1 Introduction

This document tells you how the projects will operate during summer 2012. Please read the full document now and then again near the completion of your project in order to make sure that your dissertation adheres to our standard requirements.

2 Supervision

This section identifies the responsibilities of your supervisor and yourself during the period of your dissertation.

Your dissertation counts for 60 credits. Hence, it is a serious piece of work and students must have a high degree of self-motivation.

Students should establish appropriate supervision arrangements with their supervisors at the start of the project. Contact your supervisor as soon as possible to arrange a first meeting when you can discuss a rough timetable. The frequency of the meetings should be dependent on the nature of the project and will be agreed with you subject to the supervisor’s discretion. The supervisor can also be accessible at other appropriate times for advice and for responding to difficulties raised by the student, subject again to the supervisor’s discretion. However, arrangements need to be fluid, as staff have many other things to do beside project supervision (including holidays). Temporary substitute supervision may sometimes be arranged. As a matter of courtesy to your supervisor you should always arrive on time for your arranged meetings. You should never fail to turn up at a meeting without good reason. If you have to cancel an appointment then you should endeavour to contact your supervisor in advance.

2.1 The responsibilities of your supervisor are to:

i) Discuss the project with you and, in particular, to make sure that in general terms the project is feasible within the time available.

ii) Indicate, at the beginning of the project period, if necessary, useful, relevant reading.
iii) Give guidance about: the nature of the project and the standard expected, the planning of the work required, relevant existing literature, sources and requisite research techniques.

iv) Maintain contact through regular meetings (the frequency of such meetings is subject to his/her discretion and should be agreed in advance).

v) Be accessible at other appropriate times, for example by email or during office hours, subject to discretion.

vi) Notify you when they will be absent from the School for more than a few days.

vii) Give advice on the necessary completion dates for successive stages of the work, so that you submit your dissertation by the required deadline.

viii) Where feasible and reasonable, make you aware when work or progress in your research is below standard. However, note that you are ultimately responsible for the standard of your dissertation.

ix) Establish at an early stage their responsibility in relation to your written work, including the nature of the guidance and comment they can offer. However, you must understand that you undertake this project within the principle that a dissertation must be your own work.

Note: dissertations must attain a good standard of English. It is not the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure this. It is your responsibility to ensure that spelling and grammar are free of errors.

2.2 Your responsibilities are to:

i) Take the initiative in raising problems or difficulties, bearing in mind that prompt discussion and resolution of problems can prevent difficulties and disagreements at a later stage.

ii) Maintain progress of your work in accordance with the stages agreed with your supervisor.

iii) Maintain written records of the progress of work and discussions with your supervisor in order to facilitate the writing of a dissertation.

iv) Remain in Manchester for the duration of your project work, except by prior agreement with your supervisor (which they give only in exceptional circumstances).

v) Recognize that your dissertation is an examined piece of work which will be marked by two examiners. In many ways, therefore, the
dissertation is just like any other examination that you undertake. It is you, and no one else, who must sit a conventional, written examination. Similarly, it is you alone who must write the examined dissertation.

Your supervisor gives help and advice on how to carry out the research. However, the supervisor has to strike a balance on the amount of help he/she can offer. If your supervisor gives too much help, the dissertation reflects (to an unacceptable extent) his/her work and abilities as well as your own. The purpose of the project is to examine your (not your supervisor's) abilities. As stated above, you must understand that you undertake this within the principle that a dissertation is your own work.

In other words, it is your sole responsibility to demonstrate that you can write a dissertation of satisfactory (Masters) standard. This is a responsibility that you cannot and should not share with any other person - be it another student, your supervisor, or anyone else.

3 Submission and notice of submission dates and timetable

Your submission deadline is Friday 7th September 2012.

You must submit your dissertation by the given deadline (Postgraduate Office, Room 2.236, Alan Turing Building) unless you have applied for, and been granted an extension for extenuating circumstances.

Extensions for dissertations are granted only if you have strong medical/mitigating circumstances. You must inform the postgraduate administrator and supervisor of your application for an extension as soon as you identify the problem. Please note that granting of extensions is not automatic. It depends on whether you establish sufficient grounds for mitigation and on whether this warrants an extension. We consider any request very carefully as extensions can generate extra work for the supervisors and administrators, whilst creating a snowball effect on the whole process and may severely delay your eligibility to graduate. Please note that any problems with your computer or loss of data do NOT constitute a mitigating circumstance and it is therefore your responsibility to back-up all of your work regularly onto an external disc/drive.

A student attempting to submit his/her Dissertation after the submission deadline without having been granted an extension may not have it accepted by the postgraduate office.
You should submit your dissertation in accordance with the information set out in the University’s “Guidance for the Presentation of Taught Masters Dissertations”. Please ensure you follow these guidelines carefully as your dissertation will not be accepted if it does not adhere to these instructions and hence the publication of your result could be delayed. As well as submitting two paper copies, you will also be required to upload a pdf version of your dissertation to Blackboard. Further details about the latter will be given to you nearer the time.

Warning: The text of your dissertation will be checked for unoriginal content by the University, using appropriate plagiarism detection software.

It is suggested that project work should be near completion by mid-August. This may vary depending on how much work is being written up as the project progresses. A first draft of the completed project should normally be ready by mid-August, but precise timing of this should be agreed with the supervisor. As a rule of thumb, you have about 11 weeks: four weeks to read around the subject and understand the data; four weeks to do a piece of work; and three weeks to pull the dissertation together. That does not mean that you should wait for two months before drafting anything!

4 Dissertation
This section contains some guidance on what may be expected of a satisfactory dissertation.

• The main text of the dissertation should be around 100 pages, based upon a 12-point font size and 1.5 line spacing (that is, the same font size and line spacing as in this paragraph) – regulations relating to the presentation of dissertation can be found in the university’s booklet “Guidance for the Presentation of Taught Master’s Dissertations”. As a general rule the inclusion of computer code is not encouraged unless it is central to the aim of the project. If there is any doubt over any of these requirements then please consult your supervisor.

• Past experience suggests that the best dissertations are written up as the project progresses. This allows supervisors to comment, which can lead to improvements. Also many students don’t seem to realise just how time-consuming writing up can be! Past experience also suggests that taking too much time off does not lead to good dissertations. We suggest you take your longest holiday break in September after submission.
• Past experience also suggests that poor dissertations can often be the result of:
  - a poor record of attendance at supervisions,
  - writing the dissertation at the last minute, particularly where the supervisor has not even seen a first draft.

• Dissertations must contain:
  - a cover page which gives the title of the project, the name of the student, the name of the student’s department/school and the year of submission;
  - an abstract;
  - a detailed list of contents at the start;
  - an introduction to the project and the dissertation;
  - proper structure in the main body of the text including section numbering;
  - conclusions;
  - a full and detailed list of references (bibliography);
  - acknowledgement of all persons who have contributed to the development of the project.

Failure to comply with this structure may mean that, instead of being awarded a pass, a candidate is asked to resubmit the project after revision. This will result in a delay in the award of the MSc until July the following year.

• Dissertations must use consistent mathematical notation throughout.

• Some questions that the examiners will be asking are:
  - Does the introduction say clearly what the dissertation is about?
  - How well has the student explained the area of work and summarized the relevant literature?
  - Does the dissertation show evidence of learning beyond the material of the taught courses and options?
  - If the dissertation is mainly a survey, is it complete and up to date, and has the student shown clearly, by summarizing and comparing the literature in their own words, that they have mastered the subject?
  - If the dissertation involves numerical work, is it described clearly enough for someone else to reproduce the calculations, if required, and do the conclusions demonstrate that the student understands what he or she has done?
  - Does the dissertation have a logical structure?
  - Are books and journal articles adequately referenced? – note that a complete bibliography is important for a good dissertation and should not be ignored
Where the results of numerical and other work are being discussed is this just a statement of what the results are or does the text contain real interpretation of the results. For example, does the text explain why the results are as they are?

