THE RESEARCH ELEMENT IN MASTERS' DEGREES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION: LITERATURE REVIEW AND MAPPING SURVEY

By
Amos Paran
Fiona Hyland
Clare Bentall

Department of Learning, Culture and Communication
Institute of Education
University of London
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H 0AL

June 2010

Table of contents

1   Project Details

Title	The Research Element in Master's Degrees in Distance Education: Literature Review and Mapping Survey
Principal Investigator	Dr Amos Paran
Project Team	Dr Amos Paran Dr Fiona Hyland Dr Clare Bentall Research assistant: Dr. Gertrude Shotte
Contact Details	Dr Amos Paran Department of Learning, Curriculum and Communication Institute of Education, University of London 20 Bedford Way London WC1H 0AL Tel: 020 7612 6539 Fax: 020 7612 6534 E-mail: a.paran@ioe.ac.uk
Duration of project	07/01/2008 – 07/04/2008; later extended to 30/11/2008
Funding	Centre for Distance Education

2. Executive Summary

2.1 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of this study were:

- Provide a review of the research literature on supervising Master's research projects.

- Provide a review of the research literature on supervising research projects at a distance (both at Master's and PhD level).

- Provide an overview of current regulations and requirements for distance Master's research projects within the University of London, and of the varied forms that such projects can take.

- Provide an overview of current guidance and practices for supervising distance Master's research projects within the University of London

2.2 Design

The study consists of three main parts. The initial stage involved a literature review (chapter 5), which then was used to generate questions for the interview schedule. In the second stage, documentary evidence (programme handbooks and websites) was examined in order to understand the requirements for the research element on the different Master's courses (Chapter 6). In the final stage, nine programme leaders were interviewed to understand the way in which research and research supervision were conceptualised within the programmes examined (Chapter 7).

2.3 Setting and Participants

The setting for the study was the University of London, and a search was made for all distance courses in the university. Most courses examined were in fact part of the External System. Nine course leaders were interviewed, eight from the external system and one from one of the colleges in the university.

2.4 Results

a. The project confirmed that research supervision at master's level is still an under-researched area. The vast majority of studies of supervision and supervisory practices deal with doctoral level supervision, and only 12 studies were found that dealt with master's level supervision at all. These studies are referred to in the body of the literature review, but short summaries are presented in Appendix A. It is noteworthy that in terms of disciplines studied, Education is overrepresented,

and is the only discipline in four of the studies. The research is normally small scale, with seven of the 12 studies looking at fewer than 13 participants. This is particularly striking in comparison with some of the studies of PhD supervision, which include hundreds of participants.

b. Similarly, the project confirmed that there is virtually no research dealing with supervision at a distance on its own. Most studies deal with distance supervision as bound up with face-to-face supervision. Only 4 papers were found that touched on distance supervision. These studies are referred to in the body of the literature review, but short summaries are presented in Appendix B. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that unlike Master's level supervision, which often occurs wholly at a distance, such situations are rare – if indeed ever present – in Doctoral supervision, where there is always a face-to-face element. The lack of research on distance supervision may therefore be the result of the lack of research on Master's level supervision.

c. The document analysis confirms the great variability between the different projects that are required within the different programmes. There is variation in terms of length, in terms of research training, and in terms of supervisory support available. There is also variation in terms of whether a research project is required, optional, or not available as an option. The source of variation is a combination of institutional requirements and disciplinary practices and options.

d. Whereas the literature focuses on the supervisor-supervisee relationship, in the interviews, the course leader emerged as an important lynchpin of the dissertation process in terms of approving topics, choosing supervisors, guiding, training and sometimes managing supervisors, and mediating between supervisors and supervisees in times of problems.

e. The interviews brought up the importance of timing and of staging the dissertation process for the students successfully to bring about timely completion. The course leaders interviewed also spoke of the difficulties of channelling the research process into a tight time bound procedure which would accommodate institutional procedures for payment and enrolment as well as the exam requirements of the external system.

f. The interviews also confirmed the importance of the balance between academic support and pastoral care in the supervisory process. The distance element came to the fore when it was acknowledged that at a distance it was sometimes more difficult to know when a student was struggling than on face-to-face courses.

Dissemination

a. A full report submitted to the CDE.

b. Preliminary results of the study, based on open source documentation, were presented at the CDE Research Conference, *Research in Distance Education: from present findings to future agendas,* on February 9th, 2009.

c. The full report will be sent to all participants in the study.

d. The project team is looking at the possibility of publishing the project in a peer-reviewed journal.

3. Introduction

This report describes a mapping study of dissertation supervision across distance Master's Programmes in the University of London which we carried out between January 2008 and June 2009, funded by a Teaching and Research Award from the University of London External Programme Centre for Distance Education.

Many MA/MSc programmes include a research report or dissertation as an important part of a student's assessment. Often this is seen as the climax of the programme, and is viewed as a crucial way of helping to ensure that students develop intellectual and research skills which they can apply in their professional contexts. The final research project often accounts for between 15 and 30 % of the credits for students and is thus a high stakes assessment for them. In our experience, it is also the most isolated part of any student's experience, as at this stage the student will work on their own project, without the support that working in a group with other students generates.

These factors become even more important when we look at the distance learning experience, which may already result in the students feeling isolated. The online tools, collaborations and peer discussions that are available for other modules may not be available at this stage, since the student will be working on their own topic, which will be different from topics tackled by other students. In addition, unlike other modules, all the work a student will be doing on their report or dissertation will be geared towards a single piece of assessed work, usually based on a piece of research. However, unlike doctoral students, these Master's students are often novice researchers, and this is likely to be their first research project; consequently they may lack confidence and experience in carrying out even a very small-scale piece of research. Many are also international students for whom English is not a first language and thus there may also be communication problems and issues of different cultural expectations regarding the roles and responsibilities of supervisor and student. The scaffolding and support that such Master's students receive from their supervisors throughout the research and writing process is therefore crucial, and clear communication between the two parties is essential.

Our long-term main interest, then, is the process of research supervision at Master's level at a distance. However, even a cursory examination of the information for students will reveal that there exists a large amount of variation in the

conceptualisation of the research project on different courses on the University of London External Programme. For example, the MSc in Epidemiology requires a compulsory 4000-7000 word academic paper, with a clearly defined and rigorous proposal procedure. The MA Applied Educational Leadership and Management requires a 15,000 word dissertation. The MA in Citizenship Education requires either a 10,000 word report or a 20,000 word dissertation. There may well be additional variation in the type of supervisory support; variations in the amount of supervisory contact; and variations in the amount of preparation for the research project.

As an initial step in this study investigates and documents these different conceptualisations of the research report stage of Master's programmes at the University of London.

The aims of this study were therefore to:

- Provide a review of the research literature on supervising Master's research projects.

- Provide a review of the research literature on supervising research projects at a distance (both at Master's and PhD level).

- Provide an overview of current regulations and requirements for distance Master's research projects within the University of London, and of the varied forms that such projects can take.

- Provide an overview of current guidance and practices for supervising distance Master's research projects within the University of London.

The study findings are of interest to course leaders and dissertation tutors on distance Master's courses within the University of London and more widely.

The remainder of this report consists of the following chapters:

Chapter 4 details the methodological approach used to carry out the research and details of dissemination.

Chapter 5 includes a literature review of issues relating to supervision, drawing on literature relating to both doctoral and Master's level courses.

Chapter 6 presents the findings of the mapping of distance supervision provision across a number of courses in the University of London, both those in the External programme and others, based on open source data – web pages and course handbooks.

Chapter 7 presents the findings of the interviews with 9 course leaders of distance masters' programmes in the University of London.

Chapter 8 includes concluding reflections, and some of the implications and questions this project raises for course leaders and dissertation tutors.

4. Methodological approach

4.1 Research Overview and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore what students are required to do in the research phase of distance Master's programmes at the University of London. The study included three broad stages. The first was a literature review, seeking to establish the research base on Master's dissertation writing and supervision. The second was a documentary mapping exercise, in which the project attempted to establish the formal requirements for Master's level research projects in the constituent colleges of the University of London. The third stage was an exploration of the conceptualisations of the research project by course leaders at the University, based on the information obtained in the second stage. This involved email discussions and interviews with course leaders from a range of Master's distance courses.

4.2 Research questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What research is available on supervision by distance, and on supervision at Master's level?
2. How is the research project (dissertation or report) conceptualised on distance Master's courses at the University of London?
3. What is the relationship between this final project and previous work done on the Master's?
4. What types of support do distance courses at the University of London provide at the dissertation level for students?

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Extended literature review

A search of the literature on supervision, in particular research articles, was carried out to answer the first research question, with a focus on distance supervision and supervision at Master's level (as opposed to doctorate level supervision). However, as the literature on this area is small, relevant literature on distance supervision at all levels and research on face to face supervision of Master's disserations was included in the survey. The research identified is discussed in the literature review presented as part of this report.

Survey of distance Master's courses at the University of London

The remaining three research questions were addressed partly through a comprehensive survey of the documentation provided for students in course outlines and course handbooks. In order to identify relevant Master's courses, an online search of Master's courses was carried out and courses with a research element were identified. Documentation was then collected from the public domain on these Master's courses. The documentation was examined and areas including length in words, choice of topic, type of work, credit value, position within the degree, time allotted for research were noted to identify the range of current practices at this level and provide an overview of practices in different institutions and for MAs in different discipline areas. Where there was ambiguity or missing information, a request was sent via email to course leaders and administrators, who were asked to provide additional documentation. This information was then summarised and is presented in full in Appendix C.

4.3.3 Interviews with course leaders of distance Master's courses

At this stage specific courses were identified for further investigation and course leaders were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to probe the thinking behind the way in which the dissertation is conceptualised and supported on their particular courses and to provide further general information on their supervisory practices. Although the Centre for Distance Education sent an email invitation to 24 course leaders to participate, only 8 course leaders responded to this invitation. An additional invitation resulted in one more course leader from withouth the External Programme. Nine in-depth interviews were therefore carried out, with course leaders from a range of institutions and a varierty of disciplines. An interview schedule was developed based on the research questions and on the issues identified in the literature review (see Appendix D). In some cases specific questions were generated for the programme leader being interviewed, based on the handbook for the programme.

Eight of the interviews were conducted face to face, and one was conducted by telephone. All interviews were between 30 to 40 minutes in length. The interviews were recorded with the interviewees' permission and then fully transcribed. The interviews were then analysed for recurring themes that arose.

Ethical issues

Since a large part of this study is based on documentation openly available, there were few major ethical issues. It is not possible to completely guarantee the anonymity of course leaders since they are easily identifiable from their responsibilities. However since the information is of a factual nature, there should be no highly sensitive findings, but in accordance with BERA guidelines, we obtained informed consent from the participants before they particapted in the study. We also provided course leaders with the draft summary of the findings from the documentation and course websites for correction and clarification. Similarly we provided course leaders with the draft analysis of the interviews, again for correction and clarification, and agreement on how their contributions have been presented. We complied with any requests from course leaders to remove any quotations or particular phrases individual course leaders were not happy with. We have sought to preserve anonymity as far as possible in how we have referred to particular courses within the analysis; in cases where a programme is mentioned explicitly this is either in the section dealing with information in the public domain (Chapter 6) or where course leaders have agreed to this formulation in the report (Chapter 7).

5. Literature Review

5.1. Introduction

This literature review provides an answer to the first research question:

> What research is available on supervision by distance, and on supervision at
> Master's level?

With the growing numbers of part-time and distance postgraduate students, a
considerable body of research on supervision has grown. Indeed, Petersen (2007:475)
has called doctoral education a ''hot topic' which has now received considerable
coverage in the literature', and goes on to identify the supervisory relationship as being
at the heart of doctoral education. One area of growth has been research into doctoral
supervision. In contrast, although there is some work on Master's level supervision, this
area is quite clearly underrepresented. This amounts to near invisibility in comments
such as that by Sambrook, Stewart and Roberts (2008:82), who refer to 'the problematic
transition from being an undergraduate student to a doctoral candidate', a comment
where Master's level study seems to disappear. Gurr (2001), too, refers to a scenario
where undergraduates move into doctoral studies without master's level work. Another
example is Mackinnon (2004), who discusses supervision in general, without
distinguishing at any point between masters' and doctoral supervision (or, indeed,
between postgraduate or undergraduate supervision). Cadman (2000), too, talks about
'postgraduates' in general, and it is only from her quotes that it is possible to discern that
both Master's and doctoral students were included in the study. In total, our study found
only 12 papers that deal with master's level supervision at all (see Appendix A for a list
and short summaries). Thus, in spite of the increase in the number of students
undertaking Master's dissertations worldwide (Anderson, Day and McLaughlin 2006;
Taylor, 2002), this topic is clearly under-researched in comparison with doctoral
supervision.

Research on supervision on distance research programmes is as scarce as research
on Master's level supervision, if not more so. Our survey found no studies dealing
specifically, or even mentioning, Master's level supervision at a distance and only
three papers focusing on Doctoral supervision at a distance. Although there are
various papers dealing with the general topic of doctoral studies at a distance (e.g.
Lindner, Dooley and Murphy 2001, Manathunga, Smith and Bath 2004, Wikely and
Muschamp 2004), only two papers touch on aspects of supervision of distance

students - Butcher and Sieminski 2006 and Evans, Hickey and Davis 2005. In addition, only very few papers on doctoral supervision make reference to distance supervision as one of the modes used (e.g. Price and Money, 2002). Part of the reason for the lack of such research may be that although some Master's level programmes can be wholly distance, and there will be no face-to-face element on them at all, in our experience this is probably never the case with so-called distance doctorates, which will always include a substantial face-to-face component. (For example, the EdD programme that Butcher and Sieminski (2006) refer to as 'a distance learning professional doctorate' includes both face-to-face residentials as well as face-to-face supervisory sessions; likewise, the programme that Evans, Davis and Hickey 2005 describe requires attendance at panel meetings). It is telling that a paper entitled 'New Variant PhD: The changing nature of the doctorate in the UK' (Park 2005) does refer at all to distance education. In this respect, one aspect of Harman's 2003 study is relevant. Harman's observes that when he attempted to follow up his questionnaire study with interviews, 'it proved extremely difficult to contact part-time and mature aged students' (Harman 2003: 320). Since this is precisely the population that will make up the students on a distance course, be it doctoral or Master's level, this may hint at a potential reason for the paucity of studies in this area. (See Appendix B for short summaries of studies dealing with supervision at a distance).

Given the lack of literature on distance supervision (doctoral and Master's) and the paucity of studies on supervision at Master's level, this review draws on the wider range of literature available and makes connections to the narrower focus of this particular study, whilst bearing in mind the differences between Master's and doctoral supervision. These differences result from the differences between Master's and doctoral candidates; the different expectations of supervisors and supervisees from the two processes; and the different time frames allowed for each type of research.

The review is therefore organised thematically around the key issues for supervision emerging from this wider body of literature that have a potential relevance for distance supervision at Master's level. The review thus helps identify areas for further research that could usefully follow on from this initial, narrower focused study.

5.2 Rationale for research into supervision

Much of the research into supervision, particularly at doctoral level, is driven by a concern over the years with drop out and levels of satisfaction amongst students (see

Petersen 2007), though the levels of non-completion vary from country to country (Park 2005). A number of the papers refer to research, albeit somewhat dated, showing the links between drop out and problems with supervision. For example, Haksever and Manisali (2000) cite research from the UK (Buckley and Hooley 1988) which show that 30% of cases of non-completion are to do with problems with supervision, as reported by students. Dedrick and Watson (2002) quote Bowen and Rudenstine's (1992) figure of 50% attrition rates in many PhD programmes in the US, and link concerns over completion rates and the quality of supervision and among specific groups of students (for example, female and minority students). Similarly, D. Lee (1998) considers the link between the larger number of female students in the social sciences, who have to deal with a complex range of family and other issues, and lower completion rates for these disciplines when compared to others such as science and engineering. Dedrick and Watson (2002) also note the lack of information about the process of doctoral education as contributing to drop out, arguing that students are not well enough informed to manage their expectations of the process. Other studies show more positive results of satisfaction and are more inconclusive around reasons for dissatisfaction (e.g Heath 2002). At Master's level, McCormack (2004) suggests that non-completion, or late completion, may be connected to different concepts of what research is held by the supervisor and the student. Ylioki, in a study in which 20 of the 72 students she interviewed had not completed after an average stay of 10 years at the university, also notes the differences in the views held by students and supervisors.

