

Module A15: Business Research Methods

Stage	1						
Semester	1 and 2						
Module Title	Business Research Methods						
Module Number/Reference	A15 – BRM I&II						
Module Status (Mandatory/Elective)	Mandatory						
Module ECTS credit	5						
Module NFQ level (only if applicable)	9						
Pre-requisite Module Titles	N/A						
Co-requisite Module Titles	N/A						
Is this a capstone module? (Yes or No)	No						
List of Module Teaching Personnel	Justin Keogan / Aine McManus						
Contact Hours				Non-contact Hours			Total Effort (Hours)
Lecture	Practical	Tutorial	Seminar	Assignment	Placement	Independent work	
18		18		40		24	100
Allocation of Marks (Within the Module)							
	Continuous Assessment	Project	Practical	Final Examination	Total is always 100%		
Percentage contribution	100%				100%		

Intended Module Learning Outcomes

On completion of this module learners will:

Part 1: BRMI

1. Have a dissertation topic with developed research questions that will guide and focus the research process;
2. Have identified some of the relevant literature and critically reviewed the most pertinent for their proposal and have a conceptual framework in development;
3. Interpret and describe quantitative data in a manner that addresses business and research problems;

Part 2: BRMII

4. Generate and evaluate an appropriate research design and methods for data collection and analysis which are consistent with their research philosophy/paradigm and the requirements of the question;
5. Identify appropriate quantitative methods of data collection and analysis for business related research problems selecting the appropriate data types, statistical measures, and methods of display using the relevant formula and computer software;
6. Identify appropriate qualitative methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation for business related research problems ensuring a high level of trustworthiness in the data process from generation to discussion of findings;
7. Critique the findings of their own research and appreciate its value in terms of its contributions, limitations and position within the overall research in the field;
8. Present their work in a professional manner, communicating results clearly and confidently.

Module Aims & Objectives

This module initiates the preparation of learners for their Masters dissertation. It reviews business research in general and facilitates dissertation topic selection by the learner and guides their drafting of a preliminary critical literature review and the development of a conceptual framework. The will be further developed and proofed against the demands of an appropriate research design in the iterative process of proposal development. A significant element of the module is devoted to research design issues to ensure that learners understand the significance of the process of research and its implications for how trustworthy the findings from the research can be considered. This component of the course covers research paradigms, research strategies, and quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The importance of illustrating the process in reporting and presenting the research concludes the course.

The aims for BRM are to ensure

Part 1: BRMI

1. That learners develop an understanding of the nature, purpose and value of business and commercial research;
2. That learners are able to conduct a critical literature review using best practice in developing a critical approach;
3. That learners understand the different perspectives and approaches to business research;
4. Learners develop an in-depth knowledge of quantitative research methods and understand how these can be usefully employed in carrying out a research dissertation as well as their application in the wider business context.

Part 2: BRMII

5. Learners develop knowledge of qualitative research methods and understand how these can be usefully employed in carrying out a research dissertation;
6. Learners can make a strong argument and defend their work in a professional manner;
7. Learners are equipped with a well-developed research proposal which will direct their dissertation research.

Module Curriculum

Part 1: BRM I

Week	Topic	Details
1 & 2	Introduction and Topic Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of business research methods and the research process • Overview of the module • Expectations and assessment • Process (research question and hypothesis) • Inspiration for topics • Criteria for research topics for the dissertation
3, 4 & 5	Literature review and Critical review of literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of Literature Review • Identify quality sources • Recording what you have read • Structure of literature review • Developing a critical approach to literature as a reader and as a writer • Review of techniques to developing a critical approach
6	Topic Clinic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic Clinics: Learners will have the opportunity to get oral feedback on a one-to-one basis on their chosen topic

