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1 Preface

This Code of Practice and Regulations for Postgraduate Level 7 Research Programmes has been created to ensure that the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) practices and procedures regarding research degree students are consistent with national guidelines, in particular those provided by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education, Malta.

2 Citation, Definitions & Introduction

2.1 Citation

2.1.1 These regulations may be cited as the Master by Research - M.Res. - Degree Course Regulations, 2020.

2.2 Definitions

2.2.1 The corresponding “Document 005 - Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7”, covers definitions relating to timelines, assessment criteria, assessment feedback, internal verification, interruption of studies, learning outcomes, study unit or module, time-constrained assignments, synoptic assessment, academic appeals and withdrawal from studies.

2.2.2 IRC – Institute Research Committee.

2.2.3 MDC – The MCAST Master’s Degree Committee.

2.2.4 SOP – Standard Operating Procedure.

Reference documents:

“Doc 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7”

2.3 Introduction

2.3.1 The Code of Practice provides guidance of the procedures to the various stages of the postgraduate research study at MCAST, from application through to conferment of the award. It incorporates recommendations made by the MDC. In addition, it emphasises good practice as identified through a series of internal and external expert advice. It is intended that research students and their supervisory teams will make full use of this Code in ensuring that effective and efficient progress is made in their research programmes.

2.3.2 Rationale: A Master by Research (M.Res.) programme is a postgraduate qualification in its own right. It provides the student with sound practical knowledge and experience in preparation for a research career, as well as, with practice and training for PhD research. A Master by Research degree provides a useful understanding of what studying for a doctorate might be like, whilst at the same time, allowing the student to earn a valuable Master's level qualification.

2.3.3 Much of the study undertaken at Master’s level will have been at or informed by, the forefront of an academic, vocational or professional discipline. Students will have demonstrated originality in the application of knowledge, and they will understand how the boundaries of knowledge advance through research. They will be able to deal with complex issues, both systematically and creatively, and they will show originality in tackling and solving problems. They will have the qualities needed for employment in the circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative, in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

2.3.4 The Master by Research degree is taken by candidates who own a Bachelor Degree, satisfying the conditions outlined in paragraph 4.1.4.

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2.3.5 These regulations are equally applicable to students, lecturing, and administrative staff within the College, Institute and Corporate functions.

2.3.6 It is in the student's interest and responsibility to ensure that s/he has access to and is familiar with the content of these regulations.

3 Programme Outline

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The programme is divided into two main components:

- Taught modules in Research Methods, comprising of 12 ECTS, and
- A research project, comprising of 78 ECTS.

The total number of credits of the Master's programme comprises 90 ECTS.

Master by Research		
Module 1	Basics of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods	6 ECTS
Module 2	Analysing and Interpreting Secondary Data & Methodology	6 ECTS
Module 3	Research Project	78 ECTS
	Total	90 ECTS

Thought Modules: Research Methods Module [12 ECTS]

The Research Methods modules are designed to give candidates clear insights into research practices, methodologies and the essential research tools and techniques. The objective of these two modules is to provide knowledge and understanding of how to approach both primary and secondary research.

The details of the modules are included in the unit specification document.

Research Module: Research Project [78 ECTS]

The main component of this Master by Research degree consists of an extensive dissertation or an equivalent project-led research (refer to paragraph 6.2.3 of these regulations for word count) that has to be presented to, and defended at a select, expert audience. This research endeavour shall build from the applied research components of the first stage, utilising the design and preparation of the first stage to develop a sound and defensible research endeavour.

The details of the module are included in the unit specification document.

3.2 Duration of studies

3.2.1 Studies for the M.Res. degree shall extend over the following periods:

- (a) 18 months in the case of full-time studies;
- (b) 36 months in the case of part-time studies.

