

School of Economics & Finance Undergraduate Studies

Final Year Project Guidelines Academic Year 2025/26

PROJECT GUIDELINES

0. Overview of the projects

Projects can be either 1 semester (Semester A or Semester B) or 1-year. All students taking the project module will be expected to:

1. Find a topic that interests you and write a project proposal *before* the end of June 2025.
2. Find a project supervisor among the faculty in the School of Economics and Finance (SEF) who agrees to work with you on the project. This must also be done by 27 June 2025.
3. Meet to discuss and present research ideas with other students and staff at the start of the year.
4. Attend training on academic writing, research and referencing provided by the QMUL library, or show knowledge of these skills in the execution of the project.
5. Meet with your advisor approximately 4 times per semester.
6. Present your research to other students and staff at the end of semester A (for Sem A projects) or semester B (for Sem B and full year projects)
7. Write an original piece of research of 10,000 words for a 1-year (30 credits) project and 7,000 words for a 1-semester (15 credits project).

1. Introduction

As a final year student, you may take the option of conducting a project instead of either one or two final year optional modules. There are a number of potential benefits of doing a project. It enables you to focus on a subject of personal interest. You will have the opportunity to organise a substantial piece of independent work. Your understanding of economics will develop as you apply your theoretical and methodological knowledge to a “real world” problem. In addition, the final project will be a demonstration of your practical and organizational abilities that may enhance your future job market prospects. But note that the project requires enthusiasm for the research question and dedicated, continuous work. You are required to demonstrate a great deal of commitment when embarking on a project, which can however be very rewarding!

These project guidelines have 4 purposes:

- i. To define the aims of a project and what you will need to consider before embarking on this option.
- ii. To provide advice on how to conduct a good project.
- iii. To explain the importance of providing sufficient evidence that the project is indeed your own work
- iv. To clarify the obligations of both supervisor and student.

A general introduction to what is involved in writing a project is presented in section 2. Section 3 discusses the key components of a good project. Section 4 then discusses the nature of evidence that might be required to convince examiners of the authenticity of the project. Finally, section 5 lists and explains the obligations of student and supervisor.

2. What is a Project?

a. Aims

The aim of a project is to allow you to develop the ability to conduct independent research work on a question of interest. This will involve an increased understanding of economics through the practical application of knowledge gained from other modules. You will gain valuable experience in analysing a complex and unfamiliar issue, drawing on their knowledge of economic theory and methods, without being able to rely on comprehensive textbook treatments.

b. Objectives

You will learn how to conduct your own independent piece of work from start to finish. You will practice how to develop an argument in a logical way, with the help of economic models and data analysis to support it. A project will equip you with an understanding of research methodology and the application of theoretical and methodological approaches to answering your research question. It will also provide you with the ability to write a coherent and legible report, something of great value to a potential employer or for continuing in postgraduate education.

c. Types of Project

A project may count as either one or two units towards your degree. A 15 credit project can be carried out in either the first or second semester. It may be a free standing piece of work, perhaps inspired by issues examined in an earlier module, or it can be linked to a final year taught module. In the latter case the project should develop a subject covered within the linked module. A linked project is likely to be a 15 credit option, whereas an independent project is likely to be 30 credits. However, this is not binding and you may opt to do a 30 credit, linked-project or a 15 credit, free standing project.

d. Choosing a Subject/Question.

Your project should be inspired by a question, or questions, you wish to answer and not by data availability or methodology. Of course, you need to have access to the relevant data or methodology required to tackle your particular question. Also, bear in mind that your project must have sufficient economic content. Try to keep the questions you seek to answer relatively straightforward. Many projects extend a piece of existing work, or compare results with existing work using a different data source (e.g. a different country, industry, time period, etc.). Remember to seek advice from the project coordinator. Please see the various examples of successful past projects on QMplus. They span across a wide area of Economics of Finance – from the effects of “Domestic Violence on Employment and Earnings” to “Impact of Baby Boomers on Financial Markets”.

e. Procedures for Registering for a Project

The first thing you should do is to discuss your ideas with both the project

coordinator and other members of the School with expertise in your subject area. It is **your** responsibility to find a member of the School who is willing to supervise your proposed project. You will then need to submit a **1-2 page** proposal to the project coordinator. Your proposal should contain the following:

- i. Provisional Title/Question
- ii. Agreed supervisor
- iii. General Objectives (One or two paragraphs)
- iv. Provisional Content (Expected Chapters)
- iv. Brief description of Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Techniques
- vi. The availability of Data and existing Literature

You need approval from a supervisor by the time that you submit your proposal. You will need to have a meeting with that supervisor to discuss your ideas before getting their approval. It may take a while to find a supervisor that fits your needs, so start looking early. See Section 5 for more guidelines on how to find and work with an advisor.

