



University of the
West of England

MODULE SPECIFICATION

Code: UMPC46-30-M

Title: Discovery: Research Methods

Version: 2

Level: M

UWE credit rating: 30

ECTS credit rating: 15

Module type: Project

Owning Faculty: FBL

Field: Human Resources Management

Valid from: 1 September 2001
(Revised 1 January 2010)

Discontinued from:

Contributes towards: PG Research

Pre-requisites: None

Co-requisites: None

Excluded combinations: None

Aim of module

This module will enable students to develop the necessary competencies in understanding and critically applying a variety of research methods and tools. It allows students to develop and apply theoretical knowledge and problem-solving skills in the in-depth investigation and critical analysis required for a business and management research project at doctoral level. This module provides students with the skills necessary to complete empirical research at the PhD level, and successful completion of this module will contribute towards the research training requirement of the doctoral programme.

Learning outcomes

On successful completion of this module students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the principal research traditions and approaches in business and management research.
- Appreciate the relationships between theory, research approach and method.
- Conceptualise a research problem in the field of business and management and devise an appropriate research strategy.
- Show a critical appreciation of the theory and empirical research relevant to the topic area.
- Demonstrate an understanding of different techniques of data collection (quantitative and qualitative) and understand the strengths and limitations of these methods.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the techniques of qualitative and quantitative data analysis.
- Design a research strategy that is appropriate for doctoral research.
- Understand the problems of negotiating and maintaining research access.
- Analyse rigorously and synthesise different sources of data to reach well-supported conclusions.
- Relate the research findings to the literature on the topic and to evaluate the organisational or wider relevance of the results.
- Understand the academic requirements for drafting a methodology chapter in a doctoral thesis

All the above learning outcomes are formally assessed through Component A of the assessment

In addition the educational experience may explore, develop, and practise but not formally discretely assess the following:

- Appreciate the ethical issues in social research and of the problems and dilemmas in the dissemination and implementation of research findings.

Syllabus outline

- **The Nature of Research:** the purposes of research and its contribution to the analysis of business and management issues; the main traditions in business and management research and the principal research approaches; the stages in the research process.
- **Planning the Research:** reviewing critically relevant published literature; defining the aims and objectives of the study; the principles of research design; the problems of research access and associated issues of confidentiality and anonymity; ethical issues in research.
- **Data Collection:** an overview of the different methods of data collection, their strengths and limitations; quantitative data collection techniques including questionnaire design and administration, sampling principles and methods; qualitative data collection through in-depth interviewing, observation studies, use of focus groups; the use of secondary sources and archival research.
- **Case-based Research:** understanding and selecting case studies; an overview of the benefits and pitfalls of using case studies in business and management research.
- **Data Analysis and Interpretation:** preparing data for analysis; methods of analysing qualitative data; methods of analysing quantitative data including the use of software packages (eg SPSS) and statistical methods of interpretation; the evaluation and integration of primary and secondary data.
- **Approaches to Presenting Research Data:** presenting quantitative data in tabular form; presenting qualitative data effectively.

Teaching and learning methods

Completion of the module requires a considerable amount of independent, self-directed learning which is in addition to class room contact time. In the period between formal teaching and learning sessions and submission of the assessed project, students will be expected to:

- create and develop a viable research design that is of sufficient rigour to address core research questions;
- critically engage with the academic literature concerning the methodology that underpins this design;
- prepare appropriate data collection instruments;
- complete a research access strategy.

This work will be subject to student supervision.

The teaching and learning strategy for the taught element is as follows:

- **Teaching strategy** - The module will be taught through a combination of formal staff presentations, student-led seminar discussions and debate, and exercises involving the practical application of research concepts, principles and techniques. Additional learning materials, intended to complement the formal class sessions, will be supplied. A formal teaching programme on research methods covering research design, quantitative and qualitative data collection and data analysis. Time will be made available on the course for the development of students' practical skills in such key areas as interviewing, questionnaire design and computerised data analysis.
- **Learning strategy** – Students will be expected to actively engage in workshop discussion throughout the course. In order to complete the assessment, students will be expected to undertake a large amount of self directed learning. This will include critical evaluation of

different theories and methods of data collection required for the completion of a PhD research project.