3.2.2 An extension needs to be submitted to the IRC and endorsed by the supervisor.

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4 Admissions

4.1 Admission procedure

- 4.1.1 The admission procedure will be governed by “Document 329 - Process flowchart for M.Res. Research projects”. A research proposal will be submitted to the IRC by the student using “Document 164 - Research Proposal (Statement of Intent) Form” together with two Letters of Reference.
- 4.1.2 Admissions to the programme will be held in Autumn at the start of the MCAST academic year. Exceptional consideration will be given to students who are engaged in research relating to externally funding projects
- 4.1.3 Overseas students must comply with the Immigration Rules before they apply for a visa (if required), or an extension of stay.
- 4.1.4 An applicant for registration for a research degree under these regulations shall hold:
- A relevant MQF/EQF Level 6 degree at second class, or
 - An MQF/EQF Level 6 degree, which is regarded by MDC as equivalent to an Honours degree such as professional qualifications subject, plus a portfolio evidencing relevant work experience for at least three years.
- 4.1.5 MDC shall consider proposals for exceptional entry requirements on a case-by-case basis.
- 4.1.6 The language of instruction at MCAST is English. Applicants that have completed their secondary education overseas and/or whose first language is not English, are referred to MCAST’s admission policy to fulfil the necessary entry requirements.
- 4.1.7 A learning agreement (Doc 348), which will be raised by the IRC, will be signed by the student as per “Document 329 - Process flowchart for M.Res. Research projects.”
- 4.1.8 An unconditional Letter of Acceptance which endorses the ‘Learning Agreement (Doc 348)’ and an approved ‘Proposal (Statement of Intent) Form’ will be issued by Registrar as per in “Document 329 - Process flowchart for M.Res. Research projects.”
- 4.1.9 In order to apply for full registration, all students must enrol with the office of the Registrar, complete the pre-registration form and pay the appropriate fees, as per “Document 329 - Process flowchart for M.Res. Research projects.”

The full process should follow SOP “Document 329 - Process flowchart for M.Res. Research projects.”

Reference documents:

“Document 329: Process flowchart for M.Res. Research projects.”

“Document 164: Research Proposal (Statement of Intent) Form”

“Document 348: Master by Research Student Learning Agreement”

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4.2 Selection of supervisor

4.2.1 The supervisor will be identified by the IRC to act as the principal mentor and must hold:

- (a) A full relevant qualification at Level 8, or
- (b) A full relevant qualification at Level 7 with relevant high level/executive experience in the field AND a co-supervisor with a full relevant qualification at Level 8 to provide input related to the academic/theoretical aspects of the degree.

The composition of the supervisory team needs to be approved by the MDC.

4.3 Annual Registration

4.3.1 Students are required to be actively registered at MCAST at the beginning of each academic year throughout their period of study. Such registration shall be allowed only upon recommendations by IRC and MDC following their acceptance of an independent and blind progress report submitted by the supervisor and another one by the student as stipulated in section 5.3.1(g) and 5.3.2(l).

5 Course & Coursework Regulations

5.1 Course Regulations

- 5.1.1 Attendance for Taught Modules: Refer to paragraph 9.1.2 in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.” Lectures will be held during College hours at time defined by the programme coordinator of the relevant taught module.
- 5.1.2 Interruption and Withdrawal of Studies: Refer to section 9.5, “Interruption and Withdrawal from Studies” in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.1.3 Continuous Assessment, Learning Outcomes, Grading Criteria and Assessment Tasks & Documentation: Refer to section 10.1, “Continuous Assessment, Learning Outcomes, Grading Criteria and Assessment Tasks”, and 10.2, “Assessment Documentation” in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.1.4 The Authenticity of Work (Plagiarism): Refer to section 10.4, “The Authenticity of Work (Plagiarism)” in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.1.5 Academic Appeals: Refer to section 10.12, “Academic Appeals” in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”

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5.2 Coursework

- 5.2.1 Submission of Individual Home-Based Coursework (excluding the Dissertation or Research Project): Refer to section 10.5, “Submission of Individual Home-Based Coursework (excluding the Dissertation or Research Project)” in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.2.2 Successful Completion of Coursework: Refer to section 10.6, “Successful Completion of Coursework” in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.2.3 Unsuccessful Completion of Coursework (Synoptic Assessment): Refer to section 10.7, “Unsuccessful Completion of Coursework (Synoptic Assessment)” in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.2.4 Request for Consideration of Extenuating Circumstances for Extension of the Submission Deadline of Home-Based Assignment: Refer to section 10.9, “Request for Consideration of Extenuating Circumstances for Extension of the Submission Deadline of Home-Based Assignment” in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.2.5 Absence From Time Constrained Assessment (TCA): Refer to section 10.10, “Absence From Time Constrained Assessment (TCA)” in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.2.6 Assessment Feedback: Refer to section 10.11, “Assessment Feedback” in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.2.7 Record of Work: Refer to section 10.13, “Record of Work”, in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.2.8 Students Work: Refer to section 10.14, “Students Work”, in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”
- 5.2.9 Internal Verification: Refer to section 10.15, “Internal Verification”, in “Document 005: Programme Regulation MQF Levels 5 – 7.”