The project coordinator will then examine your proposal and will inform you if your proposal has been approved. If successful, your registration on the project module will be confirmed. Otherwise, you will be required to select an alternative module.

f. Deadlines

- i. The Project Proposal must be uploaded onto QMplus in the UG Info Zone by 5pm on **Friday 27 June 2025**. Please note that your registration on the project module is conditional to the approval of your proposal. If the proposal is not accepted, you will be required to change your module selection.
- ii. At the time that you submit the proposal (**Friday 27 June 2025**), you should also provide evidence that your proposed supervisor has agreed to supervise your project.
- iii. The project coordinator will inform you if your project proposal has been approved by **15 September 2025**. You may be asked to make amendments to the proposal before it is finally approved.
- iv. 15 credit semester A projects should be submitted by the first day of the semester A exam period (**8 January 2026**).
- v. 30 credit and 15 credit semester B projects should be submitted by the first day of the semester B exam period (**7 May 2026**).
- vi. You should submit an electronic version on QMplus.

The deadline to drop the 15-credit semester A or 30-credit full year project module (and swap to a taught module) is the end of the second week of semester A. The deadline to drop the 15-credit semester B project module is the end of the second week of semester B. Please bear in mind that potential supervisors will put in considerable time and effort to help you plan the project, so we expect that any students who embark on this module will continue with it.

g. Presentations

All students taking the project module will be expected to present their work in front of the other students, the module organiser and supervisors. This is a chance to showcase your work, demonstrate your understanding of the material, and develop presentation and public speaking skills.

These presentations will take place:

- In **Week 12 of Semester A** for Sem A students
- In **Week 12 of Semester B** May for Sem B and full year students.

A brainstorming session for all students will take place at the start of Semester A, when students will discuss their ideas in a group with other students and advisors to get feedback and ideas. This session will take place in **week 2 of Semester A for SEM A, SEM B and 1-year students.**

These sessions will be scheduled on your student timetable. The final presentation in week 12 counts for **20%** of your overall project module mark.

h. Project Assessment

Assessment of your project is conducted by your supervisor and at least one other member of the School. It will also be subject to moderation by an external examiner. The final module mark for the Project module is assessed by 20% Presentation and 80% written Project.

The best project in each year will be awarded the Corry Prize.

Bernard Corry was a professor in the School of Economics and Finance from 1966 until his retirement in 1996. He died in January 2001. He was always a strong advocate of projects, and to mark his many contributions to the School of Economics and Finance, QMUL, and the economics profession in the UK, his colleagues established an annual prize for the best project. The first award of this prize was made in 1997.

3. Writing a Good Project

a. Format of a Project

Projects should be typed using a standard word processing package (e.g. MS-Word, Latex, Lyx) in either 1.5 or 2 line spacing. Your project should not exceed 10,000 words for a 30 credits project and 7,000 words for a 15 credits project. Assuming 250 words per page this corresponds to 40 pages and 28 pages respectively. There is no concrete guide to the structure of a project. This will vary depending on the subject of analysis and methodology employed. Also, the relative structure of a 15 credit project will be somewhat different from a 30 credit project.

The expectation is that the 30-credit project will include an applied component based on the use of statistical techniques you learned during your studies. On the other hand, the 15-credit project may or may not include an applied component depending on the focus you choose to give to the research. For example, an in depth critical literature review would be suitable for a 15-credit

project.

