

"How Many Words...?!"
Discussing Issues of Anxiety and
Wellbeing for Staff and Students on
Undergraduate Dissertation and
Capstone Modules



Dr Steven Cock
Senior Lecturer in Business and Management
York Business School

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Introduction

- Understand the challenges, experiences and anxieties of students and staff on dissertation/capstone modules
- Consider possible approaches to managing/mitigating such issues in undergraduate dissertation/capstone modules
- Draw upon examples of processes and frameworks that are currently implemented in York Business School



A photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The person is wearing a light-colored sweater and a watch. In the foreground, there is a notebook with a pen and some sticky notes. The background is slightly blurred, showing a desk and a smartphone. An orange horizontal bar is located in the top left corner of the image.

Part 1

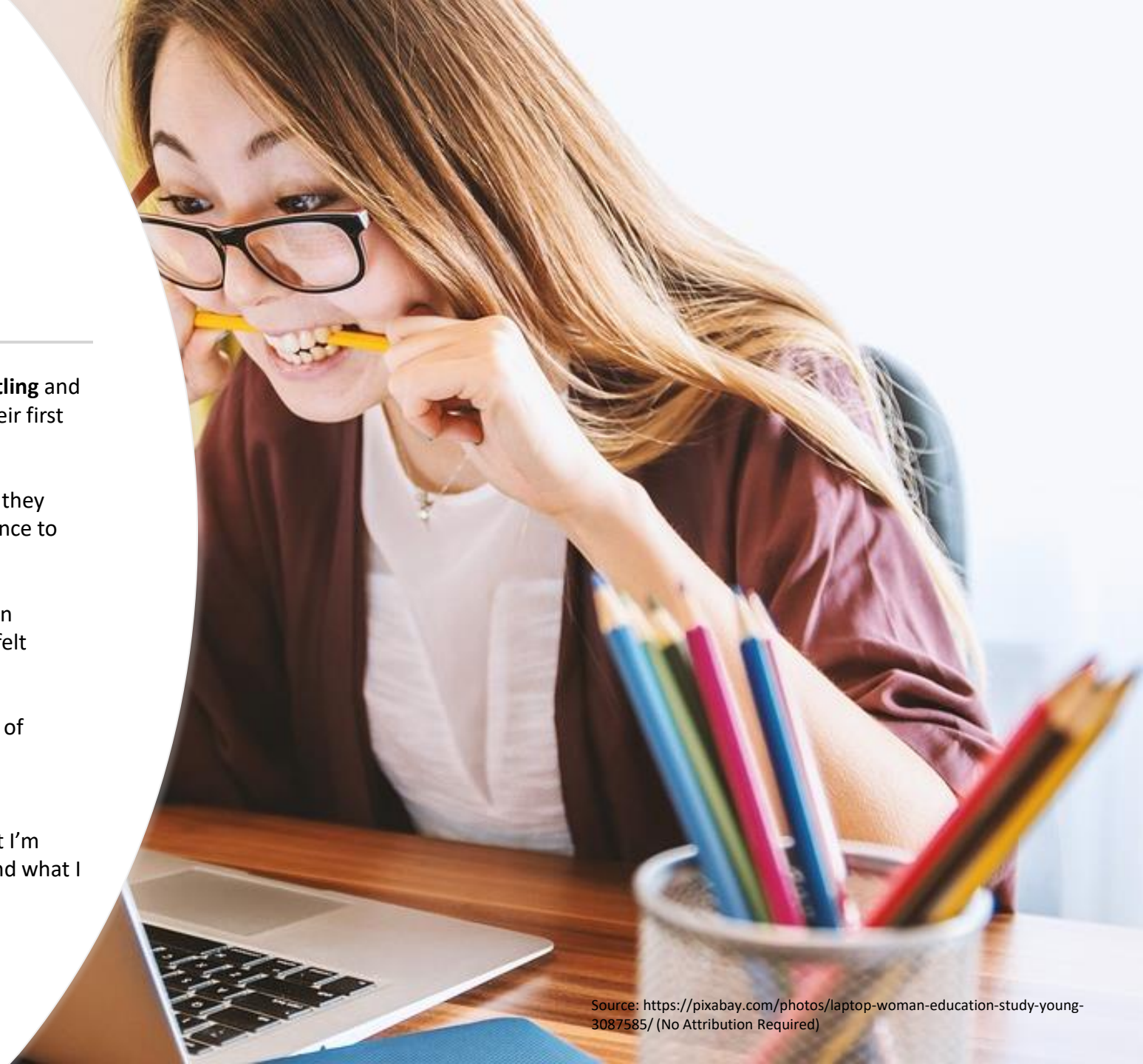
Towards an Understanding of Staff
and Student Experiences on
Dissertation/Capstone Modules...

Understanding Issues of Anxiety and Wellbeing on Dissertation/Capstone Modules

“The dissertation is relatively unique within the curriculum in that it gives students an **almost free choice** of what they can study and there is little doubt of its intrinsic **benefit for students** in terms of their own learning and the employment-related transferable skills it can develop (the ability to work independently; time management; report writing; interpersonal communication; and analysis/synthesis). The free topic choice, although often **challenging**, can also be **unsettling (‘chaotic’) for staff** who may find they are supervising a dissertation on a subject they know very little about. This does not sit well with the notion of supervisor/academic as expert, and it requires confidence on the part of the supervisor to accept and show these limitations” (Todd et al., 2006, p.171)

Student Concerns

- “The introduction of any new approach to learning is always **unsettling** and students will inevitably experience **challenges** when completing their first piece of truly independent work” (Todd et al., 2006, p.162)
- “...it is imperative that they are **not left to flounder alone** and that they receive adequate supervision, making the transition from dependence to self-directed learning smoother” (Todd et al., 2006, p.162)
- Student: “I had area of work but wanted help to focus... guidance on methodology and time scale as I am **uncertain what is feasible**... I felt enthusiastic but **a bit daunted**” (Woolhouse, 2002, p.140)
- At the start of the research process, students often convey feelings of being “**nervous**” and “**worried**” at the prospect of undertaking an independent research project (Rand, 2016, p.782)
- Student: “Literature review and methodology are under control but I’m **scared** about the research... **worried** it’s too small... **worried** it found what I want it [expect] to find... **daunting**” (Rand, 2016, p.784)



Supervisor Concerns

- "Existing research highlights the **pressurised atmosphere** in which the dissertation supervisory relationship operates. **Stress** applies to **both students and staff** within this relationship" (Derounian, 2011, p. 92).
- "...many experienced supervisors, who had successfully supported numerous students, expressed **doubts in their expertise**... Almost all of those interviewed expressed **uncertainty** about their supervisory practice – and the question '**Am I doing it right?**' emerged as a common concern" (Macfadyen et al., 2019, p. 990)



Supervisor Concerns

Linked to uncertainty regarding the supervision process, research has suggested that:

- "...training could assist in clarifying where tutor responsibility begins and ends, and would be particularly beneficial for new members of staff since supervision can be an **anxiety-provoking experience**" (Todd et al., 2006, p.170).
- Often, the first experience of supervising students is at undergraduate level, but with little support, training, resources and guidance – **"the experience can be stressful"** (Roberts and Seaman, 2018, p.29).


Additional issues to consider include:

- "...the process can also be **demanding**" (Todd et al., 2006, p.162)
- Staff **"are put under a lot of pressure"** (Todd et al., 2006, p.162) – e.g. teaching workloads, research commitments, expectation to publish, large numbers of student projects to supervise, increasing administrative requirements, etc. (Todd et al., 2006; Roberts and Seaman, 2019)
- "The job of the undergraduate dissertation supervisor can be made all the more **difficult** by the lack of explicit guidance produced for them" (Todd et al., 2006, p.163)



Part 2

Developing a Framework for the Delivery of Undergraduate Dissertation/Capstone Modules: Examples from York Business School...



Research

BMR6001M Research Investigation

The aim of this module is to facilitate and express independent enquiry in a substantial piece of individual self-directed research work. This module provides students with the opportunity to plan and conduct a piece of research through individual and independent activity and to present their findings in using visual aids and in written academic format that meets professional standards. Students will develop research objectives, formulate appropriate methodologies, and apply problem solving and analytical skills in a business context of their choice.

To be successful in the module students should be able to:

1. Critically evaluate contemporary research in a specialist area of their award.
2. Design, plan and conduct an in-depth research activity.
3. Collect, analyse, interpret and evaluate data and information generated by the research activity.
4. Communicate research findings which meets academic standards at degree level and professional standards of presentation.

Students have the opportunity to complete the research investigation in the form of:

- a) A traditional dissertation.
- b) A research report.
- c) A consultancy project.
- d) A business creation project.

The Research Investigation must be linked to the specialism within their degree title.





BMR6001M Research Investigation

40 Credit Module

Assessments:

1. Research Proposal Presentation (15 minutes) – 20% weighting
2. Report (8,000 words) – 80% weighting

A Few Key Numbers:

- Degree Programmes: +/- 14
- Students: 100+ and increasing
- Staff/Supervisors: 20+

Staff and students can have differing expectations as part of the dissertation/capstone process (Malcolm, 2012)

So, how has this module been approached within York Business School...?

Module Timetable

- It is important to instil a framework that can help students operate clearly to necessary standards, deadlines, etc. (MacFadyen et al., 2019)
- A year-long timetable for Semester 1 and Semester 2 is released at the start of the academic year.
- This provides details of all upcoming lectures/workshops, formative and summative deadlines, ethics application deadlines, feedback points, etc.
- This framework provides: (a) clarity for staff and students; (b) transparency on key timeframes from the outset; (c) clear indication of expectations on the module; and (d) consistency in approach amongst staff and students.

BMR6001M Research Investigation

Module Timetable and Deadlines: 2022-23

The following timetables for Semester 1 and for Semester 2 outline lecture/workshop topics and key deadlines for students on BMR6001M Research Investigation during the 2022-23 academic year.

Please note that:

- Students are expected to attend all lectures.
- Where there are "optional" workshops listed in the timetable below, students are expected to attend those workshops that are relevant to their project e.g. if you are undertaking a quantitative research project, you would attend the optional workshop for Designing Quantitative Data Collection Tools in Week 9 of Semester 1, for example. Likewise, if you are undertaking a qualitative research project, you would attend the optional workshop for Designing Qualitative Data Collection Tools in Week 10 of Semester 1.

Semester 1

| Week | Week Commencing | Topics in Lectures/Workshops | Deadlines |
|------|-----------------------|--|-----------|
| 1 | w/c 26 September 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Introduction to the Module and Selecting a Research Topic | |
| 2 | w/c 3 October 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Sourcing and critically reviewing academic literature | |
| 3 | w/c 10 October 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: An Introduction to Research Methods and Philosophy | |
| 4 | w/c 17 October 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Quantitative and qualitative research design | |

| Week | Week Commencing | Topics in Lectures/Workshops | Deadlines |
|------|----------------------|---|---|
| 5 | w/c 24 October 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Setting research aims/objectives and considering issues of 'quality control' in the research process. | |
| 6 | w/c 31 October 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Further Guidance on Assessment 1 (Presentation – Research Proposal) | |
| 7 | w/c 7 November 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Applying for Ethical Approval | |
| 8 | w/c 14 November 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Week (No Lectures or Workshops) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.00 noon on Friday 18 November 2022: Assessment 1 Deadline (Submission of PowerPoint presentation slides) |
| 9 | w/c 21 November 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optional Workshop 1: Designing quantitative data collection tools (please ensure that you attend this session if you are undertaking a quantitative research project) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment 1: Presentations take place w/c 21 November 2022 and w/c 28 November 2022 |
| 10 | w/c 28 November 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optional Workshop 2: Designing qualitative data collection tools (please ensure that you attend this session if you are undertaking a qualitative research project) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment 1: Presentations take place w/c 21 November 2022 and w/c 28 November 2022 |
| 11 | w/c 5 December 2022 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday 9 December: Provisional Grades and Feedback Returned to Students for Assessment 1 (Presentation – Research Proposal) |
| 12 | w/c 12 December 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Planning Ahead for a Research Investigation... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.00 noon on Friday 16 December 2022: Ethics Application Deadline (Submission 1) |