7	Research Design	<p>Introduction to the following (more detail in Part II);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Approaches and Design • Research paradigms and philosophy • Research methodology • Positivism • Phenomenology • Research methodologies • Cross sectional studies • Survey approach • Case studies • Action research • Participative enquiry • Value based perspectives • Methodological pluralism • Triangulation • Link of research paradigms to research methods
8,9	Introduction to Quantitative Methods of Data Analysis Methods of data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of quantitative data analysis • Quantitative methods in business • The application of quantitative methods in research • Brief overview of research design • Brief overview of data collection methods with an emphasis on quantitative methods • Sampling
10,11	Generating statistics and Software applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probability • Inference • Hypothesis testing • Modelling relationships • Correlations • Multiple regression • Time series and forecasting • Distribution • Location • Variation • Models for finance and accounting • Statistics and software applications • Using Excel
12	Interpreting statistics & Presentation of quantitative data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring and examining data • Describing large and small data sets • Confidence levels • Reliability and validity • Generalisability • Presenting and displaying data - tables, graphs, charts

Part 2: BRM II

Week	Topic	Details
1, 2 &3	Research Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Approaches and Design • Research paradigms and philosophy • Research methodology • Positivism • Phenomenology • Research methodologies • Cross sectional studies • Survey approach • Case studies • Action research • Participative enquiry • Value based perspectives • Methodological pluralism • Triangulation • Link of research paradigms to research methods
4, 5 &6	Methods of Qualitative Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major issues in data collection • Methods of data collection • Qualitative methods • Questionnaire • Observation • Interviews • Archival / documentary • Panels • Secondary data • Recording data and storage • Assessing the focus and logic of your data collection
7, 8	Methods of Qualitative Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major issues in data analysis • Trustworthiness • Methods of qualitative analysis • Content analysis • Coding • General analytical procedure • Template analysis • Influence of grounded theory • Repertory grid technique • Cognitive mapping • Data displays • Quasi-judicial method
9	Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure and format of proposal • Planning and timetabling research
10	Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics and access • Making basic ethical provisions • Human participants / organisations • Guidelines, policies and procedures

11	Findings and Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretation • Findings and synthesis • Developing conclusions
12	Presentation of dissertation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of findings • Writing up • Process • Focus and logic of the dissertation • Structure and template • Presentation and formatting • Viva • Preparation • What to bring • Presentation • Questions • When answering questions

Reading lists

Core Reference Materials

Collis, J. and Hussey, R., 2003. *Business Research*. 2nd Ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Denzin, N. K. And Lincoln, Y. S. (eds), 1994. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Fisher, C. 2007. *Researching and Writing a Dissertation for Business Learners*, 2nd Ed. London: FT Prentice Hall.

Miles, M.B. And Huberman, A. M., 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhil, A., 2009. *Research Methods for Business Learners*, 3rd Ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Wallace, M. And Wray, A., 2006. *Critical Readings and Writing for Postgraduates*. London: Sage.

Waters, D. 2007. *Quantitative Methods for Business*. London: Financial Times/Prentice Hall.

Zikmund, W. G., 2003. *Business Research Methods*, 7th Ed. Mason (OH): Thomson-Southern Western.

