The Final Project and Dissertation Guidelines (DSG)

And

The Research Methods Training for the Computing MSc

Version 16.3
The Final Project and Dissertation Guidelines
and
The Research Methods Training

Guidelines for Students, GDIs and DAs
For the Computing MSc

Version 16.3 (updated)
DECEMBER/2019

Please note that the latest updated version of this document is found in the Class Material section of the Computing Research Methods Training class in the Blackboard system as well as in the “Student Success” site. The version in the Blackboard system and the “Student Success” site are synchronized, but in case of a difference the definitive version is the one in the Computing Research Methods Training class.
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1 Introduction: Module Aims, Learning Outcomes and Roles

The Dissertation (DS) module is the concluding project of each Computing degree programme. The dissertation should present a piece of work that involves original thinking and is of merit beyond the narrow scope of the student’s particular need. The project should emphasise the student’s ability to: (i) make use of the knowledge and various techniques acquired during their programme of study, (ii) investigate and critically evaluate alternative approaches, and (iii) present the results in a professional manner. The central requirement of the dissertation module is to frame a proposed solution to an identified IT problem and to implement and evaluate the proposed solution through the production of an IT artefact. The documentation of this research process results in an academic dissertation.

1.1 Aims

The main aim of the final dissertation is for a student to develop and demonstrate autonomy in the management and conduct of an IT project in the context of their programme of study. Although new technical skills may be acquired, this is not the main aim of the dissertation. More specifically the aims of the final dissertation module are:

1. To provide a systematic analysis of the nature and conduct of Information Technology and Computer Science research.
2. To allow students to successfully complete a self-directed IT project culminating in a dissertation.
3. To equip students with the ability to undertake independent research.
4. To examine the foundations of research and the associated legal and ethical issues within their area of study.

1.2 Learning Outcomes

At the end of the Dissertation stage, the learning outcomes will be as follows:

1. A well-founded ability to conduct independent research in the context of IT projects.
2. An ability to write documentation describing and pertaining to IT projects.
3. Demonstrated knowledge and experience of conducting literature searches.
4. An ability to critically appraise and evaluate research papers.
5. An ability to critically analyse and evaluate IT project results.
6. An ability to assess the ethical issues associated with IT projects.

Project outputs include: (i) a project proposal, (ii) a specification and design, and (iii) a final dissertation describing the project as a whole, including an IT artefact of some kind. It must be emphasized that the dissertation is an integral part of the dissertation module and by no means should the writing of the dissertation be viewed as an afterthought to the project (such as the way in which software documentation is handled by many programmers!).
1.3 Roles in the Dissertation Process

Several Laureate Online Education/UoL supervisory, managerial and administrative positions are referred to in this document. Although the people concerned will advise and support the student in producing his or her dissertation, the sole responsibility for meeting the dissertation requirements and submitting documents within specified deadlines rests with the student. All subsequent references in this document to the support and advice that is available to the student should be interpreted in the light of the above statement. The table below links the function/job title to the person who currently has that position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Name and e-mails*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Administration Team</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Dissertation.administration@laureate.net">Dissertation.administration@laureate.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Dissertation Instructor (GDIs)</td>
<td>The Instructor who supervises Computing Research Methods Training classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme Director (PD)</td>
<td>Gail Miles (<a href="mailto:gail.miles@online.liverpool.ac.uk">gail.miles@online.liverpool.ac.uk</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Advisor (DA)</td>
<td>The Instructor who is the supervisor to the dissertation project</td>
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<td>Assessors</td>
<td>The Dissertation Advisor is the first assessor and a second assessor (also a</td>
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<td>Dissertation Advisor) assigned by Laureate Online Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Librarian</td>
<td>Paul Catherall (<a href="mailto:p.catherall@liv.ac.uk">p.catherall@liv.ac.uk</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead Faculty-Dissertation (LF)</td>
<td>Kathleen Kelm (<a href="mailto:kathleen.kelm@online.liverpool.ac.uk">kathleen.kelm@online.liverpool.ac.uk</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Programme Research Ethics</td>
<td>DA, GDI as the second ethical reviewer, LF (the VPREC Chair) and PD</td>
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<td>Committee - VPREC</td>
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The Dissertation’s classes

The following abbreviations will be used throughout this document for the names of the Dissertation’s classes:

- **CRMT** – Computing Research Methods Training
- **CAC** – Computing Advisor Class
- **DTS** – Dissertation Tracking System This is the system whereby the GDIs & DAs record student milestones and their progress through the Dissertation

2 Introduction to the Dissertation

The selected dissertation topic should be chosen in such a way that it meets the learning outcomes for the module (as listed above), the dissertation requirements, and the programme of study. As a quick guide it should be capable of allowing the student to:

1. Identify a dissertation question to be used to tackle an IT problem
2. Frame a testable prediction about the likely benefits of the proposed IT artefact in addressing the IT problem. This prediction will be tested during the evaluation.
3. Use research methods to analyse the nature of the problem, identify a mechanism for its solution and influence the features which the IT artefact will possess.
4. Implement the mechanism to produce some kind of IT artefact (more details are provided further down in this document)
5. Evaluate the artefact in the context of the prediction contained in the dissertation question(s).

The fundamental idea for a dissertation may be thought of in terms of it being an explanation about the outcome of some investigation which involves the production of an IT artefact. The challenge will be to verify this aspect during the evaluation. The dissertation requires the reading of academic literature to identify outstanding problems and gaps in current knowledge. The student is expected to use creativity to identify how one or more of the gaps might be addressed. In a sense the dissertation idea attempts to predict what knowledge will be added to current understanding by the production of an IT artefact.

Examples of suitable ideas for dissertations might be:

1. The investigation, implementation and evaluation of a software system that considers a number of different mechanisms for addressing some problem.
2. To demonstrate that some software development methodology will produce measurably better results in a particular area of activity than some alternative.
3. To indicate that some process framework, consisting of certain kinds of IT rules and procedures, will create less conflict and greater productivity than some existing arrangement.
4. To show that a particular model of how people interact with IT systems will provide a better explanation of why things went wrong in a particular organization than the official view and consequently suggest a solution.
5. To demonstrate that certain e-commerce arrangements will create greater trust and increased participation in a particular country.

Further advice on choosing a dissertation topic is given in Sub-section 2.1

During the course of the dissertation project, the student is expected to employ established Research Methods. The two most commonly utilized research (qualitative and quantitative) will determine what type of research design you, as a student, choose and might include: prototyping, model building, interviews, surveys/questionnaires, observation, and the examination of published and unpublished papers/documents. The research design will help in determining the appropriate features of the IT artefact which would be used to create and provide a solution to some type of IT problem. Remember that the aim is to add to the body of current academic knowledge.