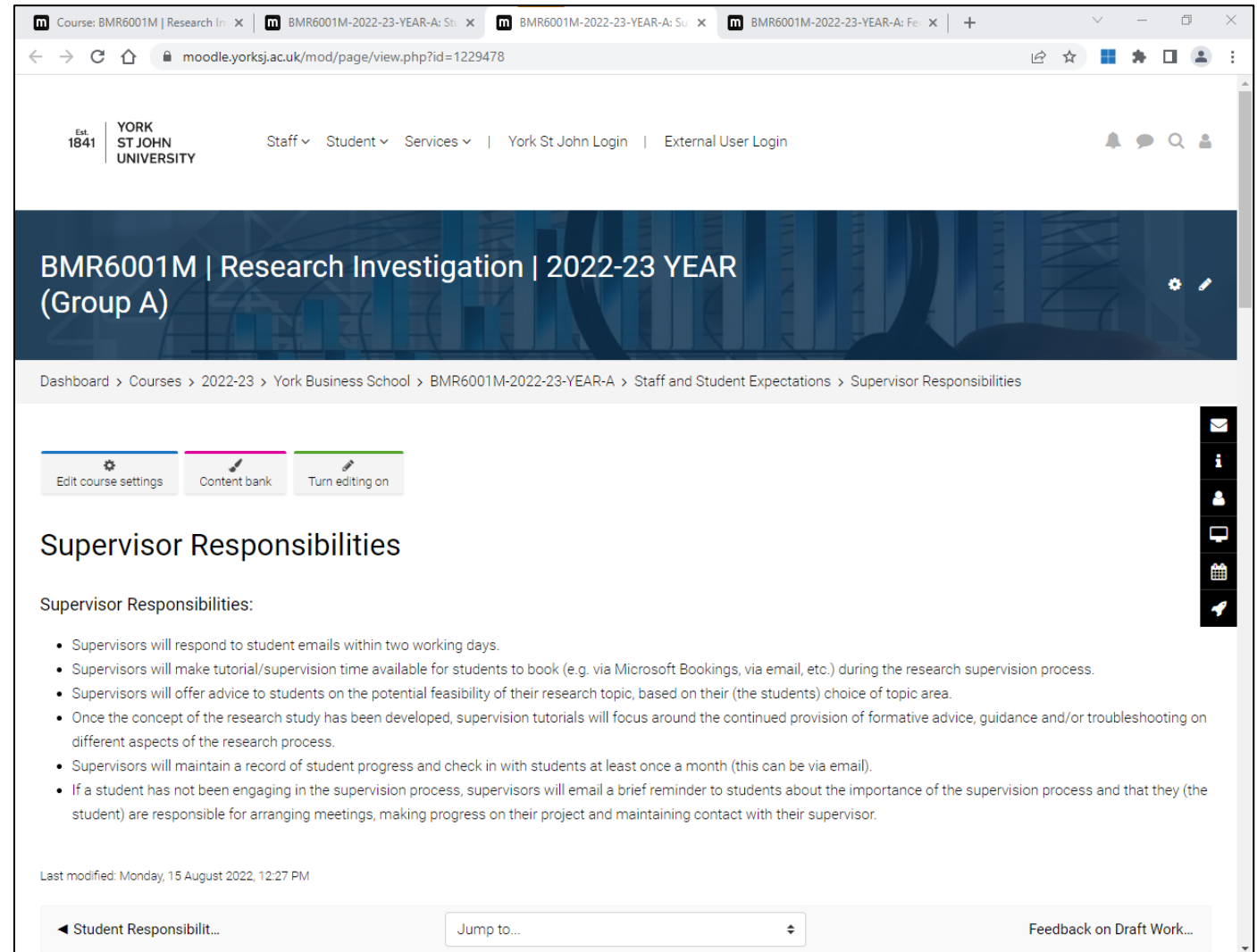
Supervisor Responsibilities

Research suggests that:

- It can be useful/important to set a "contract" or framework of expectations/guidelines to underpin the research/supervision process between staff and students (Derounian, 2011; Roberts and Seaman, 2018)

What are supervisor responsibilities?

