

Overview of the dissertation

Department of Education

MA Education (part time) dissertation: Essential overview

This brief overview is aimed to address straightforward questions about the expectations of registering for and completing the dissertation. If a question has (WIKI) after it, there is further information on the MA Dissertation Wiki, here: wiki.bath.ac.uk/display/MED/MA+Ed+Dissertation+Home

1. What is the MA Education dissertation?

The dissertation provides an opportunity for you to design, conduct and evaluate a small-scale educational research project. This can be approached using literature-based research or empirical-based research.

- A literature based dissertation would be based on the (academic) literature in the field
- An empirical study would add to this investigation of the literature, some form of qualitative or quantitative work – surveys, interviews, etc.
- Both of these need a good, solid literature review – the difference is that in the first option, the literature review is the entire dissertation, and in the second, the literature review informs the rest of the work in the dissertation. (See the WIKI for information on literature reviews)

2. When should I register for my dissertation?

Please download and complete a dissertation registration form when you have successfully gained 60 credits AND passed the University's Academic Integrity Test. The registration form can be found in the dissertation advice section of the [MA Education Moodle Hub](#).

3. How should I choose a topic for my dissertation?

First and foremost, choose a topic that you are passionate about and one that holds particular significance to the research context. In other words, your research should have a clear purpose, not just 'research for the sake of doing research'. The more passion you feel toward the research area you want to explore, the better your research will most likely be. We strongly recommend that you engage in extensive reading about the general topic that you are interested in to narrow down a particular research question. Your dissertation must be grounded in the field of study of the specific MA programme and/or pathway that you are following.

4. How can my dissertation outline reflect what I submitted for the RME assignment?

The Designated Essential Unit, Research Methods in Education (RME), has been designed, in part, to help prepare you for the dissertation. Although it is not a requirement that your RME assignment is directly related to your dissertation topic, and you may wish to pursue a different topic, it is an advantage to build on this assignment, as your research plan has already been reviewed by a tutor. However, caution must be taken in the writing-up of your dissertation not to auto-plagiarise your own work. You can refer to the RME assignment and reference it as a publication but you must not reproduce parts of it in the Dissertation.

5. How should I prepare to write my dissertation outline?

The dissertation registration form will be accompanied by an outline (proposal) form. If you are using your RME assignment (plan for a research project) you can draw on that to complete the outline. Importantly you will need to narrow down a research topic and clarify your aims and a main research question. In addition you will be asked to explain your research methodology. Once your registration form and outline have been received the Director of Studies, or appointed member of staff, will approve the proposal and allocate a supervisor. Please note that students who wish to pursue a named degree (international education, leadership and management, learning and teaching) must ground the dissertation proposal in the relevant field of study. Once you have made contact with your supervisor, you should discuss the outline, prepare a more detailed plan and complete the ethics approval form. (Please note you must not undertake any data collection before the ethics form is approved). (See the WIKI for more about your relationship with your supervisor and about ethics).

What tips can you give me when preparing my dissertation outline?

There are a range of questions you might ask yourself, many of which you should have already addressed in the RME assignment. Some particular questions you might consider include:

- Why is my topic interesting?
- Is my research question a single question?
- Is my research question manageable within the time and word constraints of this dissertation?
- How is my topic related to gaps I am finding in the literature?
- How might my research be unique in its contribution?
- Who is this research for and what it will it provide them?
- How practical is my research – will I have enough time to carry out my research?
- How is my research linked with 'great debates' and/or major schools of thought?

- How is my methodological framework the best for my research question?
- Is my dissertation going to be a literature review or an empirical-based research study?
- What philosophical and epistemological frameworks are guiding my research question and methodological framework and for what reasons?
- What are the potential limitations of my research?
- What ethical considerations will I have to consider throughout the process of my research?

6. Can I request a specific supervisor?

If you feel that one of your unit tutors or someone you know in the Department of Education would make a suitable supervisor, you should specifically ask for that person to be your supervisor. The Director of Studies cannot guarantee that this person will be your supervisor, but will note your request. You are welcome to review research information about staff who work in the Department of Education.

7. Once I have been allocated a supervisor, what should I do?

You should contact your supervisor and with their advice you should produce a detailed plan. You should keep in contact with your supervisor during the period of completing your dissertation. It is your responsibility to maintain contact with your supervisor who will support you through the dissertation process according to your needs.

8. What can I expect from my supervisor?

Although different supervisors may have different supervision approaches and students will have different needs, you should expect approximately 14 hours of attention for your dissertation. This includes checking one draft of the dissertation and marking the final dissertation. You are advised to discuss with your supervisor how you will work together and how often you will communicate.

9. What other support can I access?

The University of Bath provides extensive study support including specific advice on dissertations, for example, statistical analysis and writing skills. You can access this via the web pages (academic study skills). In addition, the library provides advice on accessing literature, referencing and information skills. Computing services provide access to software and IT support.

10. What is the word length of a dissertation?

The main text must be 15,000 words long, + or – 10%. We use the default University of Bath policy on word counts. (see Note 1)

For the purpose of calculating the word count, footnotes are included, whereas contents pages, abstracts, tables, figures, appendices and reference lists/bibliographies are excluded.

11. What is the format of the dissertation?

Every dissertation should have, in the following order: (See the WIKI for more help)

- A title page;
- A copyright statement, a disclaimer and/or restriction statement if appropriate;
- Acknowledgments, if appropriate;
- An abstract that is no more than one page;
- An author declaration;
- A list of contents, indicating the appropriate page numbering;
- The main dissertation text;
- References/bibliography;
- Appendices

12. How should I organise and present references?

Please use the Harvard (Bath) referencing style. The University of Bath library provides guidance on using this system

The library also provides advice on using *EndNote* to store, organise and import references into your work. You are advised to arrange a system of referencing, such as EndNote, from the beginning of your Dissertation study period. (WIKI)

13. What can I include in the appendix?

The appendix can include anything that adds further explanation to information provided within your dissertation but is not essential to your main argument. Where relevant, you can include such things as: surveys, questionnaires and/or interview schedules used during fieldwork, transcripts of interviews, tables of results, video or audio recordings, pictures, maps, examples of fieldnotes or journal entries, policy document examples, etc.

It is important to remember that the appendix shouldn't contain anything that the reader needs to know to understand or follow your argument – it is *supplemental* material.

14. How must I present my dissertation?

A dissertation must be typed on one side of A4 paper, use double line spacing and have all margins (left, right, top, bottom) 1" wide.

15. What ethical considerations do I need to attend to?

We view ethical considerations as being important throughout the entire research process, from the creation of the research question/s, to the production of data and its subsequent interpretations and analysis, to the manner in which you interact with those you are researching and the ways in which the data is written up and disseminated. It is of utmost importance that the interests and requests of those you are researching are listened to and recognised (i.e. issues of anonymity). The University of Bath has formal ethical guidelines that you will need to complete before conducting your fieldwork, this includes an MA Education Ethics Approval form to be agreed and countersigned by your supervisor and sent to the MA Administrator. (See the WIKI for more on ethics)

Note 1: Policy on word count

The marker(s) will stop reading the work once the student has exceeded a word limit (or the upper figure of a word range) by 10%. If a student writes less than the word limit (or the lower figure of a word range) they risk not maximising their potential mark;