

Unit 16: Research Methods for Strategic Managers

Unit code:	R/602/2422
QCF Level 7:	BTEC Professional
Credit value:	15
Guided learning hours:	20

Unit aim

This unit provides the learner with an understanding of the methods and techniques used and required when carrying out formal research. The unit addresses a variety of research methodologies and offers the learner the opportunity to develop research skills.

Unit introduction

This unit is designed to introduce learners to the techniques and methods required to carry out formal research. The unit addresses a variety of research methodologies.

Learners will be required to propose a unique research question related to an area of professional business practice that interests them and will add to their professional development. They will carry out a literature review on the topic, critically evaluating its relevance to their research question.

Learners will understand the techniques, both quantitative and qualitative, used in research to analyse data. They will select an appropriate research methodology for their question, and record and present their findings.

Tutor approval should be sought before learners begin their research and their final report should be presented in a format agreed by the tutor.

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria determine the standard required to achieve the unit.

On completion of this unit a learner should:

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
1 Understand how to select a research question	1.1 select a research question 1.2 explain the factors that contribute to the process of successful research question selection 1.3 justify their choice of research question
2 Be able to conduct a literature review	2.1 conduct research to find literature relevant to the research question 2.2 undertake a critical review of the key literature for inclusion in a research proposal
3 Understand techniques used to interpret data in a research proposal	3.1 evaluate techniques for use with quantitative data in a research proposal 3.2 evaluate techniques for use with qualitative data in a research proposal
4 Be able to choose the appropriate methodology to research the question	4.1 evaluate appropriate research methodologies in terms of the research question 4.2 choose an appropriate methodology in terms of the research question 4.3 justify the methodology selected in terms of the research question
5 Be able to present the findings of a research proposal	5.1 record findings on a research question, literature review and methodology in an agreed format 5.2 summarise the findings using suitable methods 5.3 present the findings using suitable methods 5.4 critically analyse the findings

Unit content

1 Understand how to select a research question

Research question: definition; suitability; skills and knowledge to be gained; aims; objectives; terms of reference; duration; rationale for selection; methodology for data collection and analysis; type of research eg qualitative, quantitative, systematic, original; methodology; resources; statistical analyses; validity; reliability; control of variables; literature review; implications eg resources; ethical issues

Action plan: rationale for research question or hypothesis; task dates; review dates; monitoring/reviewing process; strategy

Preparation: identifying ideas/topics/areas of investigation; research question(s); scope and feasibility; hypothesis; literature search; agreeing the process; targets; milestones; action plan; timetable and procedure; monitoring and revision

Methodology: literature search eg library, internet, sector data sources; pure and applied research, developmental, longitudinal, survey, case study; research and development; concepts and theories; terminology; validity and reliability

2 Be able to conduct a literature review

Secondary research: books; journals; papers; conferences; library search; use of IT; internet; media

Evaluation of literature: credibility; validity; reliability; frequency of references and esteem in which publications are held; use and acceptance by others

3 Understand techniques used to interpret data in a research proposal

Qualitative data analysis: interpreting transcripts and records, coding techniques, categorisation, relationships, trends, processes, use of computers; presentation of data and information

Quantitative data analysis: coding/values, manual/electronic methods, specialist software; presentation of data eg bar/pie charts, graphs, statistical tables; comparison of variables, trends, forecasting

4 Be able to choose the appropriate methodology to research the question

Research methodologies: intervention, non-intervention, action research

Implement: according to research design and method; test research question/hypotheses; considering test validity; reliability

Methodology for quantitative data: questionnaires (type, layout, questions, distribution, original research data); interviews (selecting interviewees, bias, verification of data, time, place, style, preparation, format, recording); surveys

Methodology for qualitative data: case study; observation; interviews

Data collection: selection of appropriate tools for data collection; types eg qualitative, quantitative; systematic recording; methodological problems eg bias, variables and control of variables, validity and reliability

Data analysis and interpretation: qualitative and quantitative data analysis – interpreting transcripts; coding techniques; specialist software; statistical tables; comparison of variables; trends; forecasting

