Dissertation Guidelines  
Law Programmes  

Guidelines for students starting their dissertation from June 2017 onwards.

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Introduction

The Dissertation is the culmination of your Master’s degree programme. It provides you with the opportunity to express yourself critically and logically, demonstrate the knowledge you have acquired in your studies in an applied setting and thus justify the award of a Master’s level degree.

Your Dissertation should involve the critical application of knowledge acquired in the programme, specifically Legal Methodology and subject-based knowledge gained in relevant Law modules. On completion of the Dissertation, you will have demonstrated the ability to research a given topic, synthesize and critically analyse relevant materials to construct an argument and, as a result, develop a piece of research work related to your chosen specialization degree title LLM International Business Law, LLM International Finance and Banking Law or LLM Technology and Intellectual Property Law.

Roles in the Dissertation development process

There will be several people helping you towards the successful completion of your Dissertation. You will already be familiar with your Student Support Manager (SSM), who will continue to offer advice and guidance to you, especially on administrative issues or on personal matters that may affect the progress of your studies. In addition, you will come into close contact with the following faculty:

- **General Dissertation Adviser (GDI).** The GDI will be responsible for running the Research Methods Training (RMT) module that you will join at the start of your Dissertation. The GDI also will be responsible for helping you choose a subject and for making sure that you have learned the basics of research necessary to complete your Dissertation. Last, the GDI will be responsible for approving your dissertation proposal, once it has met the required standards, and your DA has confirmed with him or her that they are satisfied with the work.

- **Dissertation Adviser (DA).** Your DA will be your one-on-one guide in respect of the Dissertation. Your DA will help you develop your Dissertation proposal and work with you through the various stages of your research and writing. Your DA will also act as the first assessor of your Dissertation once it is completed. In Week 2 of the RMT module, you will submit your chosen Subject Area for the dissertation to the GDI. Your GDI will work with a DA with expertise in your chosen Subject Area to ensure availability and communicate the assignment by the beginning of Week 4.

Dissertation development process overview

The guidelines below explain briefly how the Dissertation process works, the steps you need to take to embark on your Dissertation and the requirements which will be placed on you in this final stage of your Master’s degree programme.

Subject to your satisfactory progress, the key milestones on the route to your Dissertation are described briefly in the following table and in more detail in the sections that follow. Those elements marked with an asterisk (*) are formal evaluation points in the process which you must achieve. Monthly milestones of progress (3rd–7th months) are guides to expected progress.
### Eligibility and pre-work

The Dissertation can be undertaken as soon as you have reached 120 credits, the equivalent of eight modules. After finishing your final module, the maximum period of time you can wait to enter the Dissertation classroom is 16 weeks.

However, you are strongly advised to begin thinking of a potential subject for your Dissertation well before you have completed the modules. As you are working through the programme, be attentive to subjects that have particular interest for you and make notes of how you might turn these areas into a Dissertation subject. It is extremely important that you find a subject with which you can engage, as you will be expected to spend approximately 600 hours working on it over the 9 months.

**Enrolling for your Dissertation the RMT and Dissertation (DST) classes.** If you meet the eligibility criteria listed above, and you are ready to begin your Dissertation, please do not hesitate to contact your SSM to discuss starting your Dissertation. Your SSM will contact you regarding your Dissertation enrolment as you approach the end of your modules to discuss getting ready to begin the Dissertation and to help you decide on an appropriate time line for starting. Your SSM can help you enroll in an appropriate class and will discuss how and when that enrolment is confirmed.
You will join the RMT module when you are ready to begin your Dissertation. The RMT portion of this module is led by your GDI and functions in a similar way to those you have already completed in your Master’s programme.