- In particular, it is important for supervisors to provide guidance on the inception/development of a project at the start of the research process (Brewer et al., 2012; Roberts and Seaman, 2018; Todd et al., 2006)
- ...with a transition then to facilitating the student undertaking an independent research project through guidance in meetings (MacFadyen et al., 2019; Roberts and Seaman, 2018; Todd et al., 2006)



The screenshot shows a Moodle course page for BMR6001M | Research Investigation | 2022-23 YEAR (Group A). The page includes a navigation menu with options like Staff, Student, and Services. Below the navigation, there are three buttons: Edit course settings, Content bank, and Turn editing on. The main content area is titled "Supervisor Responsibilities" and contains a list of responsibilities for supervisors. The page also shows a "Last modified" date of Monday, 15 August 2022, 12:27 PM and a "Feedback on Draft Work..." button.

Course: BMR6001M | Research Investigation | 2022-23 YEAR (Group A)

Dashboard > Courses > 2022-23 > York Business School > BMR6001M-2022-23-YEAR-A > Staff and Student Expectations > Supervisor Responsibilities

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Supervisor Responsibilities

Supervisor Responsibilities:

- Supervisors will respond to student emails within two working days.
- Supervisors will make tutorial/supervision time available for students to book (e.g. via Microsoft Bookings, via email, etc.) during the research supervision process.
- Supervisors will offer advice to students on the potential feasibility of their research topic, based on their (the students) choice of topic area.
- Once the concept of the research study has been developed, supervision tutorials will focus around the continued provision of formative advice, guidance and/or troubleshooting on different aspects of the research process.
- Supervisors will maintain a record of student progress and check in with students at least once a month (this can be via email).
- If a student has not been engaging in the supervision process, supervisors will email a brief reminder to students about the importance of the supervision process and that they (the student) are responsible for arranging meetings, making progress on their project and maintaining contact with their supervisor.

