

## **BFM209 APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Academic Year 2011/12**

Number of Aston Credits: 15

Number of ECTS Credits: 7.5

### **Staff Member Responsible for the Module:**

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### **Other Staff Members Contributing to the Module:**

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### **Pre-requisites for the Module:**

None

### **Mode of Attendance:**

On-Campus

## Module Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

In the course of their work, managers often need to rely on research-based information. In order to make proper use of such material and to ensure that any decisions made on the basis of research findings are soundly based, it is necessary to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the methods and techniques used to collect and analyse such information.

There is a wide range of possible approaches to conducting research or consultancy studies which vary in terms of the kinds of questions they seek to answer and the methods used to provide answers. This module is designed to enable course members to develop the knowledge and skills required:

- > To assess the validity and reliability of research and consultancy studies carried out by others
- > To define and commission effective research studies
- > To prepare convincing research proposals

After completing this module students should be able to:

- > Evaluate, critically, research reports prepared by others
- > Design and present research proposals in an effective manner
- > Assess the reliability and validity of research findings
- > Analyse and interpret research data in appropriate ways
- > Present research findings appropriately in order to inform and guide the development of management policies and practices and to evaluate their effectiveness.

## Module Content:

The topics covered are designed to lead course members step-by-step through the most important stages of the research and consultancy processes. At each stage there will be opportunities to explore, by reference to practical examples and exercises, some of the potential problems which researchers and consultants need to solve if the results of their studies are to provide a valid and reliable basis for management decisions.

## Term 2:

### Week 1

Introduction:

- > defining the scope and purpose of research and consultancy projects
- > critically analyzing existing research-based information
- > identifying gaps in existing knowledge and understanding



- > techniques for focusing down
- > formulating your aim and objectives.

- Week 2** Planning and executing your literature search [library session]
- Week 3** Reviewing the existing literature
- Week 4** Exploring the strengths and weaknesses of alternative research designs.
- Week 5** Tools for thinking: theories, concepts, models and case studies.
- Week 6** Assessing the potential of qualitative research and the case study approach.
- Week 7** Assessing the potential limitations of survey data.
- Week 8** Accounting research in theory and practice.
- Week 9** Finance research in theory and practice.

### **Term 3:**

- Week 1** **Submission of your assignment - the research proposal.**

### **Corporate Connections:**

This module draws heavily on experience gained by staff and previous generations of course members in conducting policy-oriented research projects for a wide range of businesses, governmental and non-governmental organizations. The successful completion of the assignment requires course members to prepare a convincing proposal for researching a real-world practical management problem.

### **International Dimensions:**

The practical examples which will be used to illustrate the application of particular research methods and techniques will be drawn from recent research projects carried out by previous course members and others in Europe and other parts of the world. Particular stress is laid upon the importance of being sensitive to cultural and economic contexts when designing and presenting research proposals.

### **Contribution of Research:**

This module draws heavily upon the first hand practical experience of the module team in applying a wide range of management & business research methods in the



context of practical research and consultancy projects undertaken for a wide range of clients in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.

### Method of Teaching:

Lectures, workshops and case study exercises focusing on real-world practical management and business problems and issues.

### Method of Assessment and Feedback:

A project proposal, to be submitted by the end of Thursday 19 April 2012.

This should include:

- > Aim.
- > Background and context – outlining the problem and describing the organizational context of the proposed work.
- > Objectives.
- > An initial, critical review of the literature.
- > An outline and justification of the methods it is proposed to use to obtain and analyse the information needed to achieve your research objectives - including a brief review of their potential strengths and weaknesses.
- > Brief review of ethical issues.
- > A programme of work summarizing the key tasks, potential problems likely to be encountered and how it is proposed to overcome these.
- > References cited.

Maximum length: 3,000 words, plus appropriate diagrams and illustrations.

This assignment provides an opportunity for course members to demonstrate, in a practical context, the extent to which they have understood and are able to apply the principles, concepts, methods and techniques introduced in the module.

The criteria by which it will be assessed relate directly to the intended learning outcomes.

Feedback will be provided on the standard coursework feedback sheets.

### Learning Hours:

Lectures	10
Workshops/Tutorials	20
Directed Reading	50
Private Study	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>





The following essential and recommended readings are subject to change. Students should not therefore purchase textbooks prior to commencing their course. If students wish to undertake background reading before starting the course, many of the chapters/readings are available in electronic form via on-line library catalogues and other resources

### Essential Reading:

Bryman, A & Bell, E (2011) *Business Research Methods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Gummesson, E. (2000) *Qualitative Methods in Management Research*, London: Sage

Jesson, J., Matheson, L. and Lacey, F. M. (2011) *Doing Your Literature Review*, London: Sage

### Indicative Bibliography:

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. & Lowe, A. (2002) *Management Research*, London: Sage

Gill, J. & Johnson, P. (2002) *Research Methods for Managers*, 3rd ed. Paul Chapman Publishing

Saunders, M.N.K. (2009) *Research Methods for Business Students*, London: Prentice Hall

Luck, M., Pocock, R. & Tricker, M. (2000) *Market Research in Health & Social Care*, Routledge

Yin, R. K. (2009) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Sage

A fuller list of references to literature dealing with alternative approaches to research and consultancy and particular research techniques is available on Blackboard.

