with your chosen supervisor and he/she is happy to supervise you please submit this form to the dissertation module convener, Leonard Holmes, via email to [leonard.holmes@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:leonard.holmes@roehampton.ac.uk). Deadline is the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2014.*



**AGREED MEETING SCHEDULE**

*This form should be completed at the beginning of the supervisory process. Supervisor and the student should retain a copy.*

*Students are entitled to **FOUR hours (normally) of face-to-face individual** supervision supplemented by an appropriate amount of e-mail support.*

**Student's Name:**

**Supervisor:**

**Proposed Dates of Meeting and Research Progress Monitoring:**

**1<sup>st</sup> Meeting Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Estimated Duration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Estimated Duration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Estimated Duration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**4<sup>th</sup> Meeting Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Estimated Duration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**5<sup>th</sup> Meeting Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Estimated Duration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Agreed submission date of final draft:** \_\_\_\_\_

Student's signature

Date:

Supervisor's signature:

Date:

**SUPERVISION RECORD**

*This form should be completed at **each** supervisory meeting. Supervisor and the student should retain a copy.*

**Student's Name:**

**Supervisor:**

**Date of Meeting:**

**Time: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_**

**Written work submitted or other purpose of meeting:**

**Main topics/issues discussed and action points agreed:**

**Time, date and location of next meeting:**

**Actions and agenda topics for next meeting:**

Student's signature

Date:

Supervisor's signature:

Date:

### **Ethics discussion and agreement**

I have discussed the ethical considerations associated with my proposed research with my supervisor. The following points were covered:

1. Rights of participants: what participation involves, right to withdraw
2. Confidentiality of findings: who has access to the findings, anonymity of participants/organisation.
3. Data protection: making it clear how the data will be gathered, stored and destroyed.
4. Institutional reputation: ensuring that the research is conducted in a professional manner, including all written communication.

If my research methods change in any way, I will re-discuss any ethical issues with my supervisor.

Name of Student: .....

Name of supervisor: .....

Signed (student) .....

Date .....

Signed (supervisor).....

Date.....

## EXAMPLE ACCESS LETTER



Date

Dear Ms/Mr/Dr

I am undertaking a Dissertation as part of my MBA programme in [insert programme name] at the Business School at University of Roehampton My project is entitled [insert project title] and it has the aim of [insert key aims].

I am writing to ask if you could spare the time to be interviewed for the project. The interview would last approximately [insert time commitment].

I assure you that any information you give me will be treated with complete confidentiality, if you so wish. In addition, if you wish, the name of your institution and those of any individuals will be changed. The final report will be seen by two examiners from University of Roehampton and one from another university, but will not be publicised further. If you would find it useful, I am happy to provide you with a summary of the findings.

In order to get as much detail as possible, I would like to record the interview, but I am happy to take notes if you would prefer. Any transcripts and notes will be destroyed at the end of the project and will be kept securely until that time. I will offer you the opportunity to see the interview transcripts and to correct any details.

Unless I hear to the contrary, I will phone you in a few days' time to arrange a convenient time for the interview. My email address is [username@roehampton.ac.uk] and my phone number is [number].

Yours sincerely

***signature***

Your name

Student of XY

Contact details



**RESEARCH PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT FORM**

**Title and brief description of the research project:**

**Name and contact details of researcher:**

Name:  
Address:  
Email:  
Telephone:

**Statement of Agreement:**

*I agree to take part in this research and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information provided will be treated in confidence and that the Dissertation will be seen by two examiners from University of Roehampton and one from another university, but will not be publicised further.*

*I have been informed that I will have the opportunity to check the contents of my interview and any material attributed to my organisation before it is included my Dissertation.*

*I agree to the interview being recorded. I understand that the data will be kept securely and that it will be destroyed after the examination process is completed.*

Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

If you have any concerns about this research or any aspect of your participation in it please contact my supervisor:

Name:  
Email:  
Direct telephone number: