



21 Academy

Master's Level 7 Dissertation Guidelines

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1. Introduction

1.1. Content and important notice

These guidelines set out the policies, procedures and academic requirements for the preparation, submission and assessment of Master's (Level 7) dissertations at 21 Academy. The guidelines are authoritative and binding on all students registered for Master's programmes that include a dissertation component. Students shall ensure that they read and understand these guidelines, and shall refer to the official academic calendar for precise deadlines and milestones (refer to Section 2).

The dissertation is an independent piece of scholarly work based exclusively on secondary data sources. Students are expressly prohibited from collecting primary data (e.g., interviews, surveys, observations) unless an exceptional written approval has been granted in advance by the Academic Quality Office. These guidelines are written in formal, prescriptive language appropriate to a university policy handbook; however, the Academy recognises that many students are non-native English speakers and has therefore presented requirements in clear and accessible English.

2. Important Dates

All deadlines in these guidelines are placeholders. Students must consult the official academic calendar and programme timetable for specific dates. Key milestones include: submission of the preliminary proposal, submission of the final research proposal, ethics confirmation (secondary data only), submission of draft chapters (where required), submission of the final dissertation, and any required hardcopy submission.

2.1. Consequences for failing to adhere to the rules and procedures

Failure to comply with the rules, processes or deadlines set out by 21 Academy may result in academic penalties, administrative sanctions, or disqualification from the assessment process. Where a student believes they have valid grounds for a deviation from these procedures, they must submit an application in accordance with Section 7.

2.1.2. Failure to submit the Research Proposal

Students who fail to submit the research proposal by the deadline specified in the academic calendar shall be deemed ineligible to proceed with data analysis and may be required to re-sit the research module or withdraw from the dissertation component. Exceptional cases may be considered under the extensions or extenuating circumstances procedures (Section 7).

2.1.3. Failure to submit the Research Ethics Approval Request

Although the dissertation is based on secondary data, the Academy requires completion of a Research Ethics Approval Form confirming the absence of primary data collection. Failure to submit this form by the stated deadline may result in delay to formal approval to commence work and may prevent assessment until the requirement is satisfied.

2.1.4. Failure to submit the final dissertation for assessment by the dissertation deadline

Failure to submit the final dissertation by the official deadline shall normally result in a mark of Fail (or No Submission) unless an approved extension or other mitigating arrangement has been granted in accordance with Section 7.

2.1.6. Failure to submit the hardcopy

If the programme specifies submission of a hardcopy (bound) version, failure to provide the hardcopy by the stated deadline may result in the submission being considered incomplete and may delay assessment. Where a hardcopy is required, students are responsible for adhering to the Academy's binding and presentation standards.

3. Dissertation Process

3.1. General Information

The dissertation provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of subject knowledge, independent critical thinking, and the ability to undertake scholarly analysis based on secondary data. Students shall present a coherent argument, demonstrate familiarity with relevant theory and literature, and apply appropriate methods for analysing secondary data.

3.1.1. Data sources

Acceptable secondary data sources include: peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books and book chapters, government publications, open datasets (publicly available), archived datasets, industry reports, and reputable statistical databases. Use of non-academic sources is permitted only where justified and critically appraised. All sources must be reliably referenced.

3.1.2. Previously published / assessed material

Students must not resubmit work that has previously been assessed for a different module or at another institution. Where a student wishes to develop prior coursework into a dissertation, explicit permission must be obtained in writing from the Academic Quality Office; any approved reuse must be clearly acknowledged and the student must demonstrate substantial additional independent work.

3.1.3. Criteria for the examination of the dissertation

The dissertation will be examined against the Academy's Rubric (see Section 10 and the Dissertation Rubric in Section 8). Examiners shall evaluate the quality of the research question, literature review, methodology, analysis, argument, originality, critical reflection, presentation, and referencing.

3.2. Selecting a Research Topic

Topics should be feasible for study using secondary data within the timeframe of the dissertation module. Students shall select topics that are academically grounded and aligned with programme learning outcomes. Proposed topics shall be sufficiently focused to permit in-depth analysis.

3.3. Your Dissertation Supervisor (made available by 21 Academy)

Student shall be allocated a named dissertation supervisor by the Academy. The supervisor's responsibilities include advising on topic refinement, providing feedback on drafts, and ensuring the student adheres to the Academy's academic standards. Supervisors may act as a member of the assessment board for the student's final dissertation. The frequency and mode of supervisory meetings shall be set in advance and communicated to the students after the first dissertation meeting with the supervisor.

3.4. Final Research Proposal

The Final Research Proposal shall be submitted using the Academy's prescribed form and shall include the following sections. The proposal is a formal document that must be approved prior to substantive work on the dissertation proceeding.

Section – Personal Details

This section must include complete and accurate information identifying the student and their supervisory arrangements. The details must include the student's full name, student number,

study programme's title, and official contact details (email and phone number). The name and email address of the assigned dissertation supervisor must also be recorded.

These details ensure that all submitted documentation can be formally logged and verified, and that communication between the student, supervisor, and the 21 Academy administration is properly maintained.

Students are responsible for ensuring that their contact details remain current and accurate throughout the dissertation process.

Section - Proposed Title

Students must propose a clear, concise, and informative working title that accurately reflects the central theme, focus, and scope of their intended research. The title should identify the key variables or concepts under investigation and, where appropriate, indicate the context or case study area.

The proposed title may be refined or modified during the course of supervision, subject to the approval of the dissertation supervisor, to ensure continued alignment with the research objectives, literature, and data availability.

Section – Summary

This section should consist of a short abstract of approximately 250–300 words that summarises the main components of the proposed study. It should outline the research aims, the academic and practical significance of the topic, the primary theoretical orientation, and the intended methodological approach.

The summary must be written in clear academic language that conveys the research purpose to a general scholarly audience and should demonstrate how the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the topic through secondary data analysis.

Section – Research Question/s

This section must clearly identify the main research question(s) and/or research objectives that guide the dissertation. Questions should be specific, focused, and feasible, capable of being addressed entirely through secondary data within the timeframe of the dissertation.

Where relevant, students may also include sub-questions that break down the main research problem into manageable analytical components.

All questions should be framed to show how they link directly to existing literature and how the study's findings will add value to the academic field or professional practice.

Section – Literature Review

This section must provide a structured summary and critical evaluation of the most relevant literature related to the research topic. Students are expected to demonstrate a strong understanding of key theories, frameworks, and empirical findings, identifying both consensus and debate within the field.

The review should logically lead to the identification of a research gap—that is, an area where current knowledge is limited, contested, or underexplored—and explain how the proposed dissertation will address this gap.

All literature should be cited and referenced in accordance with the Harvard referencing style, and, as far as possible, should draw upon recent academic sources published within the last ten (10) years unless older, seminal works are essential and approved by the supervisor.

Section – Proposed Methodology

This section must clearly describe the methodological approach that will be used to address the research questions through the analysis of secondary data.

Students should specify the data sources (for example, published datasets, academic databases, government reports, or prior empirical studies), explain why these sources are appropriate, and outline the analytical techniques to be applied—such as systematic literature review, meta-analysis, content analysis, or secondary statistical analysis.

The rationale for choosing each method should be explained in relation to the research question(s) and theoretical framework. Students should also note any limitations or constraints inherent to secondary data and how these will be managed or mitigated.

Section – Ethical Considerations

This section must explicitly confirm that the dissertation is based solely on secondary data and therefore does not involve direct data collection from human participants.

Students must demonstrate awareness of ethical research practice, including:

- Respect for intellectual property and copyright in using published data;
- Proper attribution and citation of all materials;
- Protection of sensitive or proprietary data, where applicable; and
- Anonymisation of data if re-using previously collected datasets that contain identifiers.