The focus therefore of many of the articles is on what supervision involves, supervisor and student expectations of the process and supervisor roles (which often differ), particular issues for certain groups of students and then recommendations for how these issues can be addressed. The rest of the literature review addresses each of these in turn.

5.3. Models and modes of supervision
The literature provides a number of differing conceptualisations of supervision, often involving a comparison with other teaching, counselling or mentoring relationships. As suggested above, most of these were developed through research of supervision or of study at PhD level.

Gatfield (2005) constructed a model which sees supervisory style as the intersection of two factors, structure and support, each of which is conceptualised on a cline from

high to low. This intersection results in four quadrants, each exemplifying a different type of supervision: laissez-faire (low support, low structure); pastoral (high support, low structure); directorial style (low support, high structure) and contractual style (high support, high structure). Gatfield then tested the model through interviewing 12 supervisors deemed 'excellent' by the dean of their faculty. 'Excellence' was seen as high completion rates, submission within the expected time frame, multiple supervision, and receiving excellent supervisory reports. On the basis of the interviews, the supervisors were classified into the four quadrants mentioned above. Nine were classified as utilising a contractual style; the other three styles included one person each. Importantly, the study suggests that supervisors move between different styles during the supervisory process, mainly as the result of the student's progression through the different stages of PhD research, as well as the result of what Gatfield calls 'abnormal conditions' such as a personal crisis or a change in direction. As a result, Gatfield suggests that this model 'is built on the premise that in general a candidate will be most successful if a supervisor operate (*sic*) across a range of supervisory styles.' (p. 322). The move is seen mainly as a move from an initial phase where there is a combination of laissez-faire and directorial styles (i.e. low support with either high or low structure), moving to a second phase of contractual operation, with high support and high structure, and ending with a third phase of directorial operation, during the writing up stage of the thesis, incorporating low support with high structure. Gatfield also points out that the style adopted is to some extent influenced by candidate variables (see section 5.5 below).

A similar four quadrant analysis of supervisory styles was identified by Murphy, Bain and Conrad (2007) in a study consisting of interviews with 17 PhD supervisors and 17 PhD supervisees in an engineering department in Singapore. Murphy *et al* (2007:219)*,* identified what they call 'two pervasive distinctions': a controlling/guiding axis, and a person focused/task focused axis, leading to four major orientations towards supervision being identified: controlling and task focused; controlling and person-focussed; guiding and task focussed; guiding and person focussed. Each individual was characterised as belonging to one of the orientations, and there was a statistically significant tendency for controlling and task focused orientations to go together, and for guiding and person focused orientations to go together. Murphy *et al's* conclusion was that supervision is in fact a form of teaching, and they align their four quadrants with Fox's (1983) analysis of personal theories of teaching.

Dysthe (2002), in a study of supervisors' and Master's students' understanding and experiences of supervisory practices at a Norwegian university, identified three models of supervision from the data:

- **The teaching model** – a traditional student teacher relationship characterized by status difference directiveness (even taking over control of the text) and dependency with feedback seen as correction and a joint focus on effectiveness in producing an acceptable thesis.
- **The partnership model**- a more symmetrical relationship where the thesis is seen as a joint responsibility characterized by cooperation and fostering independent thinking. Feedback is presented as a dialogue and students are seen having authority over their own texts and encouraged to write exploratory texts.
- **The apprenticeship model** – This is cooperative like the partnership model, but the supervisor has a clear authority role. The idea is that the student learns tacitly by watching and performing tasks in the company of a 'master' or more experienced person. Feedback is from multiple sources and includes peer feedback. This was found most in natural sciences.

Most supervision includes aspects of all three models, but one model may predominate and this may vary depending on the stage of the thesis work.

Hockey (1997) also develops a categorisation of various aspects of supervision from his interviews with 89 PhD supervisors (senior academics to novice supervisors) in 1990/1, across 3 disciplines (business studies, economics and sociology) in a number of UK institutions. He says the categories are often interconnected.

- **Balancing** – managing the complex business of being critical but also assisting the student
- **Foreseeing** – seeing accurately the possibilities within the study (entry requirements, possibly interview, looking for the necessary skills to conduct fieldwork etc).
- **Timing** – being able to intervene, offer advice etc at moments that will 'maximise momentum' (p. 53)
- **Critiquing** – being able to help the student work rigorously (intellectually and in writing), questioning from a local point of view all ideas, and indicating when they can be more analytical, precise etc.

17

- **Informing** – informing about practical (and emotional) aspects of research – being able to communicate the messiness of research that is not covered in books on how to do it.
- **Guiding** – being able to see the overall structure and the components from early on and judge potential progress realistically (ie being able to see the stages involved).

Although this comes out of research on doctoral supervision there is much in the categories that applies, albeit in a more condensed timeframe, with Master's level supervision.

5.4. Role of supervisor

The academic aspect of the supervisor's role is the most obvious one. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002, in Sambrook et al. 2008) thus list professional knowledge of the topic and of research methods and personal research activity as the first two points in their characteristics of a successful supervisor. However, personal characteristics also emerge as important. Indeed, the supervisor's role is characterised by two tensions in the literature surveyed, which can also be conceptualised as areas that need to be balanced: the balance or tension between supervisor authority and student agency and the balance or tension between academic and pastoral support.

5.4.1 Authority vs. agency

At Master's level Anderson, Day and McLaughlin (2006) analysed data from interviews with 13 supervisors in a faculty of education, focusing on the relationship between student agency and supervisor authority. They found that supervisors generally acknowledged that they had the power and authority to direct students, especially about choice of topic, but they also had a firm belief that students should be able to choose their own topic. Many supervisors, however, took a fairly hands-on approach to helping students shape and manage topics, withdrawing and reducing the level of support as students became more autonomous.

The potential tension is seen by supervisors in their need to be both gatekeepers and critical readers, maintaining academic standards, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the more affective, guiding role of helping students to choose and engage with a topic they were interested in, in order to develop their sense of agency. Anderson *et al* (2006) suggest that the whole process of supervision involved a complex weaving of guidance and student direction rather than a dichotomy between agency

18

and control, and highlighted the way that supervisors' practices were framed by the duality of both supporting and shaping students' efforts.

Similarly Delamont, Parry and Atkinson's (1998) study of 94 social science and 32 natural science doctoral supervisors highlights the tension between control and dependence and non interventionist supervision, student autonomy and independence at various stages in the process. A number of interviewees mentioned how achieving this balance as a supervisor was hardest in the production of the text of the dissertation, where it was difficult to resist taking over and rewriting the text.

Dysthe (2002) suggests that at Master's level the balance between direction/control and freedom is perhaps getting more difficult with the recent, more rigid time frames and level of control of the supervision process in many academic institutions. Her tripartite model of supervision explicitly focuses on issues of authority (most strongly expressed in the teaching model of supervision) and dialogue (evident in the partnership model; see section 5.3 above).

5.4.2 Academic support

This need to both critique and maintain academic standards, as well as be supportive raises the issue of the duality of the supervisor's role in both academic and pastoral support. Some of the articles look in detail at how supervisors deal with feedback on the work that students produce. The way in which the supervisor assumes different roles while providing feedback is discussed in Kumar and Strake (2007). They analysed the feedback provided on a thesis into three types of comments – referential (providing information), directive (telling supervisee to do something) and expressive (expressing feelings). They stress the importance of the expressive comments, which were also viewed by the supervisee as the most beneficial and most important for the revisions.

The supervisors in Dysthe's (2002) study discussed the value of 'exploratory texts' as a way of thinking aloud and developing ideas but many raised the problematic issue of whether students should have feedback on such unfinished texts; many who followed the teaching model of supervision preferred only receiving more finished drafts. Students on the whole felt more value in handing in and getting feedback on exploratory texts, but some also preferred more directive supervisors and handing in more complete drafts. Some felt this gave them more control over the texts.

5.4.3 Pastoral support

A number of studies point to the importance of pastoral support. For example, Watts (2008) stresses the empathy that is needed in part time and distance supervision, and the need for supervisors to provide emotional as well as pedagogic support.

The auto-ethnographic research by Sambrook, Stuart and Sambrook (2008) into their own experience of supervising and being supervised (by each other), highlights the importance of emotional issues, and the emotional domain is one of two they identify. In relation to this they highlight the importance of choosing the right supervisor, which is not something necessarily possible for Master's level students. On the theme of encouraging independence, they conclude that the degree of control over the supervisory experience affects the degree of dependence of student on their supervisor. They discuss the factors that affect this and students' confidence: age and age difference between supervisor and student; gender; personality – particularly the ways in which each individual demonstrates and deals with emotion; previous work experience; previous study experience, etc. Particularly in relation to the issue of emotion they argue that 'whilst the supervisee might almost naturally be less confident and more emotionally involved in their doctorate, an effective supervisory relationship requires the supervisor to be more emotionally *intelligent*' (2006: 81; italics in original.)

However, this part of the supervisor's role is not without its challenges. Lee (1998) quotes evidence from Brown and Atkins (1988) that students like supervisors who show a personal interest as well as offering professional support. However, her study, focusing on the specific issue of sexual harassment, highlights the potential problems there are for supervisors and students in deciding what issues are appropriate to be discussed within the context of supervision, and the degree to which discussion of personal issues, which might be affecting the work, is appropriate. Lee's (1998: 308 italics original) conclusion is that "students and supervisors need to negotiate boundaries on this type of interaction in their *particular* supervisory relationship". In other words, a pastoral role is appropriate, but students and supervisors must also both feel comfortable. She also emphasises that supervisors must retain sufficient distance to be able to offer effective critiques of the student's work.

Hockey (1994) also emphasises the need for doctoral supervisors to take an affective as well as an intellectual role with students. He raises the question of the   the degree of pastoral involvement supervisors have with students, which could be influenced by a personal liking for students and the departmental culture, and the problems with over-involvement, the need to balance guidance and critique with emotional support and the need to draw a boundary between the student's autonomy and legitimate support.

Brown (2007: 244), in a reflective study of the MA supervision, also suggests that the supervisor often has a pastoral role, and recommends that 'a dissertation supervisor might benefit from counselling training, in order to adequately respond to serious personal problems'. Price and Money (2002) also argue that supervisors need to be able to understand the processes that their supervisees are undergoing, as well as having relevant experience on the context in which students are conducting their research.

In contrast to the studies mentioned above, Firth and Martens (2008) suggest in a position paper that the transformation that is sometimes requested of supervisors is both unnecessary and not useful; asking supervisors to 'be both a mother figure who responds to emotional needs and a father figure who expects intellectual autonomy is exhausting and unsatisfactory'. They argue for exploring 'supervision as a specialist form of *teaching* rather than a particular kind of self' (2008: 280 – italics in original).

The general conclusion might best be summed up by work cited by Dedrick and Watson (2002). In their study of the contents of different guides to PhDs and research, they argue that mentoring is a key part of the supervisory relationship, and suggest that the pastoral role is required of supervisors whatever their own personal view of the relationship is.

5.5. Comparison of student and supervisor expectations of the supervisory relationship

5.5.1 General

Many of the articles address the issue of student and supervisor expectations of supervision. Much of the research concentrates on student expectations, without necessarily comparing it to supervisor expectations and many highlight the mismatch between student expectations and the support they received. It varies as to whether

the research concludes that this led to an overall dissatisfaction with the whole supervision experience.

Haksever and Manisali (2000) offer a framework for examining the communication between PhD supervisors and doctoral students and their expectations of the relationship. They focus on 3 areas: personal help, which they list as including 'support, motivation, socialising, help in organising accommodation and other things…unrelated to the research'; indirect research related help, which includes 'providing contacts….., providing equipment and initial help in locating references'; and finally direct research-related help. This last category includes 'critical analysis of work, help with methodological problems, precise direction and help with the management of the project' (Haksever and Manisali 2000: 21). Using this framework, they surveyed students across a range of UK universities in the field of Construction Management and Engineering, asking them to rate their own supervision, by reporting what they expected under each of the 3 categories and then the degree to which that help was provided.

Haksever and Manisali (2000) report that over half of their 57 doctoral respondents reported dissatisfaction with at least one of the 3 aspects of supervision. Students reported expecting more in relation to direct research-related help than they felt they were receiving. Overseas students expected more personal help than they received, and female students reported an even larger discrepancy between expected and help received in relation to both personal and direct research-related issues. These results confirm findings from other studies on generally lower levels of satisfaction amongst female PhD students. For example, Harman (2003: 325) reports 'that some women students appear to have higher expectations then male students about the student-supervisor relationships'. This probably needs further probing to determine what exactly is meant by a 'higher' expectation but reinforces conclusions from other research about the different needs of different groups of students (see section 5.5 below). Part-time students expected less help and reported spending more time on personal matters (though it is not clear from the article whether this was within the supervision time or more generally).

As Haksever and Manisali (2000) did not research supervisors' perspectives they can only speculate that responses from supervisors might have differed. However, they do recommend the use of their framework by supervisors and individual students as a basis for discussions on how the supervision will work.

22

In a large scale study which included 1531 participants, Harman (2003) reports on the experience of PhD students in 2 universities in Austrhalia. He found that only 57% of the respondents reported satisfaction with their overall experience, with 13% classifying their experience as unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory. Also only 62% said that the quality and effectiveness of supervision was satisfactory, with 17% reporting it as unsatisfactory. Similar responses were found in relation to supervisors' interpersonal skills, in comparison to greater levels of satisfaction in relation to the competence of the supervisor (their knowledge of their field and their own abilities as researchers).

In follow-up interviews, Harman (2003) elicited reports on the missing aspects of the supervisor's role: lack of supervisory skills, lack of interpersonal skills, lack of time and supervision not being taken as seriously as students would like. Other problems included personality clashes, supervisors not being interested in the topic, language and cultural problems, in particular for international students. Students also identified the need for good feedback on work and help with making research presentations as areas in which supervision was not as satisfactory as they hoped. Students rated a supervisor's enthusiasm, technical skills, and the 'willingness to give students appropriate independence' (p. 327).

Archibong (1995) looked at data from 33 self report questionnaires completed by overseas students of varying nationalities from 3 main discipline areas (Applied sciences, social sciences and arts) including some MA students but mostly PhD and Post-Doctoral students. Results indicated that for these students an ideal relationship with their supervisors was one that was close and personal but offered firm guidance. They preferred their supervisors to initiate meetings, offer guidance on possible theoretical frameworks and the direction of the research and some wanted help with the writing up of the thesis. Although they did not often receive this level of support and guidance they did indicate high levels of satisfaction with their supervision and good relationships with their supervisors. A number of disciplinary differences were found between students in applied sciences and social scientists (see section X.X. below).

One element of this mismatch in expectations is students' expectation around levels of support and more directed supervision. At MA level, Brown (2007) suggests that students simply expect more contact. Hetrick and Trafford (1995) report that both

supervisors and students on the Master's programmes they investigated were aligned in expecting the supervisor to set strict timetables, with around two thirds of supervisors and supervisees agreeing on this (though there was fairly large variation between different subjects). However, three quarters of supervisors expected a research question, before the first meeting, whereas less than half of the students agreed.

