



University of the  
West of England

**BRISTOL**

## MODULE SPECIFICATION

**Code:** UMSCDC-60-M **Title:** Executive Dissertation and Research Methods **Version:** 3

**Level:** M **UWE credit rating:** 60 **ECTS credit rating:** 30

**Module type:** Dissertation

**Owning Faculty:** FBL **Field:** Strategy and International Business

**Faculty Committee approval:** QMAC **Date:**

**Valid from:** 1 September 2002 **Discontinued from:**  
(Revised 1 September 2010)

**Contributes towards:** Master of Business Administration

**Pre-requisites:** None

**Co-requisites:** None

**Excluded combinations:** None

### Aim of module

The aim of the module is to help MBA students to acquire significant research skills, partly through undertaking a course in research methods, but mainly through carrying a research project (Research proposal and Dissertation). The research proposal and dissertation write-up are embedded within the published academic theory and research relating to a chosen topic and encourage students to conduct conceptual and empirical research that advances the understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of organisations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value (Principle 4, United Nations Principles in Responsible Management Education).

### **Learning outcomes:**

On successful completion of this module students will be able to

- Demonstrate the relationship between research focus, theory, research approach and method.
- Display deeper knowledge and skills in a specific subject or context that is the topic of the independent investigation.
- Defend choices of research methods on the basis of reliability, validity, generalisability, applicability of findings and resource requirements.
- Distinguish between descriptive, exploratory, predictive, explanatory and action research and to manage problems associated with reliability, validity, bias, and resource intensity of research methods.
- Apply a creative and reflective approach to enquiry and research process acquiring a clear knowledge that approaches vary depending on research methods chosen: interviewing, questionnaire design and administration, focus group management (including diary management), project management, information search, text analysis, content analysis, statistical techniques, etc.
- Apply knowledge, critical thinking and problem solving skills and techniques to an area of personal interest or organisational relevance.
- Reconcile the ethical issues in social scientific and business research, including those arising in relation to the negotiation of research access, dissemination and implementation of research findings in accordance with any relevant codes of conduct pertaining to the nature

and scope of the research topic e.g. protection of subject confidentiality, Data Protection Act, Market Research Society, BBS code of conduct, NHS code of ethic, etc.

- Conduct conceptual and empirical research that advances the understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of organisations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.
- Demonstrate skills and expertise in addressing multifaceted management problems through this self-learning activity.
- Undertake a critical literature review, identifying a conceptual model to underpin the work, develop a research design, select appropriate data collection method(s) and carry out a competent and rigorous analysis of the data to synthesise new knowledge and insights in the research context and make effective use of multiple and potentially conflicting sources of data/information/knowledge
- Produce two substantial written documents, -a research proposal and a dissertation- that demonstrate clarity of thinking and logical argument in drawing practical conclusions and recommendations for further research and/or for practising managers

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

- ability to find creative and practical solutions to gain access to relevant data, to conduct research recognising resource constraints, and to present findings in a manner that is appropriate to the level of detail required.
- autonomy to independently conceptualise a research problem and determine appropriate research strategies.
- ability to manage the research process over a prolonged period of time involving both theoretical and practical issues.

### **Syllabus outline:**

#### Research Methods:

- Introduction to Business & Management Research; definitions of research; debates on the nature, generation and dissemination of knowledge; features and range of applications of business and management research; ontology, epistemology and methodology; aims and structure of the module.
- Research planning; the research process; generating a research topic and conceptualising the research problem; selecting an appropriate methodological approach; research design and project management negotiating access; ethical issues in business and management research.
- Reviewing the literature; purpose and process of literature review; use of library data-bases and the internet; characteristics of a convincing, critical literature review; relationship with the conceptual/analytical framework informing the research; attribution of sources; use of appropriate software packages.
- The survey method; characteristics of the survey method; potential scope of application; questionnaire design and piloting sampling techniques; questionnaire administration, data analysis, and evaluation.
- Quantitative data analysis; statistical data analysis techniques; presentation of statistical data.
- Qualitative interviewing and observation methods; interviewing, observation and ethnography; planning and conducting semi-structured and unstructured interviews; recording, analysing and evaluating the data; types of observation study and examples of use in business & management research.
- Case study approach; nature, types and applications of the case study method; planning and conducting a case study investigation; use of multiple data collection methods; organising, analysing and evaluating the findings.

- Qualitative data analysis; quantifying and non-quantifying methods of qualitative data analysis; evaluating the data and analysis; presentation of qualitative data.
- Writing-up and presentation of research findings; planning the work, getting started and avoiding the problems and pitfalls; structuring the dissertation report, organising the content, achieving overall coherence writing styles and issues of presentation.
- Critical evaluation of research methodologies and methods; the indeterminacy of knowledge; evaluating critically the purpose of an investigation, approach adopted and results obtained.