The dissertation project is expected to culminate in some IT artefact; this could be a software prototype, a particular configuration of a hardware-software system, an algorithm, a model, a process or set of processes, a procedure, a framework or guidelines, or a simulation. With reference to “suitable ideas for dissertations” listed above the artefacts would be: (i) a software system, (ii) a software development methodology, (iii) a process framework, (iv) a solution to the deficiencies of a model or (v) an e-commerce arrangement.

As part of the Dissertation project, the student is expected to evaluate the IT artefact produced in the context of the original dissertation question(s) postulated at the beginning of the research project. In producing an IT artefact, guided by some research methods (see above), the intention is that the student will be able to demonstrate whether the dissertation question(s) is/are answered and the extent to which the project addresses the original aims and goals stated at the beginning of the project. The evaluation is the final check. Depending on the type of artefact, the evaluation might involve: (i) selecting participants to test the artefact according to certain objective criteria, (ii) creating and distributing a survey, employing users or experts, (iii) convening and conducting a focus group or (iv) completing standardised forms of performance testing to see
whether the artefact features the benefits claimed for it. It may be that the evaluation demonstrates that the proposed solution to the problem identified within the proposal is incorrect, or only partially correct. A full evaluation of the results and the provision of solid conclusions will extend the body of academic knowledge, which is one of the overarching aims of the Dissertation.

A wide range of project topics are possible, subject only to the requirements of the student’s individual programme of study and the requirement that the work should be intellectually demanding and involve the original application of knowledge gained in the specific programme of study.

The current Computing MSc programmes are:

- MSc in Information Technology
- MSc in Advanced Computer Science
- MSc in Cyber Security
- MSc in Software Engineering
- MSc in Information Systems Management
- MSc in Big Data Analytics

A proposed project should relate to the programme that the student is pursuing, so that the learning outcomes are met. There is more flexibility in the choice of subject if the student is pursuing the more general Advanced Computer Science programme.

The project does not necessarily need to include programming as part of the IT artefact, but it must include some application of practical or experimental work, and critical evaluation and analysis concerning the solution to the problem addressed within the dissertation. *The project cannot simply comprise a literature review, a survey of users or experts on a particular framework, or some untested project plan.*

In all cases the work carried out should have the following key characteristics:

- **Originality;** in the application of knowledge, together with a practical application of the techniques of research and enquiry.
- **Generalization;** even when the project has a specific target, the student should address it in a way that the results can potentially be applicable in a broader context.
- **Critical evaluation;** design decisions made during the project should be done in the context of a critical examination of alternatives, and you should subject the results and conclusions to the same rigorous analysis.

In a Master’s dissertation, originality is not expected to include the creation of new knowledge, in the sense of making new scientific discoveries. However, the dissertation should include an innovative approach, or an otherwise interesting or beneficial contribution to the field. In other words, it should feature some originality in the sense that it applies current knowledge to find a solution to a real problem in the workplace or elsewhere, for which no solution was previously known. Thus, a display of scholarly achievement (in the broad context of Computer Science) must be present in the work. When considering how a project can make an original contribution, a student thinking of a practical project should focus on the generic problem and consider what the problem is that needs to be solved. This will help orient the student to the scholarly aspect of the project by examining the problem, its influencing factors and consequences; and the types of solution that are available.
and why they might be appropriate, and so on. Students should consider “what can I contribute to the knowledge of others?”.

Students should also remember that it is a Master’s dissertation being completed, and not just a Systems Engineering/Programming/Installation/Administrative/Managerial project, and therefore there must be some degree of scholarly added value attached to the project.

The project’s final outcome takes the form of a written dissertation. A target size of 12000-18000 words is recommended (excluding references and appendices); the word count can be slightly higher, if deemed appropriate, but must be approved by the Dissertation Advisor. If a submitted dissertation is substantially outside of the prescribed word limits, the student may be penalised with the grading component.

The Research Methods Training module provides additional information on the requirements of the Dissertation, the proposal and the Dissertation process and stages for completion.

2.1 Guiding Principles for Acceptable Dissertation Topic

This sub-section gives further advice on the nature of appropriate dissertation topics (and the nature of those that are not appropriate). Some specific considerations are listed below.

All projects are expected to have a focused investigation into a particular aspect of Computer Science, such as a critical and rigorous investigation and evaluation of some IT solution to address a known aspect of the discipline that would benefit from further research. Unlike technology projects that are developed to solve problems, Computer Science dissertations involve the development of a research idea based on the need for continued research into the topic area, identified, in part, through a review of the literature. The proposal needs to clearly identify not just the need for the research, but also what will be produced and evaluated. The originality infused into the research project provides the opportunity to make a unique contribution to the academic community.

While students might propose, as a project: (i) the creation of a Web site, (ii) a reorganizing of the structure of departments in their office, (iii) the installation of hardware and/or software or (iv) some similar task that is closely linked to their workplace’s needs, these projects do not fulfil the requirements of extending the topic focus beyond just solving the problem unique to their workplace. Workplace project proposals are often too focused on a product as the outcome, rather than the scholarly aims of a dissertation. Sometimes there is a feeling that the project is a task the student wants/needs to perform for his/her organisation, but students should be aware that the demands of a dissertation are different. In fact, it could well be the case that, the student accomplishes everything for the employer that has been proposed but still not meet all the required learning outcomes of the dissertation module, and thus, receive a poor grade.

A project that is intended to implement (identify, define, analyse, code, test, and evaluate) a computer system that is designed to solve specific trade, office or community needs could be considered suitable if the proposed system goes beyond the simple activity of programming and testing of an application to include aspects of a novel solution and appropriate evaluation.

2.1.1 Literature Reviews

Proposals that are mainly critical literature reviews will not be approved, even if this is accomplished in a scholarly fashion. A literature review is a required part of the Dissertation to inform the reader of the
background to the work presented in the dissertation and to inform the design of a considered solution to an IT problem.

2.1.2 Surveys
Proposals where the intention is to conduct a survey using, for examples, questionnaires, accompanied by an analysis of the results (using bar charts, pie charts) do not meet the requirement of producing an IT artefact. Surveys are a suitable research method, for example, as a tool for evaluating the IT artefact generated as a solution to some IT problem, or as a means for requirements gathering as part of the design of some solution to an IT problem.

2.1.3 Software and Hardware Inquiries and Installations
Simple installations of software and hardware are not sufficient as projects, because they typically do not include elements of research into an aspect of the Computer Science discipline. These include the following: (i) installation of commercial software packages, even if complex, (ii) upgrading of hardware components, (iii) selecting from existing programming solutions or evaluating software packages, and (iv) recommendation of what should be installed in a specific installation that is already well documented and researched. All of these are regarded as part of the regular day to day tasks of systems programming and do not constitute a scholarly undertaking suitable for a Master’s degree in Computer Science.