5.3 Mentoring and Supervising Students undertaking the Research Project

During the course of studies, the student will be allocated a supervisor for the duration of the Research Project as stipulated in Section 0 of these regulations.

- 5.3.1 The role of the supervisor entails:
- (a) Encourage completion of the research project by setting targets through a written schedule which outlines the expected completion dates of successive stages of the work:
 - Clarification of research problems
 - Summary of themes emanating from the literature review
 - Choice of research methodology and design of research instrument
 - Discussion on analysis of results
 - Draft of the Research Project
 - (b) Provide assistance and advice concerning the overall aim of the research, the relevant sources to support the research, the research methods, the technical aspects of writing, and methods of data analysis.

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- (c) Act as a mentor, performing the role of an expert in the field that the student is researching.
- (d) Will hold agreed prescheduled regular meetings with the student to ensure invaluable support and student's progress towards the successful completion of the degree. As a guideline, the face-to-face contact with student spread across the duration of the study is expected to be a minimum of 52 contact hours for a Master by Research with dissertation. The supervisor will prepare in advance of the meeting any up-to-date material that would benefit the discussion with the student.
- (e) Will anticipate any written work that has been agreed with the student, and provide constructive feedback to the student in a timely manner (not later than four weeks from submission of work by the student). The supervisor is expected to provide constructive comments on at least one draft of each part of the Research Project. The supervisor will inform the student in case the submitted work is below the expected standard.
- (f) Arrange any training or formal instruction which the student requires, including research and personal skills.
- (g) Must submit progress reports on student's progress to IRC and MDC as per scheduled timelines established on the Learning Agreement (Doc 348). The report must be independently and blindly submitted from that of the student.
- (h) Is responsible to decline the official submission of the final work if this is considered to be sub-standard, irrespective of the circumstances. If the student still elects to submit, despite the lack of supervisor's consent, then the supervisor should clearly record this.
- (i) Is responsible to provide the IRC a recommendation of an appropriate External Examiner for the VIVA with international expertise on the research domain.
- (j) The ownership of decisions relating to the Research Project lies with the student.
- (k) Will assist with the publication of any research papers as appropriate.
- (l) Ensures that the student makes a positive contribution through the work within MCAST and through the choice of area of study, research methods and analysis, to promoting diversity and equal opportunities within the MCAST and the community.

5.3.2 It is the student's responsibility to:

- (a) Comply with the requirements of official procedures.
- (b) Work independently under the guidance of the supervisor.
- (c) Attend the required research training programme.
- (d) Re-enrol with MCAST on an annual basis as a continuing student.
- (e) Set regular meetings with the supervisor with meeting times arranged well in advance.
- (f) Prepare and submit in advance of scheduled meetings with the supervisor, the agreed work that needs to be discussed. The kind and frequency of written work should be agreed with the supervisor at the outset of the research.
- (g) Take note of the advice given by the supervisor and engage in discussion around suggestions made.
- (h) Maintain progress with the research, along lines agreed with the supervisor/s.
- (i) Inform supervisors immediately of any encountered problems or difficulties, seeking help or advice and where necessary applying for extensions, suspensions, withdrawals or a change in the mode of study.
- (j) Prepare material for presentations at seminars and conferences.
- (k) Undertake to submit papers for publication.

