



Assessment of Dissertations

Policy and Procedure

Document Overview

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Version History

Version No.	Date	Description of Changes
V2	01/07/2025	Document amended due to company re-branding

Continuous Improvement

Policies, procedures and processes are meant to be 'living' documents that need to be followed, implemented and maintained. If the procedure does not reflect the current, correct work practice please contact us on

quality@knights.edu.mt

1. Assessment of Dissertations Policy and Procedure

1.1 Scope and Applicability

This policy applies to all undergraduate (MQF Level 6), postgraduate (MQF Level 7), and doctoral (MQF Level 8) students enrolled in programmes at the Knights (KNIGHTS) that require the submission of a dissertation or project-based dissertation as part of the programme's assessment. The policy covers the entire dissertation process, including the submission of the research proposal, supervision, ethical considerations, submission, assessment, and the viva voce (oral examination).

The policy is intended for students, supervisors, internal and external examiners, and other academic staff involved in the dissertation process. It ensures that assessment procedures align with KNIGHTS academic standards, the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) guidelines and other external awarding bodies, supporting both students and academic staff throughout the dissertation journey. This policy also supports KNIGHTS's commitment to upholding ethical research standards and fostering academic integrity.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear and comprehensive guidelines for the assessment of dissertations submitted as part of MQF Levels 6, 7, and 8 qualifications at KNIGHTS. It ensures that the dissertation process is conducted with fairness, consistency, academic rigour, and in compliance with KNIGHTS's Programme and Academic Regulations, Code of Academic Integrity, Research Ethics and other associated policies.

The policy also aims to support students in producing high-quality academic work, providing clear expectations for dissertation structure, supervision, and assessment. By setting out standardised procedures, the policy ensures that all dissertations meet the required academic and professional standards, and that both students and academic staff have a structured framework within which to operate.

1.3 Guiding Principles

This policy is guided by the following principles:

- **Academic Integrity:** Dissertations must adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty and originality. Plagiarism, collusion, and any other forms of academic misconduct are strictly prohibited, with sanctions outlined in KNIGHTS's academic regulations.
- **Student-Centred Learning:** The dissertation process is designed to promote independent research, critical analysis, and academic growth. Supervisors are expected to guide students while encouraging autonomy, especially at MQF Levels 7 and 8, where the ability to conduct independent research is a key outcome.
- **Fair and Transparent Assessment:** Dissertation assessment will be conducted in a fair, impartial, and consistent manner. Clear grading criteria will be provided, and external examiners will be used where necessary to ensure objectivity, particularly at MQF Level 8. Viva voce examinations will be held to assess the depth of knowledge at postgraduate and doctoral levels.
- **Ethical Research:** All dissertations must comply with ethical standards as defined by KNIGHTS, MFHEA and other awarding bodies (where applicable). Research involving human participants, sensitive data, or other ethical concerns must receive approval from the KNIGHTS Academic Affairs Committee before commencement.
- **Continuous Improvement:** The dissertation assessment process is subject to periodic review and updates to ensure alignment with evolving academic standards and stakeholder feedback. KNIGHTS is committed to continuous improvement, adapting its procedures to meet both student needs and external accreditation requirements.

2. Definitions

Dissertation:	A substantial piece of academic writing, typically based on original research, that is submitted as part of the requirements for undergraduate (MQF Level 6), postgraduate (MQF Level 7), or doctoral (MQF Level 8) programmes.
Research Proposal:	A document outlining the intended research project, including its aims, objectives, methodology, and significance, which is submitted for approval before the commencement of the dissertation.
Viva Voce:	An oral examination where the candidate defends their dissertation in front of a panel, typically involving internal and external examiners, and sometimes required for the final approval of the dissertation, particularly at MQF Level 8.
Internal Examiner: <i>(First and Second Marker)</i>	A faculty member or academic staff member of KNIGHTS responsible for evaluating the student's dissertation based on established grading criteria.
External Examiner:	An independent examiner, typically from another institution, who reviews the dissertation to ensure objectivity, particularly in cases of discrepancies between internal examiners or for high-level qualifications such as MQF Level 8.
Academic Affairs Committee (AAC):	The governing body at KNIGHTS responsible for overseeing academic policies, including dissertation approval, ethical review, and appeals related to the dissertation process.

Plagiarism Detection
Software:

A tool used to identify potential instances of plagiarism by comparing submitted work against a database of academic sources, internet content, and other student submissions.