2.1.4 Web Sites and other Applications
When considering the implementation of various types of web applications as potential masters projects the following should be considered:

1. Is it essentially just a web site? If so, then it is not a proposal that fits the learning outcomes of the dissertation module. Even if it has a good range of features, it could still be essentially a well-defined production task rather than a project requiring innovative thinking and research into the discipline of Computer Science.
2. When considering web-based application style projects (and similar) it is essential to understand that the goal of the project should not just be the production of a web site, nor indeed any software deliverable, but a dissertation that demonstrates the student’s ability to carry out an intellectually demanding program of work that requires research, planning, innovative thinking and objective evaluation.

2.1.5 Previously Completed Projects
An existing project that is already either finished or close to being finished cannot serve as the dissertation project, as the dissertation must be a new piece of work.

2.1.6 Commercial Projects
Commercial and institutional projects are not considered as suitable dissertation projects, as they most likely will be conducted according to the methodology of the company that manages them, rather than being conducted according to the dissertation guidelines.

In some instances, it might be possible to construct a suitable dissertation project from a commercial project, but much care would need to be taken to identify the student’s contribution and to ensure that the project has the proper academic content. If such a project is to be considered, it would be necessary to identify, in advance, the student’s role in the project. The student’s work must be sufficiently and clearly separated from the rest
of the team. It should also be noted that an implementation project would require substantial work to ensure that the dissertation criteria (hypothesis, IT artefact, evaluation) are met and that the project is undertaken within a proper academic context.

2.1.7 Administrative and Managerial Projects
In cases of administrative and managerial projects, dissertations concerned with the routine work that is expected to be performed by an IT manager in day to day operations does not meet the requirements of originality and innovation based upon research conducted into the Computer Science topic that results in an IT artefact.

2.1.8 Frameworks and Guidelines
You may propose an analysis of the limitations of an existing application or context focused on an aspect of the IT profession. In the past, students have developed a framework (or model) to improve an existing application or procedure, basing their research on a review of the application, interviews with stakeholders, and literature and product surveys. In this case the proposed framework (the IT artefact to be produced) also incorporated an approach in which the proposed framework could be applied so it could be evaluated for its feasibility or applicability, possibly conducted using prototyping or a feasibility test, to demonstrate the quality of the proposed solution. This type of evaluation should involve individuals who were likely to be aware of the consequences of applying the framework or guidelines, and who were not involved in earlier surveys or interviews, to ensure that there is an independent check on the validity of the proposed framework or guidelines.

2.1.9 Case Studies
Case studies offer an opportunity to apply ideas to unique environments in a practical manner. However, conducting a case study, where the context is examined and described, does not meet the requirements of a computing dissertation. However, case studies can be used as a tool to support the evaluation of a proposed solution to an IT problem implemented in the form of some IT artefact. For example, a case study method might be appropriate to identify a major problem that exists within an organization and/or industry and to suggest some solution to that problem in the form of some IT artefact (for example a set of IT procedures or a work flow). The result of the research may lead to the development of a set of guidelines, or an innovative framework that can then be implemented and evaluated. In this way, the dissertation project produces results that add to the body of knowledge because it: (i) builds upon existing theory by adding new aspects or it is the application of theory under new (never tried before) circumstances; (ii) proves that there are circumstances in which the widely accepted theory does not apply, or (iii) adds new theory (by combining existing evolving theories that are blended into a new theory that is broadly applicable).

2.1.10 Use of Sponsors
It can be desirable to have a dissertation project, conducted on behalf and supported by a sponsor, which defines some aspects of the research to be performed on behalf of the sponsor or the sponsor’s organisation. Such projects must still conform to the University’s requirements for a dissertation.

Sponsors are viewed as external customers of the dissertation. For example, when the project is related to the student’s workplace, the sponsor may be a member of staff of the employer. Students would normally be expected to initiate and manage all links with sponsors. The sponsor’s role is to assist in the definition of the goals of the project in general terms, providing support in describing the problem that is to be solved or the activities that are to be accomplished in support of the dissertation project. The Dissertation Advisor can provide assistance to the student on how the needs and/or requests of the sponsor can be accommodated in
a manner that conforms with the University’s requirements. The project would require substantial work to ensure that the dissertation criteria (hypothesis, IT artefact, evaluation) are met and that the project is undertaken within a proper academic context. Sponsors are not involved in the assessment of the project.

### 2.2 Outside help with Language Skills

The writing of the dissertation, as well as the work presented, must be the result of student’s own authorship. It might be acceptable to ask a friend or colleague to read a chapter and point out unclear sentences, problematic paragraph structure, but, it is unacceptable to give the text to a professional editor for corrections. University rules do not allow for the use of (human) editors to correct the English of a dissertation. Such cases will be treated as unauthorized collusion. Students are encouraged to make use of the Writing Centre and other Academic Resources available to them but 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 to write the dissertation in another language and have it later translated into English.

### 2.3 Security and Backup of Dissertation Work

Dissertation students should regularly back up their work throughout the duration of their project. This would include preliminary notes, sketches, programming sections, questionnaires, reports, drafts or any other material. If there are human participants, then all data collected as part of the research process must be kept for five years. If backup includes a location other than a personal computer (such as the use of the Cloud), then it must include the use of an appropriate secure mechanism.

### 2.4 What the Dissertation Must Include

The Dissertation will not be accepted as a satisfactory piece of work unless it includes:

- A statement and elucidation of the problem to be solved and the objectives of the project (including some proposed solution to the problem)
- An in-depth review of the context and the relevant academic literature identifying different models and implementation strategies that can potentially be used. It is of utmost importance that the referenced resources are from quality publications such as academic journals and conference papers, and not just from general web sites on the Internet which are of dubious scholarly merit.
- A critical evaluation of the possible alternatives.
- Design and justification of the proposed solution, including the rationale and academic support for any design/implementation decision.
- Implementation of the proposed solution, which will include the creation of an IT artefact; and, where appropriate, a description of any tools used to support the development process.
- In the case of a programming project the relevant source code should be available. If this is not included, it may be specifically requested by the DA and/or the second assessor. A convenient place to store source code would be in the File Exchange located within your private dissertation area in the CAC.
- Evaluation of the artefact in the light of the dissertation question. In some case it may be useful to organise third party testing and evaluation of the artefact.
• Analysis and discussion of the outcome (including critical appraisal of the project, lessons learnt during the course of the project and/or review of project plan).
• Expansion of the conclusion to a general context: how the results could be applied in other situations and why what has been learned is of general interest.

The dissertation must also be documented report produced according to the format set out in the DS template file.

The learning outcomes of the DS are specified in the “Introduction” to these guidelines, and the student should aim at accomplishing these learning outcomes.