In this portion of the module, you will:

- Choose your subject for the Dissertation and have it approved by your GDI
- Learn about research, structuring your Dissertation and planning the research process
- Get feedback on your proposed topic and on early drafts of sections of your Dissertation proposal (similar to the research project you may have completed in your modules)

The Dissertation portion of the DST module will begin after you have submitted your Dissertation proposal to the PM for approval. Once approved, your DA will provide you with one-on-one guidance in the Dissertation classroom as you develop your Dissertation.

**DST module learning outcomes:**

- Develop substantive knowledge of a law-related research topic; Understand the methodological steps involved in the research process of doing a Dissertation;
- Formulate an independent piece of research;
- Synthesize different information sources to form coherent arguments and relate research findings to legal policy and practice;
- Prepare a logical, critical and sustained argument, using bibliographies, referencing, citations and quotations in the appropriate manner.

**Selecting your research topic**

In identifying the research question or topic to be addressed in the Dissertation, it is not sufficient to say, ‘I am going to analyse the law on doctor-patient confidentiality’. Some understanding of the aspect that needs to be researched, and why, is important. By this stage, you should be able to demonstrate an appreciation of how to identify and frame research questions.

It is common for the scope of the Dissertation to change during the process of researching and writing it. The further you delve into the issues and available literature, the more likely that your preconceptions will be challenged. Changing the scope of your Dissertation or changing your focus or line of argument can be a reflection of the fact that you have remained open-minded in the course of your enquiry. In your discussion, consider featuring these instances where you find your expectations challenged.

Research questions will often identify a ‘gap’ identified in the current literature on the topic a gap to be filled at least in part by this Dissertation. You might identify coverage of the area you are proposing to explore as sparse. Alternatively, you might consider that the topic has been well covered in the past, but recent developments (e.g. economic, scientific and/or technological developments) mean that new insight or reflection is needed.

The Final Research Project preparation materials in the Centre for Student Success (https://success.liverpool-online.com/FinalResearchProjectPreparation/index) are a suite of self-guided resources to help you start planning for your research as early as possible. By reading through these materials, you will learn what makes a good research question, what ethical considerations you will need to consider before you begin collecting data, what information literacy is and why it is important, what processes and policies are involved in the Final Research Project phase, what
resources and services are available to help you, and about some research basics such as writing a literature review, choosing a research methodology, and how to maintain a good working relationship with your Dissertation Advisor.

You will continue to develop these ideas and formally develop your topic early in your RMT module.

Ultimately, your final Dissertation should be between 12,000 and 15,000 words long. Be sure that your chosen topic can generate enough content to meet this requirement and, at the same time, is scalable so that it does not exceed the word limitation. See Appendix 1: Word Limits for more information on this subject.

Proposal submission and approval
Before the end of the 8th week of your RMT module (the end of your 2nd month) you will need to have obtained approval for your Dissertation proposal. Once you have agreed with your DA that your proposal is ready, you will have to post your proposal in your RMT for a final review (by the GDI). This should be done no later than the end of the 7th week of your RMT class. You will be notified once the GDI approves the Proposal.

This is the first formal checkpoint on your Dissertation journey, and your progress will depend on getting through it. The key criterion for judgment is whether the GDI believes you have developed a research question that is feasible and limited in scope and demonstrated sufficient knowledge of research to be allowed to embark on the rigors of the Dissertation itself. It is vitally important that you realise the responsibility for your work on your Dissertation is entirely yours. Your DA will act as just that – an adviser you are strongly encouraged to follow his or her advice. However, ultimately it is up to you to submit the required work on time and to the standards outlined in the Dissertation handbook.

Once your proposal has been approved, then you will be allowed to continue with your Ethics Application.

Ethical Policy

The University of Liverpool and Laureate are fully committed to the advancement of high quality academic research, and to ensuring that all research activities involving human participation are conducted in a way that safeguards the dignity, rights, health, safety, and privacy of those involved.