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- (l) Submit progress reports to IRC as per scheduled timelines established on the Learning Agreement (Doc 348). The report must be independently and blindly submitted from that of the supervisor.
- (m) Submit written work that is of an adequate standard for the award and contains the correct language, overall structure and coherence of the final dissertation.
- (n) Ensure that the work is free from plagiarism and that all citations are adequately referenced and that the list of references is accurate, complete and consistent.
- (o) Honour agreements about ownership of the research and in accordance with the MCAST's regulations and guidelines and rules in relation to copyright and intellectual property.
- (p) Take responsibility for the quality and presentation of the work, including the final dissertation.
- (q) Submit the dissertation (at the sole discretion of the student) in compliance with MCAST's Regulations.

The student is also encouraged to present at seminars and conferences, as well as submit papers for publication

Reference documents:

“Document 348: Master by Research Student Learning Agreement”

6 Dissertation Guidelines & Examination Procedures

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 Master's Students are expected to complete a dissertation in their final phase of studies. The grading of the dissertation shall be through a viva session. (Refer to “Document 237: Research Programme Viva Procedure.”)
- 6.1.2 Students will be required to follow “Document 074: Research Ethics Policy and Procedure” referenced below when conducting their research. This procedure refers to the IRC, that is responsible for approving the research project once a Research Proposal has been submitted to the IRC by the student. Students shall not commence their research before they have approval in writing to proceed by the IRC. The IRC shall, in turn, seek ethics approval from the Research Ethics Committee and confirmation that all the necessary steps, as outlined in the SOP “Document 329 - Process flowchart for M.Res. Research projects”, have been addressed, before proceeding to give final approval to the student. Students should be very cautious in attempting to change their research theme once they have submitted their Research Proposal to the IRC, as this will cause delays that may result in the student failing the research module.

6.2 Research Proposal

- 6.2.1 The Research Proposal also called the ‘Statement of Intent’, is a vital initial part of the student's research endeavour. Students will normally be requested to submit an initial research proposal Form (refer to document referenced below) that outlines the plan for their early stages of research, and a detailed research proposal after completing the taught Research Methods modules. In both cases, the student shall seek separate IRC approval before commencing the research. The Research Proposal Form also includes summarised

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guidelines for ethical standards that are explained further in the Research Ethics Policy and Procedure.

- 6.2.2 Final Level 7 dissertation submissions shall unless specified otherwise, follow the following schedule. The Student is to:
- Submit two spiral-bound copies of the dissertation to the Institute concerned as agreed with the supervisor.
 - Collect one corrected spiral-bound dissertation copy by a specified date as communicated by College administration.
 - Submit two hard-bound copies and one PDF soft copy of the final corrected dissertation by the last Friday of September to MCAST. One hard-copy of the dissertation will be retained in one of the MCAST Libraries, while MCAST will retain the other hard copy.
- 6.2.3 Master's dissertations which are not accompanied by a tangible outcome in the form of a model, prototype or an actual product, shall generally be between 35,000 to 40,000 words in the main text that is excluding the abstract, the bibliography and the appendices. The dissertation shall be of direct relevance to the product. This means that the designed product, model or prototype must be intelligently supported by a relevant argument. This writing will thus follow the same guidance offered above and must also include the Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review and other main chapters, as well as the Bibliography and the Appendices.
- 6.2.4 Dissertation duties of students and the supervisory team: refer to sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2, above.
- 6.2.5 Dissertation meetings with the supervisory team and the Dissertation Log-book: The student is expected to keep a Dissertation Log-book (refer to document referred below) of the work carried out towards the development of the dissertation and also a record of the meetings with the dissertation supervisor. As a general rule, at least fifteen (15) student-supervisor meetings are expected over the research period.

The student is to ensure that the Dissertation Log-book is correctly documented and maintained. The log-book is to be submitted together with the dissertation at the end of the dissertation period. Students are to request written supervisor feedback and signatures to each log-book input that they will make, relating to the various individual meetings that take place throughout the academic period. Supervisors will add their comments and feedback/direction to the descriptions and inputs made by the student in each log-book entry. Students have to actively seek out their supervisor to ensure that this feedback/direction is regularly provided and the log-book adequately documented. MCAST reserves the right not to accept the dissertation for evaluation if the log-book is not filled in correctly and each meeting duly signed off by the Student and Supervisor.