2.5 Research Ethics Policy, Plagiarism, Copyrights, Confidentiality and Publishing

2.5.1 Ethical Policy
Laureate and the University of Liverpool monitor the dissertation process to ensure that any research conducted as part of the award of a Computing degree conforms to the University’s Research Ethics Guidelines. These are available in the Centre for Student Success (https://success.liverpool-online.com/finalresearchproject/ethics) and apply to projects where Master’s students use human participants or existing data sets which could identify individual people. Participants include people whom might be chosen for an interview, asked to complete surveys, or used to test or evaluate an IT artefact. Where there are no human participants, the DA will confirm that no ethical review needs to be carried out. In all other cases, an Ethics Response Form, an Ethics Application Form, a Participant Information Sheet and a Consent form need to be completed under the DA’s guidance. This will take place immediately after Proposal Approval has been granted. When the DA is satisfied that the documents meet the requirements of the University, they will be referred to a Second Ethical Reviewer. When the second reviewer confirms that the documents meet the requirements, students will receive written confirmation that Expedited Ethical Approval has been given in the form of a letter, sent by the Lead Faculty (Dissertation) acting as the Chair of the Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC). The student must not approach potential participants or begin data collection until ethical approval has been received. Master’s students are not permitted to engage in high risk research projects. These would include projects involving participants considered vulnerable populations: (i) children under the age of 18 and (ii) individuals over whom the researcher has authority (such as in a work environment).

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.

Students should work with their DAs to ensure that their requests for survey participation meets current data protection regulations and that the identity of all participants is protected. An example of an acceptable practice is to distribute a request for survey participation in a manner where the full list of recipients in an email is masked using the blind carbon copy (bcc) function.
2.5.2 Quotation, Citation and Plagiarism

The importance of proper quotation and citation in all stages of the project cannot be stressed enough. The dissertation has the same requirements for proper citation using the Harvard conventions that were applicable in all other modules of the programme.

Proper credit for the use of other published sources should already be present in the proposal and then continued through the specification and design stage. The use of proper quotation and citation must be an integral part of the final dissertation report.

Students must use the Harvard Reference System as explained later in this document and as promoted throughout the programme. No other reference system will be accepted.

An explanation of how to cite and reference sources is available within the Online Library, the link to the Online Library can be found in the Student Portal.

Students are required to submit a draft of the final dissertation paper one month before the final paper is due for submission. By submitting the draft, through the Turnitin link, provided within the CAC, a check for possible similarities to sources is conducted. The DA reviews the draft and will report any concerns in sufficient time for students to make any necessary changes to the draft version, prior to submitting the final version.

Each of the two assessors of the dissertation is obliged to inform the Programme Director of any suspicion of plagiarism in assessed work. will be brought to the Board of Examiners 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 up to failing the dissertation.

Please note that all Dissertation students must sign the Dissertation Agreement, located within the CAC, as soon as the student gains access.

2.5.3 Copyrights and Confidentiality

There are three separate issues regarding copyright:

a) The copyright status of a student’s dissertation and to whom does it belong.

By default, all academic work completed at a university will be owned by that university. Usually it is beneficial for the university to share the credit with the student; and, even though they don’t have to technically, most universities choose to do this. Due to most of our students being active working professionals, often using their companies as case studies, the ownership of the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) becomes a little more complicated.

The University of Liverpool’s official stance is:

"Except in the case of students supported by outside bodies, where specific provisions relating to intellectual property are embodied in the conditions of the support, all postgraduate students are required to agree to assign to the university all their rights to intellectual property arising from their studies or research at the university. The University has a policy of sharing profits arising with the staff and students concerned." (University of Liverpool Legal Department)
However, we believe that:

1. Students are the effective copyright holders of their Dissertation with respect to publication of the work. The University and/or Laureate will not publish student work without their consent.
2. Any published work arising out of a Dissertation project, on completion of the project, should normally be viewed as a joint undertaking between the student and the supervisor, and each has an obligation to discuss this with the other and to agree on authorship and/or acknowledgements as appropriate. The University has no rights over any such publication, but it is expected that it will include an acknowledgement that the work was carried out as part of the student's studies with the University/Laureate. Note that in the context of normal dissertation supervision this statement should not be interpreted as implying that the dissertation project is a collaboration between supervisor and student. The dissertation project is the student’s own endeavour, the supervisor is simply there to advise, and offer guidance and suggestions, regarding the pursuance of the project.
3. In the case where a student's Dissertation project is directly sponsored by their employer or relates directly to their employment, the University is unlikely to make any claim on the IPR of the work.
4. Where a student is unsure, the student should in the first instance contact the Programme Director.
5. Generally speaking, if any commercial exploitation of work carried out as part of the Dissertation is planned the student should in the first instance contact the Programme Director.

b) When a DS project is based on some work that a student performs at the location of his/her employer, the student must supply a signed agreement by the employer, indicating that the organisation is aware that the student has made use of proprietary material and confirm that they agree to its use.

c) The Dissertation is subject to the University of Liverpool policy on the use of outside material. Dissertation Students are required to sign the Dissertation Agreement which includes confirmation of the Academic Integrity Declaration.

d) Students who need to keep their dissertation confidential should indicate, when the final document is submitted, that they do not give permission for it to be published. Students should include the following sentence on the same page where they make their declaration about originality:

“This dissertation contains material that is confidential and/or commercially sensitive. It is included here on the understanding that this will not be revealed to any person not involved in the assessment process.”

2.5.4 Publishing and Posting

All documents concerned with the progress of the dissertation during the dissertation process (proposals, reports, specification and design) are internal documents submitted to the University for assessment. These documents are regarded as coursework assignments which belong to the UoL/Laureate rather than to the student. Until the assessment has been completed, the dissertation is an internal document. Once assessed, it can become public.
3 Managing the Project

3.1 Supporting the Dissertation Student
The key persons involved in the dissertation process are the General Dissertation Instructor (GDI) - the instructor in the Research Methods Training class, and the project Dissertation Advisor (DA), a designated instructor who will oversee the project, in a Computing Advisor Class (CAC). The Lead Faculty (LF) provides final approval of the dissertation proposal and issues the Ethics Approval letter (when needed). The LF also provides advice and support to the DAs

3.1.1 Roles in the dissertation process
There will be several people involved in helping the student towards the successful completion of the dissertation.

General Dissertation Instructor (GDI). The GDI facilitates the Research Methods Training (CRMT) module and provides support to the student during the first phase of Dissertation Proposal development. The GDI will be responsible for running the CRMT in which the student is enrolled at the start of the dissertation. The GDI is responsible for assisting the student in choosing a suitable topic, developing a draft proposal, facilitate in arranging a match with a Dissertation Advisor and supporting the student in developing skills and expertise in basic research methods. The GDI is also a member of the ethics approval committee (Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)).