As a University of Liverpool student, you must conduct your research in accordance with some fundamental ethical principles. These principles are:

- Except where the nature of the research makes this impossible, researchers and participants must be fully informed about the purpose, methods, and intended possible uses of the research. Based on this information, they must give their voluntary consent to take part in the project, free from coercion.
- The confidentiality of the information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected. Wherever possible data is anonymised and there is full compliance with the principles within the Data Protection Act. Personal information can only be disclosed when permission to disclose is part of the consent procedure.
- Risks to those involved in the research must be minimised, and harm to research participants and researchers must be avoided. Participants must be warned about any potential risks of harm.
• The independence of the research must be clear, and any conflict of interest or partiality must be explicit.
• The research must conform to all relevant statutory requirements and to the requirements of the institution in which the research is undertaken.

You can find more information about the ethics procedure in the Centre for Student Success:

http://success.liverpool-online.com/ethics

Whilst awaiting ethics outcome, it is expected that students will continue to work on the introduction/background, and the literature review, as well as be planning your fieldwork/collection of data, in anticipation of gaining ethics approval. Nevertheless, they must not approach their prospective participants or start any sort of data collection until they receive the approval:

Conducting research without ethical approval is likely to constitute research misconduct. Any final research projects (dissertations / consultancy projects) that contain data collected without ethical approval will be classified as not having been submitted, will not be assessed and will be treated as a non-submission. This applies to dissertations containing any data collected prior to ethics approval or data collected beyond the scope of the ethics approval. In such cases the Board of Examiners will normally award a mark of zero and require a re-take on a new topic. However, students will only be entitled to re-take if the breach occurred during the first attempt to academic entitlement.

Outside help with language skills

The writing of the dissertation, as well as the work presented within it, should be the students own. It is acceptable to ask your DA or a friend / colleague to point out unclear sentences, problematic paragraph structure, etc, when reading a draft chapter, but it is unacceptable to give the text to a professional editor for corrections. The University of Liverpool will treat the use of a professional editor as unauthorized collusion. However, your SSM can advise about services offered by the University to improve writing skills.

Even the most minor assistance with any aspect of the writing up of the Dissertation should be clearly acknowledged in the dissertation acknowledgements.

It is not permitted under any circumstances to write the dissertation in another language and have it translated into English.

Providing updates on your progress

While you are encouraged to request assistance from your DA when necessary as you develop your Dissertation, you will be expected to submit formal progress reports in the 5th and 7th months to your DA, through your@online.liverpool.ac.uk account. Your DA will post process information for submission of these reports in your Dissertation classroom. Use the guidance provided by your DA during this time to hone and revise the areas of your Dissertation that are in progress.
Dissertation Submission

Submitting your draft Dissertation

You will be expected to submit to your classroom a full draft of your Dissertation one month before the final deadline of your Dissertation (from the enrolment in your RMT class) for your DA in the DST classroom to critique. The DA will not normally be expected to give detailed feedback on multiple versions of the Dissertation; however, you should expect him or her to allow you to submit one or two additional versions to the DST classroom for review before you submit the final version, if there is time.

You will find in your DST classroom a link to submit your draft Dissertation through the plagiarism-checking tool. This is to enable you to review your draft for compliance with our plagiarism guidelines (see Appendix 2: Citations and Plagiarism) and make any minor adjustments to your citation practices before your final submission. As this is a draft submission, your Dissertation will not be added to the database, and it will not be matched against your final submission.

Submitting your final Dissertation

You should submit the final version of your Dissertation to the Turnitin link in the DST Submissions area of your classroom before submission deadline of your dissertation. This is 40 weeks after the start date if no extensions have been granted. For more information see:

(i) The Final Research Project: Submission, Deadlines and Extensions section of the CSS: http://success.liverpool-online.com/finalresearchproject/submission

(ii) The module calendar for your programme: http://success.liverpool-online.com/modulecalendars/2019

Submission Time: Previously, the time used to determine if a final research project was submitted by the deadline or was late was based on the time used by our online classroom (US Eastern Standard Time). Now, with effect for any submission with a deadline of 28th December 2016, the time used will change to the time zone of your country of residency as recorded in the University records.