Reference Documents:

"Document 067: Dissertation Log Book"

"Document 074: Research Ethics Policy and Procedure"

"Document 164: Initial Research Proposal Form (Statement of Intent)"

"Document 329: Process flowchart for M.Res. Research projects"

- 6.2.6 Periodical Progress Review and Monitoring Exercise:

There shall be a periodical review as defined in the Learning Agreement (Doc 348) for all candidates undertaking a research degree on the progress of their research. This will be carried out by a reviewer who is independent of the supervisory team. The periodical review shall establish whether the candidate is actively engaged on the research programme, making

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satisfactory progress with the research, maintaining regular/frequent contact with the supervisory team, identify skills achieved to date and discuss any future developmental requirements that are required by the candidate. If the expected level is not reached, the candidate will be expected to rectify the situation, before being allowed to renew registration.

6.2.7 Guideline for Content of Dissertation's Main Sections

6.2.7.1 Abstract (400 – 500 words)

This section should clearly state what the study is about, summarising how it was carried out and what the results were. References are not to be included in the abstract. It should present only the essentials of the work in general.

6.2.7.2 Introduction (1,000 – 2,000 words)

In this section, the student is expected to state clearly:

- (a) the 'problem' or 'question' being researched;
- (b) why this topic was chosen;
- (c) what was the motivation behind the choice of topic;
- (d) how the student approached the investigation;
- (e) what problem the student wished to explore;
- (f) what is the context for the research.

6.2.7.3 Literature Review (6,000 - 8,000 words)

The main purpose of a literature review is to show the reader that the student studied and analysed the viewpoints of other researchers on the problem under consideration. A literature review is not just a summary of the books read but rather a thorough analysis of other viewpoints on the problem.

6.2.7.4 Research Methodology (3000 – 5000 words)

This section should make about 20% of a dissertation. It presents the chosen research methods and explains why these methods are effective.

6.2.7.5 Analysis of Results and Discussion (8,000 – 11,000 words)

This section includes a critical discussion about the student's findings. It shows how these findings support the original objectives laid out for the dissertation, which may be partially or fully achieved, or even exceeded. The student may also include new areas of investigation prompted by developments in the research dissertation. Above all, it is required to present strong arguments which show how findings may offer a valid contribution to the development of the subject of the selected research area or issues related to it.

6.2.7.6 Conclusions and Recommendations (3,000 – 4,000 words)

In this chapter, the student has to evaluate the significance of the work done and give recommendations for any further investigations.

6.2.7.7 Bibliography

Refer to paragraph 3.5.7, "Bibliography" in "*Document 100: Dissertation Guidelines and Grading Rubrics.*"

6.2.7.8 References

Refer to paragraph 3.5.8, "References" in "*Document 100: Dissertation Guidelines and Grading Rubrics.*"

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6.2.7.9 Appendices

Refer to paragraph 3.5.9, "Appendices" in "*Document 100: Dissertation Guidelines and Grading Rubrics.*"

6.2.8 Hard Bound Presentation and Front Cover

Refer to paragraph 3.8 "Hard Bound Presentation and Front Cover" in "*Document 100: Dissertation Guidelines and Grading Rubrics.*"

6.3 Examination Processes

6.3.1 Form of Examination

The examination shall have two stages:

- (a) the submission and preliminary assessment of the dissertation
- (b) its subsequent defence by oral examination during a viva.

6.3.2 Submission of the Dissertation

Candidates will be sent an email reminder by the MCAST Research Degrees Administrator typically six months prior to their dissertation submission deadline informing them of the details for their dissertation submission and their dissertation submission date.

The submission of the dissertation for examination shall be at the sole discretion of the candidate. While a candidate would be unwise to submit the dissertation for examination against the advice of the supervisory team, it is their right to do so.

Candidates should not assume that a supervisor's agreement to the submission of a dissertation guarantees the award of the degree. Candidates must be aware that the function of the examination team is to make an independent academic judgement and that their opinion may vary from that of the supervisory team.

6.3.3 Examination Procedures

Details of the Viva examination process (including pre-viva and post-viva procedures) can be found in "*Document 237: Research Programme Viva Procedure.*"

Reference Documents:

"*Document 137: Master's Degree External Examiner Report Form*"

"*Document 237: Research Programme Viva Procedure*"