"Research Skills in Practice"

UMW – On-Line Alternative to the Dissertation

MOLI-G

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Expansion of On-Line Learning at The University of Manchester

Why?

- Importance of technology enhanced learning in the future of Higher Education

- High-quality courses in high-demand subject areas

- Cost-effective and sustainable delivery model

- Significant increase in DL/BL student numbers/revenue by 2023-4

- Benefits extend to on-campus programmes and students

University SLT Strategic decision July 2016
Creation of UMW 1st August 2017

Typical UMW On-line Course Structure

YEAR 1			
20 CR 10 WEEKS	20 CR 10 WEEKS	20 CR 10 WEEKS	20 CR 10 WEEKS

YEAR 2		
20 CR 10 WEEKS	20 CR 10 WEEKS	60 CR PROJECT/DISSERTATION 20 - 30 WEEKS

2 years part-time

4 start points per year; Sept, Nov, Feb, May

Each 20 credit unit = 10 weeks (c20hrs study per week)

1 week gap between each unit

We need to talk about "the dissertation"

Traditional 60 credit dissertation approach

- 1:1 supervision usually required
- Short timeframe to produce "research"
- Difficult to do on-line
- Relevance to career development for typical professionals undertaking on-line courses?
- Handling large numbers for scale up is difficult
- UK QAA does not require empirical research as part of a Masters degree

QAA Descriptors for Masters degree

all master's degree graduates have in-depth and advanced knowledge and understanding of their subject and/or profession, informed by current practice, scholarship and research. This will include a critical awareness of current issues and developments in the subject and/or profession; critical skills; knowledge of professional responsibility, integrity and ethics; and the ability to reflect on their own progress as a learner.

graduates of professional or practice master's are able to apply research and critical perspectives to professional situations, both practical and theoretical, and to use a range of techniques and research methods applicable to their professional activities.

What do other Universities do?

Example 1:

All MSc students are required to write a 10,000 to 12,000 word dissertation. This contributes one-third (60 credits) of the overall assessment for the programme. The dissertation is an opportunity to apply the content of the modules studied to a topic of interest to the student. It may address an issue of theoretical or practical importance and must be capable of being supervised by an [academic staff member](). Students may relate the topic to their own work and / or their own country, but this is not compulsory. Most important is that the topic chosen is practicable, in the sense that there are adequate sources of reliable information available to the student.

Preparation for the dissertation begins on successful completion of the six taught modules. An online two week Research Methods Module runs once a year to help with this. The student is then encouraged to produce a dissertation proposal and then a dissertation supervisor is allocated. Contact with the supervisor will normally be by email or skype. If students either reside in the UK or are visiting, they can take the opportunity to visit their supervisor (by prior appointment).

Example 2:

The *Dissertation* modules enable participants to develop knowledge and understanding of a specialist area within the broad fields of career development, career coaching, coaching and work-related learning. The modules are taught principally via individual supervision, an online dissertation guide and materials available to Dissertation students in the Research Project module virtual learning space

Summary of teaching
This module is predominantly distance learning-led with materials provided via a virtual learning environment supported by core reading, a research workshop and tutorial support. Distance learning supervision is conducted via phone, Skype, face-to-face and email.

Dissertation A (60 credits) consists of a 15000 word dissertation (100%)

Or lose it altogether…..

Distance Learning MSc Degrees in United Kingdom (Without Dissertation)

We have 70 Distance Learning MSc Degrees in United Kingdom (Without Dissertation)
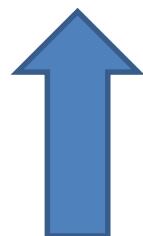
…………But….actually they don't……

UMW's solution

3 options:

60 credit Individual Project (traditional format – by exception)

60 Credit Group Project (Team work)

60 credit Research Skills in Practice Unit

Research Skills in Practice

Module	Working title	Credits	Co-requisite(s)?
1	Formulating your research question	10	2
2	Critical appraisal of the literature	10	1
3	Defining your study methodology	10	
4	Your responsibilities as a researcher	10	
5	Communicating your research	10	
6	Reflective practice	10	