A short statement should affirm that the project complies fully with the 21 Academy Research Ethics Policy and that the research supervisor has approved the ethical approach.

Section – Limitations

This section should present an honest and thoughtful reflection on the anticipated limitations of the research design and data sources. Students must acknowledge any constraints—such as limited data availability, potential bias within existing sources, or methodological restrictions—and discuss how these limitations will be addressed, mitigated, or acknowledged in the analysis.

Recognising limitations demonstrates academic integrity and critical awareness, and strengthens the overall credibility of the research.

Section – Project Timeline

Students must prepare a comprehensive Gantt-style timetable that outlines all key stages of the dissertation process, including:

- Refinement of the research proposal
- Completion of the literature review
- Data collection and analysis (of secondary sources)
- Drafting of chapters and submission of drafts to the supervisor
- Final submission of the dissertation

The timeline should include estimated start and completion dates for each milestone, ideally aligned with the official academic calendar and submission deadlines.

Students are expected to adhere to their timeline and maintain regular progress updates with their supervisor.

Section – Suggested Bibliography

This section should include a preliminary list of key sources that demonstrate the student's awareness of the main academic debates, theories, and evidence related to the proposed topic.

A minimum of twenty (20) academic references is recommended at this stage. These should include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and reputable scholarly reports relevant to the chosen area of study.

As far as possible, sources should be limited to those published within the last ten (10) years from the year of the expected dissertation submission, in order to ensure that the research is grounded in current and credible scholarship.

Where the use of older sources (beyond ten years) is necessary — for instance, to reference seminal works or key theoretical foundations — such references must be explicitly justified and approved by the dissertation supervisor.

All sources must be formatted in accordance with the Harvard referencing style, and the list should be presented in alphabetical order by author surname.

3.5. Research Ethics Approval

Even where only secondary data are used, the student must complete the Research Ethics Approval Form to confirm compliance with ethical and legal requirements related to the use of existing datasets and published materials (e.g. copyright, licensing, sensitive personal data). Where secondary data include restricted or personal data, the student must obtain permission from the data custodian and demonstrate lawful basis for processing.

Section A – Personal Details

Student name, student number, supervisor, programme, contact details.

Section B – Description of Proposed Research

A brief description of the study, objectives, data sources, and proposed methods of analysis.

Section C – Potential Risks to the Researcher

Assessment of any risks arising from handling of sensitive secondary datasets (e.g., legal, reputational) and proposed mitigation measures.

Section D – Information on Participants

Not applicable for research relying solely on secondary data. If the secondary dataset contains personal data, the student must provide details of data custodians and any approvals obtained.

Section E – Potential Risks to the Participants

Not applicable for purely secondary research without identifiable participants. If datasets include personal or sensitive data, describe risks and safeguards (e.g., anonymisation).

Section F - Data Protection

Description of how data will be stored, processed, and disposed of in compliance with applicable data protection law; encryption and secure storage measures; retention period.

Section G – Supporting Documents

Attach copies of dataset licences, data sharing agreements, secondary source permissions, and evidence of supervisor approval.

Section H – Declaration

Student declaration that the research will use only secondary data and that all information provided is accurate; signature and date.

3.6. Finalising the Dissertation

Students shall submit drafts to their supervisors as agreed in the supervisory schedule. Drafts should demonstrate progressive development and allow time for meaningful feedback. The submission of drafts does not guarantee a pass and does not preclude the assessment process.

3.6.1. Submission of drafts of the dissertation

Draft submissions shall be made electronically via the Academy's learning platform or other specified method. Supervisors shall supply constructive feedback within a reasonable time, as per the supervisory agreement.

3.6.2. Submission of the final dissertation

The final dissertation must be submitted in the formats required by the Academy (usually Microsoft Word and PDF). Students shall follow the filename conventions specified by the Programme Office. A separate submission form and declaration of originality must accompany the final submission.

3.7. Submission of the Dissertation for Assessment

The Programme Office shall confirm submission instructions and assessment deadlines. Submissions received after the deadline will be treated in accordance with Section 2 and Section 7 (extensions and extenuating circumstances).

3.8. Assessment of the Dissertation

Dissertations shall be assessed by an Assessment Board appointed by the Programme Director. Examiners will evaluate the dissertation in line with the Academy's marking criteria and rubric (Sections 8 and 10).

3.8.1. General procedure

Each dissertation shall be independently assessed. Examiners shall prepare individual written reports and provisional marks. The Assessment Board shall meet (or correspond electronically) to agree a final mark and report.

3.8.2. Composition of the Assessment board (two persons)

The Assessment Board shall consist of two examiners appointed by the Head of the Academy: (a) an internal examiner who is independent of the supervisory relationship; and (b) a second examiner who may be internal or external. Supervisors may be members of the Assessment Board. Where available, an external examiner with relevant expertise is preferred.

3.8.3. Individual and Joint Assessment Report

Each examiner shall complete an Individual Assessment Report detailing strengths, weaknesses, recommended mark, and required revisions (if any). The examiners shall then produce a Joint Assessment Report that records the agreed outcome, differences in opinion (if any), and recommended actions (minor amendments, resubmission, viva voce, etc.).

3.8.4. Other comments by the Assessment board

Examiners may make additional comments regarding the suitability of the dissertation for publication, recommendations for further research, and any intellectual property considerations.

3.8.5. Confidentiality of the assessment

All assessment materials, examiner reports and marks are confidential and shall be retained by the Academy in accordance with its records retention policy.

3.9. Viva Voce in case of suspicious high AI use

21 Academy recognises the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in academic work. Where there is reasonable suspicion that a dissertation contains excessive or unacknowledged AI-generated content that compromises academic integrity, the Academy may require the student to attend a viva voce.

3.9.1. Applicability of Viva Voce

A viva voce may be invoked when the Academy's anti-plagiarism software, in use at the time, either detects a high similarity score exceeding 20% or a high suspicion of AI generated text exceeding 30% (excluding the text which has been AI paraphrased).

3.9.2. Viva Voce panel members (two persons)

The viva panel will consist of two staff members appointed by the Head of the Academy, independent of the Assessment Board where possible. One panel member shall chair the viva and the other record the outcome. The head of the academy may be a member of this board.

3.9.3. Logistics of the Viva Voce

The Administration Office shall notify the student in writing of the viva arrangements, which will normally take place within five working days of the notification. The viva may be held in person or via secure video-conferencing platforms in use by the academy.

3.9.4. Format of the Viva Voce

The viva shall normally be 30–45 minutes in duration. The student will be expected to: (a) summarise their research and methodology; (b) respond to questions on their literature, analysis,

and conclusions; and (c) explain and demonstrate understanding of any sections suspected to be AI-generated. The panel may request clarification of sources, analytical processes, and reasoning.

3.9.5. Non-attendance of the Viva Voce

Failure to attend a scheduled viva without prior agreement may result in the assessment being finalised in the student's absence and may adversely affect the outcome, including the decision to fail the student.

3.9.6. Participation in the Viva Voce

Students may be accompanied by a single observer (e.g., a student representative) who may not participate in the viva. The observer's role is limited to witnessing the proceedings.

3.9.7. Report

The viva panel shall produce a written report summarising the proceedings, the student's responses, and the panel's recommendation. The report shall be retained with the assessment records, and the decision may not be appealed.

3.10. Minor Amendments

Where minor amendments are required (e.g., corrections to referencing, formatting, or minor clarifications), the student shall be given a deadline to submit the corrected work. Minor amendments are not assessed by the full Assessment Board but must be verified by the supervisor designated by the Board.

