THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
School of Biological Sciences

MSc Research Project/Dissertation Guidelines

Your dissertation should conform to the guidelines set out below. Please read through these carefully before writing your dissertation.

Early in the preparation of the dissertation you should consult your supervisor, as their advice will be invaluable in ensuring the best way of presenting your data.

Drafts

Your supervisor is allowed to discuss the dissertation and provide limited advice on the presentation and content of ONE DRAFT ONLY. The supervisor may point out any fundamental flaws in the approach and the methods of data analysis but will not be expected to provide guidance on multiple drafts. You should meet with your supervisor to discuss your draft dissertation at the latest by the start of August.

Word limit

Your research dissertation should be around 10-12,000 words. There is an absolute maximum of 15,000 words. This includes everything but your figure legends, appendices and references. In your writing, try to be concise while explaining your thoughts clearly. A target of 10,000 words should allow you space to explore your findings and ideas about the work you have done over the summer.

The main body of the dissertation should be maximum 50 pages, including figures. You may use appendices to add data or code, but these may not be read so do not include additional analysis here.

Format

All dissertations should be word processed, clearly legible and look professional.
Font
Arial should be used throughout, and a minimum font size of 12pt should be used for main body text.

Layout and margins
Line spacing should be at least set to 1.5 lines apart and one line space should be left between paragraphs. Quotations and notes should be in single spacing. The text should be aligned to the left.

Margins should be set as:
4 cm binding margin (left side);   2 cm head margin (top)
2.5 cm fore-edge margin (right side);   4 cm tail margin (bottom)

Page numbers
Page numbers should be continuous throughout, located in the same place on each page.

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Diagrams, figures and tables

Diagrams and figures must be numbered and wherever possible should be placed near to the appropriate text. They must have clear explanatory legends so that they can be interpreted without reference to text elsewhere.

Tables should be given a number and a title and placed near the relevant text. Adjustments should be made to make full use of the available space and wide tables may be inserted landscape.

Content

Your dissertation should include the following sections (if relevant to the project: some projects will have greater focus on different sections, there is no specific word limit for each section of the main content). Note that in Academic year 2019-20 project work has been seriously interrupted by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Specific measures to account for the interruption may be announced later. For now, be assured that we have modified the guidance for examiners to reflect the current situation, and we realise that some dissertations will contain a severely restricted (or possibly no) methodology and results section.

- **Title page:** An example can be found below.

- **Abstract/summary** (maximum 500 words or 1 page).

- **Introduction:** Background to the project work, previous work carried out in the area, exposition of relevant literature, setting of the work in the proper analytic context.

- **Methodology:** Should be an adequate description of the methods used with sufficient detail to allow someone skilled in the field to replicate the procedure. It should include any developments to methods made in light of the quality of results they produced.

- **Results:** Should describe the outputs of each procedure. We should give marks for i) clarity of description and ii) quality, appropriateness of figures and tables used.

- **Discussion:** This presents the chance for the student to advance ideas about the work they have done. Naturally there will be a thematic overlap between this and the introduction. Students may also advance more complex ideas about what the work means in the context of the literature and illustrate an understanding of how realistic these might be. In short, the discussion allows them to show they understand what the project means (even if the final data do not definitively prove their hypothesis).

- **Conclusion:** A short conclusion section may or may not be appropriate.

- **Bibliography and references:** See information below.

MSc Research Project/Dissertation Guidelines

- **Acknowledgements (optional):** If you choose to add them, these should be brief, no more than one page, and avoid anything that could identify you to markers.

Research Project Proposal:

*Relevant only to students who submitted a research project proposal *

Students should refer to the Taught Assessment Regulations regulation 30 (Academic Misconduct) regarding using material from their proposal in their dissertation (https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/taughtassessmentregulations.pdf).

Whilst the research proposal and the research dissertation may sometimes be expected to have similar content, the dissertation must be an entirely new piece of work. You cannot submit the same material from your proposal to be assessed again in your project. This is considered to be plagiarism of your own work and will certainly be picked up by Turnitin.

If there is a figure or table from your proposal you feel is imperative to include within your dissertation, then you must formally acknowledge that and apply appropriate referencing.

Bibliography and referencing

You should reference your work correctly to acknowledge works you have read and used to support your arguments. These should be journals or specific technical resources. You should not use resources such as Wikipedia.

There are various referencing styles and you should choose one and use it consistently throughout. Information on the commonly used Harvard reference system can be found at http://www.docs.is.ed.ac.uk/docs/Libraries/PDF/SEcitingreferencesHarvard.pdf. References should be cited in the text. There are many available automatic referencing systems that link with common word processing packages, and we recommend you use one of these.

The bibliography is an ordered list (usually ordered alphabetically by first author) of all sources (e.g. books, journal articles, newspapers) that you quote in, or consult for, your assignment/essay. It is advisable to record bibliographical details as you take your notes, this will save you backtracking later to find them.

MSc Research Project/Dissertation Guidelines

Submission Procedure

Online submission

You must submit an electronic version via the University's plagiarism detection software 'Turnitin', which can be located on Research Project Learn page in the *Assessment* folder.

Prior to submitting your assignment online, you must **convert your assignment into a PDF** (Portable Document Format), for the most secure method of submitting your work. The electronic versions will be sent to our External Examiner for review and therefore <u>must</u> be submitted in this format.

Further information on the University's guidelines on plagiarism can be found in your programme handbook.

Deadline

The dissertation is due by **4pm on Friday, 14th August 2020**. Late submission will be subject to the usual penalties, as detailed on the PGT Student Intranet: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/BioSciPGT/Late+coursework .
Earlier submission is permissible and encouraged, do not leave it until the last minute.

MSc Research Project/Dissertation Guidelines

Marking Scheme

The table below conforms to the University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Common Marking Scheme and will be used to determine the mark awarded.

Grade	Mark	Description
A1	90-100	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
A2	80-89	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
A3	70-79	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
B	60-69	A very good performance
C	50-59	A good performance, satisfactory for a masters degree
D	40-49	A satisfactory performance for the diploma and certificate, but inadequate for a masters degree
E	30-39	Marginal fail
F	20-29	Clear fail
G	10-19	Bad fail
H	0-9	Bad fail

A dissertation presented as a part of the assessment for a taught postgraduate master's degree may be judged satisfactory, as presented and without alteration, for the award of the degree despite containing small deficiencies and editorial imperfections.

Any candidate who fails to reach the standard required for the award of MSc but who satisfies the requirements for the award of a postgraduate diploma may, on the recommendation of the examiners be awarded the postgraduate diploma.

Dissertations or project work must not include work submitted for any other degree or professional qualification unless (i) a clear statement is made as to the precise extent of the work so included, and (ii) the inclusion is approved by the project supervisor.

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School of Biological Sciences

Dissertation Title

Student Exam Number: …………………

In partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Science in *(please enter degree title)* at the University of Edinburgh
2019 / 2020

Name of Dissertation Supervisor: ………………………………………..