Woolhouse (2002), in a study reflecting on her own experience supervising one MA student, compared her own expectations with those of the student's and their reactions to each other's point of view. From the student's point of view the main concern related to different expectations, with 'the student wanting/needing direct instruction from the supervisor' (p. 139). She speculates that this difference may well reflect the power and experience differential between the supervisor and the supervisee and suggests that one important practical implication of her study is that the expectations of the student and the tutor need to be discussed at the beginning of the supervisory process.

5.5.2 International students

Archibong's (1995) study referred to above focused on international students, and notes that part of the mismatch and the possible miscommunication between overseas students and their supervisors may be due to their previous experiences and differences of culture, resulting in different expectations of their academic relationship.

Cadman (2000) uses questionnaires to look at international students' experiences of supervision and supervisors' experiences of supervising international students, both at doctoral and Masters' level. Cadman looks first at the students' views and uncovers many instances of miscommunication, insecurity in their relationships with their supervisors and unresolved problems and conflicts. Some students felt challenged by the need to develop a critical academic approach and some found it hard to produce the academic discourse they needed to demonstrate their academic competence and fully participate as a member of a research culture in their discipline. One strong theme is the sense of frustration with aspects of the supervisory process felt by many students and also the sense that they were powerless to change this or seek redress for perceived injustices or deficits. Supervisors, in general, were sensitive to students' needs and recognized the issues that students faced and the anxiety that they were likely to feel. However, only some

24

supervisors responded to the questionnaire which might reflect their general levels of motivation and thoughtfulness towards supervision. They also highlighted the need for students to focus on developing critical and analytical skills and the written and spoken skills to articulate their ideas and to meet the expectations of their research culture.

Cadman (2000) argues that both students and their supervisors adopted a deficit model of international postgraduate students and assumed unquestioningly that only the students needed to change their academic goals and practices, especially in relation to critical thinking and to studying in a different postgraduate research culture. She suggests that with an increasing emphasis on international students in the current commercialised educational context, we should not accept this deficit view and that we should instead see that there is an equivalent challenge to learn on the supervisors' side, and that we use the perceptions of international students to critique the westernd academic tradition.

Harman (2003: 328) also notes 'in the case of international students, language and cultural problems sometimes cause difficulties especially in the first year while a proportion of international students appear to find difficulty in adjusting to a more democratic and less directive style of supervision'. Clearly this issue of understanding the nature of supervision at a UK institution is an important one for all students, with some students having to make more adjustments than others. This is equally applicable to dissertation students and more challenging on a distance programme where the student has not experienced the academic context at first hand. This also has to be communicated effectively over a shorter period of time than with a PhD programme (see also the point made by Brown 2007 regarding the time available for language improvement on Master's programmes as compared with doctoral programmes).

The relevance of these findings to Masters level supervision is in looking at these 3 areas of help, the different perspectives of students and supervisors, and the different needs of different students. For example, do part-time students on Masters level courses, which are more likely to have a fixed allocation of supervision time for all students, still expect and receive less support?

5.5.3 Female students

Harman (2003) notes that the responses of female students need to be looked at carefully as there are increasing numbers of female PhD students in the Australian context whilst the majority of supervisors are still male. Female students are increasing in many contexts and they are more often part-time due to other family and work commitments, and possibly older. Harman's (2003: 320) large scale survey noted that 'females were more likely than males to have completed their former qualifications at the same university and to have part-time or casual employment, but less likely to be in full-time employment'.

His results show 61% of male students satisfied compared to 57% females with their overall experience, and 13% and 14% respectively dissatisfied or very dissatisfied; where the quality of supervision was concerned, 20% of females were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared to 14% of males. One point Harman makes is that satisfaction with supervision was higher when the supervisor was of the same gender, and gender difference resulted in higher rates of 'unsatisfied' responses: the rate for female students with male supervisors being unsatisfied was 23% compared to with female supervisors at 14%. Harman suggests that some of the patterns may not be easily interpreted: for example, some of the dissatisfaction with female supervisors may be due to the lesser seniority of female supervisors. Harman (2003: 325) also reports complaints from some in his study that 'in largely male-dominated departments, female PhD students frequently feel left out of social interactions and particular social activities, and that male students tend to be much more competitive, jostling for positions and resources'. He also notes that male students meet supervisors more frequently but this could be because of the area of study (i.e. more likely to be in labs with weekly supervision).

Although focusing on sexual harassment, which is arguably potentially less relevant to a study of distance supervision, Lee (1998) raises other issues that are useful to explore. Possible contributory factors Lee and others allude to in relation to female students' responses to supervision include the still larger numbers of male academics supervising increasing numbers of female students and a residue of 'paternalism' in the inherent inequality in the supervisory relationship (Phillips and Pugh 1987 in Lee 1998). Whether or not one agrees with Lee's (1998: 304) assertion that 'the taken-for-granted notion of the PhD supervisor's professionalism' needs to be questioned, so that the power dynamics in HE organisations can be changed, she

does point to the challenges for both supervisors and students in negotiating their way through the relationship and the specific issue of female students' perceptions and experience of the supervisory process.

Dedrick and Watson (2002) make the point that these two groups above are still underrepresented amongst staff, which could have an effect.

5.5.4 Part-time students

Harman (2003: 322) also concluded that 'overall supervision of part-time students appears to be far less effective than supervision of full-time students' though specific data supporting this are not provided. It seems to be based on whether or not they had more than one supervisor, which is unlikely to be relevant at Masters level. Watts (2008), in a discussion of the needs of part-time PhD students, suggests that as a group they might be more complex and less homogenous than full time students. She suggests that scheduling and planning is important, and that there is a need for incremental writing tasks to scaffold or structure the whole process and that scheduling supervision sessions for a whole year ahead can be helpful.

5.5.5 First year compared to 3rd – 5th year students.

Harman (2003) also notes that satisfaction levels go down further into the PhD, with the highest during the first year (only 48% of part-time on campus students satisfied in years 3 –5). He speculates on possible reasons why: being more idealistic in the beginning, more pressure later on, increasing or specific expectations of supervisors on feedback on work that they don't meet etc. This time span is not as relevant for Master's supervision of dissertations as these tend to be completed over the maximum of a year. However, without further research it is not possible to say whether there is any reduction of satisfaction over the course of a two-year Masters programme in relation to supervision or whether satisfaction levels change in relation to different stages of a dissertation project.

5.5.6 Different disciplines

Most of the articles reviewed here did not make any specific claims about supervision differences within different disciplines. One exception is Haksever and Manisali (2000), who focus on Construction Management and Engineering (CME). They explain it is a relatively new field with a confused mix of hard/soft science which causes a strain on the supervisory relationship at PhD level, affecting completion rates.

One discipline specific issue relates to the discussion of gender above; lack of role models for female students within the sciences. Harman (2003: 326) points out that in his study amongst the female students the 'most satisfied students tend to be those in education and engineering and the least satisfied as those in science, health, architecture and agriculture'.

Archibong (1995) found a number of disciplinary differences between students in applied sciences and social scientists (the small number of arts students precludes a useful discussion of their results). Applied science students had higher expectations for supervisor guidance in most areas, but lower expectations of a close personal relationship with their supervisor (50%). Social scientists did not expect supervisors to choose topics for them, but had high expectations of a close personal relationship (84%) and also high expectations of supervisor's role in reading drafts and ensuring the thesis was finished on time (86%).

Dysthe (2002) found differences in terms of the text culture for the discipline examined, with the differences being most marked between the natural sciences on the one hand and social sciences and arts on the other. Supervisors in different disciplines placed different weights on content formal features and audience awareness with sciences placing more emphasis on formal features, social sciences on content and humanities on audience. Of the three models Dysthe identified, the natural sciences preferred the apprenticeship model.

5.5.7 Distance students

Watts (2008) suggests that students who are a distance will not have the same role as full time students who often teach undergraduates, and may feel disconnected from the research culture. Communication with them will need to strike a balance between support and harassment: weekly communication, for example, might be too much. Harman (2003: 326) makes an interesting observation about the possible 'catch-22' of supervision and satisfaction. Although his comments refer to full time face-to-face students, they have implications for distance learning: 'Students who spend less time on their research and meet less frequently with their supervisor tend to be more likely to become dissatisfied but, on the other hand, students who are tending to be dissatisfied may as a result spend less time each week on research and meet with their supervisors less frequently'.

5.6 Recommendations

Many of the articles dealing with the mismatch of supervisor and student expectations make recommendations on approaches to supervision that might alleviate the difficulties this mismatch creates.

5.6.1 Managing expectations

Lee (1998: 302) points out in reference to Hockey's (1994) work that 'explicit communication between supervisor and students about the nature of their supervisory relationship is often lacking' with it being more often 'implicit, set amidst a host of taken-for-granted assumptions about academic life' leading to many misunderstandings. Gurr (2001) talks about the need for a 'constructive alignment' between the style of supervision and the development of the student. Negotiated written contracts are an example of how this might be achieved. Firth and Martens (2008) also refer to what Yeatman 1995 calls a contractualist model of supervision. Sambrook et al (2008) also conclude that the degree of openness in initial discussions between supervisors and students is important in making the relationship work, particularly in exploring the match or not between student and supervisor personalities and learning styles. Archibong (1995:92) also suggests that the way to help students to get the most out of their supervision is through 'changing expectations and clarifying actualities'. Hockey (1996) also recommends the use of a written contract for supervisors and students for doctoral supervision.

Ylioki (2001) suggests a framework for looking at the student experience which might help. In a study using interviews with 72 Master's students from 4 disciplines at one Finnish university, Ylioki categorises the student experience into four types (each of which is an idealization): Heroic, in which the thesis is not a normal part of the curriculum, takes on mythical status and is seen as 'some moment of truth where academic abilities are put to a severe test, in which some will succeed and others fail' (p. 25); Tragic, where the thesis is the final judgement on academic worth, inducing a prolonged sense of horror resulting in feelings of inferiority); Businesslike, where the thesis is an integral part of the course, a job to be done); and Penal, where the student does not understand why it is necessary and it is viewed as a form of punishment, with no redeeming features. Ylioki suggests that the framework could be used to understand student and supervisor behaviour and to find solutions to problems – e.g. an understanding of a student's heroic stance may lead to adopting a businesslike attitude in order to help them out.

Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2004) conclude from looking at dilemmas supervisors face that good supervisors should be on the lookout for the incidences that signal to them that a student has lost or is losing the will to complete his/her project. Also, supervisors should not avoid issues but should be willing to seek measures that can address them in a practical way.

5.6.2 Training supervisors/supervisees for a productive relationship

A couple of the articles reviewed here raise the question of training and accreditation for supervisors, or supervisor development. Lee (1998) argues for training on specific issues around the pastoral role and the relationships between male supervisors and female students. Others look at the wider range of issues.

Cryer and Mertens (2003) focus on a specific programme for supervisors called Training and Accreditation Programme for Post-graduate supervisors (TAPPS) developed with the support of a range of UK institutions working in animal health and biology/biotechnology. They identify 4 interested parties: students, supervisor, institution and funding body. The rationale for this programme was based on the sort of research conclusions discussed above: that the supervisory relationship is one of the most important factors for successful completion of a PhD, but is also an area identified as one that students may be dissatisfied with.

The programme combines the use of a portfolio of evidence for 7 areas of objectives / competencies and the personal reflections of supervisors on their practice are discussed by peers and are used to identify the supervisor's training needs. Then supervisors participate in discussion forums, workshops etc to help address the needs they have identified. Cryer and Merten's (2003) argument is that supervisors need training in the different areas that are encompassed within supervision. Although the main area that the supervisors they questioned identified as particularly needing training and support is the assessment and examination process, which is not an area of direct relevance to Masters level dissertation work, the conclusions that they reach after the piloting of this programme, that supervisors and students overwhelmingly support the idea of training and accreditation, has implications for examining whether Masters dissertation supervisors feel sufficiently equipped to fulfil this aspect of their teaching role.

Emilsson and Johnsson (2007) describe a programme to improve supervision in which seven PhD supervisors had a number of lectures on communication theory

and social-psychological theory, combined with group work and discussions of cases to encourage reflection on their experiences. Emilsson and Johnsson argue that the programme helped the supervisors to develop the capacity for 'process-oriented supervision' which concentrates on the interpersonal relationships between supervisor and supervisee as opposed to problem-oriented supervision which focuses on problems to be solved and is essentially cognitive. They argue that supervisors need five requirements of trust, theories, tools, training and time in order to develop their supervisory practices and be effective supervisors and they consider their model of 'supervision on supervision' could serve as a way of improving supervisory practices.

Harman's (2003) research also identified some specific areas for supervisor development, based on the recommendation from some respondents for supervisor training and accreditation: clearer guidelines about supervisor responsibilities, supervisors being more involved in students' projects and better monitoring of progress.

Hockey (1997) also draws a number of conclusions about doctoral supervisors' approaches and the links to possible staff development.

- Supervisors developed their practices through trial and error – a process of reflecting on what worked and what not and amending accordingly.
- Supervisors are affected by how they experienced their own supervision – either wanting to emulate it or do the opposite.
- Little evidence that there was much discussion with peers about the process, even when there was joint supervision, so it is an individual process of learning.

He acknowledges that many institutions are now running staff development on the supervision process, though at the time of his study not many had been evaluated for their effectiveness. His conclusion is that the most useful staff development exercises involve looking at case studies of real issues, not just lectures on regulations etc, as a form of group mentoring. However, he points to time and resourcing from departments as the biggest reason why these things are not addressed adequately. The degree to which this is also the case for Master's supervision is an area for further investigation.

The research carried out by Dedrick and Watson (2002) on texts on how to study for a PhD highlights some gaps in what is available to support supervisors and students. They discovered that out of 22 books available, only 9 in total covered one or more of the following issues: supervising minority students, international students, female students. In total each aspect was only covered in 5 books (not the same 5 in each case). In relation to female students, the main areas tackled were gender differences, access and role models, psychosocial effects. Time management with other responsibilities are mentioned and interestingly the perception that female students are less dedicated. This last point is left rather ambiguous in their article. On the issue of race, in the American context, stereotyping emerges as a main concern.

One point arising from their content analysis of these texts was that when students complain about unsatisfactory treatment on the basis of gender or race, this itself is perceived as a problem by institutions. They conclude that institutions change little on the basis of complaints, a view supported by Lee's (1998) example, where a supervisor was promoted after a complaint of sexual harassment, whilst the student had to change institutions to continue studying.

In general the needs of international students were more comprehensively addressed. Interestingly, they note that more books such as these are available from the UK context, than in the US, and discuss whether the more explicit drive in the UK to address completion rates might have contributed to this. What is not evident from the research is the degree to which students and supervisors actually consult such texts in their own preparation for their supervision, whether at PhD or Masters level.

5.7 Chapter summary

To summarise, the majority of research into supervision deals with doctoral level studies, in face-to-face mode. Some of the writing could be thought of as position papers, though since many of these position papers are based on the writers' own supervisory practices over the year and include reflection on these practices, we have tended to see them as a form of reflective research. On the other hand some of the research cited demonstrates an impressive scope (e.g. Harman 2003).

There is some research that includes both doctoral level and Master's level supervision, but there are only 10 papers that deal clearly and specifically with Master's level supervision: Anderson, Day and McLaughlin (2006); Armitage (2006); Brown (2007); Dysthe (2002); Dysthe, Samara and Westrheim (2006); Hetrick and

Trafford (1995), McCormack (2004), Ylioki (2001); Stacey and Fountain (2001); Woolhouse (2002). In addition, Archibong (1995) and Cadman (2000) mention Master's students, but in the first case Master's students are a small minority of respondents, and in the second case, although there is mention of Master's students, the paper discusses 'postgraduates' in general, with no indication of what the proportion of Master's to PhD students took part in the study.