- It is not necessary, and in fact would be quite uncommon, for a dissertation to contain truly original work that would be classified as research. What matters is that it shows the student's own understanding of the chosen subject (not the supervisor's!).

- Remember, it is your work that is being examined and not the supervisor's. In particular, the supervisor is not there to proof-read your drafts or to teach you to write in English.

- Style and layout are up to the student, subject to the constraints on structure detailed above. However, it is a good idea to look through a few journal articles and note the elements of good style. Remember, the examiners are researchers which means that they are, to a large extent, professional authors and will not appreciate having to navigate a badly laid-out or sloppily-written dissertation.

- The final version of the dissertation should be free of typing and spelling mistakes. Modern word processing packages can check spelling and identify poor grammar. Examiners may tolerate, at their discretion, a small number of errors. However, a large number of spelling mistakes and errors in grammar may be cited by examiners as a reason for stating that the dissertation had been judged as not reaching Masters standard.

- The thesis should contain all the necessary diagrams, formulae, tables, charts and bibliography. These items must be clearly presented with appropriate identifying information (titles, equation numbers, labels etc). Sources of data must be given in full detail.

- References should be entered in an appropriate format (see below for examples). Candidates must check to make sure that no references are missing from the bibliography. As with spelling/typing mistakes and poor use of English grammar, omission of references can cause the award of the degree to be deferred.

There are different acceptable referencing styles. Professional journals and scholarly books provide examples of different acceptable styles. The following is recommended.

References to publications in the text or footnotes, other than to newspapers, magazines, or popular periodicals, should be as follows:
‘Smith (1992) reports that …”, “Chan et al. (1995) content analyse …”, “(see Fama and French, 1994)’.  

Note that “et al.” can be used where there are more than two authors and you are referring to the article for a second or further time. Note also that if the passage that contains the citation is already in parenthesis, we normally omit the parenthesis around the year of the reference. Finally, when you are referring to a very specific point in an article that is incidental to its main contribution, or when you include a quotation from an article, you should give the specific page reference to where this can be found in the original article. For example, “… Beaver (1996, p. 45) refers to …”. You should not list references separately in footnotes. If the footnote itself includes text that contains a reference, you then follow the same procedures as in the main text.

You must make sure that all references appearing in your main text (and footnotes) are listed in the list of references at the end of the main text. The reference list must be in alphabetical order of the first author’s surname. Examples of types of references are as follows:

**For books or monographs:**

Author(s)  
Year (in brackets)  
Title (underlined)  
Edition (in brackets)  
City of publication  
Publisher

Example:  

**For contributions to collective works:**


**For periodicals:**

Author(s)  
Year (in brackets)  
Title (between apostrophes)  
Journal name (underlined)  
Volume number, issue number  
Page numbers

Example:  

**For references on the web:**


Where the reference list contains more than one source from the same author(s) for the same year they should be distinguished by 2000a, 2000b, etc.

**References to newspapers, magazines, and popular periodicals:**
These should not appear in the reference list, but should be referred to in the text or footnotes as follows, ‘The *Financial Times* (20 June 2001) reported that …’, ‘Observers also criticized the extent of Gent’s control over Vodafone (*Economist*, May 2000).’

5 Plagiarism

It is quite unacceptable to copy text from another source (be it a book, paper or another MSc project) without clear and regular references in the text to the source material. **Students are expected, when reviewing relevant material, to structure their presentation and explanations in their own unified way, written in their own words rather than copied and pasted with a couple of words changed here and there. Appropriate references must also be given.** Where it is absolutely essential to quote directly from another text, the copied material should be “*written in italics and enclosed in quotation marks*”. If you have any doubts about this then you must seek the advice of your supervisor.

Plagiarism is a serious offence and students found to have committed it will be penalized. See also Appendix 1, page 45 of the School of Mathematics Postgraduate Taught Programmes Handbook.

**Warning:** The text of your dissertation will be checked for unoriginal content by the University, using appropriate plagiarism detection software.