A typical project might adhere to the following structure:

i. **Introduction**

This should not exceed 4 pages and it is advisable that you write this at the *end* of your writing up. It should contain the general objectives of your project. You should briefly explain the background to the subject/question tackled and the context and contribution of your dissertation. You should also outline the general approach that you will take and provide a summary of your findings.

ii. **Theoretical and Empirical Background**

This should be around 12 pages and should demonstrate your understanding of the existing theoretical and empirical literature that deals with your chosen subject. An important component of your project is your knowledge of the current literature. In this section you should provide a clear overview of the key papers and the state of understanding in your subject. This will include a review of the main theoretical and empirical approaches, the methodological problems encountered and the empirical results obtained. You should also outline the expected contribution of your own work and where this fits into the existing literature. For 15 credit projects this section is likely to be somewhat shorter since more emphasis should be placed on your analysis.

iii. **Analysis**

This section is the fundamental part of your project and should be about 20 pages in length. You should begin with a discussion of the objectives of your analysis; i.e. what questions you expect to be able to answer. Then you should provide a description of the analytical framework. This will include a presentation of the methodology and techniques you are employing. Make sure that you are clear about what you hope to achieve with your analysis and highlight potential problems in your methodology. You should then describe the results obtained from your analysis. In describing your findings remember to refer back to the questions you are seeking to answer. Also, highlight any problems in your analysis and how these may affect your findings. You should finish this section with a brief overview.

iv. **Conclusions**

This should be a maximum of four pages. You should present a summary of your findings and where applicable relate these to existing results from the literature. Finally, discuss the general conclusions you have reached with reference to any policy conclusions and future areas for research.

b. The Characteristics of a Good Project

A good project will meet a number of key criteria. These may change somewhat depending on the nature of your project but overall you will be

assessed on the following criteria:

- i. **Question/Subject Tackled**
The question tackled needs to be sensible and clearly defined and your dissertation must be your own piece of original work.
- ii. **Context and Understanding of Existing Literature**
You must demonstrate a good understanding of the current literature in your chosen subject, including knowledge of existing theoretical and empirical methodologies and results. You should also demonstrate your awareness of potential problems in analysis and provide a clear explanation of the context of your own dissertation. You must provide a full bibliography according to academic convention (e.g. see *School of Economics and Finance Undergraduate Handbook*)
- iii. **Analytical Skills**
The quality of analysis is perhaps the most important component in a good dissertation. You must justify your chosen research method and demonstrate a good understanding of your methodology. This will include an awareness of any assumptions made and limitations to your approach. Your arguments must be logical and coherent. If you are using primary or secondary data then this must be appropriate for your analysis. You must highlight potential problems with the data and state how these may impact upon your results. If collecting primary data you must employ appropriate data collection techniques and fully explain the procedure.
- iv. **Organisation and Presentation**
Your dissertation should be structured in a clear and logical manner. As far as possible, be sure to split up the sections of your project into those outlined above. Concentrate on each issue in the relevant section of your dissertation so that the reader follows a logical progression. It is important to write with clarity and conciseness. Good spelling and grammar are also important.
- v. **Conclusions Drawn**
You should clearly explain the findings from your project and discuss the implications in the context of existing literature. Your conclusions should be supported by your results and you should identify areas of further research. You can also discuss the policy implications of your findings if applicable.

c. Managing Your Project

The management of your project is key. We advise you to keep a project notebook that takes the form of a laboratory workbook or a diary. It is a record of how, when and where you undertook the main activities that go towards compiling a project. In constructing it, you should consider three potential end users.

- i. *Yourself*
You should find it an essential source not only when writing up, but also in later stages of the project when you need to revise or reinterpret earlier activities.
- ii. *Other readers* (including potential employers).
The persuasiveness of a piece of research depends on the credibility of the evidence and the analysis. A standard test is whether the reader has enough information (either in the report itself, or in the associated notebook) to replicate the study for themselves.
- iii. *Examiners*
The notebook can provide a crucial role in convincing any potentially doubting examiner that the work really is your own.

The following list considers the main activities that might form part of your project, but it is not exhaustive and (bearing in mind the end users) you will need to use your judgement. You should keep records of these activities, where relevant, as you proceed in your notebook.