The research encompasses different disciplines and different countries, and this may account for some of the differences as well. Dysthe (2002), for example, discusses the situation in Norway, where Master's courses last 2 years, as compared with one year in the UK. Ylioki (2001) discusses students who are still working on the Master's theses after ten years, a situation that could not arise in the UK, where there are strict time limits on completion and registration.

Most of the research focuses on either students or on supervisors, but not on any triangulation of data from both sources. Nevertheless, one of the important elements that arise from this survey is the mismatch between supervisor and student expectations, suggesting that further research should focus on this area. A notable exception is Dysthe (2002), who looked at disciplinary texts, supervisors' views, and students' views; she does not report a finding of mismatch in expectations, but this may well be a characteristic of the context that she investigated. Although the study described in the following chapters does not deal with issues of mismatches, it contributes to the research literature in this area through focusing very specifically on Master's level supervision in situations where supervision is done wholly at a distance, with no face-to-face contact at all.

6. Requirements for the research project

This chapter presents the findings from the overall mapping of different courses, with the full details provided in Appendix C.

6.1 Summary of dissertation requirements and suppport provided

The grid in Appendix C provides an overview of the requirements, and an initial view of the conceptualisation of the research project across 37 Master's courses in 8 colleges within the University of London, both those within and without the external system. It also shows levels of support for students, including types of technology.

The details provided in Appendix C and in Table 1 below represent the situation in the academic year 2008-2009, and are based mainly on open source, publicly available knowledge. We did not receive replies from all course leaders when requesting information and therefore only those course leaders whom we interviewed have explicitly verified the findings. Details for all other courses are therefore taken from course and college websites in relation to the 2008-9 academic year.

6.2 Length of Master's course

Distance Master's courses range from 1 year full-time to up to 5 years part-time. Course length tends to be consistent within colleges, suggesting that college regulations are a guiding factor.

6.3 The research project within the degree

The place of the research element on Master's courses varies. The data suggests that there is an intersection here of institutional requirements and disciplinary options. Four of the institutions surveyed (IOE, Kings College, Royal Holloway, UCL) include a compulsory research project. Two of the courses do not provide the option of a research project at all. Of the rest, eight have it as optional. In some cases students are only allowed to take the research option based on their performance on previous parts of the course (e.g. SOAS CEFIMS). In others, a short proposal for a research proposal is part of the application process (the law degrees at Kings College).

The types of research project vary. Some are designed to be related specifically to work, some are expected to be empirical, others have the option of a desk study. Some allow for a literature review, concept note or use of an existing data set.

Table 1: Requirements for Research on University of London Master's Degrees

College	Degree	Status	Length	Name	Research Methods Module
Birkbeck	Human Resource Management	Y	10,000	Scientific Report	Not specified
IOE	Applied Educational Leadership	Y	15,000	Dissertation	Compulsory (Embedded)
	Citizenship	Y	10,000 20,000	Report Dissertation	No
	Educational Research	Y	15,000	Dissertation	All modules deal with research
	MA TESOL	Y	10,000 20,000	Report Dissertation	Optional non credit bearing
	MA Development Education	Y	10,000 20,000	Report Dissertation	Optional package of materials
Kings College	MA European Union Law	Y	12,000-15,000	Dissertation	Not specified
	MA EC Competition Law	Y	12,000-15,000	Dissertation	Not specified
	MA UK, EC, US Copyright Law	Y	12,000-15,000	Dissertation	Not specified
	MA International Addiction Studies	Y	10,000 minimum	Dissertation	Compulsory
	MSc Dental Public Health	Y	Not specified	Dental Public Health Project	Compulsory; integrated
	MSC Dental and Maxillofacial Radiology	Y	20,000	Report	Compulsory; integrated
	MCliDent Fixed and Removable Prosthodontics	Y	10,000	Report	Not specified
	MA War in the Modern World	Y	15,000	Dissertation	Not specified
LSHTM	Epidemiology	Y	4000-7000	Project report; scientific paper.	Compulsory (statistical methods)
	Clinical Trials	N	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Infectious Diseases	O	10,000	Project report	Compulsory
	Public Health	O	None specified	Project Report	Compulsory
Royal Holloway	MSC International Business	Y	12,000	Dissertation	Compulsory
	MBA/MSc International Management	Y	12,000	Dissertation	Compulsory
	MSc Information Security	Y	50-60 pp.	Dissertation	No
Royal Veterinary College	MSc Livestock Health and Production	O	Author guidelines of selected journal.	'a scientific paper for publication in a peer-reviewed journal'	Research module exists; not clear if compulsory
	Veterinary Epidemiology and Public Health	O	Author guidelines of selected journal.	'a scientific paper for publication in a peer-reviewed journal'	Research module advisable but not compulsory
SOAS CEDEP	Poverty reduction: Policy and Practice	Y	10,000	Written report	Compulsory
	Agribusiness for Development	Y	10,000	Research report	Compulsory
	Biodiversity Conservation and Management	Y	10,000	Research Report	Compulsory
	Environmental economics	Y	10,000	Research Report	Compulsory
	Environmental management	Y	10,000	Research Report	Compulsory
	MSc Agricultural economics	Y	10,000	Research Report	Compulsory
	MSc Managing Rural Development	Y	10,000	Research Report	Compulsory
	MSc Sustainable Development	Y	10,000	Research Report	Compulsory
SOAS CEFIMS	MSc Finance and Financial Law	O	10,000	Dissertation	Compulsory
	MBA Banking	N	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Public Policy and Management	O	10,000	Dissertation	Compulsory
	MSc Finance	O	10,000	Dissertation	Compulsory
	MSc International Management (China)	O	10,000	Dissertation	Compulsory
UCL	Primary health care	Y	13,500-16,500	Dissertation	Compulsory

Y= Compulsory; O= Optional; N= None required

6.4 Nomenclature

Different programmes call the research element by a different name. The most common name is Dissertation, used by 18 programmes. A number of programmes call this a report, using either the term report on its own, or terms such as 'written report', 'project report', or 'scientific report'. The word 'project' also appears in names such as 'Dental Public Health Project'. Three programmes (the LSHTM Epidemiology course and the two RVC courses) use the term 'Scientific paper'. Indeed, the RVC requirements are that this should be a paper for publication. In one college, the IOE, a distinction is made between a dissertation and a report according to length – a report is 10,000 words long, whereas a dissertation is 20,000 words long. IOE course handbooks also make a distinction between the two in terms of the type of project, and dissertations are required to be research based, and reports to be practice based. However, our own knowledge of practice in the IOE suggests that in effect many reports are empirically based research studies.

6.5 Length of the research report

Table 1 provides an overview of the word count required for the research element. The data indicates that the word length of the research reports varies considerably. The range is from 4 – 7,000 (LHSTM) through to 20,000 (IOE, Kings College). (The most common length is 10,000 words. In addition to the variation in length, there is variation in the way in which the word length in specified. In some cases a range is specified – e.g., the law courses at Kings College, where the range is 12,000-15,000. In some cases, an indicative word count is specified, but there is a margin: this is the case with the IOE, where in effect regulations allow for a 10% margin in terms of work count, which means that the minimum for a report is 9,000 words, and the maximum for a dissertation is 22,000. Other courses specify a minimum – the MA International Addiction Studies at Kings college specify a 10,000 word minimum.

Two courses do not specify a word count. One Royal Holloway course has a stipulation of 50 – 60 pages, rather than word count. The RVC requirements do not include a word count, since the report is conceptualised as a paper for publication, with the word limit being dictated by the journal selected for the publication.

Colleges do not have a standard length requirement across all their distance courses. For example, the IOE has a standard report length of 10,000 words or dissertations of 20,000 for its courses, but there are exceptions on the Masters of

Research at the IOE, which requires a dissertation of 15,000. LSHTM specifies 4000-7000 words for the Epidemiology project report, but 10,000 words for the Infectious Diseases project report.

6.6 Exam requirements

Eight of the courses assess the dissertation partially by exam. Of these, one LHSTM course assesses only by exam but has a written report as part of a core module, which is designed to include original work by the student, but not necessarily empirical research. The RVC courses are exam based with one of them also having a research project as an option. Similarly the MBA Banking at SOAS is exam based only.

The weighting of written submission for dissertations and exams varies also:

      80 : 20 (Royal Holloway MSc Information Security)

      50 : 50 (UCL MSc International Primary Health Care)

      40 : 60 (IOE MA Citizenship and History Education)

6.7 Research methods modules and support for proposal

There are various ways which the research proposal is supported in the different colleges. As pointed out above, in some courses a short proposal is part of the application process. At later stages, twenty-three courses have compulsory research methods modules, or cover research methods in an embedded, integrated way, as part of a core module or modules. On the MRes at the IOE, for example, all modules focus on research. In some of the other courses it is not clear whether there is a research methods module.

The proposals are treated differently on the difference courses. On some courses, the proposals are marked: on the 8 SOAS CEDEP courses 10% of marks for the dissertation are allocated to the proposal, and 90% for the final submission. In some courses, the course leader looks at all proposals and gives the go ahead for the topics.

6.8 Amount of supervision time provided

Without access to course handbooks it is not possible to say for all courses whether there is a stipulated number of hours supervision allocated to the research project / dissertation. However, from the information available it is clear that again there is

great variation across and also within colleges. Some colleges (e.g. IOE) have standard approaches of 2.5 hours for reports and 5 hours for dissertation, with some allocation also of time for other support for students, including draft reading time of 2.5 hours for reports and 5 hours for dissertation. Other examples are the LSHTM MSc Infectious Diseases, which provides 16 hours, SOAS CEFIMS courses which have 15 hours, other than MSc Finance and Financial Law which has 20 hours.

Many courses state they have no fixed time allocation (UCL MSc International Primary Health Care, King's International Addiction Studies, SOAS CEDEP courses). The King's Law courses specify instead that students have contact with supervisors 3 – 4 times a year.

7. Analysis of interviews with course leaders

7.1 General points

Before presenting the findings from the interviews it is important to clarify a number of points. Firstly, all but one of the 9 course leaders interviewed run programmes that are part of the external system. Two of the course leaders refer to groups of related courses in their area rather than a single Master's programme, so although the findings cover 9 programme areas, they represent more than 9 named qualifications. The responses of the individual course leaders/tutors also depend on how long their programmes have been running, whether they have had a cohort complete the dissertation phase yet, and what size cohort they have.

Programmes use different terms to describe the dissertation (see Chapter 6) and one programme offers both a report and dissertation option (CL1), but we have retained the term dissertation throughout for ease, though sometimes we refer to 'research element'. We have also retained the term 'supervisor' even in cases where the programme or the interviewees refer to them as 'dissertation tutor'.

The analysis is presented in three sections, each referring to one of the research questions for the project.

7.2 Conceptualisations of the Research Element on Master's Courses

7.2.1 The purpose of the dissertation

The first theme to emerge from the interviews is around the nature of the dissertation: its purpose and what type of projects students can undertake. There is a degree of consensus about the purpose of the dissertation. The majority of course leaders listed one or more of the following:

- to put into practice the learning from the previous modules on the programme (CL2, CL4, CL3, CL5, CL6, CL7),
- to gain an understanding and experience of how to do research and be taught to do it (CL9, CL1, CL2, CL3, CL5, CL7),
- to give students the opportunity to explore something they are interested in in-depth, often of relevance to their current or future work (CL1, CL2, CL8, CL7, CL3)

In addition, two course leaders saw the function of the dissertation as providing opportunities for producing an extended piece of writing (CL2, CL3); two others saw

this as an opportunity for the student to do something more self-directed (CL7, CL4). Two course leaders made the point that it also helps prepare students for further study at doctoral level, if they wish to undertake it (CL1, CL7).

Although the dissertation is seen as important in offering opportunities for students to do research it is not compulsory for all programmes (see Chapter 6). The reasons for this are mainly discipline/subject related. For example, the more professional degrees in areas such as Finance or Law do not require students to be experienced in research (CL8). For one of the Health related programmes, the difficulty of carrying out research relevant to the degree in the context of distance studies means that not all students are able to develop a feasible proposal and are therefore not permitted to take this option (CL5). In these cases alternative taught modules make up the remainder of the degree and the status of the degree for the student is not affected.

7.2.2 Types of project for the dissertation

Linked to the various purposes outlined above are the types of projects encouraged for the dissertation. With most programmes a range of research possibilities or types of project are offered. Again some variation is discipline related, with at least one of the Health based degrees requiring a quantitative data element and allowing that to be existing data (CL9); the use of existing data is not something that was raised by any of the other interviewees (though see Chapter 6), and the assumption is that at least for those programmes that encourage research, part of the 'Master's experience' will be data collection. There is a consensus also amongst the course leaders that even when the literature review/desk based study option is available this is not particularly encouraged, unless it is clear that the student is able to bring in an original element. For a Master's in Research the declared purpose of the degree is to prepare students for empirical research, so the literature review option would not be encouraged. Some programmes have choices of types of study, with one programme having 4 different dissertation modules: research dissertation, service delivery dissertation, teaching and learning dissertation and systematic review dissertation (CL7). Another has the option of practical projects, for example designing a procedure related to their work, and writing it up, as well as a purely theoretical option (CL6).

Programmes also vary in terms of the structure that they require for the final project, with science programmes requiring a more standardised structure. For example, the Institute of Psychiatry (King's College) programmes required the following structure:

Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion format. Others, similarly, offer guideline structures for the various approaches students might take (CL5, CL7).

Qualitative approaches are an option on many of the programmes, though not for those programmes where ethical considerations are particularly difficult to solve, such as conducting research with vulnerable people overseas with no local supervisor (CL9, CL5).

7.2.3. Relationship between distance and face to face programmes

Some programmes have developed the distance course based on an existing face to face course. At least 4 programmes offer both, with only slight changes in content of modules to accommodate the distance element, such as not being able to do activities like role play online (CL3). Other programmes do not have a face-to-face equivalent (CL7 ,CL5), with the modules or the whole course designed specifically for the distance students. For example, King's College offers many clinically based face to face programmes, but a policy orientated programme by distance. One college does offer opportunities for blended learning but this requires attendance in person (CL5).

7.3. The relationship of the dissertation to the rest of the Master's course: Structuring / staging of the dissertation process

A key theme to emerge here concerns the structuring and staging of the dissertation process and how this assists students in completing within the set timescale of programmes. This discussion also covers how the dissertation links to the other modules on the course, in particular those on research methodology.

7.3.1 Links to other modules and exams

For most of the programmes the dissertation is the last piece of work to be undertaken, though not all programmes have students complete all other modules, coursework and exams before they embark on the dissertation. There are a number of different ways course leaders have organised this. In some cases, students have to complete the Diploma part of the degree before embarking on the dissertation (CL7). In contrast, the MRes programme students have only the last couple of months of their degree to work solely on the dissertation, and prior to that they are working on both their dissertation and on their modules.

A number of course leaders discussed the difficulties of organising the staging of the

dissertation within the degree, to accommodate individual institution procedures on payment and enrolment, as well the external system's requirement for exam based assessment. For example, on one programme students are now required to pay for their research methods module and dissertation at the same time, even though they may not pass the former and may not be able to continue. As the course leader explained "the other advantages of doing it that way, it was partly to overcome administrative problems, but it also meant that people could start working on it as soon as their exams were finished….and that would increase the number of months available for the research" (CL4).

Occasionally programmes are flexible over the exact timing. For example, on one programme students might have the opportunity to work overseas and therefore they are assisted in using that time to do the data collection for the dissertation. This might require bringing their individual timetable forward (CL5).

Although some of the institutions would take students at different points of the year for their face to face programmes, this does not happen for many of the distance programmes, often due to the timing of the exam for the dissertation. For example, students might need to have completed a certain amount of work on their dissertation in order to be able to answer the exam questions in June (CL1).