Ethical Approval:

The process of ensuring that all research conducted by students complies with ethical standards, especially when involving human participants or sensitive data, overseen by the Academic Affairs Committee.

Dissertation Meetings Log:

A document used to record and track meetings between the student and their dissertation supervisor, detailing the topics discussed, decisions made, and progress on the dissertation.

Supervision:

The guidance provided by an appointed academic supervisor throughout the dissertation process, including advice on research methodology, structure, and academic standards.

Appeal:

A formal request made by a student to review and potentially revise their final dissertation grade, in accordance with the KNIGHTS Grievances and Appeals Policy.

3. Dissertation Process

This section provides a clear outline of the process and key milestones in the dissertation process, ensuring both students and staff understand the expectations at each stage. This policy must be read in conjunction with the Dissertation Guidelines (MQF 6 & 7) and the Dissertation Guidelines (MQF 8) which are currently in development.

3.1 Research Proposal

- a) The research methods module is typically held during the final year of the study programme. As part of the Research Methods module, students are required to submit a Research Proposal via the learning management system by the stipulated deadline.
- b) The research proposal is reviewed by the tutor and Internal Verifier (where applicable), and if necessary, revisions may be requested.

3.2 Ethical Approval

- a) All research at KNIGHTS shall be conducted ethically and responsibly in line with KNIGHTS's **Code of Academic Integrity** and **Research Ethics Policy and Procedure**.
- b) Once the research proposal is approved by the tutor, an Ethical Approval Form must be submitted via the LMS for verification and approval by the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC).
- c) The Academic Affairs Committee will issue formal approval or provide feedback for revisions if approval is declined. Research may only begin after official confirmation from the Committee, via an official Ethics approval letter.

3.3 Supervision

- a) Following approval of the research proposal, KNIGHTS will allocate a suitable dissertation supervisor based on the student's chosen research area.
- b) Dissertation supervisors are typically assigned six to nine months before the submission deadline.
- c) Students may request a specific supervisor from within or external to KNIGHTS.
- d) For external supervisors, students must submit an External Supervisor Request Form with the required documentation (contact details, CV, proof of highest qualification, and relevant work experience).
 - KNIGHTS will review the request and, if the individual meets the institution's requirements, onboard them as a supervisor.
 - KNIGHTS retains the final decision in the selection of dissertation supervisors.
- e) Once a dissertation supervisor is confirmed, the student is required to make the first contact with the supervisor and schedule an initial meeting. During the meeting, communication protocols and a working system should be established.
- f) All communication with the supervisor must take place via their KNIGHTS email.
- g) Students are responsible for completing the Dissertation Meetings Log for each meeting, documenting the discussion and outcomes.
- h) The log must be signed by the supervisor and submitted with the final dissertation as evidence of supervisory meetings.
- i) The dissertation supervisor is required to provide feedback to KNIGHTS on the student's progress and performance every eight weeks during the supervisory period. Interaction between tutor and supervisor and student is documented via the LMS.

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Specific details regarding the dissertation supervision process can be found in the respective guides:

- Dissertation Guidelines

3.4 Dissertation Format and Submission

3.4.1 Structure and Format

Key components of a dissertation typically include the following:

- Title Page
- Authenticity Declaration
- Abstract
- Dedication
- Acknowledgements
- Table of Contents
- List of Tables and Figures (if applicable)
- Glossary/List of Abbreviations (if applicable)
- Chapters
- References
- Bibliography
- Appendices

Detailed information regarding the structure, format and word count can be found in the respective guides;

- Dissertation Guidelines

3.4.2 Plagiarism and Integrity Checks

All submissions must go through plagiarism detection software, with appropriate actions taken for any breaches of academic integrity. Refer to the following associated policies:

- Recognising and Avoiding Plagiarism
- Code of Academic Integrity
- Academic and Programme Regulations
- Research Ethics

3.4.3 Submission of Dissertation

Upon submission of the dissertation, the supervisor must provide feedback on both the dissertation and the student's performance to the KNIGHTS Academic Affairs Committee. For programmes validated by Coventry University, feedback will also be submitted to Coventry University faculty and thereafter discussed during the examinations board meeting that is set by the Coventry link tutor.