3.11. Dissertations Requiring Substantial Revisions

Where substantial revisions are required (e.g., reanalysis, significant rewriting, methodological flaws), the Assessment Board may: (a) require resubmission within a specified period for re-assessment; (b) require an oral defence (viva voce) prior to re-assessment; or (c) award a fail grade if deficiencies are irredeemable. Resubmission policies and timeframes shall follow the Academy's regulations.

3.12. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty in Dissertations

All dissertations are subject to screening for plagiarism and academic misconduct using accepted detection tools. Unauthorised copying, fabrication of data, misrepresentation of sources, or failure to attribute AI assistance (where policy requires disclosure) shall constitute academic misconduct and will be dealt with under the Academy's Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism Policy and Procedures. Penalties range from a requirement to revise to failure of the module and possible disciplinary action.

4. Academic Language and Formatting

4.1. Academic Language

Students shall write in formal academic English. Clarity, precision and correct use of terminology are expected. Argumentation must be logical and supported by appropriate references.

4.2. Length of the Dissertation

The dissertation shall be 12,000 words in length (word count excludes front matter, abstract, references, and appendices). A tolerance of +/- 10% is acceptable. Excessive deviation from the required word count will be penalised unless supported by a written statement from the supervisor justifying the deviation which should be the last appendix in the dissertation.

4.3. Referencing, in-text citations and formatting

The Academy's default referencing style is Harvard. Students shall use consistent in-text citations and provide a full reference list. Where footnotes are used for explanatory notes, they should be sparing and not substitute for proper referencing.

4.4. Language

The dissertation shall be written in UK English unless special permission has been granted. Any non-English text must be accompanied by an English translation. Terminology should be consistent and acronyms should be defined on first use.

4.5. Units of Measurement and Currency

The dissertation must include the metric system (SI units) for all measurements and the euro (€) as the standard currency.

Where non-metric measurements (e.g., miles, inches, pounds) or non-euro currencies (e.g., USD, GBP) are referenced—such as in quotations, datasets, or cited sources—the metric or euro equivalent must be included in brackets immediately following the original unit.

4.6 Font

Use a standard, Times New Roman 12-point for the main text. Headings may be larger. Line spacing should be 1.5. Use 2.5 cm margins on all sides unless otherwise specified. Text should be justified.

4.7. Pagination

All pages must be numbered consecutively. Front matter may use lower-case Roman numerals; the main body of the text should use Arabic numerals starting at 1.

4.8. Layout and Paper

Electronic submissions shall be in PDF. Hardcopy submissions shall be printed double-sided on A4 paper and securely bound. The Academy may require a specific binding format; students shall check programme guidance.

4.9. Chapter Headings and Subheadings

Use numbered chapter headings (e.g., 1. Introduction, 2. Literature Review, etc.). Subheadings should use a clear hierarchical numbering system (e.g., 2.1, 2.1.1). Consistent formatting aids readability and assessment.

4.10. Images

All images must be of sufficient quality for print and must be accompanied by a caption and source citation. Where images are subject to copyright, the student must ensure that necessary permissions or licences are in place.

4.11. Figures

Figures (e.g., charts, diagrams) should be numbered and titled (e.g., Figure 1: Title). Each figure should be referenced in the text and include the data source.

4.12. Tables

Tables should be numbered and titled (e.g., Table 1: Summary of Data). Use consistent table formats and reference tables in the text.

4.13. Footnotes

Footnotes should be used sparingly for supplementary information. Two categories of footnotes are recognised: content footnotes and copyright footnotes.

4.13.1. Content footnotes

Use content footnotes only for substantive clarifications that would otherwise disrupt the flow of the argument.

4.13.2. Copyright footnotes

When reproducing copyrighted materials (e.g., images or long quotations beyond fair use), include a copyright footnote identifying the copyright holder and permission status.

4.14. Supplementary Material

Materials that are supportive but not central to the argument (e.g., extended data tables, code, large appendices) shall be included in the Appendices and clearly referenced. Sensitive raw data shall not be published without appropriate permission; where necessary, provide redacted or aggregated material.

5. Dissertation Content

5.1. Structure

A typical dissertation structure is as follows (this is indicative and may be adapted with supervisor approval):

- Title Page (Cover Page)
- Abstract
- Acknowledgements (optional)
- Author's Declaration of Authenticity
- Table of Contents, List of Tables, List of Figures
- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methodology (secondary data and analysis methods)
- Findings / Analysis
- Discussion
- Conclusion and Recommendations
- References
- Bibliography (optional)
- Appendices

5.2. Title Page

The Title Page serves as the formal front page of the dissertation and must provide all essential identifying details of the work. It should include the following information, clearly presented and accurately formatted:

- The full title of the dissertation
- The student's full name
- The student number
- The programme title
- The academic level (Level 7 – Master's)
- The name of the dissertation supervisor
- The total word count (excluding references, bibliography, and appendices)
- The date of submission

Where applicable, the student's list of qualifications may be displayed on the title page or on a separate preliminary page immediately following it.

5.2.1. List of qualifications

Include relevant academic qualifications (e.g., BSc Economics, BA Hons) formatted as a concise list.

5.2.2. Title Page Layout

The page must be visually professional and well structured, using a clean and consistent layout that reflects academic standards. Students are encouraged to make use of Word cover page templates or to design their own, provided the design remains formally appropriate, uncluttered, and visually appealing.

5.3. Abstract Page

The abstract shall be single-spaced and limited to 250–300 words. It should state the research problem, methods (secondary data), principal findings, and the significance of the study. Keywords (3–6) should be provided beneath the abstract.

5.4. Dedication and Acknowledgement

The Acknowledgements section is optional and, where included, should remain brief and professional. It may be used to express appreciation to individuals or organisations that provided significant academic guidance, personal support, or resources during the course of the research and dissertation preparation.

Similarly, Dedications are permitted but not required. They may be used to recognise personal inspirations or sources of motivation relevant to the student's academic journey.

To maintain impartiality and academic integrity, acknowledgements and dedications must not include any reference to members of 21 Academy's academic or administrative staff, excluding the supervisor and when the supervisor is not part of the examiners' board, in order to avoid any perception of bias or undue influence in the dissertation's assessment process.

5.5. Author's Declaration of Authenticity

The student must include a signed declaration that the work is their own, that the research uses only secondary data, and that all sources have been appropriately acknowledged. A template declaration form is provided in Annex F (Consent Form template) for administrative convenience; however, the Academy's official declaration form must be used.

5.6. Table of Contents, List of Tables, List of Figures and Supplementary Material

Students shall generate these lists using Word's automatic features and ensure page numbers are accurate before final submission.

5.7. References

Provide complete bibliographic details for all works cited in the text. The reference list should be alphabetised and consistent with the Harvard referencing style.

5.8. Bibliography

A bibliography of supplementary works consulted but not cited may be included where appropriate.

5.9. Appendices

Appendices should contain material that supports the dissertation (e.g., extended tables, dataset descriptors, codebooks). Each appendix should be numbered and titled.

6. Final Version

Prior to final submission, students must ensure that: (a) the dissertation adheres to the word count; (b) all references are complete and correctly formatted; (c) all figures and tables are captioned and sourced; (d) the document complies with formatting requirements set out in Section 4; (e) the Research Ethics Approval Form (secondary data confirmation) is included as Appendix A of the dissertation; and (f) the declaration of authenticity is signed and attached as Appendix B of the dissertation. Students should retain copies of all submitted material.

Submission formats: PDF. Filenames should follow the convention: Lastname_Firstname_Studentnumber.