Dissertation Advisor (DA). The DA is the person who provides one to one guidance to the student throughout the dissertation process, from the point the DA match is made with the student, through the proposal approval process, the ethical review, and development and grading of the Specification & Design document until the time the dissertation is submitted. The DA is the main point of contact for the student. The student and the DA should be in continuous contact using the Laureate Online Education Blackboard system. Each student has a private area, within the DA’s CAC, which serves as the point for communication and the housing of all documents related to the Dissertation. The DA will provide advice on the various stages of writing up the research and also act as the first assessor of the dissertation once it is completed. The DA’s role is to provide advice and guidance to students to determine whether the goals of their dissertation project are consistent with the academic requirements of the MSc, and whether or not the proposal and work on the dissertation are likely to satisfy the learning outcomes itemized at the beginning of this document.

Lead Faculty (LF). The Lead Faculty (Dissertation) has the responsibility of conducting the final review of all dissertation proposals and providing approval to the proposal. The LF serves as chair of VPREC for the Computing dissertation and issues the Ethics approval letter, when it is required.

During your Dissertation, you will take part in two classes. The first, into which you will be registered, after you complete your final taught module, is the Computing Research Methods Training (CRMT), LAUR 906, which is the first stage of the Dissertation. It is facilitated by a General Dissertation Instructor (GDI). The second is the Computing Advisor Class (CAC), CKIT 702, which we will discuss in more detail later in this section.

You cannot take a break for a period of longer than 16 weeks without special authorization. This means that you have four months (16 weeks) after finishing the last module to start working on your dissertation. However, the expectation is that you will start with your DA as soon as the match takes place. The CRMT module functions in a similar way to the other taught modules you completed on your Master’s programme.
3.2 Computing Research Methods Training (CRMT) module

In the CRMT class you will have lectures and assignments, participate in discussions, and submit work for assessment much like any other Master’s module. Guidelines for participation in this class are similar to what you already know as requirements in other modules; such as participation, submission of assignments and corresponding with the GDI.

Additionally, beginning in Week 5 and continuing until the end of the CRMT, you will be expected to select a DA, with whom you will continue your work on your dissertation, after completing the CRMT. In the CRMT, you will select a topic, develop your initial draft of a proposal, receive feedback from your peers on your selected topic and the proposed IT artefact. The CRMT class will stay open at the end of week 7 and remain available to you for the duration of your dissertation. The CRMT is assessed and forms a part (10%) of the final mark for the dissertation project. More detailed information about the CRMT can be found within the Module Syllabus.

3.2.1 The DA Matching Procedure

During the CRMT, after week 4, students should review the DA profile information (currently located within the DAs and Subjects file) so as to identify DAs with expertise on the student’s topic of interest, and whether or not the particulars DAs are available to accept new Dissertation students. Students choose potential DAs whom they may wish to be their advisor. Using the email system, student contact the DA(s), providing a copy of their Draft Proposal developed within the CRMT, DAs may ask further question of the students; DAs may also reach out to students to express interest in supervising them. Once a student and a DA are matched, the GDI notifies the Dissertation Administration of the match and arrangements are made by the Dissertation Administration to enrol the student into the DA’s CAC.

It is the responsibility of students to locate and be matched with a DA. If, for any reason, a student is unable to complete the DA match by the end of the CRMT, the LF can assist the student in locating a DA to provided supervision.

3.3 Computing Advisor Class (CAC) module

The CAC is the location of your private Dissertation area, accessible only by you and your DA. Once you have been matched with a DA (normally completed during the CRMT), you will be notified that your DA is now matched to you and your CAC access is granted. The DA creates a separate, private space in which you and your DA will correspond and work together on the remaining phases of the Dissertation The majority of your work on the dissertation will now take place in the CAC, until you submit your final dissertation after a maximum of 40 weeks (from the beginning of the CRMT).

3.3.1 Stages of in the CAC.

The required dissertation stages (Dissertation Proposal, Specification and Design and Final Dissertation Submission) must be executed in a sequential order, and all stages must be completed. Students must submit a Specification and Design Report before the final Dissertation report is submitted. The grade for the Specification and Design report must be completed by the DA before the final dissertation document can be submitted. The final dissertation submission will not be accepted if the previous stages (CRMT, proposal approval and ethical review, and the Specification and Design report) have not been completed.
3.4 Changing your DA
It should be noted that a fee might be imposed if you want to change your DA before the proposal has been approved, and another or higher fee will be charged if you decide to change your DA after the proposal has been approved. Shifting the subject of the dissertation to such an extent that a new proposal must be reworked (with the same DA) is equivalent to changing a DA due to the additional work placed on the DA. You will need to submit a request via your SSM if you wish to change DAs at these stages. This will be discussed with your DA, the Academic Director or Lead Faculty (Dissertation), and your SSM and a decision will be made whether you should be allowed to change.

3.5 Proposal, Ethics Documents, Specification & Design Report and Dissertation Template
Please adhere to the format of the various forms, reports, and the template. The format to use for the submission should be Microsoft WORD. Please don’t submit a PDF file) for the Proposal, Specification & Design Document, and Draft final submissions.

The reports, grading pro forma and the Dissertation template are highly annotated and contain guidelines on how to use them. We strongly suggest students be acquainted with all of them prior to starting the project to gain familiarity with how the DS module is conducted and how the final dissertation should be presented.

4 Phases of the Dissertation (Steps, Schedule and Duration)

The overall duration of the DS module is 40 weeks from initiation (beginning of the CRMT) to submission.

4.1 Preparation for the Dissertation
The Masters Research Portal is a suite of resources available within the Centre for Student Success designed to help prepare students ahead of starting their Final Research Project and to support students whose projects are already underway. These resources are not programme-specific, but they will help students start the constructive thought processes necessary for the Final Research Project.

We highly recommend viewing these materials before starting the Final Research Project phase of the programme, especially a preparatory module which can be found at this link: https://success.liverpool-online.com/FinalResearchProjectPreparation/index.

Upon completion of the preparatory module, students will have the opportunity to think about what research entails and what it means to be a researcher, understand the importance of referencing and academic integrity and of ethics in responsible innovation in research, and be familiar with the processes and steps involved in the research phase.

Further to the preparatory materials, there are additional resources and services, including:
- Live Chat and the ability to schedule 1-1 appointments via Skype or phone with members of the Academic Development Team.
- Regular information sessions in Blackboard Collaborate on key topics.
- Dissertations of the Year per programme to show examples of good practice.
• Media-rich content on topics such as writing a literature review, research design and methodology, and information literacy.
• Tips and advice for maintaining a good student-DA relationship.
• A Final Research Project process and timelines area, which presents the research phase in a chronological, easy-to-understand way, with concrete tips on how to prepare for carrying out research.
• A more streamlined overview of the ethics approval process with relevant forms, guidance, and examples.