3.5 Dissertation Assessment

3.5.1 Process

- a) The Dissertation/Project-Based Dissertation is assessed and graded by the Dissertation Supervisor using the KNIGHTS's Dissertation Assessment Rubric. Refer to **Dissertation guidelines** for grading criteria a level specific dissertation grading rubric.
- b) Once grading is completed, the Internal Examiner submits final grade and feedback via the LMS
- c) The graded dissertation is then forwarded by the Academic Affairs team to a second examiner for grading.
- d) In cases where there is a significant discrepancy between the first and second marker both parties will be required to meet with the Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee, or their designate, to resolve the issue.
- e) If the discrepancy remains unresolved, an external examiner will be appointed to conduct a blind review of the dissertation.
- f) The Academic Affairs Committee reserves the right to hold a Viva Voce with any student, especially in cases where a student is between a pass and a failure or if there is suspicion of collusion or academic dishonesty. The Viva Voce is an interview where all those involved in the dissertation process will be present along with the Academic Affairs Committee. Refer to our **Recognising and Avoiding Plagiarism Policy and Procedure**.
- g) For KNIGHTS qualifications validated by Coventry University, the Academic Affairs Committee, the dissertation supervisor and Coventry link tutor must attend the Coventry University Examinations board to approve the final grade.
- h) Results may only be published to the students once approved by the Coventry University Examinations board.
- i) If the student deems that the grade assigned is that an inaccurate representation of the work, an appeal can be submitted by completing the Appeal Request Form. For further guidance, refer to the **Grievances and Appeals Policy and Procedure**.

4. Responsibilities

Responsibility to the Community

Researchers at KNIGHTS, including faculty, staff, and students, are expected to uphold high standards in their work, ensuring accuracy and honesty in the presentation, interpretation, and discussion of their research findings. Any actions that may mislead or distort research outcomes are to be avoided and may be subject to disciplinary action as highlighted in the associated policies listed below.

Students must adhere to ethical guidelines to prevent their research from being discredited, as this can harm the integrity of the broader research community. Examples of misconduct that could damage the credibility of research include:

- Misrepresenting or falsifying data or findings.
- Conducting research where there is a perceived conflict of interest.
- Demonstrating inadequate competence in research methodology.
- Exaggerating findings at the expense of academic integrity.
- Criticising other researchers in an unprofessional manner.
- Using another researcher's work without their permission.
- Engaging in research with dishonest or unlawful objectives.

Refer to the following associated policies:

- Recognising and Avoiding Plagiarism
- Code of Academic Integrity
- Academic and Programme Regulations
- Research Ethics
- Malpractice & Maladministration

The Student:

Students play an active role in the dissertation process and are expected to fulfil the following responsibilities to ensure successful completion:

- a) Prepare and submit a research proposal by the stipulated deadline, following the required format and guidelines.
- b) Ensure research adheres to ethical standards and secure approval from the Academic Affairs Committee before starting the data collection process.
- c) Initiate contact with the supervisor and maintain regular communication via KNIGHTS email, scheduling meetings as needed.
- d) Document all meetings with the supervisor in the Dissertation Meetings Log and submit it with the final dissertation.
- e) Meet all submission deadlines, including those for proposals, drafts, and the final dissertation.
- f) Submit the dissertation through plagiarism detection software and ensure all work follows academic integrity standards.
- g) Revise the dissertation based on feedback from the supervisor and examiners in a timely manner.
- h) If applicable, prepare to defend the dissertation in the viva voce examination.
- i) Liaise with the Admissions and Student Affairs team if the student feels the appointed supervisor is not providing the appropriate support.

Dissertation Supervisors:

Dissertation supervisors are responsible for guiding students through the research and dissertation process, ensuring academic integrity and quality. Their key responsibilities include:

- a) Offer clear guidance on the structure, expectations, and standards required for the dissertation from the outset.
- b) Advise students on research planning, methodology, and timelines to ensure successful completion by the submission deadline.
- c) Schedule and participate in regular supervision meetings, ensuring open communication throughout the process.
- d) To give students support via email and/or the LMS during the duration of supervision up to the assigned submission date.
- e) To undertake 10 supervision sessions of 30 minutes or equivalent.
- f) To reply to any emails/messages sent by the student within 48 hours maximum.
- g) Review drafts and provide timely, constructive feedback on the student's work to support improvement and academic growth by completing the dissertation meetings log on the LMS.
- h) Submit progress reports to KNIGHTS every eight weeks, documenting the student's performance and adherence to the research plan.
- i) Review and sign the Dissertation Meetings Log after each meeting, ensuring that both the student and supervisor maintain a record of discussions and progress.
- j) Guide students in maintaining ethical standards throughout their research, including compliance with KNIGHTS's ethical approval process.
- k) Upon dissertation submission, provide feedback on both the student's performance and the dissertation to the KNIGHTS Academic Affairs Committee.
- l) Where required, assist students in preparing for the viva voce examination and provide feedback to the examination board.
- m) Liaising with the Academic Affairs team if the process is not followed by the student.