5 Be able to present the findings of a research proposal

Presentation: eg formal written format, by *viva voce* or oral presentation, diagrammatic or graphical figures

Methodology: presentation eg IT, audio, visual aids, time, pace; delivery critique of the methods used in the study, recommendations, eg using the findings, recommendations for the future, areas for future research

Evaluation: planning, objectives, focus, benefits, difficulties; an overview of the success or failure of the research project planning, aims and objectives, evidence and findings, validity, reliability, benefits, difficulties, conclusion(s)

Future consideration: significance of research investigation; application of research results; implications; limitations of the investigation; improvements; recommendations for the future, areas for future research

Criteria: purpose, editing, format, sequencing success, critical analysis, discussion of evidence and findings

Format: professional delivery format appropriate to the audience; use of appropriate media

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

Learners may have developed a range of investigative skills throughout their programme of study, but this unit focuses on formal research methods leading to the production of a 'thesis style' report. It is important that learners understand the elements that make up formal research, including the different methodologies, how to select a research question, action planning, carrying out the research (in this case a literature review), being able to be critical and evaluating the relevance and importance of material, and ways to record and present their findings. Tutors will need to cover the theory that underpins formal research to enable learners to complete this unit successfully.

The research proposal itself depends on the learner, the context of their area of learning, their focus of interest and the anticipated outcomes. The unit could draw together a range of other content areas from the programme of study to form a holistic piece of work that makes a positive contribution to research on commercial practice. As *Unit 17: Project Development and Implementation for Strategic Managers* requires delivery of a major research project, the research question investigated in this unit could underpin the practical outcomes required by that unit.

To meet the learning outcomes, learners need to establish relationships with commercial and industrial organisations to collect data that will lead them to their conclusions. It is essential that tutors monitor the development of individual research questions closely to ensure that learners are following the correct guidelines and working towards agreed objectives.

Learners will need further guidance to support the presentation and evaluation of their work. The presentation of their research should follow formal presentation practice, with correct referencing and bibliography details. Tutors could deliver an appropriate session to underpin this approach, but the development of presentation skills should not be the focus of this area of work.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way of planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to the unit and assessment criteria
Tutor input – selecting a research question Assignment 1: Selecting the Question
Individual investigation and research followed by tutor support and feedback
Tutor input – literature reviews Assignment 2: Literature Review
Tutor support and feedback
Tutor input and discussion – qualitative and quantitative data and techniques
Practical exercises on qualitative and quantitative data and techniques
Tutor input – research methodologies Assignment 3: Analysing Data for a Research Proposal
Tutor support and feedback
Tutor input – how to present the findings of research proposals Assignment 4: Presenting a Research Proposal and its Evaluation
Tutor support and feedback
Review of unit and programme of assignments

Assessment

Evidence for this unit should be generated through a written report, demonstrating a sound understanding of research methods and protocol. The report should show evidence of secondary research through a critical review of the relevant key literature relating to the selected research question. It should also show primary research through the selection of a new research question, and then by selecting the appropriate research methodology for this question and evaluating and justifying its use. Crucially, research needs to be focused on meeting its objectives and the outcomes need to be credible. The research question needs to be well-thought-out, appropriate, unique and researched and planned thoroughly.

Learners will need to demonstrate the ability to work independently and provide evidence of an individual approach in their finished work. Learners will require close supervision and organised tutor support in order to design a research question/hypothesis which is realistic, achievable and economically viable within the scope of the unit. Tutor approval should be sought before learners begin the research.

Tutors will need to establish the availability of resources to support independent study before learners proceed with their proposals.

For AC1.1, learners select an individual research question. Learners should adopt a critical and realistic approach in this selection exercise and gain tutor support before progressing further.

For AC 1.2 and 1.3, learners must explain the factors that contribute to the process of successful research question selection and justify their choice of research question. This will require careful planning and preparation in relation to the selected research question as well as consideration of alternative questions before final selection.

For AC2.1, learners need to conduct research to find literature relevant to their research question. The literature review should be comprehensive and thorough. It should include all key material and show an understanding of the concepts in the material and their relevance to the current question. Learners should be selective and disregard irrelevant material.

