

# Collis & Hussey: Business Research

## Guided tour of the book



### Learning objectives

When you have studied this chapter, you should be able to:

- understand the general entry requirements for degree programmes
- understand the general standards for research at different levels
- choose a university or college
- consider issues relating to your future employability
- choose a supervisor for your research.

### Learning objectives

provide clear goals for the chapter

Introduction provides the context and links between topics

Key definitions provide quick reference to key terms

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although you may be thinking hard about your research already, if your research is going to be a means of achieving an academic qualification, you will need to look at the academic regulations and procedures at an early stage. Even if you are writing an internal consultancy report, you will need to consider the terms of reference. As the academic requirements can vary from one institution to another, we only provide a general guide, but this chapter should alert you to the main points. We also advise on choosing an academic institution and supervisor and examine how your choices can enhance your employability.

### 2.2 GENERAL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR DEGREE PROGRAMMES

In this section, we explain the general entry requirements for undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in business and management and the standards expected in the associated research report, known as a *dissertation* or *thesis*. There are no hard and fast rules and this is largely a matter of convention. Of course, the detailed requirements will be defined by your university or college, the type of research you are undertaking and whether it is going to be submitted in whole or part assessment of your degree. When you have completed your research, you will write it up and it will be assessed. There may also be an oral examination.

#### KEY DEFINITIONS

A *dissertation* is a lengthy treatment of a thesis.  
A *dissertation* is a 'detailed discussion, esp. as submitted for academic degree'.  
A *thesis* is a 'dissertation, esp. by candidate for a higher degree'.  
(Oxford Compact Thesaurus, 1997, pp. 211, 216 and 801 respectively)

Table 2.1 shows the main degrees and corresponding name of the associated research report. The degrees are shown in ascending order, starting with the undergraduate degrees and ending with the doctorates, which are the highest of the postgraduate degrees. This concentrates on research reports that are an important part of an award (such as a Bachelor's degree, taught Master's degree or DBA), or those that lead directly to an award (such as an MPhil or PhD). However, you might also be conducting research as part of an assignment (for example for course work on a degree programme) or a consultancy project. In such cases, the regulations may be fairly loose or non-existent and you will need to establish *terms of reference* for your project.

- These allow you to establish:
- the purpose of the research
  - the scope of the study
  - the research question(s) to be addressed
  - the nature of the research (for example whether it will be exploratory, descriptive or analytical, and whether you are expected to make recommendations as well as draw conclusions from your findings).

The terms of reference need to be negotiated with the person requesting or commissioning the research and it will be your responsibility to ensure that your research fulfils the agreed terms. Whether your research is being conducted for an academic award or for consultancy purposes, many of the research processes are identical.

TABLE 2.1 Main degrees and associated research reports

Level	Main degrees	Research report
Undergraduate	Bachelor of Arts (BA) Bachelor of Science (BSc)	Dissertation
taught Master's	Master of Arts (MA) Master of Science (MSc) Master of Business Administration (MBA) Master of Research (MRes) Master of Management (MOM)	Dissertation
Master by research	Master of Philosophy (MPhil)	Thesis
taught doctorate	Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)	Thesis
Doctorate by research	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	Thesis

Clear figures and tables summarise key information

Numbered headings for ease of reference

### 2.3 GENERAL STANDARDS FOR RESEARCH AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

For all researchers, even those with a high level of experience, research is a process of enquiry and therefore a learning experience. In business research, as in other subject areas, a student project at undergraduate or postgraduate level affords a medium through which you can acquire the following skills and knowledge:

- skills for independent research, such as problem identification, problem definition, and the ability to plan and execute a research project appropriate to the problem under investigation, also, the ability to collect and analyse data, form conclusions and make practical recommendations
- skills for effective communication, such as verbal and presentational skills as well as written and organisational skills
- knowledge of research methodologies, methods and analytical techniques
- detailed knowledge of a particular topic, including the literature published in that area, its underlying concepts, theories and assumptions
- personal skills, such as resourcefulness, flexibility, creativity and clarity of thought, also the self-confidence that is gained as a result of managing an independent research project
- the ability to critically analyse a situation and to draw conclusions
- the knowledge to evaluate research carried out by others.

#### 2.3.1 BACHELOR'S DEGREES

In many parts of the world, it is common for undergraduates studying for a Bachelor's degree (BA or BSc) to undertake a research project towards the end of their programme, which will result in a report usually known as a dissertation. This is not restricted to business and management degrees, but increasingly students of law, engineering and science must demonstrate an appreciation of business, and this is often achieved by means of a research project. You may find that you are required to have reached a prescribed standard in your course in order to proceed to this stage. In contrast to the assignments you have worked on for your other modules, where the lecturer determines the content and direction of the coursework, in a research project, you will be respon-

## BOX 2.1 Checklist for choosing an academic institution

- Are you provided with detailed information on the research programme at the outset and the rules and regulations that apply?
- Are you offered an interview with the programme director or a potential supervisor to explore the match between your research interests and the research activities and abilities of the supervisor?
- Is there a research training programme or, at the very least, a series of seminars on research methods, to provide you with knowledge and opportunities to meet other researchers?
- Is there a culture of conference attendance by supervisors and research students that will give you the opportunity to present papers and discuss research with others?
- Are the library services, photocopying, printing, computer and other facilities adequate?
- Will you have access to common rooms where you can meet fellow researchers?
- Will you have access to facilities at evenings and weekends?
- If the institution is fully large, is there a regular newsletter to help you keep in touch?