BRM I & II Reading List

Topic	Readings
Introduction	Russell, B., 1998. The Problems of Philosophy. 2nd Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. - 1st chapter - Appearance and Reality Saunders et al – Chapter 1 Fisher – Chapter 0 – Introduction – P.1-12
Topic Selection	Saunders et al – Chapter 2 Fisher – p29-39 Zikmund – Chapter 6 – Problem Definition and the Research Proposal
Literature Review and conceptual framework	Wallace and Wray – Chapters 11 and 12 Saunders et al – Chapter 3 Fisher – p77-116 Fisher – Chapter 3 – Concepts, conceptual framework and theories
Research fundamentals	Collis and Hussey - Chapter 3 – Dealing with conceptual issues Zikmund – Chapter 3 – Theory Building
Methodology	Collis and Hussey - Chapter 3 – Dealing with conceptual issues Saunders et al – Chapter 4 – Deciding on the research approach and choosing a research strategy
Methods of Data Collection	Fisher – Chapter 4 Collis and Hussey - Chapter 7 – Quantitative Data Saunders et al – Chapter 6 – Selecting Samples Saunders et al – Chapter 7 – Using Secondary Data Saunders et al – Chapter 8 – Collecting data through observation Saunders et al – Chapter 9 –Collecting primary data using semi-structured and in-depth interviews Saunders et al – Chapter 10 – Collecting primary data using questionnaires Saunders et al – Chapter 11 – Analysing quantitative data Zikmund – Chapter 10 - Survey Research Zikmund – Chapter 13 – Measurement and Scaling Concepts Zikmund – Chapter 14 – Attitude Measurement Zikmund – Chapter 15 – Questionnaire Design Zikmund – Chapter 16 – Sample Design and Sample Procedures Zikmund – Chapter 18 – Fieldwork Zikmund – Chapter 19 – Editing and Coding (quantitative)
Methods of Data Analysis	Collis and Hussey - Chapter 8 – Qualitative Data Saunders et al – Chapter 12 – Analysing qualitative data
Ethics	Saunders et al – Chapter 5 – Negotiating access and research ethics Zikmund – Chapter 5 – Ethical Issues in Business Research
Findings and Synthesis	Fisher – Chapter 5 – Interpreting the research material
Write up & Viva Voce	Fisher – Chapter 6 – Framing articles and writing up Saunders et al – Chapter 13 – Writing and presenting your research

Module Learning Environment and Teaching Strategy

This module is delivered through a series of seminar type lectures with an emphasis on extensive feedback for topic selection and guidance on literature selection and exercise-based tutorials / workshops for the quantitative component of the course. Extensive discussion of examples is used to assist learners in the design of their own research illustrating the reasoning behind the selection of the various options in each research design. Case studies of research, in some cases delivered by those who have successfully completed substantial pieces of research, are used as a basis for discussion and as a starting point for work on the learners' own dissertations. In order to obtain maximum benefit from the module and to prepare the learners effectively, learners are encouraged to develop their proposal throughout the semester in order to make a constructive contribution in the lectures and to develop and justify their ideas without a "deadline" rush towards the end of the semester. In addition to the lectures, there are extensive support materials available on Moodle.

Module Assessment Strategy

Assessment for BRM is centred on the completion of a research proposal that is used to guide and inform the dissertation. There is a strong emphasis put on the idea that there should be no "break" between the work the learner does in BRM, ending in the proposal, and in the work they do for the dissertation, starting with the proposal. As the proposal is an end of semester assessment with no exam, there is a considerable effort made to ensure learners understand the importance of class participation informed by the incremental development of their proposal. Quality class participation is essential and the guiding rule for assessing quality is the potential of the learner themselves and other learners to learn and develop from such participation. There is a small component of the marks reserved for in-class tests related to quantitative methods of collection analysis.

Constructive Alignment of Assessment

In designing the assessment for the module, a conscious effort is made to ensure that each of the intended learning outcomes is assessed in the proposal. The following table of grading criteria for the proposal provides an indication of how the intended learning outcomes for the module are aligned with the assessment criteria used to assess the proposal. The full grade descriptors for the assessment criteria are detailed in the Sample of Marking Criteria further below. It should be recognised that, strictly speaking and consistent with the overall aim of the module, some of the intended learning outcomes are assessed to a fuller extent at the dissertation stage. This would apply in particular to the interpretation of data.