Once done, you should proceed to the ‘My Dissertation’ area of your @online.liverpool.ac.uk account to complete the ‘Dissertation Submission’ declaration by clicking on the 'My Dissertation' tab on the home page. This must be completed for the Dissertation to be graded, and you should be aware that failure to complete this declaration could lead to a penalty for late submission (see Late Submission Policy, below).

Dissertation assessments and policies

Marking your dissertation

Your Dissertation will be marked by your DA as the first assessor and also by a second assessor. Once the final submission has been made, you will receive an email confirming the receipt of your
Dissertation. This contains the final acceptance of your Dissertation and marks the point at which communication between you and your DA should end so that the grading process can begin.

Grading will continue for several weeks once the Dissertation is complete. Final grades will be released to you as soon as possible after the Board of Examiners has met and agreed on a final award. The Board usually meets in October and May. This could mean a wait of several months, depending upon the deadline and submission date of the Dissertation. Once the Board of Examiners has made its decision, you will be contacted by your SSM with official confirmation of the results.

One of the most important requirements is that the Dissertation must be completed as scheduled. The clock starts as you enter the RMT class. If you fail to complete your Dissertation in the required timescale, your Dissertation grade will be dealt with under the Late Submission Policy, below.

Extensions

Extensions will not normally be granted except in clearly unexpected circumstances beyond student control, such as in cases of real personal/family/medical/work emergencies, or in instances where the Disability Centre have authorised an extended deadline following a review. Please contact student support or view the support website for details of making a claim for Extenuating Circumstances to be taken into consideration, or to learn about the Disability Centre. More information You can find more information in the Centre for Student Success:

http://answers.liverpool-online.com/faq/129457

Grading in the RMT/Dissertation module

Your overall RMT/Dissertation module grade is based on your performance in two areas: the assignments completed in the RMT portion of the module and your final Dissertation completed in the DST module. The assignments completed in the RMT portion of the module are weighted at 10% of your overall grade, while your final Dissertation constitutes the remaining 90% in the DST module.

The grade descriptors below will provide you with a better understanding of the classification of the grades for the RMT/DST module. This classification will be used for both components of the LLM RMT/DST modules, namely the 10% awarded to the assignments completed in the RMT and the 90% awarded to the final Dissertation in the DST classroom. It is worth bearing in mind that when assessing LLM Dissertations, the Dissertation Adviser and second marker will pay particular attention to the student’s knowledge and understanding of the subject matter of the Dissertation topic; ability to analyse, synthesize and evaluate legal and extra-legal materials used in the Dissertation; ability to research, provide evidence of research and communicate effectively throughout the Dissertation; and organizational, planning and presentation skills.

LLM Dissertation Assessment Guidelines General Considerations

All LLM dissertations should be graded and assigned a numerical grade between 0 and 100. An assessor of an LLM dissertation is encouraged to make use of the full range of marks available. Similarly, he or she should consciously and expressly note which of the criteria below informed their award of a particular grade, and, where appropriate cite or quote specific aspects of the dissertation to demonstrate the satisfaction of particular criterion.
The guidelines below are intended to spell out the criteria that are to be used to assess LLM Dissertations on a 0-100 scale. The criteria show the features the University of Liverpool expects to see in a dissertation assigned a given mark or grade. To achieve a given grade, a dissertation need not meet all the criteria listed; however, it must demonstrate a preponderance of those qualities. In general, aspects of a dissertation that may be taken into account during assessment include:

- Relevance of material in the dissertation in relation to the title of the dissertation
- Understanding of issues or problems under discussion
- Knowledge, understanding and critical discussion of relevant authorities on the subject matter of the dissertation
- If appropriate to the dissertation, the use of suitable data and current information
- Clarity and depth in the analysis and coherence of argument
- Clarity and relevance of abstract, introduction and conclusion
- Clarity and precision of expression and writing, including grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence construction
- Use of appropriate and consistent conventions for referring to other people’s work, including the OSCOLA Guide to referencing in law
- Clarity of presentation (layout, including use of paragraphs and tables, headings, subheadings and table of contents)

