

# The Thesis-Project Proposal

A Quality Assurance Issue?

# The Proposed Research Title

- This should clearly reflect what the research will be about. It should be focused and succinct. It may also be used to reflect the methodology within the thesis, as in the following example:
- *‘Programme Management and role of the Course Director: a **case study** in professional development’.*
- Providing alternative titles is advised.

# The Rationale

- Sets out the purpose of the study
- Provides reasons for doing it
- Gives a context explaining origins and development of topic to date
- Identifies gaps in current research
- Provides personal/professional reasons

# Aim(s)

- The Aim of the study should be aligned to Rationale
- It should be clear and focused
- It is important to distinguish between Aim and Research Questions
- Obviously, however, these are complementary.

# Research Questions Are Next

- These should be unambiguous and feasible
- How? What? When? And Why?
- They may change (but this is acceptable):
  - As reading deepens
  - As data is analysed
- Supervisor and supervisee work in tandem: this is crucial in the longer-term

# Background and Literature

- Advocate an Annotated Bibliography: Why?
- Questions that might guide this are:
  - What insights did the source provide?
  - How might they be applied?
  - Is the source theoretical or practice-based?
  - How might it be built on?

# Methodology

- Which category is the methodology within?
- Alternatives: what are they?
- Which are chosen and why?
- How will data be collected?
- How will it be analysed?
- What ethical issues arise?
- How will they be dealt with?

# Dissemination

- Dissemination:
- How?
- Where?
- Why?



# Timescale

- Extremely important for good management purposes
- It needs to be attainable
- It needs to be agreed
- It should be manageable
- It should keep in mind institutional dates and requirements

# Reviewing Literature

Research Supervision

# Problems

- Disorganised content
- Descriptive reviewing
- An absence of criteria to minimise the above
- Inconsistent referencing
- Plagiarism

# Solutions

- Organise into themes
- Compare and contrast
- Draw criteria up/apply it:
  - How sound?
  - How valid?
  - How relevant?
  - How influential?
- Being consistent
- Giving credit where it is due

# Causes:

- Uncertainty: what is that (a Lit. Review)?
- Lack of confidence: should I/can I really do that?
- Lack of training: few opportunities to do that
- Lack of guidance: wish I'd known that
- Unrealistic assumptions: you should know that by now
- Undervaluing importance of a good review: is it really necessary to do all that?

# What will help?

- Defining what a Literature Review is
- Explaining the Purposes of a Review
- Clarifying types of sources
- Providing guidance on critiquing
- Giving opportunities for practice
- Providing feedback: early diagnosis

# Definition

- A Literature review involves reporting, analysing synthesising and evaluating seminal and other significant findings, insights and arguments pertaining to a substantive research area. In evaluating sources, one seeks to compare and contrast findings and perspectives and to apply these to one's own research.

# Purposes of a Review

- Show evidence of comprehensive reading
- Establish significance of sources used
- Identify gaps in knowledge
- Establish knowledge contribution/originality
- Show progression in development of topic in terms of findings, insights, conclusions
- This contains a comparative perspective for analysis purposes

# Originality

- What is it?
- Why can it be problematic?
- What would help with this?
  - Consult class handout



## Writing a Literature Critique: questions researchers MUST ask

- Is it clear what the study is about?
- Is its context explained?
- Are purpose, relevance and target audience clear?
- Is literature thematically treated?
- Has it helped to clarify, make connections?
- Is methodology clear, justified, appropriate?
- Is it possible to extract meaning and relevance for own work?

# Furthermore:

- Are:

biases declared

valid conclusions reached

claims supported/substantiated

appropriate/feasible

recommendations made?

And is the source written in a user-friendly manner?

# What will help students to do this?

We could provide:

- Contrasting examples of written research (effective/less effective)
- Opportunities to discuss them
- Critical friendship/learning sets
- Online examples of completed projects/online discussions (synchronous/asynchronous)
- Online and other sources on reviewing literature
- Feedback on drafts, or parts thereof
- Self-assessment criteria and follow-up

# Self-assessment criteria for a Literature Review

Guideline examples: Have you:

- Explained how literature was found and where?
- Clarified purpose of review?
- Identified themes and shown how they were identified?
- Integrated sources?
- Analysed sources for soundness of methodology/coherence of argument?
- Explained influence on your thinking?
- Evaluated relevance (of theory, principles, concepts used)
- Focused only on key/relevant sources?

# And...

- Used all seminal works associated with topic
- Referenced your work consistently?
- Edited content?
- Incorporated previous tutor comments?
- Could this be shown if asked for?
- How have you done this?

# Weaknesses Encountered

## in Thesis Writing

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# Introductory Chapter

- **In the Introduction:**

- Limited, or absent, explication of the purpose of the study
- Failure to state clearly or with conviction the overall research aim
- No mention of originality or contribution to knowledge
- No or little mention of self, professional context, or professional relevance of research
- Unclear, if any, signposting of origins or context
- No structural overview
- Limited highlighting of coherence between/across chapters

# In the Main Body

- Unclear links between sections and chapters
- An uncritical literature review and methodology
- Theoretical, conceptual perspectives only superficially dealt with
- Theory to practice application limited
- Co-relation between research aim and adopted methodology not shown
- Methodology not justified, or only superficially so
- Sampling not explained in detail; alternatives are not discussed effectively
- Piloting carried out but not well reported Outcomes and implications



# Other Weaknesses

- Knowledge contribution not established in the analysis of
  - own findings
  - integration of these with other findings
- Choice of data analysis methods not explained;
- Details on processes/procedures left to speculation
- Subjectivity, objectivity, validity, reliability are either unmentioned or only briefly mentioned
- Absence of triangulation
- Testable hypotheses not used

# More General Issues

- Researching an unfeasible topic
- Not cross-referencing literature and the findings
- Unclear presentation of findings
- Losing sight of the research aims and objectives
- Unedited content
- Not reaching logical conclusions
- No, or unfeasible, recommendations
- Not stating limitations of the research as carried out
- Inconsistent referencing
- Incomplete bibliography