For those programmes under the external system, there are a few comments on the issue of the exam and debates within programmes around its value and also issues of plagiarism (CL6). Some course leaders have responded creatively to the requirement by asking for a written viva (CL1, CL7). Each programme seems to have negotiated a different weighting for the dissertation and exam, seemingly as a result of the balance between coursework and exams for other modules, resulting in a varied picture across programmes. (See Chapter 6 for details of the different requirements on the different courses).

7.3.2 Research methods modules

Five of the programmes have a compulsory research methods module (CL9, CL8, CL2, CL7, CL4) and one has research methods as part of a compulsory module (CL3). One programme has moved away from this as the research methods module, which was running at the same time as the dissertation, was thus being provided too late and it was in fact the supervisor who was providing the requisite amount of support. This requirement was therefore dropped. However, the programme has a

very intensive process for preparing the proposal before students are allowed to progress with the dissertation (CL5). Another programme runs online seminars in the summer on the various aspects of the process of doing a project instead of a research module (CL6).

7.3.3 Staging the dissertation process

All course leaders talked about the importance of staging the dissertation process for students, particularly at a distance. Although there is variety in the degree of compulsion for activities, drafts and specific parts of the process, all made the point that this is a really important aspect that helps the students complete successfully and in time. One course leader commented on students being in a rush towards the end and struggling to get drafts submitted (CL6). Some programmes have deadlines for intermediate drafts or reports on progress (CL3, CL1 CL5, CL6, CL7). One course leader also pointed out that distance learning support does need to be carefully thought out. "I think we have a huge amount to learn in face to face regimes from distance learning because we just have to be so precise about our aims, our outcomes, our learning objectives, our assessment and our feedback and so on. We can't afford to be in the slightest bit sloppy" (CL1).

The proposal stage is the first part that is explicitly laid out and again there is variation as to how this is tackled, although the programmes do all ask students to complete a form or produce a detailed written proposal. For one programme this has to be submitted and approved by the end of the autumn term, otherwise the student either has to defer until the next year or take the alternative route of more taught modules (CL5). For others the proposal is started in the research methods modules so that this is quite intensively supported (CL9, CL8).

Other stages which are important include the ethics approval. For the scientific and health based programmes this is particularly important and needs to be completed before fieldwork takes place (CL5). For health related studies students may also need ethical approval from the institutions in which they work (for example the NHS) and this can be time consuming (CL7).

Although these stages are fixed for many programmes, there is also a degree of flexibility in how they are operated, to meet student needs, as well as taking into account individual supervisors' recommendations on what is suitable for a particular student (CL3). One programme has a deadline for intermediary reports but does not

specify their exact nature. The primary purpose is for the student to produce something which will indicate whether they are on track, what help they need or whether they ought to be advised to defer or withdraw, so submissions include draft chapters or a report on what they have done so far. This course leader also discussed the value of having milestones for students, but expressed concerns that it would just lead to more apologies from students for not having met them and "we would just end up with more cheating and not much progress" (CL6).

7.3.4 Monitoring of students' progress

One of the challenges with having such clear stages is the monitoring of student progress. It varies across programmes as to whether this is done centrally (for example, every email going via the administrative office (CL5)), the degree to which the Course Leader keeps an eye on things and how much this is left up to the supervisor. Some of this will be discussed in more detail below.

7.4 Support Mechanisms for the Research Element: The course leader

One theme to clearly emerge from the interviews addressed the role of the course leader. The course leader is usually the key to the support that students receive.

7.4.1 Matching supervisors to students

All of the course leaders are involved in matching supervisors to students. This process usually involves finding supervisors, either from the existing course team (online and face to face – CL1) or from across the institution (CL2) or even externally as well as internally (CL5, CL3, CL6). The proposal is key to this process and the aim is to find supervisors who share an interest in the same subject or have experience in the relevant methodological approach. One programme takes 'bids' from supervisors this year as a result of employing more external supervisors, as they are likely to give higher quality supervision on projects they like and are interested in (CL6). Often the course leaders introduce the supervisor and student (CL5 and CL2), though this can also be done by the administrator (CL1). There are occasions where the course leader will also suggest that a student talks to someone else who has relevant expertise in their field (CL7).

In one programme the course leader also takes an initial look at the proposals and may communicate with the supervisor and the student as to the areas that need addressing, if it is to be accepted (CL5). In another the allocated supervisor might help a student work out what topic to focus on (CL6).

44

7.4.2 Managing supervisors

All the course leaders interviewed also talked about how they manage the supervisors. This is a difficult area and there is a tension between asking supervisors to get students through the often very staged process with deadlines and interim submissions, on the one hand, and allowing supervisors to use their expertise to decide what students need when and how best to manage the process, on the other. There is also variation as to whether or not institutions provide guidelines for supervisors for Master's dissertations (see sections 7.5.1 and 7.5.5).

One part of the course leader's role is trouble shooting, such as when a student asks for help in contacting their supervisor if they have not heard from them. Course leaders exert peer pressure using a number of strategies: phoning or emailing supervisors or visiting the supervisor (CL5), changing the supervisor if necessary (CL3, CL5, CL4). One said, "if you have any issues, like we had with just one tutor last year, then you pick them up as early as you can and try and sort them out. And we will switch supervisors if we need to…" (CL3). One other course leader pointed out that students can find it difficult to complain "because the trouble with the supervisor/students relationship is that the student doesn't want to upset the supervisor because they are going to be marking" (CL4).

Some course leaders are relatively specific with supervisors as to what they expect (CL9) whilst others do not feel that they can really tell supervisors how to proceed (CL2). These two examples possibly reflect the different settings in which their programmes have been developed. With the first, the programme is very new, they are on their first cohort and are working in partnership with other HEIs internationally. The second example, in contrast, draws supervisors from across the institution, rather than from a designated course team, as the disciplinary affiliation of the course is less specific. Their goodwill is therefore required to agree to be supervisors in the first place. As the course leader points out, it partly depends on personalities and the supervisor's experience. He says: "They are all experienced people who are doing this and while egalitarianism is one way to look at these things you can't legislate for people's differences and you are not going to be able to encourage people to come and supervise students if you start telling them, no don't do it like that, do it like this" (CL2).

Programmes use various support mechanisms to help the supervisors and course leaders keep an eye on the quality of the supervision provided: fortnightly conference

calls with the course teams across the 3 institutions (CL9); a yearly meeting to debrief and also consider new initiatives (eg introducing all the supervisors to the new VLE, Moodle (CL3)), a supervisors' meeting with approx 85 tutors once a year (CL8). One institution offers supervisor training, but largely only for those who can attend in person (CL5). One institution also runs a regular peer reflection activity where individual staff bring a teaching and learning issue, such as supervision, to be discussed (CL7).

7.5 Support mechanisms for the research element: supervisors

The essential ingredient for a student's successful completion of the dissertation is their relationship with their supervisor. This section discusses the interviewees' views on this relationship, how it is built, what it involves and what the challenges are.

7.5.1 Time allocated for supervision

There is variation across the programmes as to the amount of time officially allocated for supervision. In some cases institutional requirements need to be accommodated. For example, the 3 IOE programmes follow the IOE requirements of 5 hours of individual supervision and 5 hours of group tutorials, with time added on for supervisors to read and comment on drafts. Another example is the case of one of the newer programmes which is negotiating procedures across 3 institutions. Since there are only 9 students on the programme in its first year, supervision time is being left open for the time being. However, the course leader anticipates that once the programme expands this will have to be laid down in more detail (CL9)

Some of the other programmes have substantially more time allocated (e.g. 16 hours (CL5), 20 hours (CL8)), whilst others do not specify (CL9, CL7, CL6) or specify a minimum (CL4). As one course leader says, some supervisors will be very strict and provide only the amount of time allocated, "and other supervisors are very generous with their time and it always depends on what the student demands". In this case, the course leader's response has been to have some guidelines on minimum responses (to the students' proposals and drafts for example) and then leave it fairly open and "trust that it is satisfactory on that regard" (CL4).

7.5.2 Role and responsibilities of supervisors

There is more consensus on the role and responsibilities of the supervisors, which can be categorised as pastoral and academic support, in line with the main issues arising from the literature review. Although each course leader did not list all of the

following there was considerable overlap, particularly on academic support:

- **Pastoral care**: being sympathetic and understanding (CL1), getting students through (CL7), calming students down (CL5), possibly suggesting deferrals etc (CL3, CL6).

- **Academic support**: suggesting literature, subject knowledge guidance, helping with the proposal and planning of the research, helping students identify a small and focused enough project (something that is feasible), helping with ethics approval, methodological issues, linking research questions to literature review and data analysis, commenting on drafts, helping students develop intellectually, helping them with dissemination.

One point emphasised by course leaders is that supervisors need to be supportive and understanding, but also critical of what students are proposing (CL9, CL1). They might have to suggest alternative approaches, or even steer students off particular projects. For example, one course leader talked about a student from a particular geographical location who wanted to do exactly the same topic as a student from the previous year who lived in the same place and therefore had to be persuaded to choose something else (CL3).

All course leaders talked about commenting on drafts. There were mixed views, however, on how much correcting of those drafts, including correcting English, was appropriate. One course leader stated that college policy is that supervisors may only comment, not proof read (CL5), whereas others were more open to whether or not supervisors should track changes on the drafts (CL2). They did all mention the need to make allowances for language and some specifically encourage students to get their work proof read, if it is deemed necessary (CL1, CL5). In general, the students' level of English is not seen to be the main problem, compared with other issues such as being able to conceptualise research. Many courses make allowances with language focusing on the need for comprehension rather than grammatical accuracy (CL5, CL8). As one interviewee says, "we are not precious about language" (CL8).

One course leader made the point that it is not possible to distinguish between academic and pastoral support, and gave an example of helping a struggling student on the point of giving up with how she thought of herself in relation to the project. "At one point I encouraged her not to think of herself as a researcher but as a detective. And this seemed to hit a chord with her… Now I don't know what I was giving her there. I am not sure whether that was pastoral support or academic support, but it

47

sort of did something to keep her hanging on in there" (CL7). Another felt that there is possibly more pastoral support needed for distance, rather than face to face, supervision (CL3).

One course leader also discussed the need for the supervisor to advise students on intellectual property rights if they are going to publish their work. This arises in particular where students do dissertations based on work they are doing as part of a laboratory team (CL5).

Some supervisors are also asked to be first or second markers (CL5, CL7, CL8, CL1, CL2 and CL3). This role is important for one course leader as she feels that distance students often have external events affecting their progress (for example, pregnancy or riots in Kenya during fieldwork). Her view is that "it is only the supervisor who understands all the difficulties they (the students) have had to go through in order to get this final report. And that is the thing, we don't test…. when we just mark a report, we don't test process. So that is why we thought it was important to get the supervisor to be second marker as well. So their knowledge of what has been going on to produce the report is taken into account" (CL5). Similarly on another programme, the first marker (supervisor) will give the second marker a sense of how the year has gone for a particular student, including 'significant events'. This has raised questions about the students' responsibility to place their work in context and reflect on that as part of the finished work (CL7).

7.5.3 The challenges for the students

When asked which parts of the process they think students have the most problems with course leaders identified most stages as being challenging, though some highlighted particular ones they had noticed their students struggling with. These are then key areas in which supervisors and course leaders aim to give support to students.

Conceptualising the research and getting a feasible project together was a frequent concern. Students often choose to do something that is too big, either in terms of the initial idea or in terms of the research design (CL9, CL8) and getting them to focus is a key part of the process (CL7). Another mentioned linking the research questions and data collection. "What a lot of students seem to do is that they have an idea, then they have an idea of what is data collection… making a questionnaire. Then they don't link them very well. They don't link what they ask in their questionnaire to what

48

their research question is…They have almost decided what their data collection tool is before they have even formulated their question" (CL4). Another mentions the data collection itself being a big challenge. "Because they always have huge ambitious plans. You know massive surveys that they are going to do in ten days and then they say 'Oh look only half the people have replied, I can't get interviews' and so on" (CL8).

Apart from the MRes, where students have been studying methods throughout the degree, most course leaders thought that all stages were potential stages where students would need more support; from proposal, through literature review, ethics, research design to data analysis and writing up.

One course leader emphasised the difficulties students have with motivating themselves to complete the project on time, as there is less structure provided in the distance course (CL6).

7.5.4 The challenges for the supervisors

The course leaders also talked about the particular challenges for supervisors. One example concerns giving the right amount of support to an individual student beyond what was stipulated, or asked for by the student, and being responsive to individual needs whilst getting the student through the process. "It is quite challenging, I think, as a tutor to try and find that balance between being fair and being sort of flexible and accommodating individual needs" (CL7).

The other main area of difficulty is in trying to judge the communication by distance, particularly on email (CL5, CL9). The importance of getting to know the students was mentioned (CL3) and the difficulties of judging at a distance who needs more or less help. As one course leader said "I do miss the student interaction and I feel I kind of know them but I don't really…. I don't know whether I need to chivvy them along or say this is not good enough and you could do better. So it is difficult to know how to manage them sometimes" (CL9). The wording of emails and how to get students at a distance to understand the comments and suggestions are other concerns (CL5).

Another course leader pointed out that without face to face communication, judging how much a student is struggling is difficult, often leading to advice to defer being provided later than it might for a face to face student: "I think if you have got someone in face to face you can work out exactly how much something is bothering

49

them. But X for example, who has come back this year after her difficult pregnancy, she didn't really tell me how bad things were until it got to the point where she was going to have to give up the whole thing. Whereas if I had seen her here and seen how flustered she was an how poorly she was feeling, I would have twigged much earlier" (CL3).

Phone calls are one response to this concern and on one programme supervisors have actually asked that the initial tutorial be by phone. As the course leader says, "People are quite unhappy with supervising only by email….Discussion doesn't go fast enough. The kind of tuition you need, we think, at the beginning of the dissertation cuts off avenues of unproductive work and encourages people going in the right direction" (CL8).

A couple of the course leaders made comments about the nature of distance, part-time students and speculated on why these students might be slower to let supervisors know there is a problem. A couple felt that students who choose this method of study might be more private and also more used to being self-sufficient, so to admit that they are struggling would be quite difficult (CL5, CL3). One said "also the overseas students, they come from a different educational background where academic staff are held in high regard and almost untouchable, and under pressures so they don't want to bother you" (CL5). Another said that it is more likely that the supervisor will be chasing students than a student driving the process, particularly with some students who are culturally inclined to not want to bother their busy supervisors (CL6).

We did not ask specifically about personal models or approaches to feedback that might help deal with some of the challenges for supervisors. However, one course leader mentioned that she uses a particular model for feedback based on previous experience working with distance learners to help structure the process and support the students (CL3).

7.5.5 Guidelines for supervisors

Whether or not the programmes offer guidelines for supervisors varies. Some courses do (CL5, CL4) with detailed notes on what is expected and others do not (CL7). Most institutions have them for PhD supervision and some tutors will work at both levels (CL7). One course leader described a new contract specifying supervision time and how many drafts a supervisor will read etc for the face to face

programmes, but has mixed feelings about it. "It is almost impossible to implement but it sets a guideline to protect staff, if you like, from the student who sends them a draft every other day but also gives students an indication of what they are entitled to" (CL6). The course leader feels that it is better to aim for flexibility with the distance courses, rather than being too specific.

7.6 Support Mechanisms for the Research Element: Developing a distance learning community

All course leaders discussed the notion of developing a sense of community within the cohort and encouraging peer support. However, the degree to which particular programmes structure activities and materials on a VLE varies. Those who do not have anything particular set up online, in terms of spaces for students to post proposals or research questions, or to be involved in discussions on writing or literature reviews, feel that this is something they should introduce (CL5), or will be relevant later once the course has expanded (CL1). One of the potential benefits of this is in using peer pressure to help students through the various stages and deadlines and also the potential of having stronger students to encourage others (CL5, 2). As one course leader put it, "we really need to make them into a little community, because I think that lots of them could help each other, advise each other and also they need to have, they need to have some peer input, to give them a sense of timing" (CL5).