- i. *Obtaining primary data*
This might be through interviews, questionnaires or straight observation (e.g., of traffic flows or purchasing behaviour in a supermarket). Over what period did you develop your questionnaire or data collection plan? Who did you discuss it with and when? Was there a pilot study, and if so how, when and where was it administered? How where and when was the questionnaire received, completed and returned by the respondents?
- ii. *Extracting secondary data*
Where was the data published and where and when did you access it (e.g. Table 6 of 1999 Blue Book in library; Finance page of Unilever web-site, interview with marketing director, from the UK Data Archive.)? How, when and where did you record the information (copy by hand, photocopy, electronic download)?
- iii. *Analysis of data*
What steps were taken in devising a strategy for analysis? Who did you discuss this with? Record results as you proceed.
- iv. *Bibliography*
You should compile a bibliography as you proceed and record in your notebook when and where you accessed items, and whether you took notes or a copy. Detail is particularly important where there may be difficulty for someone else accessing the document (e.g. an internal company document, or web page), whereas if it is in our library, then the date is enough.
- v. *Sessions with supervisor (or other advisors)*

Record when you met, the main topics of discussion, what you showed them (pilot questionnaire, draft of analysis section) and what strategies and activities they suggested.

vi. *Writing up your dissertation*

Record when you carried out the writing up and the primary sources of inspiration for each major section of the report.

Whilst we advise you to keep a project notebook, this is not a requirement for the project module assessment. Your project module notebook will not form part of the module assessment.

4. Showing the Project Is Truly Yours

This section considers the concerns that examiners might have about plagiarism, and the sort of evidence required for you to show (except where there is specific acknowledgement to the contrary) that all of the work implied by the final report is your own. Your project notebook will assist you with this. If in doubt, then discuss any issues with your supervisor.

- i. Primary data - How you devised the questionnaire (copy of draft version, copy of previous questionnaire on which it was based), administration of questionnaire (copy of acknowledgement if carried out by third party; if postal, covering letter and information of dates returned), extraction of relevant information (original data worksheets).
- ii. Secondary data - The source of data (UK Data Archive, website address), method of extraction (original worksheets if copied by hand, photocopies, downloaded files).
- iii. Analysis of Data - Preliminary description of analysis (copies of original worksheets and graphs), statistical analyses (precise description of software with examples of inputs and outputs, including some relating to subsequently rejected analyses).
- iv. Reading and References - All sources, whether used for specific ideas or information, or as general background, must be acknowledged. Equally, the bibliography should only include items you have actually looked at (for non-standard references, photocopies or original notes, downloaded internet files).
- v. Final Report - Process of constructing the final report (copy of project framework with supervisor's comments, copy of section drafts with supervisor's comments, note of meetings with supervisor).
- vi. Anti-plagiarism software: Turnitin – You will submit your project online on QMplus via a software called Turnitin. This software will allow you and the supervisor to monitor how much your work matches existing work in order to understand the level of similarity that, in turn, could be interpreted as plagiarism. You will have the opportunity to check the similarity report before final submission of your project and, in case, amend it.
- vii. Presentations and discussion sessions: these will give you a chance to articulate your ideas and take questions on your project, which will allow you to demonstrate your understanding of the subject.

5. Obligations of Supervisor and Student

a. Allocation to Supervisor

A member of staff appropriate to the subject will supervise your project. It is your responsibility to find a member of the School willing to supervise your project prior to submission of your project proposal. Your supervisor may be any suitable member of staff. It can be someone who has taught you a module which has inspired your project proposal, particularly in the case of linked projects, or can be a member of faculty who has expertise in your area of interest. Please familiarize yourself with the research fields of faculty at the School, which are available through the SEF website. You should talk to the project coordinator if you are unsure about the suitability of different potential supervisors.

b. Arrangement and Frequency of Meetings

You must meet your supervisor no fewer than 4 times for a 15 credits project and no fewer than 8 times for a 30 credits project (normally one meeting per month). Precise arrangements should be agreed with your supervisor. You and your supervisor have an obligation to meet at mutually convenient times. Be sure to make arrangements to meet with your supervisor early in the semester to discuss your expectations in terms of number of meetings and to devise a strategy for your project. You should agree preliminary deadlines for the completion of phases of your project.

c. Amount of Guidance

Do not expect your supervisor to tell you exactly what you need to do at each phase of your project. They will provide guidance on key issues and suggest ways to review the literature that will develop your understanding of these issues. They will help you devise a strategy or work plan for your project and offer comments on your results. Remember that your supervisor is only there to provide guidance and assistance; it is your project.