

MA Integrative Counselling Dissertations **Information for Students**

1. What is an MA Integrative Counselling Dissertation?

The MA Integrative Counselling dissertation is an independent piece of original advanced research that a student enrolled on this top up course will be expected to plan, implement and report with guidance from a supervisor. Students are expected to show initiative and responsibility in this process and the capacity to reflect on evidence and make links with research theory and practice. You will get 12 hours of project supervision with your named supervisor.

2. Direct Entry to the MA Integrative Counselling

The MA Integrative Counselling is a top-up degree which Students who access would have completed a PG Dip Counselling & Psychotherapy (i.e. a BACP accredited course) prior to enrolling on the top-up. The curriculum of the PG Dip award is weighted to cover the professional requirements for academic content and practice hours and therefore a research module cannot be included in that award, and must be taught on the MA. The 20 credit Research module and 40 credit Dissertation module resolves the issue arising from the professional requirements of the PG Dip.

3. What standard is expected?

It is in effect, a significant research project in your chosen subject area demanding a high standard of achievement reflecting Masters level work. The approach may be either essentially empirical or theoretically reflective, or may combine both theoretical and empirical insights. It is not a 'long essay'; surveying the arguments of material contained in a limited number of references on a broadly defined topic. At masters level students are expected to display a sound familiarity with source literature in his/her chosen area within counselling and psychotherapy, a high level of theoretical competence, a clear ability to sift and evaluate evidence relevant to the area of counselling being examined, design investigations in a sure and competent way, and to produce a dissertation of potentially publishable quality. You will be expected to synthesise conceptual, analytical and research skills. You will identify and define a question or line of questioning within the field of counselling and psychotherapy and then develop an appropriate research methodology to address those questions. To assist with this you will be provided with a research methods course in your first semester. It is not necessarily expected that original research results may emerge, but the dissertation should demonstrate the potential of the student to progress to this given further time and resources.

4. What topic can I select?

You can select any topic you like within the field of counselling and psychotherapy. Please complete Appendix A (attached) which contains a short pro-forma for counselling research sufficient to get you started in selecting a topic. If you come to

the MA having completed our PG Dip in counselling and Psychotherapy, you may already have a topic selected. If not, by all means please complete based on your area of interest. At an appropriate time, a member of staff will be allocated to you and will be happy to discuss with you further. Please note that because the MA Integrative Counselling course is rooted in social research tradition, we ask that research proposals are based upon **qualitative** research methods and methodologies.

5. How do I get started?

By reading counselling and psychotherapy literature, published research on your topic of interest and/or some general introductory texts to research methods and methodologies and providing us with a 1000 word outline of your research ideas in Appendix A.

6. How will I be supervised?

You will be allocated a supervisor and you will receive a research methods/dissertation guidelines booklet to which you can refer (supplied on the modules post enrolment).

7. How is progress monitored?

There are specific rules which require the submission of written material. There is a research methods assignment which is a proposal of your research and there is also a required interim report on progress. The dissertation guidelines booklet which you will be given contains further details.

8. Is the MA in Integrative Counselling a qualifying course?

No. The MA Integrative Counselling course is not professionally accredited course however it is a course for practitioners who would have completed a PG Dip in counselling and/or psychotherapy and eligible to register via accreditation of the course they would have completed or via the independent route with United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy, or with the BACP.

9. Is there a requirement for me to be in psychotherapy/counselling?

No. There is no course requirement, this is purely an academic and research based course.

10. How long will I have to complete the course?

The course is a part time course designed as a top up course therefore it is to be completed within 1 year. The actual submission of the completed dissertation is within 9 months, taking into consideration the academic calendar, marking periods and exam board dates.

11. Contact Details

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Appendix A: Thinking about a Topic

- Counselling research must contain an in-depth study and critical evaluation of a particular problem in counselling, which may include: counselling and psychotherapeutic theory, counselling and psychotherapy in practice, sociocultural issues and counselling, or policies relating to counselling and psychotherapy practice.

Choosing a research Topic - Initial Thoughts

The initial steps are extremely important, yet some students find this the most difficult part of the dissertation. In selecting a topic, you must be able to demonstrate its practical and/or theoretical interest in Integrative Counselling. It is particularly important to be aware of the way in which your topic relates to broader themes in the disciplines concerned. You should also take into consideration manageability, in terms of time and resources, whilst showing an awareness of the existing state of knowledge on the subject so that research may be located in the wider debate. Fairly extensive reading around your chosen topic is important. The following specific points may help:-

1. There are virtually no topics where the last word has already been said: start to delve and researchable issues soon emerge.
2. By all means choose a topic which has interested you, but remember that the dissertation is an academic piece of work and the study must be approached in an objective and disinterested manner.
3. Have you checked the recent academic literature (e.g. journals, books) to see where the research focus is at present? Can you update some research done a number of years ago? Sources of information of use to you in constructing a literature review include books, journal articles, and research theses. When carrying out a literature search, the most recent issues of abstracts/indexes should be consulted first. Studying published research on your topic of interest can also help you to get some insights into methodologies that may be appropriate for your inquiry.
4. For many students, topics may arise from their counselling practice. This is to be welcomed, though to be done with care, as there can be problems of ensuring a research project with an adequate academic framework conducted with sufficient objectivity and a disinterested focus. In the case of practitioner research, previously published research should not dictate the form of the stated research problem and research questions asked: but *aid* the development of the research design, once the problem(s) and questions are closely identified.
5. When confronted with the prospect of having to carry out research, researchers often concentrate most on the question of how they are going to collect the data (and later on how this data might be analysed) - the mechanics of the research process. The more conceptual element of the research process - identifying, developing and contextualising the problem and questions to be addressed in the first place is usually assumed to be of less importance. However, if counselling research is to be fruitful, then the way in which research problems and research questions are identified and developed must receive adequate attention.

COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING AND SUBMIT

MA Integrative Counselling research idea

Working title

Outline research idea and Methodology being considered. *Please include a small number of references and in-text citations in order to locate your thoughts in early reading on your topic.*

Possible research questions of interest