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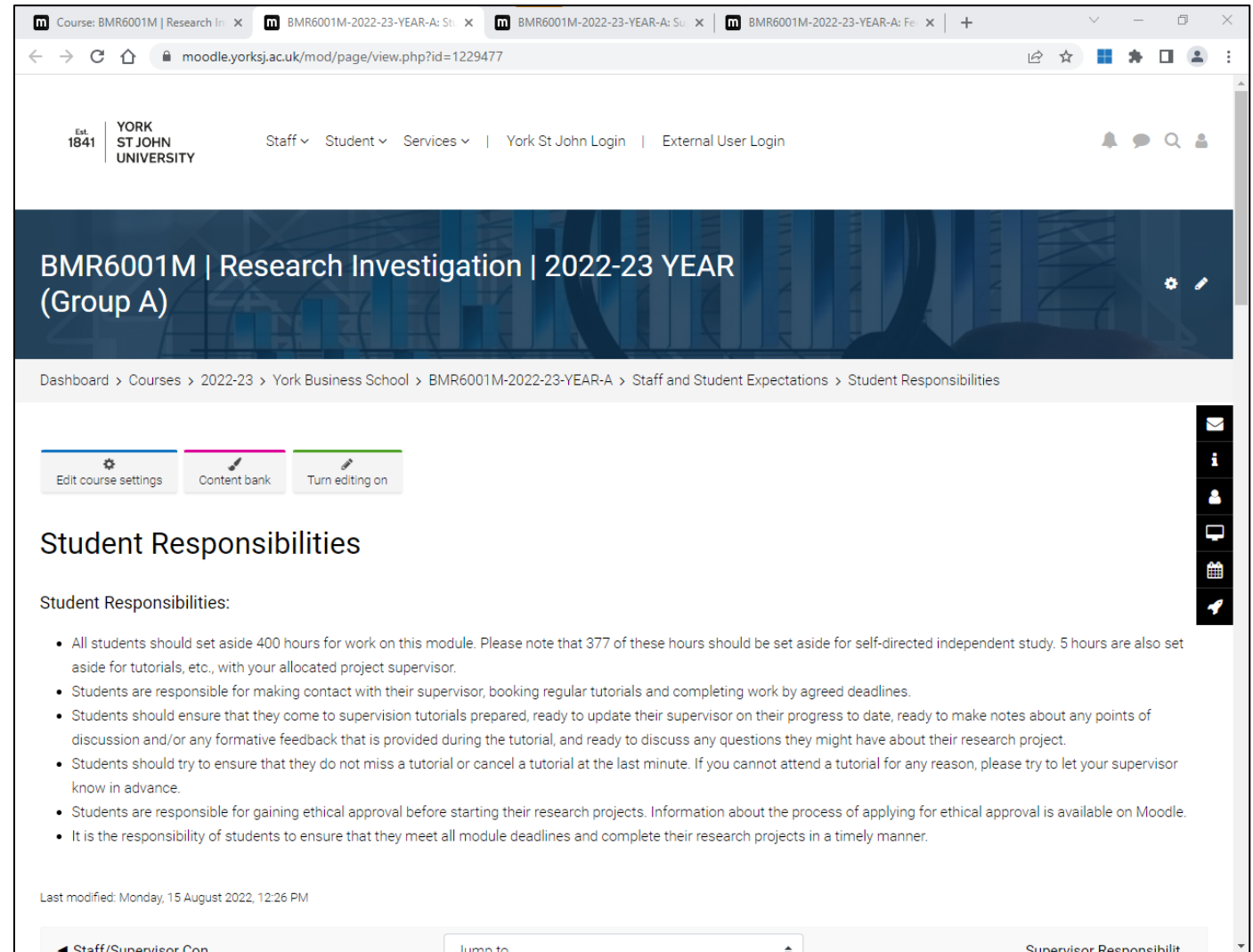
◀ Student Responsibilit... | Jump to... | Feedback on Draft Work...

Student Responsibilities

Similarly, as part of the learning "contract" between staff and students (Derounian, 2011), what are the expectations/responsibilities of students?

For example, students should:

- Take ownership of the project, arrange meetings and then turn up on time (Brewer et al., 2012; Todd et al., 2006).
- Prepare in advance for supervision meetings (Roberts and Seaman, 2018; Todd et al., 2006).
- Inform staff members if unable to attend (Todd et al., 2006).



The screenshot shows a Moodle course page for BMR6001M | Research Investigation | 2022-23 YEAR (Group A). The page includes a navigation menu with options like Staff, Student, and Services. Below the navigation, there are three buttons: Edit course settings, Content bank, and Turn editing on. The main content area is titled "Student Responsibilities" and lists several expectations for students, such as setting aside 400 hours for work, making contact with their supervisor, and ensuring they meet all module deadlines. The page also shows a "Last modified" date of Monday, 15 August 2022, 12:26 PM.

Course: BMR6001M | Research Investigation | 2022-23 YEAR (Group A)

Dashboard > Courses > 2022-23 > York Business School > BMR6001M-2022-23-YEAR-A > Staff and Student Expectations > Student Responsibilities

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Student Responsibilities

Student Responsibilities:

- All students should set aside 400 hours for work on this module. Please note that 377 of these hours should be set aside for self-directed independent study. 5 hours are also set aside for tutorials, etc., with your allocated project supervisor.
- Students are responsible for making contact with their supervisor, booking regular tutorials and completing work by agreed deadlines.
- Students should ensure that they come to supervision tutorials prepared, ready to update their supervisor on their progress to date, ready to make notes about any points of discussion and/or any formative feedback that is provided during the tutorial, and ready to discuss any questions they might have about their research project.
- Students should try to ensure that they do not miss a tutorial or cancel a tutorial at the last minute. If you cannot attend a tutorial for any reason, please try to let your supervisor know in advance.
- Students are responsible for gaining ethical approval before starting their research projects. Information about the process of applying for ethical approval is available on Moodle.
- It is the responsibility of students to ensure that they meet all module deadlines and complete their research projects in a timely manner.