In summary the focus of dissertation assessment is on knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation, synthesis and creativity, organisation and planning, and communication. The assessor will be looking for the following in determining a grade for the dissertation:

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<th>Fail up to 49%</th>
<th>Pass 50 – 59%</th>
<th>Merit 60% -69%</th>
<th>Distinction 70+%</th>
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<td>KNOWLEDGE &amp; UNDERSTANDING</td>
<td>Limited substantive knowledge of the field; Inadequate use of authority and/or core texts.</td>
<td>An accurate understanding of the field, well supported by appropriate authority and use of core texts.</td>
<td>Highly competent view of the field; full command of relevant resources.</td>
<td>Evidence of a capacity to work at or close to the limits of technical or theoretical knowledge and understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANALYSIS</td>
<td>Descriptive with little or no critical analysis of the topic.</td>
<td>Objective approach to the topic, using appropriate tools of analysis and critique.</td>
<td>Capacity to investigate core issues effectively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SYNTHESIS/CREATIVITY</td>
<td>Little or no evidence of creative or original use of existing resources.</td>
<td>Some capacity to synthesise information and ideas; Seeks to contribute creatively to the development of the field.</td>
<td>Ability to manage information constructively; evidence of persuasive perspectives on the field.</td>
<td>Consistently reviews and reappraise existing knowledge in order to identify new problems or areas for investigation, or to develop new perspectives on or solutions for existing problems.</td>
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<td>EVALUATION</td>
<td>Little attempt to critically evaluate material or own or others’ work.</td>
<td>Seeks critically to evaluate outcomes; Evidence of extensive critiquing; effective use of relevant material to support the argument.</td>
<td>Evidence of autonomy and originality in evaluating work in the domain; Consistently reflects on own and others’ contributions.</td>
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### Guidance on the action to be taken if the student is unhappy with their Dissertation Advisor

If a student is unhappy about any aspect of his/her supervision, s/he should consult their Student Support Manager as soon as possible. The SSM will contact the Programme Director and/or Lead Faculty to discuss the issues. Every effort will be made to ensure that the student-DA match works well. However, if a change in DA is requested, the Programme Director will make the final decision considering the supporting evidence for a change.

### Students who perform poorly in the RMT portion of the RMT/DST module

A student who performs poorly in the RMT portion of the Dissertation module (receiving, for example, a grade of D or below after the first 4 weeks) will be penalized in two ways:

1. Receiving zero or close to zero marks for the RMT proportion of the final Dissertation grade
2. Being delayed, or at worst failed, in the proposal approval process. A student who does not demonstrate sufficient knowledge of research in the proposal will not be allowed to move to the next stage of the Dissertation; the student will need to restart the Dissertation process (if on the first attempt) and will be offered a postgraduate diploma (if on the second attempt).
A student will not normally be allowed to repeat the RMT. Approval to repeat the RMT will usually be accepted only if the student has missed part or all of the RMT for illness, or on compassionate grounds, and has therefore subsequently failed his or her Dissertation as a result of these circumstances. Approval to repeat should be sought from the Extenuating Circumstances Committee, through the student’s SSM.

Students who are absent from the DST module or who otherwise fail to meet the minimum participation requirements

If the DA finds during any given month that the student has been unacceptably absent from the classroom, the DA should make this clear on the relevant progress report. In the event that the student is failing even to complete the progress report in the 5th or 7th month, the DA will refer the case directly to the SSM for follow-up with the student. If there is no good reason for the student’s absence the SSM will refer the case to the Programme Director, which may give the student a fixed time to respond in the class, or the student may risk failure.