Academic Affairs Team:

The Academic Affairs Team plays a crucial role in overseeing the dissertation process, ensuring compliance with academic standards and supporting both students and supervisors. Their key responsibilities include:

- a) Address significant discrepancies between the supervisor's and examiner's assessments, involving external examiners if necessary.
- b) Coordinate viva voce examinations, ensuring the proper involvement of internal and external examiners where applicable.
- c) Oversee the review of dissertation grades submitted by supervisors and examiners, and ensure the final results meet academic requirements before approval.
- d) Manage and document any submitted appeals in accordance with the **Grievances and Appeals Policy**.
- e) Periodically review dissertation processes and procedures to ensure alignment with evolving academic standards and stakeholder feedback.
- f) Ensure that all dissertations meet KNIGHTS's ethical research standards and address any ethical concerns raised during the research process.

Internal Examiners:

Internal Examiners are responsible for ensuring that dissertations meet KNIGHTS's academic

standards. Their key responsibilities include:

- a) Assess the dissertation based on the established grading rubric and criteria, ensuring a fair and objective evaluation.
- b) Offer detailed, constructive feedback to students on the strengths and weaknesses of their dissertation.
- c) Submit the final grade and feedback through the Learning Management System (LMS) in a timely manner.
- d) Collaborate with the Academic Affairs Committee to resolve any grading discrepancies with the External Examiner or supervisor.
- e) For dissertations requiring a viva voce, participate as part of the examination panel to ensure the student's understanding and defence of their research.

External Examiners:

External Examiners play a critical role in ensuring the objectivity and quality of dissertation assessments. Their key responsibilities include:

- a) In cases where there is a significant grading discrepancy between the supervisor and second marker, conduct an independent, unbiased and objective review of the dissertation, using the grading rubric to ensure alignment with KNIGHTS and external academic standards.
- b) Where applicable, serve as a member of the viva voce panel to provide an impartial perspective during the oral defence.
- c) Provide a final report with recommendations on the student's performance, highlighting any issues or areas for improvement, and submit grades for approval by the Academic Affairs Committee.
- d) Help ensure that the overall assessment process meets both internal and external academic standards, contributing to fairness and transparency.

Academic Affairs Committee:

The Academic Affairs Committee is responsible for maintaining academic integrity and ensuring fairness in the dissertation process. Their key responsibilities include:

- a) Evaluate and approve research proposals, ensuring alignment with KNIGHTS academic standards and ethical guidelines.
- b) Review and approve Ethical Approval Forms submitted by students, ensuring compliance with ethical research standards before research begins and issue ethics approval letters.
- c) Mediate and resolve discrepancies between examiners and supervisors, particularly in cases of significant differences in grading.
- d) Oversee viva voce examinations, ensuring they are conducted fairly.
- e) Review and endorse final dissertation grades before they are communicated to the student, ensuring that all academic standards are met.
- f) Review and make decisions on student appeals related to dissertation grades, in line with the Grievances and Appeals Policy.
- g) Assist in preparing for external audits or reviews by ensuring that all internal processes and records meet external regulatory requirements and standards.
- h) Identify areas for improvement in the dissertation process and recommend updates to policies and procedures to maintain quality and compliance with academic standards.
- i) Periodically review and update dissertation policies and procedures to ensure alignment with academic regulations and stakeholder needs.

Director of Quality and Compliance:

The Director of Quality and Compliance ensures that the dissertation process aligns with KNIGHTS's policies and standards through internal audits and monitoring. Key responsibilities include:

- a) Perform annual internal audits to verify that all dissertation procedures, from proposal submission to final assessment, are being implemented as outlined in the policy.
- b) Provide detailed reports on the outcomes of audits to the Academic Affairs Committee, highlighting areas of good practice and any issues requiring attention.
- c) Assist in preparing for external audits or reviews by ensuring that all internal processes and records meet external regulatory requirements and standards.
- d) Co-ordinate sampling and monitor the dissertation process for KNIGHTS approved learning centres.

5. Associated Policies

- KNIGHTS Code of Ethics
- Data Privacy and Information Management Policy
- Code of Academic Integrity
- Research Ethics Policy
- Programme and Academic Regulations
- Recognising and Avoiding Plagiarism Policy and Procedure
- Grievances and Appeals Policy

Dissertation Guidelines