#### Research Proposal:

- Defining research problem (corporate relevance, academic interest and validity, application of taught material, originality, data usage); setting context of research (major issues or hypotheses) and justification of purpose of research (clarity of purpose, balance, critique)
- Establishing objectives; the literature review; selecting data collection methods (variety, triangulation), measurement techniques and samples; identifying resource requirements; specifying time/milestones; specifying financial cost; preparing research proposal

#### Final Dissertation:

- Structure; writing style (accuracy, clarity, conciseness, unity, readability); referencing, attribution and citations; presentation of data and results.

#### **Teaching and learning methods:**

- The module is a combination of sound academic underpinning and practical application. The academic underpinning takes two forms: the delivery of a research methods programme, and the independent study by the student with the support of a dissertation tutor. The research methods programme consists of formal specialist input, directed reading, workshops involving group and individual exercises. A tangible outcome from this part of the module is the identification of a research topic that leads to the allocation of a dissertation tutor and the production of a dissertation proposal.
- During the independent research phase of the module, primary support is given to the student via their dissertation tutor. This support takes the form of guidance and mentoring with the onus on the student to explore options and bring issues and potential solutions to the tutor for discussion. It is anticipated that, on average, students would have four formal meetings with their tutor over the period of the dissertation although individual arrangements may be made.
- In addition to the dissertation tutor, students can access the dissertation co-ordinator for more general administration and procedural advice.

#### **Reading Strategy**

Students will be given guidance (Library session) on how to identify relevant sources for themselves, e.g. through the use of bibliographical databases.

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.

#### **Essential reading**

Students will be provided with the essential text, which is currently:

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2007) *Business Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### **Indicative Reading List**

Balnaves, M., Caputi, P. (2001) *Introduction to Quantitative Research Methods. An Investigative Approach*. London: Sage

Bauer, M. and Gaskell, D. (2000) *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound. A Practical Handbook for Social Research*. London: Sage.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., and Tight, M. (2006) *How to Research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed Open University Press.

Boje, D. (2001) *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*. London: Sage.

Costley, C., Elliott, G., Gibbs, P. (2010) *Doing Work Based Research. Approaches to Enquiry for Insider-Researchers*. London: Sage.

Cryer, P. (2006) *The Research Student's Guide to Success*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed Open University Press.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.) (2005) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Sage.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Lowe, A. (2008) *Management Research: an introduction*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Sage.

Franzosi, R. (2010) *Quantitative Narrative Analysis*. London: Sage

Gill, J. and Johnson, P. (2002) *Research Methods for Managers*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Chapman.

Gummesson, E. (2000) *Qualitative Methods in Management Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Sage.

Hussey, J and Hussey, R. (2009) *Business Research: A Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed Macmillan.

Kruger, R.A. (1994) *Focus Groups: a practical guide for applied research*. Sage.

Murray Thomas, R. (2003) *Blending Qualitative and Quantitative Research methods in Thesis and dissertations*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Nykiel, R. (2007) *Handbook of Marketing research methodologies for Tourism and Hospitality*. New York: Haworth Press.

Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed London: Blackwell.

Rudestam, K.E. and Newton, R.R. (2007) *Surviving Your Dissertation*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Sage.

Ryan, B. Scapens, R.W. and Theobald, M. (2002) *Research Methods and Methodology in Finance and Accounting*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed Academic Press.

Salkind, N. (2010) *Excel Statistics. A Quick Guide*. London: Sage

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., (2009) *Research Methods for Business Students*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed, FT Pitman.

Silverman, D. (2001) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). London: Sage.

Silverman, D. (2009) *Doing Qualitative Research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). London: Sage.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (2008) *Basics of Qualitative Research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Sage.

Wilson, J. (2010) Essentials of Business Research A Guide to Doing Your Research Project. London: Sage.

### **Assessment**

The student is assessed in a summative manner on their performance in the dissertation submitted. Students are required to produce a dissertation proposal immediately following Research Methods part of the module and will therefore be assessed at an early stage in the research process with regard to their research planning skills.

### **Weighting between components A and B**

n/a

### **ATTEMPT 1**

#### **First Assessment Opportunity**

#### **Component A**

#### **Description of each element**

#### **Element weighting**

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. Dissertation proposal (2 000 words)                        | 10% |
| 2. Dissertation Project (max 15,000 words) (final assessment) | 90% |

#### **Second Assessment Opportunity (further attendance at taught classes is required)**

#### **Component A**

#### **Description of each element**

#### **Element weighting**

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. Dissertation proposal (2 000 words)                        | 10% |
| 2. Dissertation Project (max 15,000 words) (final assessment) | 90% |

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