

The University of Edinburgh

The Moray House School of Education

School Postgraduate Studies Committee

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Reducing the word count for dissertation courses (REDU 11054 and REDU 11056) on the MSc Language Teaching and the MSc TESOL

Originator of the paper

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Changes proposed:

This paper is based on a previous paper written by Dr. Florence Bonacina-Pugh regarding the reduction of the word count for dissertation for the MSc Language Teaching, which was reviewed and approved by the SPGSC on 22 November 2016 but subsequently rejected at the Board of Studies. The reason why it was rejected by the BoS was that it lacked an academic rationale. The MSc TESOL dissertation was for many years 12000 words and changing it to 15000 words as instructed by Moray House did not produce any notable increase in quality. For this reason in part, both programmes have decided to put a joint paper to reduce the word count of dissertations to 12000 words. It should also be noted that both programmes work closely together within the Languages Master suite and that their respective dissertation courses share supervisors (permanent members of staff but also a large proportion of GH staff supervising across the two programmes).

Academic rationale for the proposed change:

There has always been a certain amount of flexibility on the word count of dissertations in both programmes. On the CCAM record for the Dissertation course (REDU 11054) for MSc Language Teaching, it currently states that: "The dissertation (approximately 15,000 words) is the outcome of a guided process of research - planning, implementation and writing up - largely carried out in the last three months of the programme." On the record for TESOL, it says that: "the word length of a dissertation is up to 15, 000 words".

The first reason for this proposal is that it is still within the remit of The *Post-Graduate Dissertation Guide* 2016-2017, which states that:

"In the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, a dissertation should normally be around 12,000 - 15,000 words (**but this varies on some programmes with different requirements**)" (page 4) and "The 15,000 (**or 12,000**) words count includes any footnotes and tables but does not include the reference list and appendices" (page 13).

The second relates to Credits. If a 20 credit course has a 4000 word assignment, it would stand to reason that a 50 credit dissertation course has 10,000 words. However, to be within the School and College's guidelines, we are proposing 12,000 words. This would still make the dissertation level 11.

The third academic reason is that 12,000 words trains students in the art of concision, which should come in useful in their professional lives (for instance submitting an article for a journal). Other departments within the CAHSS such as Linguistics and English Language even have an 8,000 word dissertation.

Finally, as mentioned above, when the MSc TESOL dissertation changed from 12,000 words to 15,000 words, this did not produce any notable increase in quality.