Frequent checklists for ease of reference and practical guidance

## 2.5 EMPLOYABILITY

It is important that you consider your future employability when choosing an academic institution and degree programme. The increasing levels of participation in higher education have resulted in the undergraduate degree no longer being a guaranteed route to a future career. Increasingly employers are assessing factors other than the degree when recruiting staff. A well conducted undergraduate research project can sometimes make the difference in obtaining the position you desire. This does mean that the project must be thorough and presented well. It must also be a topic that is of interest to the potential employer.

An alternative strategy to a career for some students is to take a Master's degree or a doctorate. We have already noted that a research project for a taught Master's degree will be expected to be at a higher level than for a Bachelor's degree and provides an opportunity to demonstrate your particular skills, knowledge and preferences. For example, if you have chosen a Master's in Marketing because you are seeking a career in that area, your research project should demonstrate your interest in a particular marketing issue and your research skills.

For those students going on to a doctorate, an academic career is the usual objective. To obtain a position as a full-time lecturer at a university in North America or the UK you will need a PhD and, preferably, publications in the form of conference papers and/or journal publications. Future promotions will be based on your publications in academic journals. In most of Europe, and throughout North America, all instructors are known as professors. In the USA and Canada, the ranks are assistant professor, associate professor and full professor. In the UK, instructors are known as lecturers and the title 'professor' is reserved for those whose research achievements have been recognized as being of particular worth by a committee of academic peers.

Distance learning and on-line degrees are becoming increasingly popular, but they vary in terms of quality. Therefore, you would be wise to reflect on why you want the qualification and what your own time and financial resources will allow you to do. If you are looking for an academic career in teaching and/or research, you may find that this

Activities at the end of each chapter provide reflective and practical tasks

must be that there are sufficient numbers of students attached to a department or faculty to produce viable group sizes. They may be supplemented by managers from companies who are not registered for a degree, but who wish to conduct their own in-company research. Support sets can be a feature of more traditional research activities in the social sciences and need not be founded exclusively on process. They should be seen as being additional to normal supervision arrangements and are particularly valuable in the early stages of a research project.

## 2.7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has given an overview of the general requirements and standards you can expect in relation to your dissertation or thesis. Views on what constitutes research around the world vary and there are no global rules that govern what universities and other institutions of higher education offer research students. Once you have determined the country in which you wish to study, you then need to identify the institutions that are well recognized and offer the type of programme you want. If you have the necessary entry qualifications, visit the institution and evaluate the quality of what they have to offer. You need to be wary of degree programmes that are very short or appear to offer a qualification without substantial work.

If you are a potential MPhil or doctoral candidate, you should arrange to meet potential supervisors. This also gives them the opportunity to assess your qualities and skills at the same time as discussing your proposed research. Part of your decision about where to study will rest on whether you can find an experienced supervisor who is interested in your research topic and willing to guide your endeavours. Some students will need to find more than one supervisor.

## ACTIVITIES

1. If a research methods programme is available, obtain details of this. In addition, obtain a copy of the rules and regulations relating to your dissertation or thesis. Take particular note of the maximum word count and the length of time for doing the research/ submission date.
2. Visit the library and examine past student dissertations or theses. Look for those within your discipline to get a feel for the size and structure, and the amount of work required. Compare the contents pages and write notes on the similarities and differences in how they are structured and reflect on the reasons. While in the library, make notes on the resources available (for example access to on-line databases, the computer and printing facilities, arrangements for borrowing and photocopying, and the evening and weekend opening times).
3. Ask the programme director to put you in touch with a potential supervisor and arrange an informal meeting to explore the match between your research interests and those of the potential supervisor.
4. Ask the programme director or your potential supervisor to put you in touch with a student who is at a more advanced stage or who has successfully completed their research. Arrange a meeting with the student to obtain practical tips.
5. If you are a Master's or doctoral student, visit the common room and find out about evening and weekend access, and events where you can meet fellow researchers.

Progress tests at the end of each chapter provide feedback and consolidate understanding

## PROGRESS TEST

Complete the following sentences:

1. A detailed and lengthy treatment of a theme in the form of a research report submitted for an academic degree is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. A lengthy treatment of a theme is known as a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. A research report for a doctorate is usually known as a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Academics with responsibility for guiding students' research are called \_\_\_\_\_.
5. A doctoral research report must make a contribution to \_\_\_\_\_.

Are the following statements true or false?

6. Undergraduate researchers are not required to study the literature.
7. Undergraduate researchers do not need to address a research question.
8. Doctoral research must provide evidence of originality.
9. The research report for a taught Master's degree must provide evidence of originality.
10. A Master's degree by research must be worthy of publication.

Multiple choice questions

11. The typical length of a research report for a Bachelor's degree is:
  - a) Up to 5,000 words
  - b) 10,000–15,000 words
  - c) 10,000–20,000 words
  - d) 20,000–40,000 words
12. The typical length of a research report for a taught Master's degree is:
  - a) 10,000 words
  - b) 15,000 words
  - c) 20,000 words
  - d) 40,000 words
13. An example of an undergraduate level degree is a:
  - a) BA
  - b) MBA
  - c) DBA
  - d) PhD
14. An example of a degree by research is a:
  - a) BA
  - b) MBA
  - c) DBA
  - d) PhD
15. Once appointed, a good supervisor will:
  - a) always be available to you
  - b) formulate the research questions for your study
  - c) guide the development of your research
  - d) correct your spelling, punctuation and grammar