For AC2.2, learners must undertake a critical review of the key literature for inclusion in their research proposal. The review should be critical and consider the validity, credibility and esteem in which material is held as well as its use by other researchers, and its relevance to the current research question.

For AC 3.1 and 3.2, learners need to evaluate techniques for use with quantitative and qualitative data in their research proposal. This requires understanding of both types of data and the relevant techniques, and an evaluation of their appropriateness to the research question.

For AC 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, learners need to evaluate appropriate research methodologies in terms of their research question, choose an appropriate methodology and justify the selected methodology in terms of the research. This needs to include a thorough evaluation of all methodologies, with clear reference to the research question, from selection through to justification.

For AC 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4, learners must record their findings on the research question, literature review and methodology in an agreed format, summarising, presenting and critically analysing them in the process. The presentation must be appropriate in format and content. It must also be professional and show in-depth knowledge and understanding of the research, its context and a critical analysis of its success and findings.

It is possible to assess work orally, with learners explaining and describing things to the assessor in discussion, in group work or a presentation. If oral assessments are used, then the work must be directly attributable to the individual learner and, in this unit, needs to be backed up by a written report. The assessor must provide a signed statement that includes detail of the oral evidence presented and how it is aligned to the criteria.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the criteria in the assessment grid. This is for guidance only and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Assessment criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
AC 1.1, 1.2, 1.3	Selecting the Question	Selection of a research question, planning and preparation.	Written report
AC 2.1, 2.2	Literature Review	Review of appropriate literature to use for research.	Written report
AC 3.1, 3.2,	Analysing Data for a Research Proposal	Quantitative and qualitative data and analysis.	Written report
AC 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4	Presenting a Research Proposal and its Evaluation	The presentation of a research proposal and its evaluation.	Presentation

Essential resources

Where learners are engaged in primary research, tutors must check that access has been negotiated and that ethical research procedures are being followed. Learners will need access to ICT and appropriate commercial organisations.

Learners will also need access to ICT facilities when analysing their findings and writing up their reports.

Indicative resource materials**Textbooks**

Bell J – *Doing your Research Project, 5th Edition* (Open University Press, 2010) ISBN 0335235824

Best J W and Kahn J V – *Research in Education, 10th Edition* (Allyn and Bacon, 2005) ISBN 0205458408

Coghlan, D and Brannick T – *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization, 3rd Edition* (Sage Publications, 2009) ISBN 1848602162

Cohen L, Manion L and Morrison K – *Research Methods in Education, 6th Edition* (Routledge, 2007) ISBN 0415368782

- Coolican H – *Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology, 5th Edition* (Hodder Education, 2009) ISBN 0340983442
- Elliott J – *Action Research for Educational Change* (Open University Press, 1991) ISBN 0335096891
- Gill J and Johnson P – *Research Methods for Managers, 4th Edition* (Sage Publications, 2010) ISBN 1847870945
- Hart C – *Doing a Literature Review* (Sage Publications, 1998) ISBN 0761959750
- Hoinville G and Jowell R – *Survey Research Practice* (Avebury, 1985) ISBN 0566051567
- Kane E – *Doing Your Own Research, 2nd Edition* (Marion Boyars, 2001) ISBN 0714530433
- Lock D – *Project Management, 9th Edition* (Gower Publications, 2007) ISBN 0566087723
- Marshall L – *A Guide to Learning Independently, 3rd Edition* (Longman, 1998) ISBN 0582811708
- McNiff J and Whitehead J – *Doing and Writing Action Research* (Sage Publications, 2009) ISBN 1847871755
- Murray R – *How to Write a Thesis, 2nd Edition* (Open University Press, 2006) ISBN 0335219683
- Robson C – *Real World Research, 2nd Edition* (John Wiley and Sons, 2002) ISBN 0631213058
- Saunders M, Lewis P and Thornhill A – *Research Methods for Business Students, 5th Edition* (Financial Times/Prentice Hall, 2009) ISBN 0273716867
- Thomas R and Lynn P – *Survey Research in Practice* (Sage Publications, 2009) ISBN 0761971076