This should be submitted by 23:39 hrs of the submission deadline on the anti-plagiarism software made available by the academy at the time. The hard copy should be submitted at the Academy's administration office by not later than noon of the day after the submission deadline.

7. Procedures

7.1. (General) Procedure for requests

All formal requests (leave of absence, extensions, extenuating circumstances, appeals, embargo applications) must be made using the Academy's official forms and submitted to the Administration Office by the published deadlines. Documentary evidence may be required.

7.2. Leave of Absence

A student may apply for a leave of absence for compelling personal reasons using the official Leave of Absence form. Approval is subject to the regulations and may affect the submission timeline for the dissertation.

7.3. Extension to the Duration of Studies

Extensions to the dissertation submission deadline may be granted in exceptional circumstances. Students must apply for an extension in advance of the deadline and supply supporting evidence. Decisions will be made in line with Academy policy.

7.4. Extenuating circumstances

If unforeseen circumstances prevent a student from meeting a deadline, they may submit an extenuating circumstances claim with appropriate evidence, in accordance with the Academy's policy. Successful claims may result in a revised deadline or other remedies.

7.5. Appeals

A student who wishes to challenge an assessment outcome may submit an appeal in accordance with the Academy's Appeals Procedure. Appeals are limited to cases where procedural irregularities or demonstrable assessment errors are alleged.

7.6. Application for Embargo

Students may apply to embargo the public release of their dissertation (for example to protect commercial or intellectual property interests). Applications shall be made using the embargo application form (Annex G) and must state the justification and requested embargo period. Embargo periods are normally limited in duration and require formal approval.

7.7. Intellectual Property Rights

Students shall note that the Academy reserves certain rights over work produced under its auspices. Where potential commercial exploitation exists, students must disclose this to the Head of the Academy and may be required to enter into an intellectual property agreement with the Academy. The ownership of third-party datasets remains with the original holders; students must abide by licence terms.

8. Dissertation Rubric

The Dissertation Rubric provides a clear and transparent framework for marking. The rubric below expresses the relative weighting of assessment components. Examiners shall use qualitative descriptors within each component to inform the final mark.

Suggested weighting (indicative):

- Research question and objectives: 10%
- Literature review and theoretical framing: 25%
- Methodology and justification for secondary data: 15%
- Analysis and interpretation of data: 25%
- Argument, originality and critical reflection: 15%
- Structure, presentation, referencing and academic writing: 10%

Total: 100%

Examiners should allocate marks to each component and provide narrative justification for the allocation in their reports.

9. Grading of the Dissertation

The following grading scale is indicative and shall be applied consistently across programmes. The Programme Director may provide programme-specific grading thresholds where necessary.

- Distinction: 80% – 100% – Work demonstrating exceptional originality, critical insight, methodological rigour and clarity of presentation.
- Merit: 70% – 79% – Strong work with substantial strengths in theory, method and analysis, with minor weaknesses.
- Pass: 50% – 69% – Satisfactory work meeting the learning outcomes, but with notable limitations.
- Fail: 0% – 49% – Work that fails to meet the required academic standard or contains serious deficiencies such as plagiarism, insufficient analysis, or fundamental methodological errors.

9.1. Failed Dissertations

Students whose dissertation is graded as failed, even after an appeal, will be given one opportunity to resubmit a new dissertation against an administrative fee of €300 + VAT.

10. Marking Criteria

Examiners shall evaluate dissertations against the following detailed criteria. Each criterion should be considered holistically, and evidence provided in the examiner reports.

Research question & objectives

Clarity, focus, originality, and feasibility. How well do the question(s) guide the research and analysis?

Literature review

Depth, relevance, critical engagement with key sources, identification of gaps and theoretical framing.

Methodology

Appropriateness and justification of selected secondary data, clarity of analytical techniques, transparency about limitations.

Analysis & interpretation

Rigor of analysis, validity of inferences, integration of multiple sources, critical interpretation of findings.

Argument & originality

Coherence of argument, contribution to knowledge, critical reflection and originality of insights.

Presentation & structure

Logical organisation, clarity of expression, quality of writing, proper use of headings and signposting.

Referencing & academic integrity

Complete and accurate referencing, adherence to preferred referencing style, evidence of academic integrity.

Use of secondary data

Appropriate selection, critical appraisal and ethical use of secondary datasets and published materials.

Annexes

Annex A – Preliminary Research Proposal (Template)

Provide a brief preliminary proposal (1–2 pages) including: prospective title, background and rationale, preliminary research question(s), proposed secondary sources, and an indicative timetable.

Annex B – Research Proposal (Full Template)

The full research proposal should expand upon the preliminary proposal and include: detailed title, comprehensive literature review, research question(s), justification for secondary data choice, methodology and analytical plan, data sources and access arrangements, ethical considerations (secondary data), limitations, project timeline, and bibliography.

Annex C – Research Ethics Approval Form (Secondary Data Confirmation)

This form must be completed to confirm that the research is based only on secondary data. Required fields include: project title, student details, supervisor name, description of data sources, confirmation that no primary data collection will occur, statement on data protection measures, and supporting documentation (dataset licences).

Annex D – Information Letter and Request for Permission to carry out Research (Data Custodian Template)

Where secondary datasets require permission from custodians (e.g., restricted archival data), students shall use this template to request access, explaining the purpose of the research, how data will be used, storage measures, and requests for any redactions or special conditions.

Annex E – Declaration of Authenticity

A template declaration form provided for guidance and administrative convenience. Students may choose a different layout or format for their declaration, provided that it includes all the required information:

- Confirmation that the work is their own;
- Confirmation that the research uses only secondary data;
- Acknowledgement of all sources used.

Regardless of the format chosen for the declaration printed before the dissertation's contents page, the Academy's official declaration form must also be completed and submitted as part of the dissertation in Appendix B.

Annex F – Application for Embargo of Dissertation (Template)

Students seeking an embargo must complete this application stating: the rationale for embargo (e.g., commercial sensitivity, pending patent), requested embargo length, any third-party constraints, supervisor endorsement, and Programme Director approval. Embargoes shall be granted only in exceptional circumstances and for a limited period.

Final Notes and Sign-Off

Queries regarding these guidelines should be directed to the Internal Quality Assurance Office. These guidelines are authoritative but may be supplemented by programme-specific requirements; students must comply with both Academy-wide and programme-level policies.

Annex A – Preliminary Research Proposal Form

Instructions: Complete this form to outline your preliminary research idea before preparing the full proposal. Attach additional pages if your text does not fit in the fields below.



Preliminary Research Proposal Form

Student Details

Name and Surname: _____

Student Number: _____

Study Programme: _____

Supervisor Name: _____

Proposed Dissertation Title

Background and Rationale

Briefly describe the context, motivation, and relevance of your research topic (approx. 200–300 words).

Preliminary Research Question(s)

List your main research question(s) or objectives: (1 main question + 2 to 4 sub-questions)

Data Sources

Indicate key secondary data sources you plan to use (academic literature, databases, reports, etc.). (20–25 highly relevant sources)

Feasibility and Expected Outcomes

Explain why the research is feasible within the dissertation timeframe and what outcomes are expected. (approx. 200–300 words).

Student Declaration

I confirm that this proposal is my own work and based on secondary data sources only.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Supervisor's Review

Student is to submit a full research proposal

This proposal needs to be reviewed

Student has been asked to submit a fresh proposal

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Annex B – Full Research Proposal Form

Complete this comprehensive proposal once your preliminary idea has been reviewed by your supervisor.

Fill out the form and attach additional sheets if the allocated fields are not enough.