Two course leaders also pointed out that if all previous modules have had a very structured online programme then it can suddenly seem as if they are getting less support for the dissertation (CL2, CL5), which was another reason for developing something more structured.

Interestingly, given that those programmes without this structured support on the VLE want to develop it, partly out of concerns of developing a sense of community, those who already have it point out how it is difficult to maintain this. They said that when students get to the point of needing advice on their individual project, they prefer to talk to their supervisors rather than peers, and the cohort gets separated and more individual (CL4, CL8, CL7). As one course leader puts it, "My view of it is, once they are off writing their topic, they don't really want to talk to anybody else. They want to talk to their tutor" (CL8).

Participation, however, can be encouraged and trained for, by how the previous

modules were set up and run and by using a similar structure for the dissertation (CL7 and CL3). It can also be made a requirement and part of the final grade in previous modules (CL7). On the whole though course leaders also felt that levels of participation were good and that there will always be students who are less inclined to be part of a learning community, whether face to face or online. One course leader also pointed out that participation on the VLE or similar system does not guarantee a good quality finished dissertation. "I think generally we have very high levels of engagement and participation within our VLE. …Some students go off largely and do their own thing and produce very good pieces of work, some students participate very well but actually don't produce very good pieces of work…you can't generalise" (CL7). This course leader also reflected on how often students acknowledge the support from other students in their work which would seem to underline the importance of maintaining the community during the process.

Some students set up informal networks, either because they live in the same area (CL3) or because they have already been communicating outside the main activities in the VLE for their other modules (CL9) and may use options like Skype.

7.7 Support Mechanisms for the Research Element: Technology

Studying at a distance requires a certain amount of techological support. The main form of technology used to support the supervisory process discussed by course leader is email, with some institutions having a dedicated VLE site (CL3, CL1, CL2, CL7). There is variation in the degree to which activities are provided, and in whether the dissertation part of the degree runs in the same format as other modules (see above). Some of this variation reflects whether courses are dealing only with a first cohort of a small number of students (CL1, CL9).

Some provide paper-based materials as their students' access to reliable and efficient internet in countries around the world is not necessarily reliable (CL5). Others offer books to support the VLE and a dissertation / module guide (CL3, CL1). Some have only asynchronous online options for communication due to geographical considerations (CL9) whilst others are considering developing more conferencing facilities (CL9, CL2, CL1)

VLEs and other online programme facilities mentioned are Blackboard (CL9) though not necessarily used for supervision (CL4), Moodle (CL3, CL1, CL2, CL7), Eluminate (CL1,CL3), Skype for the students (CL5, CL2), and personal choice of some

supervisors to use it (CL4). One course leader mentioned a supervisor who was using Second Life (CL2).

Some programmes encourage students to have face to face tutorials if it is possible (CL1) and others also encourage or leave open the possibility of phone contact (CL9, CL5, CL2, CL7).

Access to institution libraries is also sometimes denied to students on the external programme as they are not registered in the individual institutions (CL2, CL5, CL3). This is of concern to course leaders as access to relevant literature is a key part of the research process for students.

8. Discussion

A number of themes emerge from the literature review, the survey of course regulations and the interviews with the course leaders. Making the connections between the specific experience of certain course leaders and what is said in the wider literature highlights issues that could be usefully pursued in follow up research on the process of supervision itself.

As illustrated in Chapter 5 and Appendix A, the project confirmed that research supervision at master's level is still an under-researched area. The vast majority of studies of supervision and supervisory practices deal with doctoral level supervision, and only 12 studies were found that dealt with master's level supervision at all. It is noteworthy that in terms of disciplines studied, Education is overrepresented, and in four of the studies is the only discipline examined. The research is normally small scale, with seven of the 12 studies looking at fewer than 13 participants. This is particularly striking in comparison with some of the studies of PhD supervision, which include hundreds of participants. The question arises of why Master's level supervision is still under-researched, in spite of the fact that it is far more prevalent than Doctoral level supervision. One possibility may be that doctoral supervision involves much higher stakes, and is a longer, more complex process.

Similarly, the project confirmed that there is virtually no research dealing with supervision at a distance on its own. Most studies deal with distance supervision as bound up with face-to-face supervision. Only 4 papers were found that touched on distance supervision (see Appendix B). A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that unlike Master's level supervision, which often occurs wholly at a distance, such situations are rare – if indeed ever present – in Doctoral supervision, where there is always a face-to-face element.

The literature review, the document analysis and the interviews all confirm the great variability between the different projects that are required within the different programmes. There is variation globally (most strikingly in the two year Master's theses discussed in the literature, e.g. Dysthe 2002), but even within the University of London there is variability in terms of word length, in terms of research training, and in terms of supervisory support available (see Chapter 6). There is also variation in terms of whether a research project is required, optional, or not available as an

option. The source of variation is a combination of institutional requirements and disciplinary practices and options.

Course leaders confirm the findings in the literature that academic and pastoral support are both important and the specific difficulties of managing the latter at a distance were also highlighted. The distance element came to the fore when it was acknowledged that at a distance it was sometimes more difficult to know when a student was struggling than on face-to-face courses. There is, however, less concern than expressed in the literature over international students with the course leaders generally not worried about language skills. Course leaders are more concerned with all students' abilities to conceptualise research and with international students the worry is more that they might feel supervisors are too important or busy to contact. The textual differences between disciplines does come through in the interviews with the science based dissertations more likely to have a specific structure requirement.

An important strand in the interviews was the role of the supervisor and the course leader in guiding the research process. Although there is less concern expressed about the tension between supervisor authority and student agency, the level and type of support at various stages of the project is clearly something course leaders spend a great deal of time considering. The interviews brought up the importance of timing and of staging the dissertation process for the students in order to successfully to bring about timely completion. The course leaders interviewed also spoke of the difficulties of channelling the research process into a tight time bound procedure which would accommodate institutional procedures for payment and enrolment as well as the exam requirements of the external system.

All courses have some sort of structure in place to help the student in the choice of topic and conceptualisation of the research project, but the amount of help and the type of help provided varies greatly. There is not much discussion in the interviews of a mismatch of expectations between supervisors and students, but course leaders do highlight the difficulties of making sure students receive adequate support and feedback, particularly at a distance. In the interviews, the course leader emerged as an important lynchpin of the dissertation process in terms of approving topics, choosing supervisors, guiding, training and sometimes managing supervisors, and mediating between supervisors and supervisees in times of problems. Part of the role of the course leader is to deal both with supervisors not communicating effectively and students also not participating or contacting their supervisor (highlighting the

55

pastoral support element on distance courses). Training for supervisors is also not overly common in the courses discussed in the interviews. There are some support mechanisms but it seems that many rely on supervisors' experiences, particularly at doctoral level, to inform their practice. There are some examples of handbooks and most courses have some documentation clarifying requirements and staging of the process.

The only tension seems to come with trying to keep students as a community whilst they also work individually, at different paces often, with their individual supervisor. The general challenge, not identified so much in the literature on doctoral supervision, is getting the students to complete in a short time frame. As pointed out throughout the preceding paragraphs, the need for scaffolding and support identified in the literature, particularly for distance study, is something the course leaders also feel. This seems to be a key aspect of the support and approach to dissertation study at a distance, with those course leaders who do less of it planning to attempt more.

References

Anderson, C., Day, K. & McLaughlin, P. (2006) Mastering the dissertation: Lecturers' representations of the purposes and processes of Master's level dissertation supervision. *Studies in Higher Education,* 31, 2: 149 – 168.

Archibong, U. 1995. Overseas students; research supervision: their experiences and expectations. *Journal of Graduate Education,* 1: 85-93.

Armitage, A. (2006) *Consultant or Academic?: frameworks of Supervisory Practice to Support Student Learning and Postgraduate Research,* The Higher education Academy Annual Conference July 2006 – Session papers.

Bowen, W.G. and Rudenstine, N.I. (1992). *In Pursuit of the PhD.* Princeton, NJ: New Jersey University Press. (In Dedrick & Watson, 2002).

Brown, L. (2007) A consideration of the challenges involved in supervising international masters students, *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 31, 3: 239-248.

Brown, G. and Atkins, M. (1988) *Effective Teaching in Higher Education*. Loondon: Routledge (cited in D. Lee 1988).

Buckley, P.J. and Hooley, G.J. (1988) The non-completion of doctoral research in management: symptoms, causes and cures, *Educational Research, 30.* (Cited in Haksever and Manisali 2000).

Butcher, J. and Sieminski, S. (2006) The challenge of a distance learning professional doctorate in education. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open and Distance Learning,* 21, 1: 59-69.

Cadman, K. (2000) Voices in the Air: evaluations of the learning experiences of international postgraduates and their supervisors. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 5, 4: 475-491.

Cryer, P. & Mertens, P. (2003) The PhD examination: support and training for supervisors and examiners. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 11, 2: 92-99.

Dedrick R. & Watson F. (2002) Mentoring Needs of Female, Minority, and International Graduate Students: a content analysis of academic research guides and related print material. *Mentoring & Tutoring*, 10, 3: 275-289.

Delamont, S., Atkinson, P. & Parry, O. (2004) *Supervising the Doctorate: A guide to success. 2nd edition.* Maidenhead: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Delamont, S., Parry, O. & Atkinson, P. (1998) Creating a delicate balance: the doctoral supervisor's dilemmas. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 3, 2: 157 – 172.

Dysthe O. J. (2002) Professors as mediators of academic text cultures. An interview study with advisors and mastr's degree students in three disciplines in a Norwegian university. *Written Communication, 19,* 4: 493-544.

Dysthe, O., Samara, A. and Westrheim, K. 2006. Multivoiced supervision of Master's students: a case study of alternative supervision practices in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31, 3: 299-318.

Emilsson, U & Johnsson, E. (2007) "Supervision of supervisors: on developing supervision in postgraduate education", *Higher Education Research & Development,* Volume 26, Number 2 pp. 163-179.

Evans, T., Davis, H. & Hickey, C. (2005) Research issues arising from doctoral education at a distance. In T. Evans, P. Smith & E. Stacey (Eds.), *Research in Distance Education 6,* Geelong, Deakin University), pp.120 – 131.

Firth, A. & E. Martens. 2008. Transforming supervisors? A critique of post-libaeral approaches to research supervision. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 13, 3: 279-289.

Fox, D. 1983. Personal theories of teaching. *Studies in Higher Education,* 8, 2: 151-163. (Cited in Murphy, Bain and Conrad 2007).

Gatfield, T. (2005) An Investigation into PhD Supervisory Management Styles: Development of a dynamic conceptual model and its managerial implications, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 27, 3: 311-325.

25. Gurr, G. M. 2001. Negotiating the rackety bridge- a dynamic model of aligning supervisory style with research student development. *Higher Education and Research Development, 20 (1) 81-92.*

26. Haksever, A. & Manisali, E. (2000) Assessing supervision requirements of PhD students: the case of construction management and engineering in the UK, *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 25, 1: 19-32.

28. Harman, G. (2003) PhD student satisfaction with course experience and supervision in two Australian Research-intensive Universities. *Prometheus,* 21, 3: 312-333.

29. Heath, T. (2002) A Quantitative Analysis of PhD Students' Views of Supervision. *Higher Education Research & Development,* 21, 1: 41-53.

30. Hetrick, S. and Trafford, V. (1995) The mutuality of expectation: mapping the perceptions of dissertation supervisors and candidates in postgraduate department of a new university. *Journal of Graduate Education, 2, 35-43.*

31. Hockey, J. (1994) Establishing Boundaries: problems and solutions in managing the PhD supervisor's role, *Cambridge Journal of Education,* Vol. 24, No. 2, pp.293 – 305.

32. Hockey, J. (1996) A contractual solution to problems in the supervision of PhD degrees in the UK, *Studies in Higher Education,* 21, 3: 359-371.

35. Hockey, J. (1997) A complex craft: United Kingdom PhD supervision in the social sciences, *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* 2, 1: 45-70.

38. Kumar, V. & Stracke, E. (2007) An analysis of written feedback on a PhD thesis, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12, 4: 461-470.

39. Lee, D. (1998) Sexual Harassment in PhD Supervision, *Gender and Education*, Volume 10, Number 3, 1 September 1998 , pp. 299-312(14).

Mackinnon, J. (2004) Academic Supervision; seeking metaphors and models for quality, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 28(4), 395-405.

McCormack, C. 2004. Tensions between student and institutional conceptions of postgraduate research. *Studies in Higher Education* 29, 3: 319-334.

47. Murphy, N., Bain, J. & Conrad, L. (2007) Orientations to research higher degree supervision, *Higher Education*, 53, 2: 209-234.

48. Park, C. (2005) New Variant PhD: The changing nature of the doctorate in the UK ", *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 27, 2: 189-207.

49. Pearson, M. & Kayrooz, C. (2004) Enabling critical reflection on research supervisory practice, *International Journal for Academic Development,* Vol.9, No. 1, pp.99 – 116.

50. Petersen, E.B. 2007. Negotiating academicity: postgraduate research supervision as category boundary work. *Studies in Higher Education* 32:4, 475-487.

52. Price, D. & Money, A. (2002) "Alternative models for doctoral mentor organisation and research supervision", *Mentoring and Tutoring,* 10, 2: 127 – 135.

53. Sambrook, Stewart and Roberts (2008) Doctoral supervision … a view from above, below and the middle! *Journal of Further and Higher Education* Vol. 32 no. 1 pp. 71-84.

54. Stacey, E. & Fountain, W. (2001) "Student and supervisor perspectives in a computer-mediated research relationship", G. Kennedy, M. Keppell, C. McNaught & T. Petrovic (Eds.), *Meeting at the Crossroads.* Proceedings of the 18th Annual Conference of the Australian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education. (pp. 519-528). Melbourne: Biomedical Multimedia Unit, The University of Melbourne.

55. Taylor, J (2002). Changes in teaching and learning in the period to 2005: the case of postgraduate higher education in the UK. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management.* 24 (1), 53-73

56. Watts, J. 2008. Challenges of supervising part-time PhD students: towards student-centred practice. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 13:3, 369-373.

57. Wikeley, F. & Muschamp, Y. (2004) Pedagogical implications of working with doctoral students at a distance, *Distance Education,* 25, 1: 125 – 142.

61. Woolhouse, M. (2002) Supervising Dissertation Projects: Expectations of Supervisors and Students, *Innovations in Education & Teaching International*, 39, 2: 137-144.

62. Ylioki, O-H. 2001. Master's thesis writing from a narrative approach. *Studies in Higher Education* 26, 1: 21-34.

63.

APPENDIX A
SUMMARIES OF STUDIES FOCUSING ON SUPERVISING MA DISSERTATIONS

1. **Anderson, C., Day, K. & McLaughlin, P. (2006) "Mastering the dissertation: Lecturers' representations of the purposes and processes of Master's level dissertation supervision",** *Studies in Higher Education,* **31, 2: 149 – 168.**
   The researchers interviewed 13 supervisors in a faculty of education about their views of dissertation supervision at Master's level. The main finding is the duality of roles which the supervisors experienced, between being academic gatekeepers on the one hand, focusing on the quality of the dissertation, and their concern for and commitment to the students, on the other hand.

2. **Archibong, U. 1995. Overseas students; research supervision: their experiences and expectations.** *Journal of Graduate Education,* **1, 85-93.**
   This study is based on questionnaire data from 33 international post-graduates. It includes both Phd (23), Post-doctoral (5) and Master's level (5) students, and does not distinguish between them. The author focuses on mismatches between expectations and experiences, and suggests that some of this may be due to the students' previous experience in their home country. The students in the study expected firmer guidance than they found. The study finds some disciplinary differences between social science and applied science students, with the latter having lower expectations of the personal relationship with the supervisor. Overall, however, there was satisfaction with supervision.

