

# MSc. DISSERTATION RULES AND GUIDELINES – AEFM Group, School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

## 1. Guidelines on Choice of Topic and Content

The dissertation topic and proposal will be developed during the year. The idea for a dissertation topic can be your own, however, members of staff can suggest dissertation topics.

The chosen topic should be related to your degree programme. However, it need not be a topic that is explicitly taught within the programme.

Each student's dissertation proposal will be considered by staff members. They may reject the proposal on one or more of the following grounds:

- a) No existing member of staff is able to provide adequate supervision;
- b) It and other dissertations would involve excessive demands on particular members of staff;
- c) The topic is inappropriate (does not significantly involve issues pertaining to the degree programme);
- d) It would wholly or largely duplicate work previously undertaken;
- e) The topic is too unfocused and ill-specified (too broad, too general or too vague).

## 2. Supervision and Monitoring of Progress

A supervisor will be assigned to each student, once the dissertation topic has been approved. Students must have a detailed discussion with their supervisors, covering the following matters:

- a) The scope of the proposed programme of work, the standard to be achieved, and the time scale and milestones for completion of the dissertation.
- b) Guidance about sources of information, including, if appropriate, other members of staff.
- c) A programme of, or arrangements for meetings and contacts between student and supervisor during the course of the dissertation. You should remember that supervisors have other things to do during the summer months and cannot be guaranteed to be contactable throughout this period. It is your responsibility to ensure that arrangements are made for appropriate contacts as necessary.

You are expected to maintain regular contact with your supervisor, to seek advice on the planning of your dissertation, the use of appropriate techniques, and to present written work as required. Your supervisor will criticise and make constructive comments on the content, presentation and organisation of your dissertation. *The supervisor will not read, comment upon or edit your complete draft at any stage. The final submitted version of dissertation is solely the responsibility of the student.* In other words, your dissertation is your responsibility, with guidance as appropriate from your supervisor.

## 3. Form of Dissertation

### a) Length

The dissertation should be a concise and closely argued essay, with clear objectives and well-structured contents, supported where appropriate by diagrams, data, mathematics and statistics. The dissertation should normally contain between 10,000 and 20,000 words. including space for tables and figures. but excluding references and

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appendices in which additional material may be presented. Dissertations that are too long and diffuse may be penalised.

b) Layout

Loose-leaf numbered sheets of A4 paper, typed on one side only, with double-spacing should be used. The dissertation must be typed and bound with stiff cards as both covers. Spiral binding is not acceptable and binding can be done in the Main Library Bindery at a reasonable cost. A 1.5" margin must be left on the left hand side of each page. The dissertation must include, at the beginning, a table of contents, and, at the end, a list of references cited in the text. The dissertation should be prefaced by a summary or abstract of not more than 200 words indicating the scope and conclusions of the study.

c) General Arrangements

Consider carefully the order in which your material is to be arranged so that your arguments can be put as clearly as possible. No matter how good your ideas, the final result depends upon your ability to communicate them.

d) Grammar and Style

Although your dissertation will be marked primarily on its argument and content, grammar and style are also important factors. Poor grammar may divert attention from the points you are trying to make. You should always try to avoid irritating your readers.

e) Quotations

All direct quotations from other work must be clearly indicated thus: "....." (Harvey, 1987) and be accompanied by the page no. Close paraphrasing of material should likewise be indicated, i.e. Hutchinson (1995) argues that ".....". He goes on to demonstrate, etc. Direct copying of other work is to be avoided, as are large numbers of long quotations. If long quotations are required, indent and separate them from the main text.

f) References

Only list references actually referred to in the text of the dissertation, not a comprehensive subject bibliography. References should be arranged as follows:-

Papers

McLeay, F. and Zwart, T. (1993) "Agricultural Marketing and Farm Marketing Strategies". *Australasian Agribusiness Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp 80-99.

Chapters in Books

Ness, M (1997) "Food Marketing Research" in Ritson, C. Albisu, L. and Padberg, D. (eds) *Agricultural Marketing*, C.A.B. International, Wallingford

Books

Ritson, C. and Harvey, D. (1991) *The Common Agricultural Policy and the World Economy*. (eds). C.A.B. International. Wallingford.

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References should be cited according to the Harvard System, i.e. author's names, and date of publication to be given in the body of the text and references collected alphabetically at the end of the dissertation.

g) Footnotes

Footnotes must be avoided where possible, but as a last resort should be given at the bottom of the page. They are used primarily to explain or pursue arguments further, or to give examples, references, etc.; they generally contain material that would divert attention from the main thrust of the argument if presented in the text itself.

#### **4. Submission of Dissertation**

Two copies of the dissertation should be prepared, one of which must be submitted in book form with binding, and although not necessarily hard backed, a stiff cover will be necessary. The cover should carry a typewritten label headed "MSc in Rural Resource and Countryside Management 2001/2002" followed by the title of the study and the author's name.

Under the title on the front piece should be the words "Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Rural Resource and Countryside Management. Dissertation should be accompanied by a blue form that has to be signed by the supervisor.

You will be required to make your own arrangements for the typing and photocopying of your dissertation, and to meet the cost. Departmental secretaries will not be able to take on such typing as part of their duties.

#### **5. Assessment**

Your dissertation will be assessed by examiners within the Department and may also be assessed by an external examiner. One copy of your dissertation may be returned to you.

#### **6. Standards**

The criteria against which your dissertation will be judged are specified on a separate form – which is available at:

<http://www.staff.ncl.ac.uk/david.harvey/AEF801/MScDissAss.pdf>

The essence of an MSc. Dissertation is that it should represent a professional report of research. This research may either be of the conventional academic form, (in which case the appropriate goal is to produce a publishable research paper) or a professional business report (in which case the appropriate goal is to produce a report which is worth something to the potential users, and for which one could reasonably expect to be paid for the work you have put in).

#### **7. Plagiarism**

As mentioned above, one of the primary objectives of the dissertation is to give you the opportunity of producing a piece of research on your own. Obviously plagiarism will defeat this purpose. Plagiarism is, therefore, seen as a serious matter and will be subject to serious penalties - a lower mark being awarded or, in extreme cases, a nil mark.

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Clearly, the imposition of such a penalty will have dire consequences and may lead to no degree being awarded.

Plagiarism includes adopting the arguments of another without acknowledging the source. It may take two forms:

- a) Passing off the work of another as one's own;
- b) Suppression of sources from footnotes and from the Bibliography.

It is, however, envisaged that you will be synthesising and commenting upon the work of others. This is not only valid but an intrinsic part of research.

**The key point is that you should always explicitly acknowledge (by referencing) material/ideas that are other people's work.**

### **8. English**

If dissertations contain spelling mistakes or grammatical errors they may have to be corrected and resubmitted. This may mean that these students will be unable to graduate at the December congregation when other students graduate. It is the responsibility of students to get their dissertations proof read and check that the English is correct before submission.

### **9. Dissertation Deadline**

The dissertation must be handed in to the Degree Director by Friday 12th September 2003.

A late submission of a dissertation shall be treated as a non-submission unless the time limit specified in the degree regulations is extended in writing. Such an extension may be granted, at the discretion of the Degree Programme Director, for up to one month. An extension beyond this period of up to a further two months in total may be granted at the discretion of the Postgraduate Sub-Dean.