4.2 Working with your DA in the CAC.
Once matched with the DA, you may begin to work with your DA to review the Proposal Draft produced in the CRMT. After the end of the CRMT, you will work solely within the CAC. It is vitally important that you realize that the responsibility for your work on your dissertation is entirely yours. Your DA will act as an advisor and you are strongly recommended to follow his/her advice. However, ultimately it is up to you to submit the required work on time and to meet the standards laid down in these Dissertation Guidelines and in accordance with the Dissertation Template. Failure to do so cannot be blamed on your DA. Once your proposal has been approved you will be allowed to continue with the various stages of your research and dissertation. An approved Proposal is required to pass the Dissertation. **Any dissertation submitted without an approved proposal will not be marked and a grade of F entered.**

The Dissertation calls for less online attendance than the regular taught modules. Writing a dissertation is a creative process, and it does not progress along a straight path. You are expected to spend about 600 hours of work on your dissertation. There might be periods of intensive interaction such as when the project is selected, when the various stages are due, and whenever you will need the DA’s support, but mostly it will be done by you on your own.

Nevertheless, you should keep an on-going dialogue with your DA. You will find the DA’s feedback to be of great value to successfully complete the research. You are strongly advised to use the Subscribe facility in Blackboard which will send an email alert when either you or the DA posts something in the group discussion board.

The target turnaround time for the DA’s response to questions posed by the student is within four days, and within ten days for feedback on draft chapters and the draft full dissertation. Past experience has shown that work should proceed in well-planned steps and intermediate results should be shown to the DA. Hence a key early activity for the student is the completion of their own research timetable: specifying milestones agreed and signed off with their DA. All the correspondence between you and the DA in the class must be conducted through the group discussion board and file exchange of your Group and the relevant Turnitin submission links. Any communications outside the Blackboard class (such as Skype, IM, etc) must be recorded in your private Dissertation area. This is very important as the quality of teaching and student effort may be monitored by the Lead Faculty, Programme Director, Director of Online Studies, and subsequently by the University of Liverpool Monitors and the External Examiners.

4.3 Approval of the Dissertation Proposal
An approved Proposal is required to pass the Dissertation. **Any dissertation submitted without an approved...**
A dissertation proposal will not be marked and a grade of F for the Dissertation will be recorded. Your DA may have suggestions for improvement, and, once the proposal is complete, your DA will forward the proposal to the LF for final approval. If the proposal is not approved, the LF will send an email to the DA, with suggestions for improvement. The DA works with you to complete the necessary changes and a revised version of the Proposal is sent to the LF for review and approval. If the proposal is approved, the LF records the approval into the DTS and sends an email to the DA confirming the approval and indicating whether or not Ethical Approval is required. The student uploads a copy of the approved version of the Proposal to the Proposal Turnitin link, located within the Final Submission page in the CAC. You will proceed to the next stage: Specification & Design Report and Ethical Approval (if needed).

4.4 Specification and Design Report and Ethical Approval
The Specification & Design report contributes 10% to the final mark. The report specifies what the project is trying to achieve (the Specification) coupled with a clear idea of how it will be achieved (the Design). Your DA supports you as you complete the report by providing advice and will, if desired, review one draft version of the report.

At the same time, if Ethics Approval is required, then the student completes the required Ethics forms (Ethics Response Form, an Ethics Application Form, a Participant Information Sheet and a Consent form) under the DA’s guidance. Once the DA approves the Ethics forms, they are sent to the GDI for a second review. Upon agreement that the forms meet the requirements, the LF will issue an Ethical Applications Approval letter to the student and a copy of the letter is uploaded into your private dissertation area in the CAC. Once the DA confirms that the Specification & Design Report meets the requirements, the student uploads a copy of the final version to the Specification & Design Report link, located within the Final Submission page in the CAC. The required dissertation stages (Dissertation Proposal, Specification and Design and Final Dissertation Submission) must be executed in a sequential order, and all stages must be completed. No work should be started on the final dissertation submission until the Ethics Approval (if required) is approved and Specification and Design of the project is completed and graded.

4.5 Conducting Your Project
You should continue to seek the advice of the DA throughout the duration of the dissertation module. The target turnaround time for the DAs’ responses to questions posed by the student is within four days, and within ten days for draft documents. Past experience has shown that work should proceed in well-planned steps and intermediate results should be shown to the DA. The submission of interim documents and reports is done through the Discussion Board and the File Exchange functions, located within your private dissertation area of the CAC. In addition, there are two Turnitin links. The first one will be used to submit the draft and the second one to submit the final document.

Each stage of the project should be carried out in full consultation with the DA. The DA is permitted to provide feedback on the chapters of the dissertation only once. Many students find it helpful to have the DA read chapters individually as they are written. Work with your DA to determine how best to benefit from the once only draft review opportunities.

Throughout the dissertation project process, students are expected to take full consideration of all the relevant legal, social, ethical, and professional requirements.
4.6 Quick Outline of the Dissertation Process

The key checkpoints on the route to your dissertation (subject to satisfactory progress) are as follows. Those elements marked with an asterisk (*) are formal evaluation points in the process which you must achieve.

The two major supervisors are
1. The GDI who teaches the CRMT class and provides support to the development of the Draft Proposal. In Week 5, students can approach a DA for possible matching.
2. The DA who is responsible for assisting the student through the Dissertation stages from preparation of the proposal up to the submission of the final dissertation.

### a. The CRMT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior to start</td>
<td>Student assigned to their Research Methods Training Module</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Week 3 until end of CRMT</td>
<td>Support for Draft Proposal</td>
<td></td>
<td>GDI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning in Week 5 until end of CRMT</td>
<td>Student matched with DA Student starts to work also in the CAC. From this stage onward the work on the project is continued in the CAC with a DA, while the work on the CRMT continues in the CRMT class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Week 7</td>
<td>The end of the CRMT module and grading by the GDI.</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>GDI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### b. The CAC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End of week 8 (Month 2)</td>
<td>Complete and revised proposal submitted to the DA.</td>
<td></td>
<td>DA/ LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month 5</td>
<td>Submission of the Specification and Design Report and graded by DA.</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>DA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month 8</td>
<td>Latest date for the optional submission of the complete draft of the dissertation for review by DA.</td>
<td></td>
<td>DA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 40 weeks</td>
<td>Submission of the Final dissertation document via Turnitin. Final Dissertation assessed by 2 Dissertation Advisors.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>1st Assessor (DA and 2nd Assessor (another DA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 The Working Relationship and Expectations

The working relationship between a dissertation student and his/her GDI and DA is an important one. The Dissertation Agreement document found in your DA class (and the CSS: https://success.liverpool-online.com/ResearchPortal/DA/DissertationAgreement) summarizes the key responsibilities of DAs and students during the various phases of the dissertation. You are expected to indicate that you have read and accepted the agreement by replying to the ‘Dissertation Agreement’ in your DA’s class.

5.1 Supervision Issues

If a student is unhappy about any aspect of his/her supervision, s/he should consult their Student Support Manager (SSM) as soon as possible. The SSM will contact the Programme Director and/or Lead Faculty to discuss any issues. Every effort will be made to ensure that the student-DA relationship 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.