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Staff/Supervisor Con | Jump to | Supervisor Responsibility

Feedback on Draft Work

Roberts and Seaman (2018) suggest that students can express concern at:

- a) Lack of feedback in the supervision process.
- b) Lack of timely feedback on draft work.

Expectations relating to formative feedback on the module are outlined...

Course: BMR6001M | Research Investigation | 2022-23 YEAR (Group A)

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Feedback on Draft Work

Formative Feedback During the Supervision Process

- Students should arrange regular tutorials in order to discuss their ideas with their supervisor and to seek formative advice, guidance and feedback from their supervisor on an ongoing basis throughout the research process.
- It is the responsibility of students to arrange such tutorials well in advance of any submission deadlines.
- Supervisors will provide formal **written** feedback on draft work from **up to two components** of a research project, provided that students: (a) meet the formative submission deadline(s) that are advertised on Moodle; and (b) submit their draft work using the relevant submission point(s) on Moodle. Written feedback will then be provided to students via Moodle three working weeks after the formative submission deadline.
- Please note that supervisors are not required to read full drafts of the research project. Students can however discuss and ask their supervisor questions about any chapters of their research project during supervision tutorials.

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◀ Supervisor Responsi... | Jump to... | BMR6001M - Module Ti...

Formative Submission of Draft Chapters

...and the formative feedback process is also standardised to:

- a) Set expectations at the outset.
- b) Ensure consistency in opportunities for feedback on draft work.
- c) Outline clear deadlines for return of feedback in a timely manner.
- d) Prevent a more stressful last-minute rush, where supervisors might be expected to provide written feedback at short notice prior to final summative submission.

BMR6001M Research Investigation Formative Draft Work and Feedback

All research investigations can be broken down into five main components:

| | Chapter(s) of Research Investigation |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| Component 1 | Introduction |
| Component 2 | Literature Review |
| Component 3 | Methods |
| Component 4 | Results & Discussion Chapter(s) |
| Component 5 | Conclusion |

You will have opportunity to receive written formative feedback from your supervisor on up to two of the above components of your research investigation.

Formative Submission Deadlines

In order to receive written feedback on your draft work, please note that you must submit draft chapters/components of your research investigation via Moodle by the relevant formative submission deadlines that are outlined below:

Formative Submission: Deadline 1

- You will have opportunity to submit **ONE** component of your research investigation by: **12.00 noon on Friday 3 February 2023**.
- You will need to submit your draft work using the formative submission portal, which is available on Moodle.
- Written formative feedback comments will then be returned to students via Moodle by: **Friday 24 February 2023**.

Formative Submission: Deadline 2

- You will then have opportunity to submit another **ONE** component of your research investigation by: **12.00 noon on Wednesday 5 April 2023**.
- Again, you should submit your draft work using the formative submission portal, which is available on Moodle.
- Written formative feedback comments will then be returned to students via Moodle by: **Friday 28 April 2023**.

Please note:

- You have the freedom to choose which components of your research investigation you wish to submit for written formative feedback.
- Students are however advised to discuss with their supervisor which of the above components of their research investigation they are planning to submit.
- You can only submit **ONE** component of your research investigation to each of the above formative submission deadlines (i.e. **up to two components** of your research investigation in total). Please be aware that you **cannot** therefore submit two components of your research investigation at the same time, to the same formative submission portal/deadline.
- Likewise, please be aware that you cannot submit the same component of your research investigation on more than one occasion.