Full Research Proposal Form

Student Details

Name and Surname: _____

Student Number: _____

Study Programme: _____

Supervisor Name: _____

Proposed Dissertation Title

Summary

This section should consist of a short abstract of approximately 250–300 words that summarises the main components of the proposed study. It should outline the research aims, the academic and practical significance of the topic, the primary theoretical orientation, and the intended methodological approach.

The summary must be written in clear academic language that conveys the research purpose to a general scholarly audience and should demonstrate how the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the topic through secondary data analysis.

Section – Research Question/s

This section must clearly identify the main research question(s) and/or research objectives that guide the dissertation. Questions should be specific, focused, and feasible, capable of being addressed entirely through secondary data within the timeframe of the dissertation.

Students may also include sub-questions that break down the main research problem into manageable analytical components. (1 main question + 2 to 4 sub-questions)

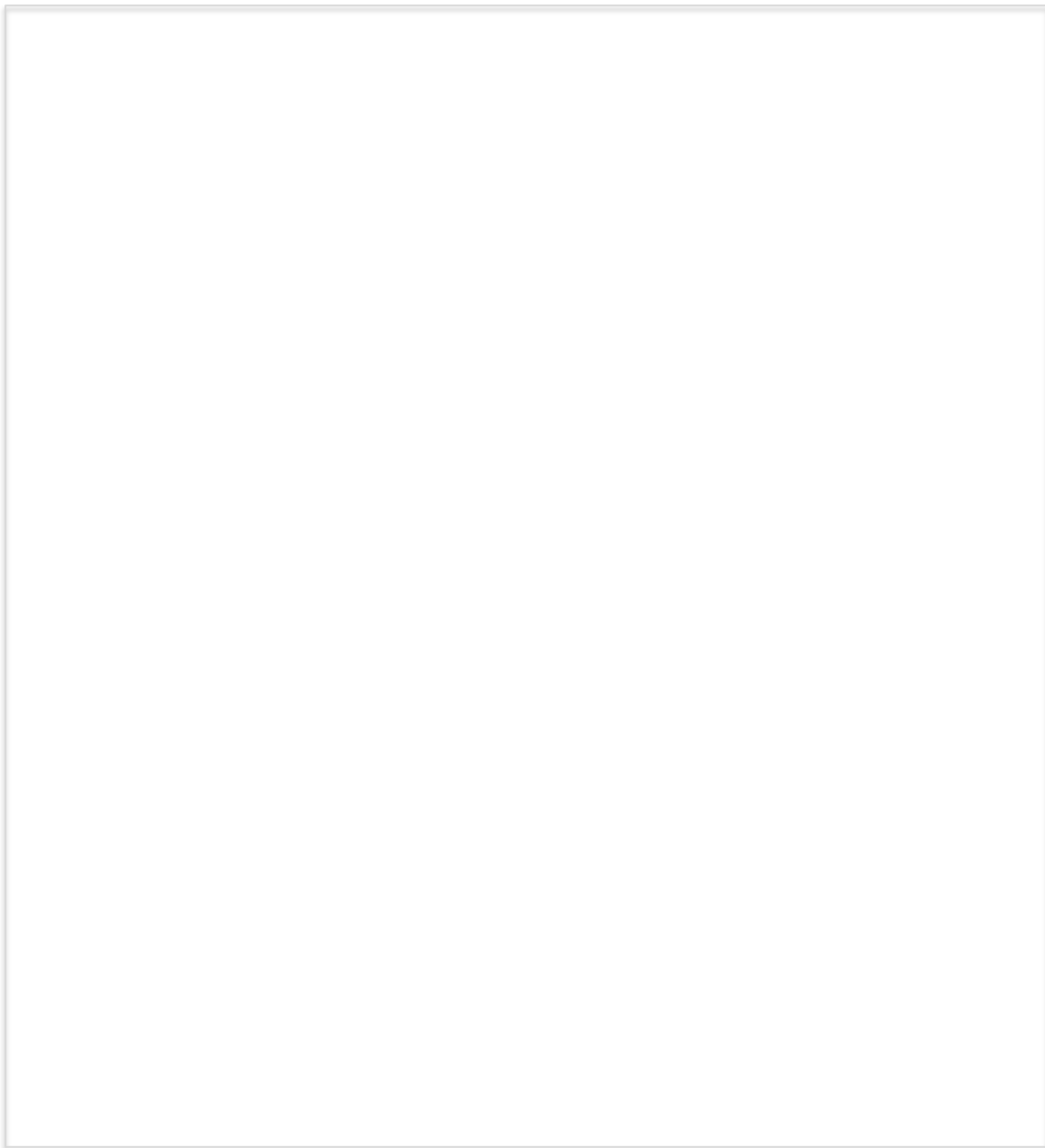
All questions should be framed to show how they link directly to existing literature and how the study's findings will add value to the academic field or professional practice.