3. **Armitage, A. (2006)** *Consultant or Academic?: frameworks of Supervisory Practice to Support Student Learning and Postgraduate Research,* **The Higher education Academy Annual Conference July 2006 – Session papers.**
   This study is based on semi-structured interviews with 9 supervisors of Master's degrees in Management, Human Resources, Health and Business Administratio, as well as case notes collected by them. The study found that supervisors saw the students in terms of three types: self-reliant students, supervisor-directed and support seeking students, and students who lost contact with their supervisor. The study suggests that supervisors 'locate themselves within their subject areas when supervising students' (p. 21). Finally, the study identified three phases of dissertation supervision: 'starting out', 'keep going', and 'the end is nigh'. The study suggests that supervisors need to understand the type of students that their supervisees are, and suggests different frameworks for professional practice.

4. **Brown, L. (2007) A consideration of the challenges involved in supervising international masters students,** *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* **31, 3: 239-248.**
   This is a reflection on the author's own experience of supervising international masters students. She focuses on issues of language, contact time, critical analysis, and the pastoral role of the supervisor. Little differentiation is made to issues that are specific to Master's students, apart from the comment that because of the short length of time that such students spend in the UK, there is little time for in-sessional language improvement.

5. **Cadman, K. (2000) Voices in the Air: evaluations of the learning experiences of international postgraduates and their supervisors. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 5, 4: 475-491.**
This study looks at the experience of students on a bridging programme for international students at a university in Australia. It focuses mainly on issues such as learning and thinking styles, critical thinking, and the affective dimension in terms of students anxietties and confidence. The study examined the views of doctoral and Master's students without distinguishing between the two.

6. **Dysthe, O. 2002. Professors as Mediators of Academic Text Cultures: An Interview Study with Advisors and Master's Degree Students in Three Disciplines in a Norwegian University. *Written Communication* 19, 4: 493-544.**
Dysthe examined three disciplines at a Norwegian university: Humanities (History of Religions); Social Science (Administration and Organizational Science); Natural Science (Fishery and Marine Biology). For each discipline, textual traditions were investigated, followed by interviews with 8 supervisors and 10 students in each discipline. Dysthe identified three models of supervision: the teaching model, the partnership model, and the apprenticeship model. She then looked at the way in which these models operated in the textual culture and in the research. There was some alignment with discipline in that the apprenticeship model seemed to be more identifiable in the natural sciences, though elements of it can also be found in the humanities and social sciences: it was aligned to issues of experimentation and project based research. Thus in some cases supervisors adopted an apprenticeship model for research, and a teaching model for work on textual matters with their students. In History of Religions, Dysthe suggests that 'the different models in this discipline arise from disciplinary, institutional and personal factors' (p. 531). Dysthe suggests that 'the clearest finding is that supervisors who practice the teaching model, with its emphasis on correction of student texts, prefer 'finished' drafts and do not encourage students to hand in exploratory texts, whereas those who practice a partnership model do'. (p. 536). One important caveat about Dysthe's research, however, is that it is based on Master's level work that is probably more akin to the MPhil work at a British university – this is a two year, intensive research relationship (e.g. a student who talked about handing in fortnightly texts to the supervisor for nearly two years).

7. **Dysthe, O., Samara, A. and Westrheim, K. 2006. Multivoiced supervision of Master's students: a case study of alternative supervision practices in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31, 3: 299-318.**
This is a report of a case study, in effect an action research project, in which a new approach to supervision was tried out on a two year Master's degree at the University of Bergen, Norway. Three elements formed the new approach: student colloquia, supervision groups, and individual supervision. Participants were 11 students and their supervisors. The study concludes that the model of supervision offered provided the students with additional opportunities to think, talk and write in their discipline. A clear finding was that students benefitted from being involved in their peers' projects. They benefited from witnessing disagreements among supervisors: the researchers suggest that gaining confidence in disagreeing with the experts is learnt by doing, by participating in a community of practice, rather than by being told.

8. **Hetrick, S. and Trafford, V. (1995) The mutuality of expectation: mapping the perceptions of dissertation supervisors and candidates in postgraduate department of a new university.** *Journal of Graduate Education, 2, 35-43.*
    This study focuses on the expectations that students have of MA supervision, comparing them with supervisors' views. The researchers found that the supervisors saw themselves as entering a transactional contract with the students, focusing on the task at hand (writing a dissertation), whereas the students saw themselves as entering a relational contract with their supervisor.

9. **McCormack, C. 2004. Tensions between student and institutional conceptions of postgraduate research.** *Studies in Higher Education* **29, 3: 319-334.**
    This is an in-depth, longitudinal study of the experiences of three students on a Masters in Research course. McCormack points out the tensions that existed between the commodified view of research held by the institution and the more personal views held by the three participants, and suggests that these tensions contributed a great deal to the non-completion of two of the students and to the long period of registration of the third.

10. **Stacey, E. & Fountain, W. (2001) "Student and supervisor perspectives in a computer-mediated research relationship", G. Kennedy, M. Keppell, C. McNaught & T. Petrovic (Eds.),** *Meeting at the Crossroads.* **Proceedings of the 18th Annual Conference of the Australian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education. (pp. 519-528). Melbourne: Biomedical Multimedia Unit, The University of Melbourne.**
    This is a small scale study in which a supervisor and supervisee reflect on the factors that led to success in the story of the supervision. Four factors were identified, all of which are related to the CMC element used between the two writers. The first one was effective computer-mediated communication and the projection of social presence. The authors identified three components of their email correspondence – practical exchange of information, focus on the process; and focus on affective or social areas, and note how each component contributed to success on the dissertation. The second factor was self-efficacy beliefs for operating in the remote context; the third was using appropriate technology; and the fourth was interaction in other online professional networks (used to combat the sense of isolation arising from the mode and area of study).

11. **Woolhouse, M. (2002) "Supervising Dissertation Projects: Expectations of Supervisors and Students",** *Innovations in Education & Teaching International,* **39. 2: 137-144.**
    This is an account of an action research study and focuses mainly on the expectations that one student and one supervisor had of the supervisory process. The supervisor and the student then analysed the data, with the student finding more similarities between her views and the supervisor's, and the supervisor finding more differences. The author then focuses on the way in which the research helped her in her own practice as a supervisor.

12. **Ylioki, O-H. 2001. Master's thesis writing from a narrative approach.** *Studies in Higher Education* **26,1: 21-34.**
    This study is based on interviews with 72 students in four different disciplines at the University of Tampere in Finland. The study identifies four stories of thesis writing each of which entails a different view of the student-supervisor

relationship. In the heroic story and in the tragey, the supervisor is a colleague and the focus is on exchange of ideas (with the situation souring in the tragedy); in the businesslike story the supervisor is a counsellor or trainer; in the penal story the supervisor is seen as a gatekeeper and the student perceives themselves as a victim. Ylioki stresses the importance of the student and the suprevisor seeing the relationship as part of the same story.

APPENDIX B

SUMMARIES OF STUDIES MENTIONING SUPERVISING AT A DISTANCE

(Note: the summary of Stacey and Fountain 2001 is identical to the summary in Appendix A)

1. **Butcher, J. and Sieminski, S. (2006) The challenge of a distance learning professional doctorate in education. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open and Distance Learning,* 21, 1: 59-69.**
This is a study based on 47 questionnaires from Open University EdD students, as well as interviews with some of them. The focus is mainly on the experience of the EdD, rather than on supervision. Some of the comments on supervision, however, indicate an expectancy of tighter supervision on the EdD than there would be on a PhD. The programme, however, can be characterised as a blended learning programme, with face to face residentials and face to face supervision as well.

2. **Evans, T., Davis, H. & Hickey, C. (2005) "Research issues arising from doctoral education at a distance", in T. Evans, P. Smith & E. Stacey (Eds.), *Research in Distance Education 6,* Geelong, Deakin University), pp.120 – 131.**
This is a description of the support seminars provided for distance doctoral students at Deakin University. It includes a short section on supervision at a distance, acknowledging the difficulties involved, but with no new research input into this.

3. **Stacey, E. & Fountain, W. (2001) "Student and supervisor perspectives in a computer mediated research relationship", G. Kennedy, M. Keppell, C. McNaught & T. Petrovic (Eds.), *Meeting at the Crossroads.* Proceedings of the 18th Annual Conference of the Australian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education. (pp. 519-528). Melbourne: Biomedical Multimedia Unit, The University of Melbourne.**
This is a small scale study in which a supervisor and supervisee reflect on the factors that led to success in the story of the supervision. Four factors were identified, all of which are related to the CMC element used between the two writers. The first one was effective computer-mediated communication and the projection of social presence. The authors identified three components of their email correspondence – practical exchange of information, focus on the process; and focus on affective or social areas, and note how each component contributed to success on the dissertation. The second factor was self-efficacy beliefs for operating in the remote context; the third was using appropriate technology; and the fourth was interaction in other online professional networks (used to combat the sense of isolation arising from the mode and area of study).

4. **Price, D. & Money, A. (2002) "Alternative models for doctoral mentor organisation and research supervision", *Mentoring and Tutoring,* 10, 2: 127 – 135.**
This study describes research supervision on a doctorate in Business Administration. The describe three models of supervision, all of which involve two supervisors: the traditional face to face model where supervisors and supervisee are located at the home institution; a semi-remote model, with one supervisor home-based but one supervisor located near to with a remotely located student; a remote model, where both supervisors are remote from the student. However, no real distinction is made between face-to-face and remote supervision.

Appendix C

Formal Requirements for Research Projects on Distance Learning Master's Courses at the University of London

University – Type of Course & Duration	Lead College	Dissertation Requirements & Word Length	Supervision	Contact Details (Course leader / Administrator)
Birkbeck MSc in Human Resource Management; MSc in Organizational Psychology. 2 – 5 Years	Birkbeck	10 000-word Scientific Report an empirical study, quantitative or qualitative, conducted by the student on some aspect of Organizational Psychology and Human Resource Management. Written up as a scientific report of not more than 10,000 words, including bibliography and notes but excluding appendices.	On-line tutorial support Support from Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Academic feedback on essay questions and mock exams	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
MA in Applied Educational Leadership and Management 3 – 5 Years	IOE	15 000-word research dissertation Students will be given guidance and further reading on basic research approaches and tools, and will be expected, where possible to conduct a small research project in their own work environment. The project is likely to be based on the investigation of a leadership or management issue leading to recommendations for improvement and action. The investigation could take the form of empirical research or it could be based on desk research making use of already available data. Research methods covered in part of core module 2. No written exam with dissertation	On-line tutorial support Support from Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) – Moodle No. of supervision hours governed by IOE allocation 5 hrs individual and 5 hrs group.	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358 Course leader: Elizabeth Wood
Institute of Education (IOE) MA in Citizenship and History Education 3 – 5 Years	IOE	10,000-word report (30 credits) **OR** a 20,000-word dissertation (60 credits) No complusory research methods module Dissertation 40% and exam 60% of final mark	On-line tutorial support Support from VLE – Moodle Supervision allocation in line with IOE standard 5 hours individual and 5 hours group tutorial	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358 Course leader: Hugh Starkey

MRes in Educational and Social Research 2 – 5 Years	IOE	Dissertation No length specified in prospectus Approach to Educational Research and Research methods constitutes the syllabus The **Dissertation** module is an interactive support network that enables researchers to overcome some of the problems that can arise from working on research in isolation. The module gives students the opportunities to present their research to others, and to discuss their research ideas within an informed and relaxed environment.	On-line tutorial support Support from Online Learning Environment (OLE). – Moodle	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 835 Course leader: **Will Gibson**
MA TESOL	IOE	Dissertation 20,000 words or Report 10,000 words. No research methods module; some assistance provided through optional activities on the VLE.	5 hours group tutorial support and 5 hours individual tutorial support in line with IOE standard Online support through FirstClass (until September 2009) and Moodle (September 2009 onwards)	Course Leader: Amos Paran
MA Development Education	IOE	Dissertation 20, 000 words or Report 10,000 words. No compulsory research methods module. Dissertation support package online, mainly optional activities and readings.	5 hours group tutorial support – face to face day optional and 5 hours individual tutorial support in line with IOE standard Online support through Blackboard.	Course Leader: **Doug Bourn**
MA European Union Law	King's	Dissertation: 12-15,000 words Pre-requisites – completion of the Postgraduate Diploma in one year. Application for Masters includes 100 word paragraph outlining proposed dissertation. Once accepted and starting 1 year to complete Masters : Project plan of 1500 words submitted at beginning of the Masters (after completion of the Post graduate Dip). Draft dissertations submitted 4 – 5 weeks before final submission date	Supervisor contact 3 – 4 times a year.	**Programme Director** Dr Alexander Turk,

MA EC Competition Law	King's	Dissertation: 12-15,000 words Pre-requisites – completion of the Postgraduate Diploma in one year. Application for Masters includes 100 word paragraph outlining proposed dissertation. Once accepted and starting 1 year to complete Masters : Project plan of 1500 words submitted at beginning of the Masters (after completion of the Post graduate Dip). Draft dissertations submitted 4 – 5 weeks before final submission date	Supervisor contact 3 – 4 times a year.	**Programme Director** Richard Whish,
MA UK, EC, US Copyright Law	King's	Dissertation : 12-15,000 words Pre-requisites – completion of the Postgraduate Diploma in one year. Application for Masters includes 100 word paragraph outlining proposed dissertation. Once accepted and starting 1 year to complete Masters : Project plan of 1500 words submitted at beginning of the Masters (after completion of the Post graduate Dip). Draft dissertations submitted 4 – 5 weeks before final submission date	Supervisor contact 3 – 4 times a year.	**Programme Director** Dr Tanya Aplin,
MA Economics for Competition Law	King's	Dissertation : 12-15,000 words Pre-requisites – completion of the Postgraduate Diploma in one year. Application for Masters includes 100 word paragraph outlining proposed dissertation. Once accepted and starting 1 year to complete Masters : Project plan of 1500 words submitted at beginning of the Masters (after completion of the Post graduate Dip). Draft dissertations submitted 4 – 5 weeks before final submission date	Supervisor contact 3 – 4 times a year.	**Programme Directors** Dr Mike Walker,
MSc International Addiction Studies	King's – jointly with Virginia Commonwealth Uni and Uni of Adelaide	Dissertation: No word length fixed but minimum 10,000 words. Compulsory research methods module. No exam The programme will be delivered completely online. Modules will be five-week blocks run consecutively, with pre-recorded lectures audio-streamed or sent via CD-Rom to participants. Evaluation will be based on participation in non-synchronous online discussions, written assignments, and a final examination at the end of each semester.	No fixed amount of supervision time	k.wolff@iop.kcl.ac.uk

Dental Public Health MSc DL.	King's	**Dissertation in year 3.** **Aims of the dissertation which is called Dental Public Health Research Project (Core Module)** This 60 credit module aims to enable students to investigate in great depth a topic within the field of dental public health and to write it up in a dissertation. By the end of the module, you should be able to design and undertake a research project, demonstrate an ability to critically review the literature and evaluate scientific data and research, reflect on their own academic work, write in a scientific manner and be familiar with use of information technology. Students will be encouraged to present their work at relevant scientific conferences.		distancedentistry@kcl.ac.uk
Dental & Maxillofacial Radiology MSc DL.	King's	**Programme format and assessment** In each year, you will need to attend a two or three week intensive course in London: Year four: individual date to meet your tutor to discuss your report. (research project). **Dental & Maxillofacial Radiology Research Project (Core Module)** *This 60 credit module aims to enable you to investigate in great depth a topic within the field of dental and maxillofacial radiology and to write it up in a dissertation. By the end of the module, you should be able to design and undertake a research project, demonstrate an ability to critically review the literature and evaluate scientific data and research, reflect on their own academic work, write in a scientific manner and be familiar with use of information technology. You will be encouraged to present your work at relevant scientific conferences.*		
Fixed & Removable Prosthodontics MClinDent DL,	King's	Report of 10,000 words. Year Four: You will complete the Clinical module and carry out an approved project relating to a topic within the broad field of Clinical Dentistry (Prosthodontics) and write a report of approximately 10,000 words.	For this you will have a personal tutor to provide advice and assistance.	
MA in War in the Modern World (e-learning)	King's	Dissertation of 15,000 words in year 3		