Assignment Guidance Documents

- Provision of guidance for both staff and students can help to lessen uncertainty and/or anxiety in the research process (Todd et al., 2006)

Guidance documents available for staff and students both online and in print format for:

- Assessment 1: Research Proposal Presentation
- Assessment 2: Report

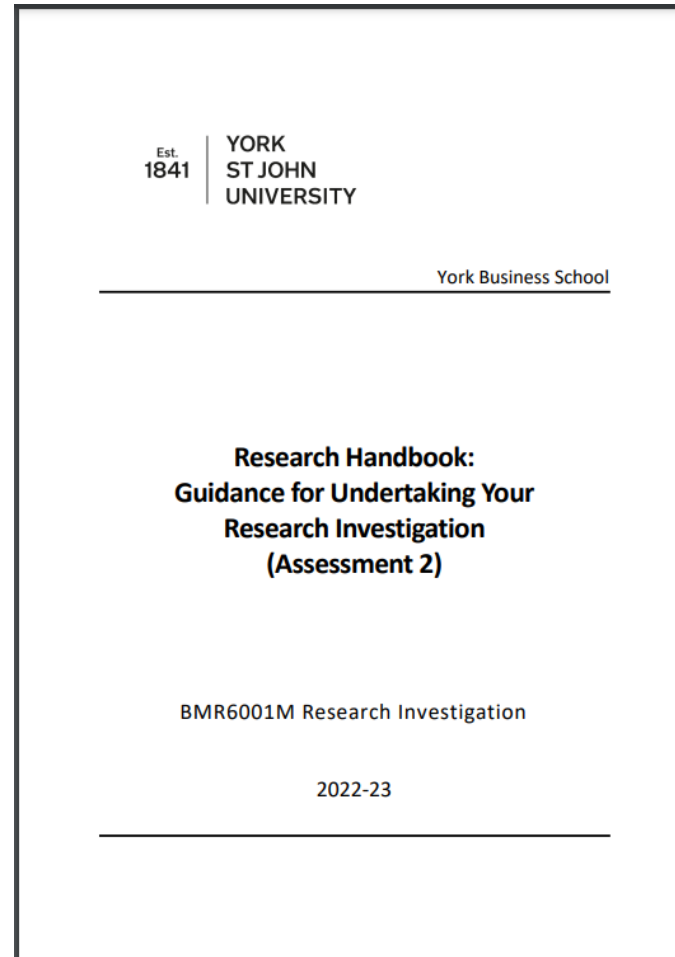


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Examples of Previous Research Investigations

- Previous examples of student research projects (available from the start of the academic year) likewise help to provide context for staff and students on the task ahead...

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BMR6001M | Research Investigation | 2022-23 YEAR (Group A)

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Examples of previous 8,000-word research investigations

- Example 1 - Examining the Night Time Culture.pdf
- Example 2 - CSR in the Fast Fashion Industry.pdf
- Example 3 - Fast Fashion Research Project.pdf
- Example 4 - Developing an Interactive App for the Elderly.pdf
- Example 5 - Developing an App for Planning a Night Out.pdf

Download folder Edit

Amendments/Revisio... Jump to... BMR6001M Assignment...



And Regular Communication...

For example:

- Lectures/workshops (S1 and S2) – recorded
- Regular student announcements/reminders via Moodle
- Anonymous Padlet Board on Moodle
- Mid-Module Review/Student Voice
- Regular updates/reminders/instructions/guidance for staff
- Staff site on MS Teams
- Staff meetings/training (e.g. start of module, research ethics, etc.)
- Staff members paired e.g. for ethics review, assessment/marketing, etc.



Conclusion

Key Points and Final Thoughts...



Conclusion

- What impact has there been from introducing this overarching framework on undergraduate dissertation/capstone modules in York Business School?
- “Just as the dissertation process is not easy for students, nor is its supervision for staff; but the benefits to both outweigh the potential problems” (Todd et al., 2006, p.172)



Any
Questions?

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Contact Details

Dr Steven Cock

- Course Leader: Events, Hospitality and Tourism Management Programmes
- Senior Lecturer in Business and Management, York Business School
- Co-Chair of the People in Employment Settings (PiES) Research Group

Email: s.cock@yorks.ac.uk

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Research Group