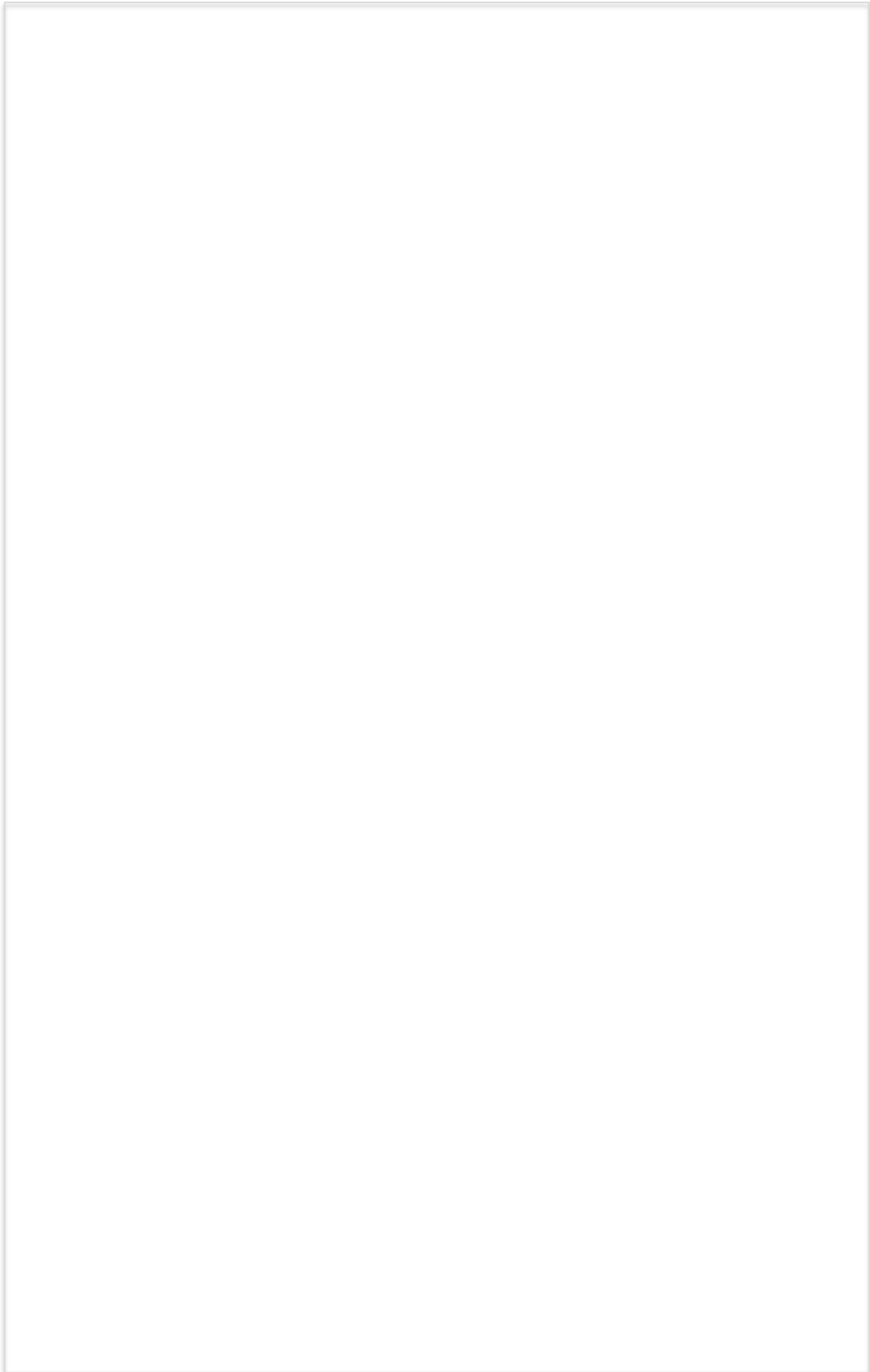
Section – Literature Review

This section must provide a structured summary and critical evaluation of the most relevant literature related to the research topic in around 1,000 to 1,500 words. Students are expected to demonstrate a strong understanding of key theories, frameworks, and empirical findings, identifying both consensus and debate within the field.

The review should logically lead to the identification of a research gap—that is, an area where current knowledge is limited, contested, or underexplored—and explain how the proposed dissertation will address this gap.

All literature should be cited and referenced in accordance with the Harvard referencing style, and, as far as possible, should draw upon recent academic sources published within the last ten (10) years unless older, seminal works are essential and approved by the supervisor.



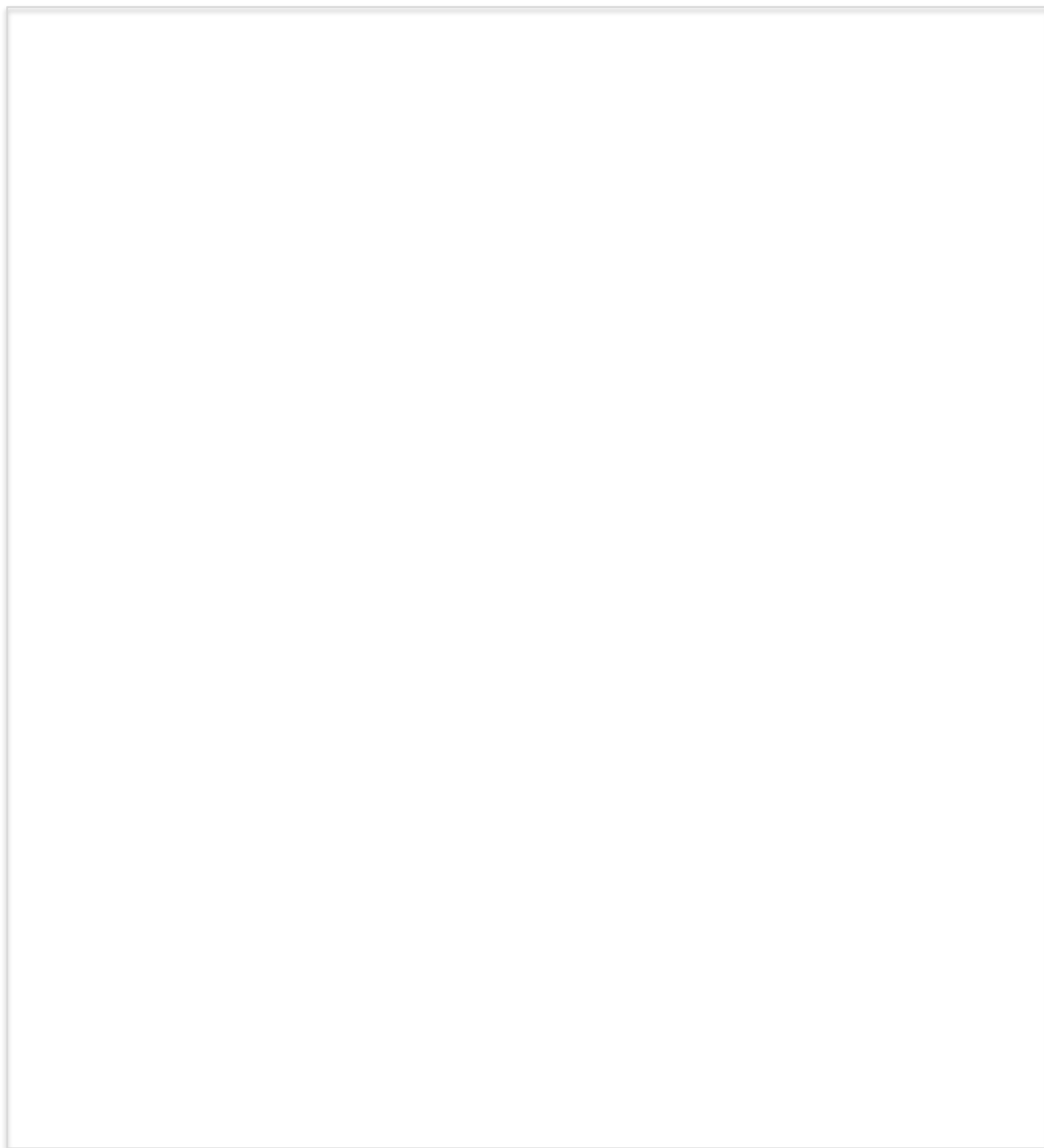


Section – Proposed Methodology

This section must clearly describe the methodological approach that will be used to address the research questions through the analysis of secondary data in around 1,000 to 1,500 words.

Students should specify the data sources (for example, published datasets, academic databases, government reports, or prior empirical studies), explain why these sources are appropriate, and outline the analytical techniques to be applied—such as systematic literature review, meta-analysis, content analysis, or secondary statistical analysis.

The rationale for choosing each method should be explained in relation to the research question(s) and theoretical framework. Students should also note any limitations or constraints inherent to secondary data and how these will be managed or mitigated.