Intended Learning Outcome	Grading Criteria for Proposal
1. Have a dissertation topic with developed research questions that will guide and focus the research process;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity in the topic of research, focus on a research objective and justification for the purpose of the research. Applies a coherent and consistent approach to all aspects of the research proposal; linking RQs to literature, to CF, to methodology, to data collection and analysis and to how the analysis will be used to address the research question.
2. Have identified some of the relevant literature and critically reviewed the most pertinent for their proposal and have a conceptual framework in development;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts a critical literature review of pertinent sources, identifying the gaps and debates in the literature and embedding the RQs in the literature. Has started to develop a reasoned conceptual framework that will assist in linking the literature to the research design. • Used the template provided, completes a detailed critical analysis of a text within the context of their research proposal. • The relevance and quality of the sources identified to the research proposal.
4. Generate and evaluate an appropriate research design and methods for data collection and analysis which are consistent with their research philosophy/paradigm and the requirements of the question;	Outlines a research strategy consistent with their outlined research methodology, including details of, and justifications for, the type of information needed to address their research question, the sources of the data, how they will collect the data needed, how they will analyse the data and present the analysis.
5. Identify appropriate quantitative methods of data collection and analysis for business related research problems selecting the appropriate data types, statistical measures, and methods of display using the relevant formula and computer software;	[It is not possible or indeed appropriate to assess some of the intended learning objectives at this stage as it would require the research to be complete.]
3. Interpret and describe quantitative data in a manner that addresses business and research problems;	
6. Identify appropriate qualitative methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation for business related research problems ensuring a high level of trustworthiness in the data process from generation to discussion of findings;	
7. Critique the findings of their own research and appreciate its value in terms of its	

<p>contributions, limitations and position within the overall research in the field;</p>	
<p>8. Present their work in a professional manner, communicating results clearly and confidently.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the presentation of their research proposal and the practicality of the timeline.

Sample of Marking Criteria for BRM Proposal

Criteria Descriptor	Clarity in the topic of research, focus on a research objective and justification for the purpose of the research. Applies a coherent and consistent approach to all aspects of the research proposal; linking RQs to literature, to CF, to methodology, to data collection and analysis and to how the analysis will be used to address the research question.	Conducts a critical literature review of pertinent sources, identifying the gaps and debates in the literature and embedding the RQs in the literature	Focusing on one text significant to the proposal, completes the critical analysis of a text template within the context of their research proposal	Outlines a research strategy consistent with their outlined research methodology, including details of, and justifications for, the type of information needed to address their research question, the sources of the data, how they will collect the data needed, how they will analyse the data and present the analysis. The quality of the presentation of their research proposal and the practicality of the timeline.	The relevance and quality of the sources identified to the research proposal.
A (80-100)	Great clarity in the selected topic and research objective. The research objective is extraordinarily clear and researchable. The justification for the topic choice, relevance and significance is extremely sound. The nature of the problem/issue is exceptionally well focused and explained. Outstanding coherence and consistency in the approach to the research objective. Exceptionally clear link between RQs, literature, CF, methodology, data collection and analysis.	The piece is extensively referenced throughout and demonstrates evidence of extensive reading of top quality sources. Literature review is very pertinent, very focussed, contemporary and consistent with the research topic. Identifies core of relevant theoretical base. Major theoretical contributions are critically evaluated at an advanced level. Research topic, questions,	Excellent critical analysis. Has an advanced understanding of the critical review process. Supports conclusions of each question with reason. Indicates that a well-developed critical literature will result.	Exceptional awareness of different research methodologies and the interrelationship with research strategies. Very high level of consistency and appropriateness between methodology and methods of data collection and analysis. Demonstrates an exceptionally high level of understanding of the need for a robust approach to the research process; clearly articulates what is to be done	Exceptionally choice of relevant, top quality sources for the research. All from peer reviewed sources. Absolutely central to the focus of the research.