6 Submission of the Dissertation

6.1 Mechanics of Submitting the Dissertation

The final submission of the dissertation for evaluation can be submitted as a Microsoft WORD or a PDF document. The preferred format for the submission is .DOC or .DOCX, using the WORD text editor. The pages’ dimensions should conform to the A4/Letter format. The template provides the proper formatting of the dissertation. You must always use the latest template as outlined in the DS template.dot file found in the CRMT. The general structure should follow the structure and format of the DS template.dot file although (justifiable) deviations are allowed. The draft and the final document must be submitted through the Turnitin Links located in the Final Submissions area of the CAC.

The dissertation must be self-contained and present a complete record of the work carried out. The approved version of the dissertation proposal should be included in an appendix to the dissertation. A target size of 12000-18000 words is recommended, but this can be slightly modified in appropriate cases with the agreement of the DA. The word count will also be checked by the first assessor. Appendices, if justified, will not be included in the word count, but examiners will not normally be expected to read appendices in detail. The dissertation content is at the discretion of the student and will depend on the nature of the project, but for a typical project, the elements presented in the template are expected. Please study the template form which is highly annotated with comments and guidelines as to how it should be used.

6.2 Draft Submission

A draft of the dissertation should be included in the planning of any dissertation. This will allow you to gain feedback on the completed work to date before the deadline is due. It is extremely important that a last draft of the dissertation be submitted to the DA before the final dissertation submission. It should be noted, however, that as this is a student dissertation, it is expected that the student will demonstrate self-sufficiency. Most of the dissertation will be already known to the DA as it was presented to him/her piece by piece along the way. Thus, the DA will normally comment in detail only on a single full last draft before the final submission of the dissertation. Please allow at least one month for this phase, as it usually requires detailed feedback from the DA and then revision and re-submission by you. The DA will not normally be expected to give detailed feedback on multiple versions of the dissertation; however, you should expect him/her to allow you to submit one
additional versions to the classroom for review before you submit the final version, if there is time. Please note that while the Turnitin report will check and alert you to failures to use proper citation and referencing, the draft is not moved into the database.

6.3 Final Dissertation Submission
You should submit the final version of your dissertation to your dissertation group folder in your CAC and the Final Submission Turnitin link before the deadline day after 40 weeks. The completed dissertation should be posted with a clear subject title indicating that it is the final version. The document should include an appendix that contains the approved version of the dissertation proposal. It is also worth noting that you are not allowed to submit the Dissertation Submission Declaration unless you: (a) have an approved proposal and (b) that your DA has graded your Project Specification and Design Document. If one of these conditions is not met and the dissertation deadline has not passed, the dissertation will not be accepted and will be returned to you so that the previous requirements can be met. If the dissertation deadline has passed, the dissertation will fail due to a breach of the regulations.

7 Dissertation Marking

7.1 Timing and Requirements for Grading
Once you have submitted your dissertation it will be marked by your DA, as the first assessor, and by a 2nd assessor (also a dissertation advisor). Once the final submission has been made, you will receive an email confirming the receipt of your dissertation and this 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 when the Board of Examiners (BoE) has met and agreed on a final award. Once the BoE has approved an official mark awarded, the student can appeal as per the appeals process if they believe there has been some irregularity. This process could mean a wait of several months for your final grade, depending upon the deadline and submission date of the dissertation. One of the most important requirements is that the dissertation must be completed as scheduled. The clock starts as you enter the CRMT class. Unless you have been granted an extension due to exceptional circumstances, if you fail to complete your dissertation in the required timescale (40 weeks) you will have a period of 10 days in which it can be submitted with grading penalties. Those penalties will not be permitted to reduce a passing grade below 50. Dissertation submission after the 10-day late period will result in a ‘Fail’. You can find the deadlines for submission in the CSS: http://success.liverpool-online.com/finalresearchproject/submission#deadline

Dissertation grades together with the grades for the Specification and Design, will be used to produce a preliminary overall grade for the dissertation. All the components of this grade, and the reports of the assessors, will be made available to the Board of Examiners (BoE), which will agree the final grade.

You will be contacted by your Student Support Manager (SSM) with official confirmation of the results once the Board of Examiners (BoE) has made its decision. The SSM will release the final overall grade to the student only after the meeting of the BoE. The SSM will send the student a message with the UoL graduation contact details, confirmation of the dissertation grade, and an explanation of Laureate Online Education’s involvement in the graduation and associated processes. Additionally, the student will be advised as to when the student’s account
will be removed. A completed feedback form will be provided to all students who submitted a final dissertation document.

Students whose results are confirmed by the February and May BoE meetings will have a graduation ceremony in July. Those confirmed by the October BoE meeting will graduate in December.

At least a Pass grade is required for the degree of MSc to be awarded. However, a student who fails to obtain a Pass grade will be given one further opportunity to submit a dissertation for re-examination. If the Board decides upon a Fail grade, the student will be informed by the Student Support Manager, along with the reasons why a Fail grade was given and a list of instructions of how to proceed from this point. The student has the option of repeating the dissertation once. This will be considered to be a “second sitting” of the module.

When software outputs are a significant part of the work, the assessors will need to see them demonstrated in some form (electronically or paper). The source code of a programming project should be available in the File Exchange section of the student’s private area within the CAC. If not included, it will be specifically requested by the DA and/or the assessor.

7.2 Extensions

Extensions will not normally be granted, except in clearly unexpected circumstances beyond a student’s control, such as in cases of illness affecting the student, bereavement or serious illness affecting a close family member, and other unforeseeable or unpreventable events. Excluded events, which do not form sufficient grounds for an extension, would be holidays, weddings, inadequate planning and time management, and any event that could have been reasonably foreseen. The case for an extension will need to be made in writing with supporting documentation. Applications may be rejected if there is insufficient or inappropriate evidence. Such requests should be discussed with the SSM (not the DA) who will advise on a formal application via the Online Dissertation Extension Form, which can be accessed via the web page http://success.liverpool-online.com/ContactSupport and the Formal case submission link at the bottom of the page. DAs have no role to play in the dissertation extension process and should refer students to the SSM Team for more information. The maximum extension that can be granted is 12 weeks. Many students will need only 4 weeks.

7.3 Standard Marking Guidelines

The CRMT is marked using the standard six point letter grade scale, although each letter grade is assigned a numerical value which enables the calculation of a percentage mark for the module.

A*, A: Distinction Level
B: Merit Level
C: Pass Level
D: Marginal Work
F: Unsatisfactory Work
The Specification & Design Report is awarded a percentage mark by the DA and a copy of the grading report will be provided to the student, within the student’s private area in the CAC.