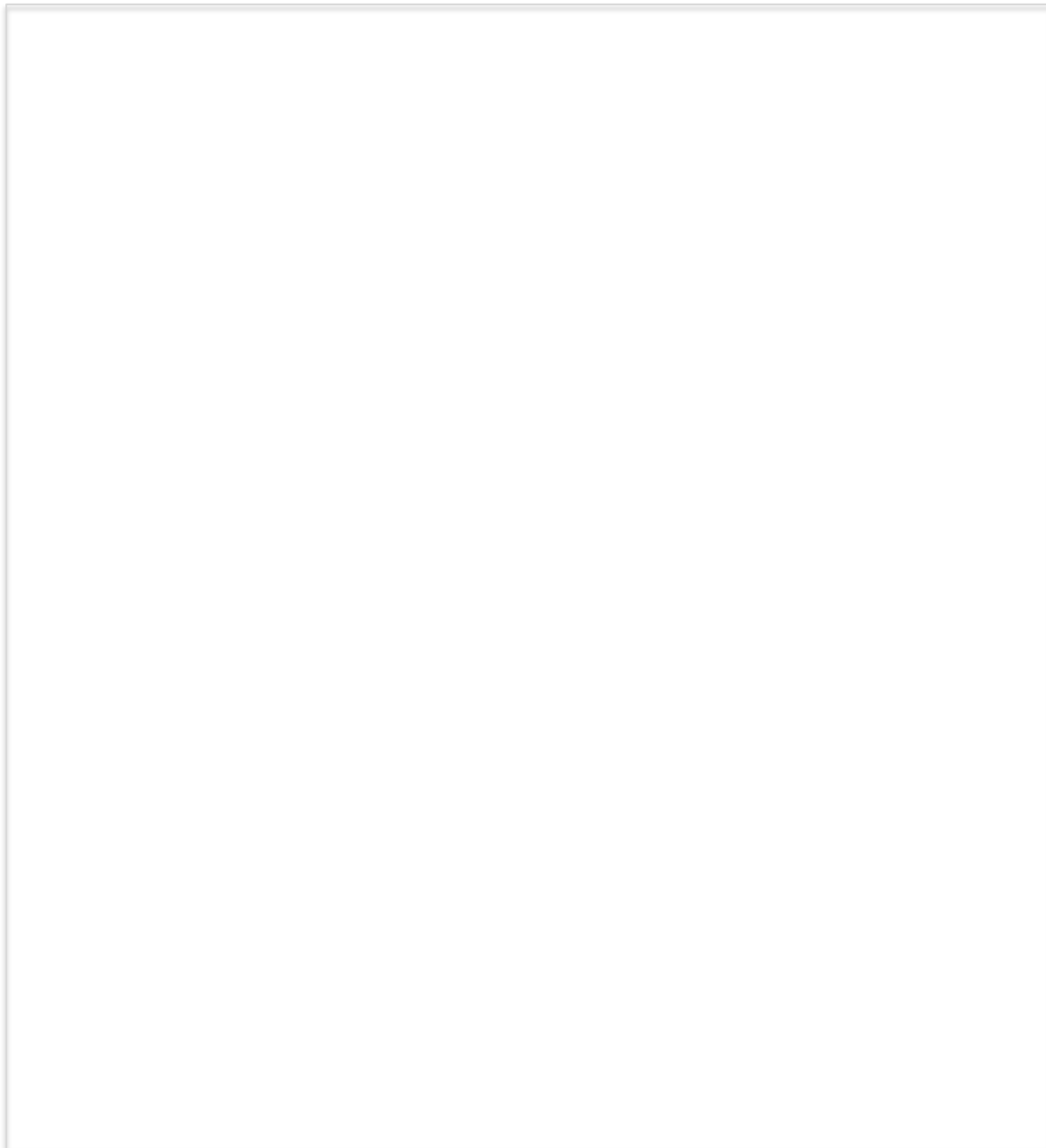
Section – Ethical Considerations

This section must explicitly confirm that the dissertation is based solely on secondary data and therefore does not involve direct data collection from human participants.

Students must demonstrate awareness of ethical research practice, including:

- Respect for intellectual property and copyright in using published data;
- Proper attribution and citation of all materials;
- Protection of sensitive or proprietary data, where applicable; and
- Anonymisation of data if re-using previously collected datasets that contain identifiers.

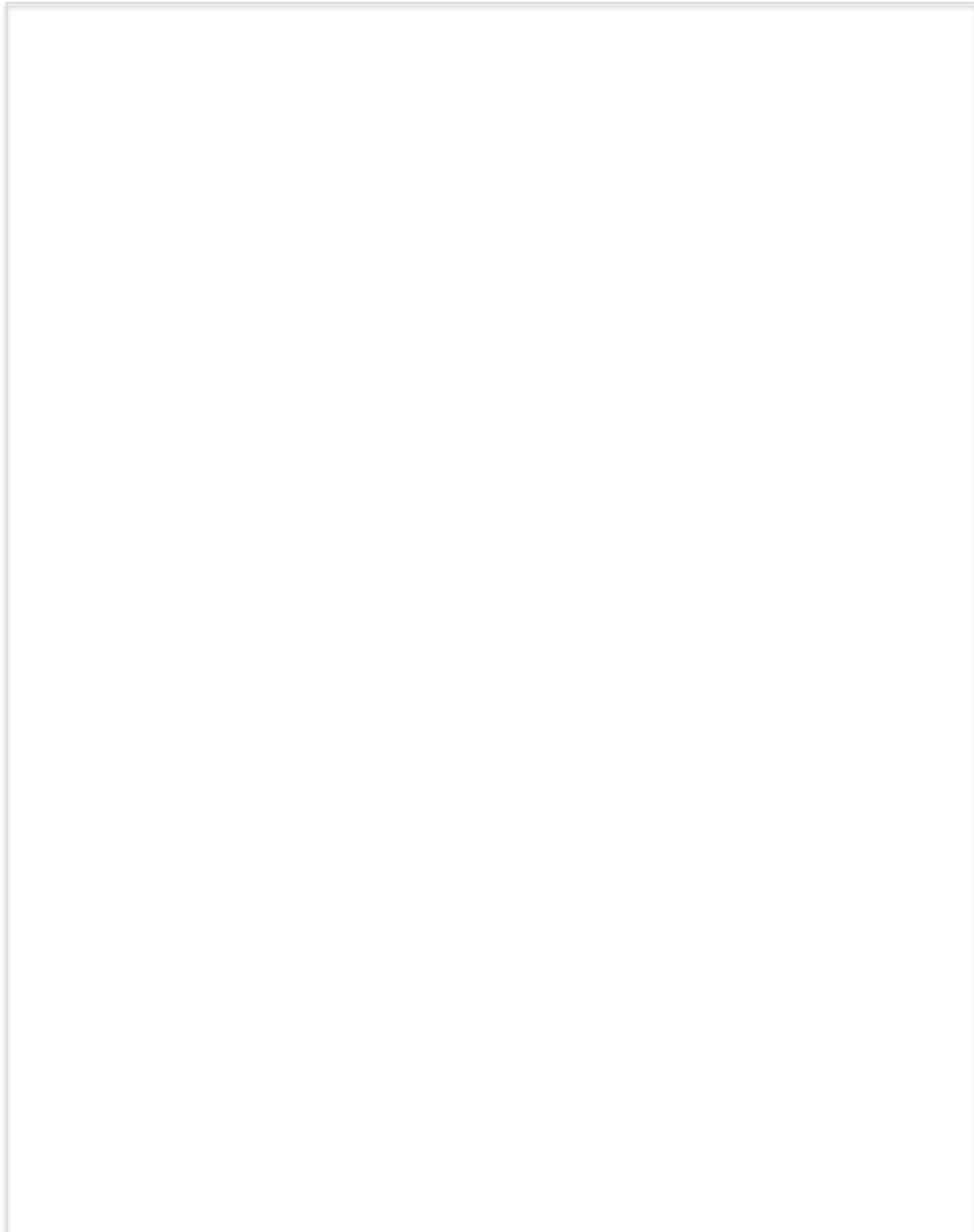
A short statement, in around 100 to 200 words should affirm that the project complies fully with the 21 Academy Research Ethics Policy and that the research supervisor has approved the ethical approach.



Section – Limitations

This section should present an honest and thoughtful reflection on the anticipated limitations of the research design and data sources. Students must acknowledge any constraints—such as limited data availability, potential bias within existing sources, or methodological restrictions—and discuss how these limitations will be addressed, mitigated, or acknowledged in the analysis in around 200 to 300 words.

Recognising limitations demonstrates academic integrity and critical awareness and strengthens the overall credibility of the research.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin grey border, intended for the student to write their reflection on the limitations of their research design and data sources.

Section – Project Timeline

Students must prepare a comprehensive Gantt-style timetable that outlines all key stages of the dissertation process, including:

- Refinement of the research proposal
- Completion of the literature review
- Data collection and analysis (of secondary sources)
- Drafting of chapters and submission of drafts to the supervisor
- Final submission of the dissertation

The timeline should include estimated start and completion dates for each milestone, ideally aligned with the official academic calendar and submission deadlines.

Students are expected to adhere to their timeline and maintain regular progress updates with their supervisor.