		extremely well embedded in this literature review.		Outstanding justification of the methods of data collection and analysis to be applied. Limitations of research methods, bias and ethical issues well recognized and acknowledged.	
B+ (70-79)	Very clear in the selection of a researchable topic. The research objective is very clear and focused which will make implementing the research proposal easier. The justification for the topic choice, relevance and significance is very sound. The nature of the problem/issue is very well focused and explained. Very coherent and consistent in the approach to the research objective. Great clarity in the link between RQs, literature, CF, methodology, data collection and analysis.	The piece is very well referenced throughout and demonstrates evidence of widespread reading of good quality sources. Literature review is pertinent, well focussed, contemporary and consistent with the research topic. Identifies relevant theoretical base. Major theoretical contributions are critically evaluated. Research topic, questions, objectives are very well embedded in this literature review.	Very good critical analysis. Has demonstrated a fairly high level of understanding of the critical review process. Supports answers well and should write a well-developed literature.	Especially high level awareness of different research methodologies and the interrelationship with research strategies. Considerably high level of consistency and appropriateness between methodology and methods of data collection and analysis. Demonstrates a high level of understanding of the need for a robust approach to the research process; clearly articulates what is to be done and why. Well-grounded justification of the methods of data collection and analysis to be applied. Limitations of research methods, bias and ethical issues are recognized and acknowledged.	Very good choice of relevant, worthy sources for the research. Mostly peer reviewed. Of major importance to the focus of the research.

B (60-69)	<p>Good clear selection of a researchable topic. The research objective is quite clear and will assist considerably in the implementation of the research. The choice, relevance and significance of research topic is relatively well justified. The nature of the problem/issue is quite well focused and explained. Considerably coherent and consistent in the approach to the research objective. Significant clarity in the link between RQs, literature, CF, methodology, data collection and analysis.</p>	<p>The piece is well referenced throughout and demonstrates evidence of fairly wide reading of good quality sources. Literature review is quite applicable, well focussed, contemporary and consistent with the research topic. Identifies relevant theoretical base. Major theoretical contributions are critically evaluated to a good degree. Research topic, questions, objectives are well embedded in the literature review.</p>	<p>Reasonably good critical analysis. Has demonstrated a good understanding of the critical review process. Supports answers reasonably well. If they deepen their understanding of how to critique literature, they could write a well-developed literature.</p>	<p>High level awareness of different research methodologies and the interrelationship with research strategies. Good level of consistency between, and appropriateness of, methodology and methods of data collection and analysis. Demonstrates a good level of understanding of the need for a robust approach to the research process; fairly clearly articulates what is to be done and why. The methods of data collection and analysis to be applied are well fairly justified. Limitations of research methods, bias and ethical issues are recognized and acknowledged.</p>	<p>Good choice of relevant, quality sources. Mainly peer reviewed. Of considerable importance to the focus of the research.</p>
C+ (55-59)	<p>The research topic and research objective is clear but is in need of some development to assist in the implementation of the proposal. The research topic choice and relevance is quite well justified but needs further development when the research starts. The nature of the problem/issue is explained but needs</p>	<p>The piece is fairly well referenced throughout and demonstrates evidence of a broad reading of the literature. Literature review is largely relevant and applicable, fairly contemporary and largely consistent with the research</p>	<p>Reasonable critical analysis. Critical aspect was less developed than required. Could have provided better support for their answers. May not understand some of the questions and therefore need to review the relevant material in</p>	<p>Aware of different research methodologies and the interrelationship with research strategies. Considerable consistency between, and reasonable appropriateness of, methodology and methods of data collection and analysis.</p>	<p>Reasonable choice of mainly relevant, fairly good quality sources. Many peer reviewed. Of importance to the focus of the research but could have chosen a little more selectively.</p>