MSc Epidemiology 2 - 5 Years	LSHTM	Project report - 4 000 – 7 000 words. (After taking 10 modules). Prerequisite: EP202 Statistical methods in epidemiology [670E202] **Project report [670E500]** The project report may consist of either (a) the analysis of an existing data set, (b) a protocol for new study, or (c) a critical literature review. In each case an outline plan must be submitted to and be approved by the Course Organiser at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine not later than 30 November in the year preceding submission of the report. The outline plan should not be more than 500 words, and should comprise: Title, Aims, Background (including rationale for this project) and Methods. For (a) the Outline should include a plan of analysis, as an indication of any analysis already carried out on these data, and an appendix giving details of the data including important variables and their coding. Assessment: by one written report in the form of a scientific paper of 4,000 to 7,000 words (excluding references and no more than 10 figures /tables).	On-line support via Interactive CD-ROM materials	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
Clinical Trials MSc 2 – 5 Years	LSHTM	Three-hour unseen exam. Does not require a dissertation or research report. Has an integrating module which is compulsory, which includes 'a written report comprising original work by the student…. This may consist of a critique or conducting and commenting on further analyses based on the data provided. Assessment: by one two-hour unseen written paper and by a written Integrating report weighted on the scale 50:50.'	Supported by On-line Learning Environment (OLE)	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
MSc Infectious Disease 2 – 5 Years	LSHTM	Project report 10 000 words (optional) Compulsory research methods module RD1	Support from tutorial feedback and advice, student network and web-boards 16 hours supervision	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) Public Health: 4 possible streams: Public Health (general), Environment and Health, Health Promotion, Health Services Management (note there is a 5th research stream in the face to face version) 2 – 5 Years	LSHTM	Project report: 5,000 – 7,000 (note face to face is different) optional Core modules: 2 hour exams Advanced modules: 70: 30 2 hour exams : Coursework Project: written submission Compulsory research methods module including: Basic Statistics for Public Health & Policy and Principles of Social Research	Tutorial feedback; **student-to student network** (WebBoard), web-based discussion form (supervised by tutors) Students will be guided in their work by a Project Supervisor, who will offer advice and feedback on methods and content.	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
Royal Holloway MSc International Business 1 – 5 Years MBA/ MSc International Management 2 – 5 Years	Royal Holloway	Dissertation - 12 000-word report, excluding bibliographies, appendices and the project statement or summary. Prerequisite: Business research methods course designed as a step-by-step guide on how to write dissertation - based on many years of experience of helping students to successfully complete a research project. 'Unlike all other courses in the MSc, there is no examination, but the course is assessed through the submission of a 12,000 word dissertation.' The dissertation is an excellent opportunity to analyse a business or management issue in depth as an independent research project. The dissertation could be carried out in conjunction with a 'blue chip' business or you could use your experience and knowledge to study a topic of relevance to your own professional or national background. You will be assigned a supervisor who will be able to offer advice and suggestions about your chosen field of inquiry, your methods and analysis. The supervisor will also provide support and encouragement to assist you in completing this challenging and final component of the MSc course.	On-line tutorial and support from World Wide Learning Community (WWLC) Assigned an individual supervisor to help you when writing up your dissertation.	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358 Alexander.Reppel@rhul.ac.uk (international business) Hui.Tan@rhul.ac.uk International Management

70

MSc Information Security 2 – 4 Years	Royal Holloway	Dissertation and One two-hour unseen exam **Project** [6900011] The project is a major individual piece of work. It can be of academic nature and aim at acquiring and demonstrating understanding and the ability to reason about some specific area of Information Security. Alternatively, the project work may document the ability to deal with a practical aspect of Information Security. The Project will be assessed by one two-hour unseen written paper and by submission of a dissertation, weighted in the ratio 20:80. No word length but number of pages specified between 50 – 60.	Support from Virtual Learning Environment	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
Royal Veterinary College (RVC) MSc Livestock Health and Production 2 – 5 Years	RVC	The research project is an option. Not clear whether the research design option is a prerequisite for this. Unseen written exam.	On-line tutorial support	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
Royal Veterinary College MSc Veterinary Epidemiology and Public Health 2 – 5 Years	RVC	The research project is an option. 'Students registered on the MSc may choose to take an optional research project…. The objective of this course is to enable the students to conduct a research project and prepare a scientific paper for publication ina peer-reviewed journal. Students are given guidance and supervision from a distance in the following: deriving a suitable hypothesis to base the research project; writing a critical literature review; designing the appropriate study with experimental and statistical details; costing the project and conducting experiments; managing the project to obtain relevant data; documenting and analysis of results to achieve a conclusion; selecting an appropriate scientific journal to publish the findings; and preparing a paper for publication according to author guidelines of the selected journal. Pre-requisite: it is advisable that students should study 'Research design, management and grant application writing' (Course code 6670014) prior to registering for this course.	On-line tutorial support	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358

SOAS Poverty Reduction: Policy and Practice 2 – 5 Years	SOAS CEDEP	10 000-word written report Prerequisite – Research Methods (R106) - covers sampling, data collection methods, basic statistical tests, and procedures for qualitative data analysis. 10% for the proposal for report and 90% written report.	Support from tutors and CeDEP staff and the CeDEP's tailor-made Online Learning Environment (OLE). Blackboard No minimum / maximum set number of hours	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
Agribusiness for Development (MSc) 2 – 5 Years	SOAS CEDEP	10 000-word written report. Involves deskbased and/or field-based research. Assessed by submission of a research proposal (10%) and a 10,000 word written report (90% of final module mark). All research topics are subject to approval by the Teaching & Research Support Officer before supervisors are assigned. The research methods module is a prerequisite for the research report. **R106 Research methods** This module commences with a discussion of the nature and role of research and then seeks to provide a foundation of basic skills in research. The course covers sampling, data collection methods, basic statistical tests, and procedures for qualitative data analysis.	On-line tutorial support Support from Centre for Development, Environment and Policy (CeDEP) tailor-made Online Learning Environment (OLE).). – Blackboard No minimum / maximum set number of hours	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
MSc in Applied Environmental Economics 2 – 5 Years	SOAS CEDEP	10 000-word written report *RR01 Research report* The Research Report involves deskbased and/or field-based research. The report is assessed by submission of a research proposal (10%) and a 10,000 word written report (90% of final module mark). All research topics are subject to approval by the Teaching & Research Support Officer before supervisors are assigned.	On-line tutorial support Support from Centre for Development, Environment and Policy (CeDEP) tailor-made Online Learning Environment (OLE).). – Blackboard, No minimum / maximum set number of hours	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358

MSc in Biodiversity Conservation & Management
2 – 5 Years
	SOAS CEDEP	10 000-word written report
		    1.1 RR01 Research report
		The Research Report involves deskbased and/or field-based research. The report is assessed by submission of a research proposal (10%) and a 10,000 word written report (90% of final module mark). All research topics are subject to approval by the Teaching & Research Support Officer before supervisors are assigned.
		    1.2 R106 Research methods
			On-line tutorial support Support from Centre for Development, Environment and Policy (CeDEP) tailor-made Online Learning Environment (OLE).). – Blackboard,	Information Centre
				Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk
				Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398
				Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358

		This module commences with a discussion of the nature and role of research and then seeks to provide a foundation of basic skills in research. The course covers sampling, data collection methods, basic statistical tests, and procedures for qualitative data analysis. This module is a prerequisite for carrying out the research.	No minimum / maximum set number of hours	
MSc in Environmental Management 2 -5 Years	SOAS CEDEP	10 000-word written report **1.3 RR01 Research report** The Research Report involves deskbased and/or field-based research. The report is assessed by submission of a research proposal (10%) and a 10,000 word written report (90% of final module mark). All research topics are subject to approval by the Teaching & Research Support Officer before supervisors are assigned.	On-line tutorial support Support from Centre for Development, Environment and Policy (CeDEP) tailor-made Online Learning Environment (OLE).). – Blackboard, No minimum / maximum set number of hours	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
MSc Agricultural Economics 2 – 5 Years	SOAS CEDEP	10 000-word written report **1.4 RR01 Research report** The Research Report involves deskbased and/or field-based research. The report is assessed by submission of a research proposal (10%) and a 10,000 word written report (90% of final module mark). All research topics are subject to approval by the Teaching & Research Support Officer before supervisors are assigned.	On-line tutorial support Support from Centre for Development, Environment and Policy (CeDEP) tailor-made Online Learning Environment (OLE).). – Blackboard, No minimum / maximum set number of hours	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
MSc Managing Rural Development 2 – 5 Years	SOAS CEDEP	10 000-word report **1.5 RR01 Research report** The Research Report involves deskbased and/or field-based research. The report is assessed by submission of a research proposal (10%) and a 10,000 word written report (90% of final module mark). All research topics are subject to approval by the Teaching & Research Support Officer before supervisors are assigned. The Quantitaive Methods module may be chosen as a prerequisite for the research report.	On-line tutorial support Support from Centre for Development, Environment and Policy (CeDEP) tailor-made Online Learning Environment (OLE).). – Blackboard, No minimum / maximum set number of hours	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358

Sustainable Development MSc 2 – 5 Years	SOAS CEDEP	10 000-word written repor *1.6 RR01 Research report* The Research Report involves deskbased and/or field-based research. The report is assessed by submission of a research proposal (10%) and a 10,000 word written report (90% of final module mark). All research topics are subject to approval by the Teaching & Research Support Officer before supervisors are assigned.	Support from tutors and CeDEP staff and the CeDEP's tailor-made Online Learning Environment (OLE).). – Blackboard, No minimum / maximum set number of hours	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
Finance & Financial Law MSc 2 – 5 Years	SOAS CEFIMS	10 000-word dissertation – optional Prerequisite - Research Methods (C253) - provides students 'with a thorough understanding of the theoretical concepts, methodological approaches and reporting issues that underpin good quality research projects – involves planning, designing, executing and reporting research -provides students with the opportunity to develop quantitative and qualitative skills. 'Dissertation is a supervised piece of research on a topic that we will agree with you. Is should be 10000 words long. Before we can consider a proposal to submit a dissertation, we will need to review your academic performance so far.' Exam on research methods	Support provided by CeFiMS via the On-line Study Centre – Blackboard from Nov 2009 20 hours superivsion	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
Banking MBA 2 – 5 Years	SOAS CEFIMS	There does not seem to be a dissertation on this course. There are 6 modules, each of which is assessed by assignments and examinations.	Support provided by CeFiMS via the On-line Study Centre. – Blackboard	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
Public Policy and management	SOAS CEFIMS	**Research methods** [C253] The purpose of the course is to provide students with a thorough understanding of the theoretical concepts, methodological approaches and reporting issues that underpin good quality research projects. It is a prerequisite course for completing a dissertation. The course outlines the issues involved in planning, designing, executing and reporting research. In addition it provides students with the opportunity to develop quantitative and qualitative skills, depending on the dissertation topic and research interests. **Dissertation** [C209] The purpose of the dissertation is to enable students to develop and demonstrate their capacity to carry out a substantial piece of independent academic work on a selected topic. Students will be assessed on their capacity to define a topic for examination, to articulate a coherent scheme for examining this topic, to	Support provided by CeFiMS via the On-line Study Centre. – Blackboard 15 hours supervision	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358

		gather the necessary information, and to analyse and present this information in a way which satisfactorily assesses the topic which they have set themselves. **Please note:** you must successfully complete C208 'Public policy and management research: principles and practice' before proceeding to the dissertation. Exam on research methods		
SOAS MSc Finance 2 – 5 Years	SOAS CEFIMS	10 000-word dissertation – optional Prerequisite – Research Methods (C253) - provides students with a thorough understanding of the theoretical concepts, methodological approaches and reporting issues that underpin good quality research projects – involves planning, designing, executing and reporting research -provides students with the opportunity to develop quantitative and qualitative skills	Support provided by CeFiMS via the On-line Study Centre–Blackboard 15 hours supervision	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398 Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358
SOAS MSc International Management (China) 2 – 5 Years	SOAS CEFIMS	10 000-word dissertation – optional **Research methods** [C253] The purpose of the course is to provide students with a thorough understanding of the theoretical concepts, methodological approaches and reporting issues that underpin good quality research projects. It is a prerequisite course for completing a dissertation. The course outlines the issues involved in planning, designing, executing and reporting research. In addition it provides students with the opportunity to develop quantitative and qualitative skills, depending on the dissertation topic and research interests. **Dissertation** [C254] This course is linked to a dissertation and teaches methods for setting up and carrying out research. It covers the methodological basis for the final dissertation. This course is available only if students have obtained permission. The topic for the dissertation to be submitted by MSc students must be approved by the Programme Director and is expected to relate to both theory and policy issues. (NB: wordings are identical to the MSc Finance)	Support provided by CeFiMS via the On-line Study Centre–Blackboard 15 hours supervision	Information Centre Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk 24Tel: +44 (0)20 782562 8398 Fax: 26+44 (0)20 7862 8358

| MSc International Primary Health Care

3 – 5 Years | UCL | Dissertation
13 500 – 16 500 words (inc. references, excl. appendices). Also assessed by a 90 minute unseen written paper. 50% of final mark

Prerequisites: The academic study of primary care [6831IP02] and Research methods for primary care [6831IP03]

Nature and scope of research in primary health care. Ethical considerations. Qualitative research methods. Quantitative research methods. Critical appraisal and biostatistics. Questionnaire development. Principles of secondary research.

There are four different dissertation modules each worth 60 credits of 180 total: *Research Dissertation; Service Development Dissertation, Teaching and learning Dissertation, Systematic review dissertation*. | On-line tutorial

Support from VLE – Moodle

No specified number of hours supervision | Information Centre
Email: enquiries@lon.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8398
Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8358

Course leader: Trish Greenhalgh
p.greenhalgh@ucl.ac.uk

Contact for further details:
Jill Russell
jill.russell@ucl.ac.uk |

APPENDIX D
Interview questions

1. What is the purpose of the dissertation/report in your masters programme
2. How does it relate to the previous modules students have taken on the masters programme?
3. Do you view it as an essential part of the masters programme? Why?
4. Is it expected to involve an original research element? If so, what form is this expected to take (lab work or fieldwork overseas, desk study etc)?
5. What are the similarities and differences between the research carried out in the distance mode and the face to face mode?
6. How long do students have to complete the research element?
7. Do they have any compulsory research methods modules to complete prior to starting the research? If yes and if no, what is the rationale for that?
8. How much support are they entitled to and from what sources?
9. What forms and sources of support are there for:
   a. Choosing a topic
   b. Writing a proposal
   c. Planning the data collection instruments
   d. Carrying out the research
   e. Analysing the data
   f. Writing up the report/dissertation?
10. Who usually initiates contact: the supervisor or the student?
11. Who has the major responsibility for maintaining contact?
12. How often do students generally contact their supervisors?
13. What do you see as the supervisor's main responsibilities in their support role?
14. Is there a contract which both students and supervisors agree to, outlining the roles and responsibilities of both parties? Why/why not?
15. Do supervisors read just one draft or a series of drafts of sections/chapters? How is the time table for submitting draft chapters negotiated with the students?
16. In your experience what are the major areas students ask for help with?
17. Do supervisors offer advice on language problems? If so, what form does this usually take?
18. Do supervisors offer advice on plagiarism issues? What form does this usually take?
19. What do you see as the major difficulties faced by distance students in carrying out the research element of the masters programme.