The timeline should be attached to this proposal form.

Section – Suggested Bibliography

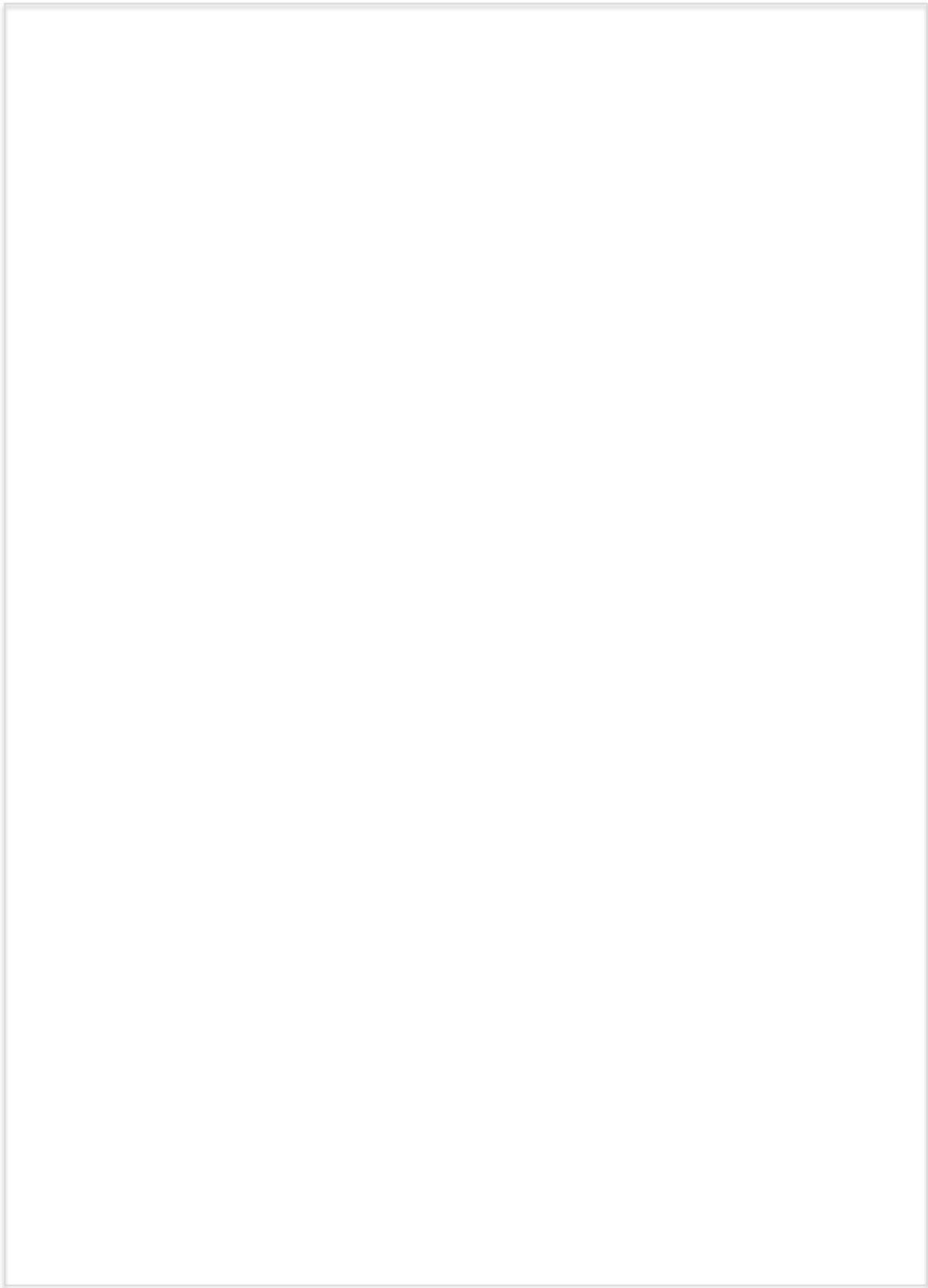
This section should include a preliminary list of key sources that demonstrate the student's awareness of the main academic debates, theories, and evidence related to the proposed topic.

A minimum of twenty (20) academic references is recommended at this stage. These should include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and reputable scholarly reports relevant to the chosen area of study.

As far as possible, sources should be limited to those published within the last ten (10) years from the year of the expected dissertation submission, in order to ensure that the research is grounded in current and credible scholarship.

Where the use of older sources (beyond ten years) is necessary — for instance, to reference seminal works or key theoretical foundations — such references must be explicitly justified and approved by the dissertation supervisor.

All sources must be formatted in accordance with the Harvard referencing style, and the list should be presented in alphabetical order by author surname.



Annex C – Research Ethics Approval Form (Secondary Data Confirmation)

Complete this form to confirm that your dissertation relies solely on secondary data and complies with ethical requirements. The signed form should be attached as Appendix A of the dissertation.

Research Ethics Approval Form

Section 1: Student Details

Name and Surname: _____

Student Number: _____

Study Programme: _____

Supervisor Name: _____

Section 2: Dissertation Information

Title of Dissertation: _____

Expected Submission Date: _____

Section 3: Secondary Data Confirmation

I confirm that this dissertation uses only secondary data sources.

List primary datasets, archives, or databases to be used:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Section 4: Ethical Statement

I confirm that all data are publicly available or used with proper authorisation and that copyright and data protection obligations have been met.

Section 5: Declaration

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____

Supervisor Approval: _____

Date: _____

Annex D – Information Letter and Request for Permission to Carry Out Research

Use this template to request access to restricted secondary data or archives. Adjust the details as necessary.

Dear [Data Custodian/Organisation Representative],

I am a postgraduate student enrolled in the Master's Level 7 programme at 21 Academy. I am currently preparing my dissertation titled: "[Insert Dissertation Title]".

My research relies solely on secondary data, and I wish to request access to [describe dataset or resource]. The data will be used exclusively for academic purposes and handled in compliance with all ethical and data protection obligations.

I would be grateful if you could confirm your permission for me to use the specified materials. Please let me know if a formal agreement or acknowledgment is required.

Thank you for considering my request.

Yours sincerely,

Student Name:

Student Number:

Email:

Supervisor Name:

Annex E – Declaration of Authenticity

This is a template declaration form provided for guidance and administrative convenience. You may choose a different layout or format for your declaration, provided that it includes all the required information:

- Confirmation that the work is your own;
- Confirmation that the research uses only secondary data;
- Acknowledgement of all sources used.

Regardless of the format you choose for the declaration printed before the contents page in your dissertation, the Academy's official declaration form must also be completed and submitted as part of your dissertation in Appendix B.

Declaration of Original Work

Section 1: Student Details

Name and Surname: _____

Student Number: _____

Section 2: Dissertation Information

Title of Dissertation: _____

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that:

This work is entirely my own and has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for assessment in any other course or institution.

The research presented in this work has been conducted using only secondary data.

All sources of information and ideas that are not my own have been fully acknowledged and appropriately referenced.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Annex F – Application for Embargo of Dissertation

Complete this form if you wish to request a temporary embargo on the public release of your dissertation.

Application for Embargo of Dissertation

Section 1: Student and Dissertation Details

Name and Surname: _____

Student Number: _____

Study Programme: _____

Supervisor Name: _____

Section 2: Justification for Embargo

Provide detailed reasons for requesting an embargo (e.g., commercial sensitivity, pending publication, third-party confidentiality):

Section 3: Requested Duration of Embargo

Start Date: _____

End Date: _____

Section 4: Approvals

Supervisor Endorsement: _____ Date: _____

Head of the Academy Approval: _____ Date: _____