Module 1

Module 2

Module 3

Module 4
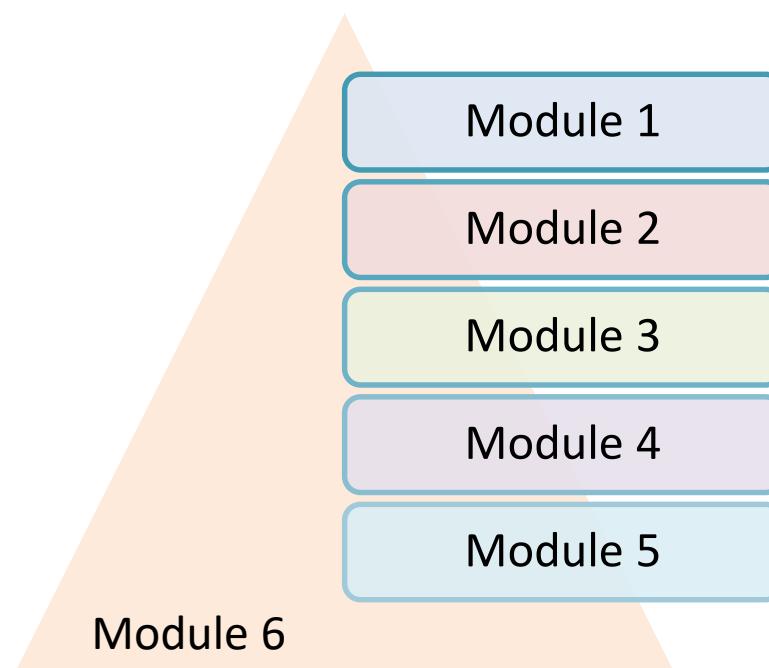
Module 5

Module 6

RSiP Unit Principles

The Research Skills in Practice Unit will be developed for use across multiple disciplines.

The content of each module will comprise a generic core of resources and activities that will be supplemented with discipline-specific examples and content as appropriate for each course.

Specific resources

Generic
Framework
& Format
including links to
MLE Etc.

Specific examples
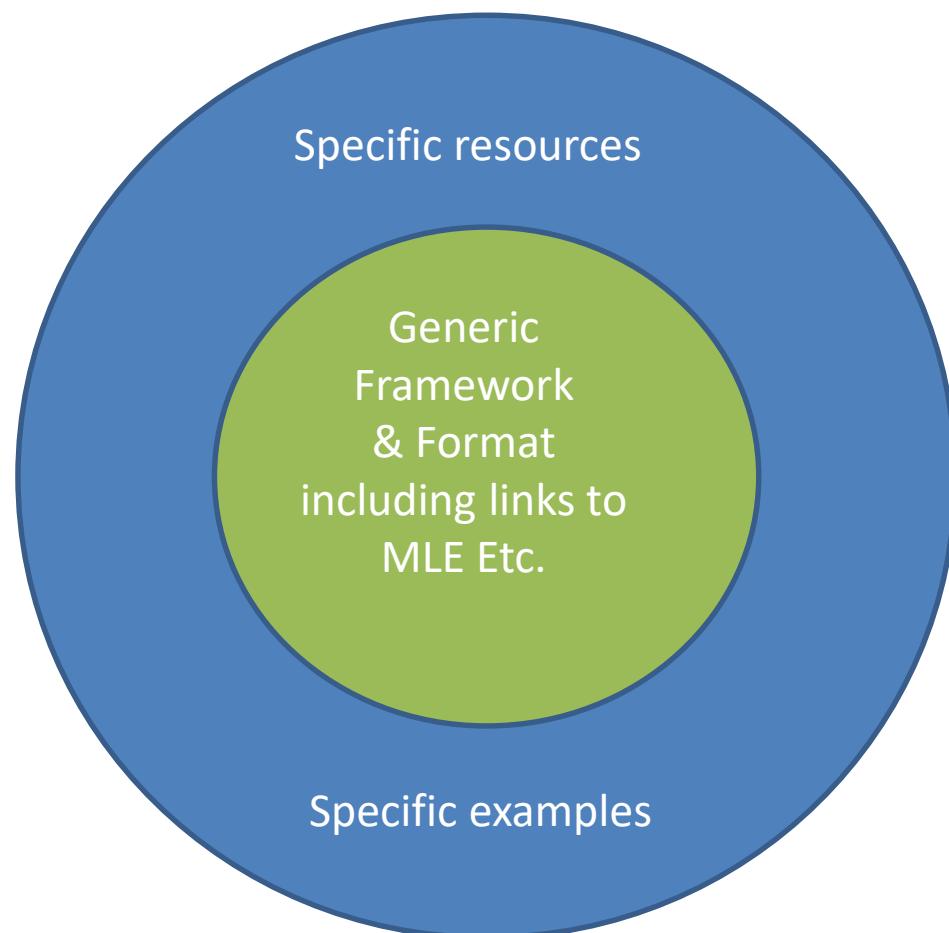
A typical module:
Week 1: Introduction, orientation and reading
Week 2: Interactive learning activities
Week 3: Interactive learning activities
Week 4: Assessment

Each module has an individual piece of assessment associated with it.

As for all UMW course units, a time-commitment of 20-25 hours per week is expected.
Each module = 4 weeks (normally)

RSiP Unit Principles contd.

- UMW will design and develop the 6 modules

- Providing discipline specific content and delivering the unit will be a **School responsibility.** This will include appointing a unit lead and tutors as required.

- Adaptation of the unit for each course and ongoing maintenance and development of the unit will be a UMW responsibility.

- An RSiP User group co-ordinated by UMW will be formed to provide training and support.

- UMW is considering a fractional appointment to act as overall dissertation skills lead academic to liaise and co-ordinate across Schools
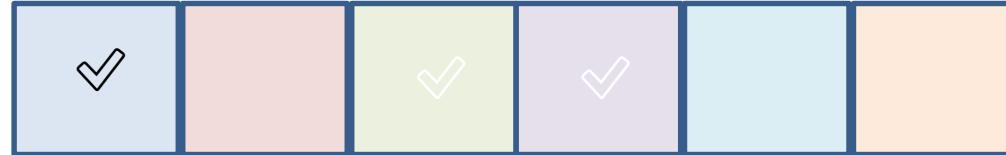
Assessment Principles:

One piece of assessment per 10 credit module

Variety of assessment methods; written, oral, blog etc.