Late Submission Policy (for dissertations started from 17th March 2016 onwards)

Guiding Principles

The University and Laureate require all students to submit assessed coursework by the deadline set by the assessor, or the revised deadline as communicated to the student in cases of extensions. The University of Liverpool Code of Practice on Assessment allows that late submissions of work should be accepted for a set period beyond the submission deadline, but that a standard system of penalties for the late submission of work for assessment should normally be imposed.

Definitions

For the purposes of this document the following definitions are used:

**Dissertation**: The final assessment towards a Master’s degree. It may be an extended piece of writing structured in response to a central question or proposition or may be an equivalent piece of work such as a Consultancy Project.

**Official submission deadline**: The final date on which the student must submit their work for assessment. This may vary from the Submission date due to a successful Extenuating Circumstances claim or extended deadline following a review by the Disability Centre etc.

**Submission date**: Students have 40 weeks in which to complete their dissertation. Please see the table in section *Dissertation Submission* for up and coming dissertation start dates and submission dates.
Guidelines

1. All student dissertations submitted up to 10 calendar days after the official submission date will be assessed.
2. Dissertations submitted after the official submission date, but before the end of the 10-day penalty window will have their dissertations graded on merit by their assessors.
3. Where a student’s dissertation/research project is found to have been submitted late, the penalties described in this document will be automatically applied to the work after it has been graded.
4. For every two calendar days after the official submission date, 5% of the total marks available for the dissertation/research project component shall be deducted from the assessment mark, up to a maximum of 25% (i.e., for work marked out of 100, five marks per two days will be deducted; for work marked out of 20, one mark per two days will be deducted);
5. If the student work has reached a passing standard on merit, the late penalty will not reduce the grade for the work below the Pass mark for the assessment.
6. Work assessed below the pass mark on merit will not be penalised for late submission of up to ten days.
7. All work submitted ten calendar days after the official submission deadline will receive a mark of zero.

Appendix 1: Word limits

Your Dissertation should be between 12,000 and 15,000 words long. The maximum word length will include footnotes and endnotes but will exclude the bibliography or list of references and any appendices (which should be used sparingly).

The word limit imposed on your Dissertation constitutes an important part of the assessment criteria. In assessing the grade to be awarded, the Dissertation Adviser and second marker will take into account the extent to which the word limit has been exceeded (or not met). Where you exceed the word limit (other than minimally), the DA and second marker will take this into account when awarding a particular grade and may draw this to your attention in their feedback.

Appendix 2: Citations and plagiarism

The importance of proper citation in all stages of the project cannot be stressed enough. The Dissertation is to follow the same requirements for proper citation that were applicable in the other modules of the programme. You must use the University of Liverpool Law School Legal Citation Guide as promoted throughout the programme:

http://www.support.liverpool-online.com/resources/referencing/law

Proper credit to other sources should be present in the proposal and then continue throughout each stage of the Dissertation. Proper citation must be an integral part of the final Dissertation. Failure to adhere to the citation rules, which are simple to follow, will most likely be considered as plagiarism.

You will submit your final draft of the Dissertation to the DA for a final review. The draft will pass through the Turnitin application that checks for plagiarism.
The final Dissertation will be submitted for assessment for the two assessors (the DA and a second assessor). They are obliged to inform the academic department of any suspicion of plagiarism or collusion. An explanation will be requested from the student, and this explanation, together with the other evidence taken from analysis of the Dissertation, will be brought to the Board of Examiners (BoE) when it considers the assessment of the Dissertation. The Board has the power to decide what final result should be recorded, in the light of the evidence, and also to consider whether further action is necessary.

Thus, great care should be exercised when posting the final Dissertation document, as no additional submissions or corrections are allowed after the final draft is submitted. Missing citations and references will not be allowed to be added late to any document. For more information, please see the University’s policy on plagiarism:

http://www.support.liverpool-online.com/student-handbook/assessment/academic-integrity