	<p>Reasonable coherence and consistency in the approach to the research objective. Relatively clear link between RQs, literature, CF, methodology, data collection and analysis.</p>	<p>quality of the literature consulted needs to be improved. Some of the relevant theoretical base has been identified but needs development. Major theoretical contributions are evaluated but a greater emphasis on critical evaluation is needed. The research topic, questions, objectives are well embedded in the literature review.</p>	<p>reasonable literature review.</p>	<p>sufficient understanding of the need for a robust approach to the research process, articulating what is to be done and why. Sufficient justification of the methods of data collection and analysis to be applied. Needs to deepen understanding of limitations and issues of bias in research design.</p>	
C (50-54)	<p>The research topic and research objective is apparent but is in need of relatively significant development to assist in the implementation of the proposal. The justification of the research topic choice and relevance needs further development. The nature of the problem/issue is needs to be elaborated upon. Coherence and consistency in the approach to the research objective is somewhat apparent but needs to be developed to ensure the research is implemented well. The link between RQs, literature, CF, methodology, data collection and analysis needs much</p>	<p>While there are a passable number of references, a number of them are not relevant or their review is not very clear. There is considerable scope to deepen the extent of the literature covered. The quality of the literature reviewed needs to be substantially improved. The consistency of the literature with the research topic needs to be strengthened. The quality of the evaluation need to be improved. The extent to which the research</p>	<p>Adequate review of the text. Needs to develop their critical approach. While they may have supported their answers, this support may not have been altogether appropriate. Appears to have misunderstood some of the questions and instructions.</p>	<p>Some awareness of different research methodologies and the interrelationship with research strategies. Consistency between methodology and methods of data collection and analysis needs improvement. The appropriateness of the methods of data collection and analysis is questionable. The approach to the research process is needs some improvement. The justification for the methods of data collection and analysis to be applied needs</p>	<p>Some of the sources are of relevance but the relevance and quality of many of the sources needs to be improved. Needs to select more from peer reviewed sources. May have suffered due to lack of focus in the research question or objective.</p>

	before the learner considers embarking on the research.	questions, and objectives are embedded in the literature review needs to be strengthened.		and may need to be revised to maintain consistency. Limitations of research methods and bias needs to be recognized and provided for.	
D (45-49)	The research topic and objective is either not apparent and/or not amenable to research in this case. This topic would need to be substantially redeveloped in order for it to be researchable. The justification for the research topic choice and relevance needs to be completely revised. The nature of the problem/issue is quite poor and needs to be developed significantly. There is a lack of coherence and consistency in the approach to the research objective. The link between RQs, literature, CF, methodology, data collection and analysis is vague and uncertain. Needs to be overhauled almost completely before research can be undertaken.	The number and quality of references are poor. Many are not relevant to the research topic and objective. The evidence is of quite a weak review of poor quality literature. There is little consistency between the literature and the research topic. The literature is hardly evaluated at all.	Basic review but not a critical analysis of the text. Does not conform to the more advanced instructions. Doesn't appear to understand a number of the questions. Support for answers is basic and undeveloped.	Poor awareness, leaning towards a lack of awareness, of different research methodologies and the interrelationship with research strategies. Inconsistency between methodology and methods of data collection and analysis. Considerable questions hang over the appropriateness of research design. Poor understanding of the need for a robust approach to the research process; needs to develop, at a minimum, what is to be done and why. Poor justification of the methods of data collection and analysis to be applied. Needs to understand and provide for limitations of research methods and biases.	Poor selection of sources. Many are from questionable sources. Lack of relevance to the research objective.
F (0-44)	The topic and objective are unclear and/or unresearchable. The topic selection is unacceptable in its present state and is unresearchable in this case. The	There is little evidence of a review of any relevant literature. The number and quality of references are very poor. There appears little	Doesn't conform to instructions. Review lacks any critique. Many of the answers are inappropriate demonstrating that the question is not	Inadequate awareness and understanding of different research methodologies and research strategies. No consistency between	Very poor selection of sources. Many are from very questionable sources and are not particularly relevant. What is presented

	<p>choice and relevance is unjustified. The nature of the problem/issue is either absent or very poor. Total lack of coherence and consistency in the approach to the research objective. There is no discernible link between RQs, literature, CF, methodology, data collection and analysis.</p>	<p>attempt beyond paraphrasing a list of articles and websites reflecting very poor quality literature. There is little if any evaluation.</p>	<p>Doesn't support answers with reasons or reasons are inappropriate. May have chosen an inappropriate text.</p>	<p>methods of data collection and analysis. Completely inappropriate data collection and analysis methods to achieve research objective. Almost complete ignorance of the research process. Little and/or very poor justification of the methods of data collection and analysis to be applied.</p>	<p>going to help progress the research.</p>
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