Student is *advised* to submit assessment at the end of each 10 credit module

Final sssessment deadline is at the end of the course unit (allowing student the opportunity to delay a piece of coursework if necessary)

Marking load as per taught component – use of Tutors 1:20-25 students etc.

60 credit unit to exam board for ratification.

The Research Skills Unit is distinct from any **Research Methods Units (RMU)*** that may form part of a taught component of a Masters degree. It is expected that where Research Methods forms part of the taught component a traditional research based dissertation will be used. It is **not expected** that a course will include a research methods unit in the taught component **PLUS** the research skills unit in place of a dissertation. See diagram below.
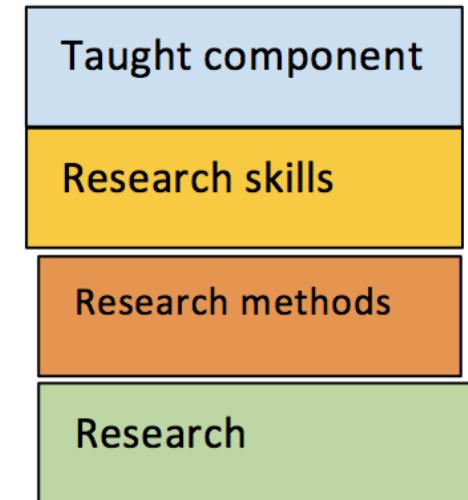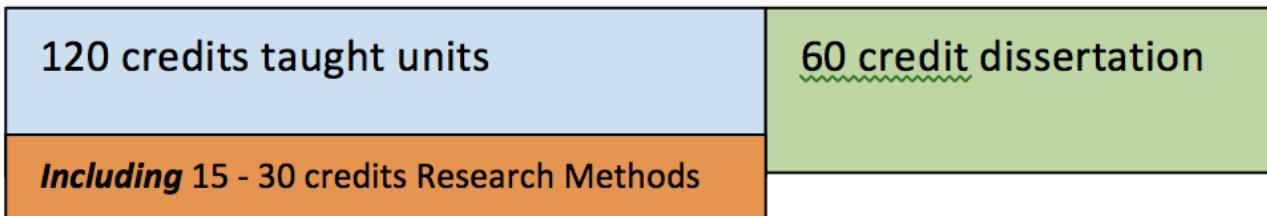
Model 1:

120 credits taught units	60 credit RSU

Taught component
Research skills
Research methods
Research

Model 2:

120 credits taught units	30 credit RSU	30 credit practice-based project

Model 3:

120 credits taught units	60 credit dissertation
Including 15 - 30 credits Research Methods	

*note it is possible that elements of the RSU could be used to develop an RMU but they cannot be used in the same course.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Cat.	No.	Students should be able to:
Knowledge and understanding	1A	Demonstrate in-depth and advanced knowledge, understanding and critical awareness of current issues in their subject, discipline or profession.
	1B	Demonstrate knowledge of professional responsibility, integrity and ethical considerations.
Intellectual skills	2A	Consider and evaluate various methods of addressing the identified issue or problem and draw conclusions on the best way forward.
	2B	Apply skills of critical analysis to real world situations within a defined range of contexts.
Practical skills	3A	Find, evaluate, synthesise and use information from a variety of sources.
	3B	Express ideas effectively and communicate information appropriately and accurately using a range of media.
Transferable skills and personal qualities	4A	Demonstrate a high level of professionalism, exercise initiative and show personal responsibility.
	4B	Reflect on their own progress as a learner.
	4C	Develop working relationships using teamwork and leadership skills, recognising and reflecting on progress and taking appropriate action.
	4D	Articulate awareness of the social and community contexts within their disciplinary field.
	4E	Demonstrate independent learning ability to support their continued professional development.
	4F	Enhance their skills and confidence to enable them to operate effectively and creatively within their professional practice.

UMW Research Skills unit [6 x 10 credit units]

ILO		1	2	3	4	5	6
1A		✓	✓		✓	✓	
1B					✓	✓	
2A		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
2B			✓	✓			
3A			✓		✓	✓	
3B		✓			✓	✓	
4A					✓	✓	✓
4B					✓		✓
4C					✓		✓
4D		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4E					✓	✓	✓
4F					✓	✓	✓

Flexibility

Course A	Course B	Course C
• M1	• M1	• M1
• M2	• M2	• M2
• M3	• + 40 credit project	• M5
• M4		• + 30 credit project
• M5		
• M6		

Modules will also be available as resources for on-campus courses

Progress & Timeline:

Feb 19 – May 19; Core group developed draft structure

May – July 19; focus groups and consultation

August/Sept; refinement of the model

Sept 19 – March 20; Develop content

March – Sept '20; user testing and refinement

Sept 2020 – release.

Updates on UMW Pages on StaffNet

https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/umw/process/research-skills/