

MSc page-limit

13 people responded in total

11 responses were positive

2 response was negative

2 response was in between with both positive and negative feedback

Positive Points

- Page limit is observed
- 40 pages was enough
- There were some high-end (very good) theses used a technical appendix with extra experimental data and technical proofs, but the thesis was nicely readable even without the appendix.
- Preferred marking with the page limit.
- For students with mono disciplinary topics the page limit was fine and would propose to keep the page limit but granting plus 10 or plus 20 pages should be granted if there are good reasons e.g. potential tutorial value of thesis or a multi part question.
- Page limit was explained to students early on, and explained why it's there. This approach worked well and no students had problems sticking to the limit, it resulted in more structured and more focused dissertations.
- Pleased with the results and found several benefits – the dissertations did not include lots of unnecessary background material. Were able to read the dissertations more thoroughly for marking, in less time. Also able to read drafts more thoroughly for feedback in less time. Seemed the students were less stressed out than before because they had clear guidance.
- 40 page limit was very helpful and appropriate, both in order to do technical writing in a concise and yet clear and informative manner. Also helps the markers given the current pressures due to MSc marking loads.
- Thought it was good and worked fine for me and my students.
- 40 pages was about right and would be very happy if we continued with this limit.
- Limit has worked out well. Reports that I saw required serious clarification/explanation were also shy of the page limit.
- Many of the machine learning dissertations I've seen in recent years had a lot of "padding" made up of standard background material that didn't add to the project, or really demonstrate any insight from the student.
- The projects this year had far less of this padding, but didn't seem to otherwise suffer. I found the page limit to be a positive change.
- Supervisor perspective: A typical dissertation can be well presented on 40 pages. The page limit forced my students to think more carefully about what/how to present. I told them they can put whatever they feel they need to add (mostly tables, longer equations) into an appendix. I supervised three, they all got distinction marks.
- Marker perspective: Definitely made it more bearable. I had 15 + 1 CDT to mark, and the time I spent on each was significantly less than in previous years. I found it easier to mark, a good student would effectively use the space to make their point.

- We should keep this. I see no downside whatsoever, and it encourages good scientific writing.
- For the projects which I was barely qualified to mark, I was grateful not to have to read more than 40 pages.

Somewhere in the middle

- Largely think it went well, but felt there was less detail to the methodology and experiments reported, making it harder to reproduce and do something useful with the project results.
- For projects that were in my area of expertise, I was left with important questions that would probably have been answered if the student had not had to keep within the page limit. We abandoned presentations for MSc projects a long time ago because some colleagues didn't want to spend their valuable time attending them, which meant that there was no opportunity to ask the student.

Negative Points

- For interdisciplinary projects the page limit was unnecessary difficult for the students who needed to explain background and methods from two fields which had easily required another 10 pages.
- One student's material ended up in the appendix disrupting the argument.
- My feedback on the 40 page limit is that students took it as an indicator of how much detail was necessary, often creating thesis with many vital details and background left out. What was extra frustrating was that students also seemed to all turn in less than 40 pages, even as low as 28, while also leaving out vital information. I cannot quite tell how or if the page limit was causing the problem since all students had more space left.... But as a side effect, all my students (correctly) got lower marks than I normally give out.
- For the project I supervised, the student spent a significant amount of time cutting out material that didn't fit within the page limit, including some very important material, and the quality of the dissertation definitely suffered as a result.

Actions

- **Response from DI Programme Director** - Would like to see the limit applied to Design Informatics theses as well. The Design Informatics dissertations require students to discuss prior design work and artefacts as part of the literature review, and this is an explicit marking criterion. This requires liberal use of pictures and photos, which will bloat thesis length - even if the word count is the same as a 30 page Informatics dissertation. Therefore, we explicitly do not wish to impose a thesis length restriction.
- We can mitigate this issue in future by ensuring that markers from Informatics who do not wish to second mark long DI dissertations can swap their load with one of the DI specific staff (Helen, Ben, Robin, John L, me). I have already done this for two dissertations. In addition, DI MSc students are told repeatedly about the page limit for non-DI dissertations in Informatics, and exhorted to be concise.
- Extra material could go in an appendix where it was clear that this didn't need to be read in details as part of the main dissertation.