The Dissertations are awarded percentage marks by the two assessors. Each assessor marks the dissertation independently, taking into account the following percentages and letter grades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRMT and S&amp;D marks</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dissertation marks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A*</td>
<td>High Distinction-level work [Exceptional work – The Module Facilitator is intellectually challenged by the student’s contribution]: Factually almost faultless; authoritative coverage of topic; strong evidence of outside reading/research; substantial elements of originality and independent thought. Perceptive; aptly focused; very well written and directed. Exceeds all requirements.</td>
<td>80%+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Distinction-level work: Displays in-depth understanding of material; Comprehensive coverage of topic; good evidence of outside reading/research; originality of thought or approach. Enlightening; well-focused; very well written and directed. Exceeds most requirements.</td>
<td>70%-79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Merit-level work: Factually sound (few, if any, minor factual errors); thorough understanding of material; evidence of relevant outside reading/research; some originality of thought or approach. Regular use of effective logical thinking, critical analysis and judgment. Suitably focused; well written and directed. Meets all requirements.</td>
<td>60%-69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Pass-level work [Satisfactory work – Worthy effort but undistinguished outcome]: Essentially correct, possibly missing important points, but no serious errors; good understanding of material but tending to be descriptive in approach; limited evidence of outside reading/research. Competently structured and reasonably well focused, but some weaknesses in expression / presentation. Possibly using large amounts of quotations.</td>
<td>50%-59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Marginal work: Displays only limited understanding of material; incomplete coverage of topic; some significant factual errors and/or irrelevancies. Entirely descriptive in approach. Poorly structured; lack of coherent argument; difficult to follow. Substantially above or below the word limit. Possibly using excessive amounts of quotations.</td>
<td>40%-49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory work: Evidence of inadequate effort. Many serious errors / misconceptions / omissions / irrelevancies. Poorly directed at target audience. Poorly structured; lack of coherent argument; difficult to follow. Substantially above or below the word limit. Possibly using excessive amounts of quotations.</td>
<td>&lt;40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9 Resitting or Retaking the Dissertation after a Fail Grade

The University of Liverpool Exam Board, or its Chair, will decide whether a student will be offered a resit or a retake of the dissertation. A resit will involve only the resubmission of the Final Dissertation document. In this case the Research Methods and Specification and Design grades from the first attempt will be carried forward into the resit. A retake will involve retaking the Research Methods Class, producing another Specification and Design, and submitting another Final Dissertation document. Any application to resit (or retake) the Dissertation module should be addressed to Student Support, who will consult the Lead Faculty (Dissertation), acting on behalf of the Programme Director. Although there may be exceptional circumstances which need to be dealt with differently, the normal procedure that will be followed for resits is as follows:

1. In all cases the student will be required to comply with the provisions of the latest version of the Dissertation Guidelines in force at the time he/she commences the resit or retake.
2. For the resit or retake, any student may choose to approach the same Dissertation Advisor who supervised the initial attempt or approach a different Dissertation Advisor. In the latter case, the new Dissertation Advisor must be informed that this is a resit or retake. In both cases, the Dissertation Advisor is free to decline the invitation.
3. Except for the case where the dissertation was failed due to plagiarism, the student will use the same subject/topic in the resit. In exceptional circumstances (such as where employer facilities necessary to complete the project are no longer available), permission may be sought to use a different topic in the resit. Where the student failed due to plagiarism or is doing a retake, he/she will develop a new dissertation proposal in conjunction with a Dissertation Advisor.
4. In cases where the dissertation was failed due to plagiarism, the student may not reuse the proposal from the initial attempt.

Where a new proposal is required, it will need to be approved following the standard process, this includes final approval by the LF.

10 References


We would like to thank Diane Seymour and Barbara Lovitts for their permission to use their works as models for the Dissertations’ assessment pro forma.
## Appendix A - Dissertation Late Submission Policy (applies only to Dissertations which commence on or after 17 March 2016)

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**Approving Authority:**
University of Liverpool Academic Quality and Standards Committee  
**Date Approved:** 1 January 2016

**Consultation Undertaken:**
Online Programmes Planning and Policy Committee (OPPC) and Online Planning and Operational Group (OPOG)

**References:**
- Code of Practice on Assessment 2015/16  
- QA Operational Framework  
  [https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/tqsd/collaborative-provision/laureate/Laureate-QA-Operational-Framework.pdf](https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/tqsd/collaborative-provision/laureate/Laureate-QA-Operational-Framework.pdf)

**Audience:**
Students; Faculty; Student Advising and Support Teams; Academic Progress Team; Academic Operations

**For comments and queries on this document, please write to AcademicOffice@laureate.net**  
If students have an enquiry regarding the Dissertation Late Submission policy, they should write to loesupport@liverpool-online.com

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**Version Control and Change History:**

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Computer Science Programmes  
Dissertation Guidelines Version 16.3  
[LAUREATE ONLINE EDUCATION](#)
1. **Purpose**

All students of the University of Liverpool are expected to be familiar with its academic policies and the Student Code of Conduct.

2. **Application & Scope**

These guidelines apply to all students and faculty on all University of Liverpool Online Masters programmes delivered by Laureate Online Education.

3. **Introduction and context**

These guidelines are based on the University of Liverpool’s Code of Practice on Assessment 2015/16: https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/tqsd/code-of-practice-on-assessment/code_of_practice_on_assessment.pdf and the University of Liverpool Quality Assurance Operational Framework February 2015 https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/tqsd/collaborative-provision/laureate/Laureate-QA-Operational-Framework.pdf. The University of Liverpool and Laureate Online Education need to be able to assure themselves that the standards of the awards delivered in partnership are consistent with the general expectations for such awards within the higher education sector nationally. Therefore, these guidelines are situated within external reference points such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

They have been written to inform students and faculty, as well as individuals from outside the University, such as external examiners and external reviewers.

4. **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 COPA 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.

5. **Definitions**

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

**COPA:** University of Liverpool Code of Practice on Assessment

**Dissertation:** The final assessment towards a Masters 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 (see below) due to a successful Mitigating Circumstances claim or extended deadline following a review by the Disability Centre etc.

**Submission date:** The official submission date for all student Dissertations is 40 weeks from the start of the Dissertation module.

**Submission Time:** The official submission time is considered to be midnight in the student’s country of residence as recorded in the University’s records. The same method will be used to determine when the dissertation is 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 days late. If the student is temporarily resident in a different time zone at the time of dissertation submission, he or she should have notified the University of that change in advance of submission. The appropriate time zone will then be used in calculating the deadline.
6. Guidelines

6.1 All student dissertations submitted up to 10 calendar days after the official submission date will be assessed.

6.2 Dissertations submitted after 40 weeks (the official submission date) but before the end of the 10-day penalty window will have their dissertations graded on merit by their assessors.

6.3 Where a student’s dissertation 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.

6.4 For every two calendar days after the official submission date, 5% of the total marks available for the dissertation 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);

6.5 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.

6.6 Work assessed below the pass mark on merit will not be penalised for late submission of up to ten days.

6.7 All work submitted ten calendar days after the official submission deadline will receive a mark of zero.

{End of the DS Guidelines document}