Reading Strategy

- Access and skills – All students will be encouraged to make full use of the print and electronic resources available to them through membership of the University. These include a range of electronic journals and a wide variety of resources available through web sites and information gateways. The University Library's web pages provide access to subject relevant resources and services, and to the library catalogue. Many resources can be accessed remotely. Students will be presented with opportunities within the curriculum to develop their information retrieval and evaluation skills in order to identify such resources effectively.
- Blackboard – The module is supported by Blackboard, where students will be able to find all necessary module documentation, to include guidance on further reading within the module handbook. Direct links to information resources will also be provided from within Blackboard.
- **Essential reading** – The set textbook is Bryman A and Burgess M 2nd edition (2007) *Business Research Methods* Oxford University Press, and students are expected to purchase it. It is likely that the textbook will change from year to year so students should check with the module leader or current year module handbook before buying.
- Other required reading will be provided from the library directly.
- **Further reading** – Further reading will be required to supplement the set textbook and other provided readings (see above). The purpose of this further reading is to ensure students are familiar with current research, classic works, and material specific to their interests from the academic literature, often journals. Suggested further reading by topic will be indicated in the module handbook/outline provided at the start of the module. However, students are expected to use their initiative and discretion in selecting appropriate further reading to support their studies. It is expected that students will engage with the academic journal literature on the subject of business and management and their chosen research topic, and as such are likely to use articles from some of the following indicative academic journals in their further reading: *Academy of Management Review*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organization Science*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Human Relations*, *Business History*, and *Work, Employment and Society*. Access to all these publications is available through the library and all are available electronically.

Indicative sources:

Alvesson M and Sköldböck K (2000) *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research* London: Sage.

Bell J. 4th edition (2005) *Doing Your Research Project* Buckingham: Open University Press

Blaxter L (2006) *How to Research* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Denzin, N K (1989) *Interpretive Biography* London: Sage.

Denzin, N K (2009) *The Research Act* London: Sage.

Easterby-Smith M, Thorpe R and Lowe A. 3rd edition (2008) *Management Research: An Introduction* London: Sage

Field, A. 3rd Edition (2009) *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS*. London: Sage.

Jankowicz A D. 4th edition (2005) *Business Research Projects*. London: International Thompson Business Press

Mason, J. 2nd Edition (2002) *Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Robson C. 2nd edition (2002) *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner*

Researchers, Oxford: Blackwell

Saunders M, Lewis P and Thornhill A (2003) *Research methods for Business Students* London: Pitman

Assessment

As much of the teaching and learning is based around applied research, the module will be assessed directly through the design, conduct and presentation of the research project in the form of a project. Formative assessment is provided from the start of the module through the consideration of research journal articles. Students will thereby benefit from class debate, commentary and feedback from the tutor. Further formative assessment will be provided by the course tutors during the preparation of the project.

Summative assessment takes place at the end of the module and has one component, Component A, which is a 7,500 word project. This is a methodological defence of the student's own research design related to their chosen PhD topic, which incorporates the concepts and critical evaluations of qualitative and quantitative research methods as grounded in the relevant literature.

Specific assessment criteria for the examination will be published in the module handbook/outline each year.

Percentage split

Weighting between components A (controlled component) and B N/A

ATTEMPT 1

First Assessment Opportunity

Component A

Description of each element

1 7500 word supervised project on research methodology. Element weighting

100%

Second Assessment Opportunity (further attendance at taught classes is not required)

Component A

Description of each element

1 7500 word supervised project on research methodology. Element weighting

100%

ATTEMPT 2 (OR SUBSEQUENT): Attendance at taught classes is required.