GUIDANCE NOTES – Early Stage Assessment (ESA)
9 months for full-time students/18 months for part-time students

1.1. The College requires that a student’s progress during PhD registration must be formally monitored at two key stages after the date of initial registration:

i. at 9 months for full-time students and at 18 months for part-time students (Early Stage Assessment)

and

ii. between 18 and 24 months for full-time students and between 30 – 36 months for part-time students (Late Stage Review)

1.2 For those students studying at a Partner Research Institution (PRI) the LSR must take place at a College campus in the UK. For those students registered for a Split-PhD, the LSR must take place in the UK.

2. The Early Stage Assessment (ESA)

2.1. The College requires that assessment of a student’s PhD research potential, to determine whether registration for the PhD can continue, will be determined by an examination, held 9 months (18 months for part-time students) after the date of initial registration. The assessment must be based upon an examination, which involves the submission by the student of a written report and an oral examination on the report. The assessment panel will include at least one independent academic assessor (independent from the research “group”, i.e. from the project and the supervisor). See the College’s Academic & Examination Regulations [3.3].

2.2. Students who started their postgraduate research degree on or after 24 September 2019 will need to follow the College’s policy on using Turnitin as part of the ESA submission process.

2.3. Students starting on or after 24 September 2019 are required to submit a copy of their ESA report to Turnitin for an originality check to guard against possible plagiarism. This should be done via Blackboard prior to the submission of the written report for examination.

2.4. The decision to allow a student’s PhD registration to continue must be based on the following factors: (a) the student must submit a written report (b) the

* Please note the milestones for students registered part-time may differ from those listed. Part-time students should check the timing of their milestones with their department. Additionally, the timings of some milestones may vary for some CDT students and some EngD students on four year programmes. Students are advised to check the timing of their milestones with their department.
written report must be submitted to Turnitin (c) the student must be orally
examined on the report by at least one independent member of academic staff
in addition to/other than the supervisor(s) and (d) the assessment should
normally be held 9 months (18 months for part-time students) after the date of
initial registration. These arrangements apply to all students whether full-time
or part-time, registered under the Partner Research Institute Scheme (PRIS)
or for split PhDs, for Joint PhDs [unless a variant has been explicitly
negotiated], and to staff registered for a research degree.

2.5. The purpose of the Early Stage Assessment is to confirm that the student has
an understanding of their field of research and the direction of their project, and
has the potential to pursue research. Data presented at this stage may be
minimal but should be indicative of the student’s ability to perform.

2.6. If the College determines that the student’s progress is such that they cannot
continue, the student may be required to withdraw from the College at this
stage; alternatively the College may transfer their registration to the degree of
MPhil. The date of MPhil registration will, in this case, be backdated to the
date of the initial PhD registration.

2.7. A student has one opportunity to repeat the Early Stage Assessment if required
to do so by the department, and this must be within 11 months (22 months for
part-time students) of the date of the initial PhD registration.

2.8. All PhD students are expected to complete a programme of professional skills
development training as prescribed by the Graduate School. Failure to
complete the requisite training may result in a student’s registration being
transferred from PhD to MPhil or in a student being barred from entering the
PhD (or MPhil) examination. See the College’s Academic & Examination
Regulations [4.2].

2.8.1. For students registered on or after 1st October 2012, the Early Stage
Assessment must ask whether a student has completed the professional skills
development training. For students registering on or after 1st October 2016,
the minimum professional skills development attendance requirement at Early
Stage Assessment is:
- a minimum of 2 professional skills courses plus the online plagiarism
  awareness course

OR

- A Graduate School retreat plus the online plagiarism awareness course

OR

- An international doctoral summer school plus the online plagiarism
  awareness course

It should be noted that a further two Graduate School courses must be
completed by Late Stage Review. Full details of the Graduate School’s
Professional Skills Development Statement of Policy and Attendance Requirement can be viewed at the Graduate School's website.

2.8.2. If the student has not completed this requirement, the College may transfer the student’s registration to MPhil. If the student subsequently fulfils the professional skills development requirement, and has otherwise successfully completed the Early Stage Assessment, the student’s department may request a transfer of registration from MPhil to PhD. The date of PhD registration will, in this case, be taken as the date of the initial PhD registration.

2.8.3. For students who registered before 1st October 2012, the professional skills development requirement should be completed before the Late Stage Review, and it is therefore not necessary to confirm attendance of training as part of the Early Stage Assessment.

2.9. The Early Stage Assessment must also consider whether the student needs additional English language support.

2.10. The Head of Department† (or nominee) and all supervisors concerned should sign the ESA form. The independent assessors must also be named on and sign the form.

2.11. The standard Early Stage Assessment form can be found at: [http://www.imperial.ac.uk/about/governance/academic-governance/academic-policy/research-programmes/](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/about/governance/academic-governance/academic-policy/research-programmes/)

2.12. Departments are responsible for confirming to the Registry that an assessment has been completed for every student.

3. Guidance on completing each section of the form

3.1 Section A

3.1.1 To be completed by the students and Department ahead of the ESA assessment. Section A also includes confirmation from the Department that the student has met the College’s professional skills and English language requirements.

3.1.2 The Graduate School ([graduate.school@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:graduate.school@imperial.ac.uk)) will provide Departmental administrators with a report confirming what professional skills courses students have completed. Alternatively, students may present their administrator with a copy of their professional skills attendance certificate as evidence. The Centre for Academic English ([English@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:English@imperial.ac.uk)) will be able to provide confirmation that English language requirements have been met if not known.

† Any reference to “department” or “departmental” includes schools, institutions, centres or divisions, as appropriate.
3.2 **Section B**

3.2.1 To be completed by the independent assessor. Departments are reminded that it is not good practice to appoint members of staff who are also responsible for providing pastoral care to students as independent assessors of those students.

3.2.2 The independent assessor must be given a copy of the relevant Turnitin report and satisfy themselves the ESA report is free from plagiarism.

3.3 **Section C**

3.3.1 To be completed by the supervisor following the ESA Assessment. Both the supervisor and student are then asked to sign the form to confirm the conversation has taken place.

3.3.2 The College wishes to provide its research students with an outstanding and world-class experience whilst at College. This includes the provision of excellent support and guidance from supervisors. It is recognised that supervisors will provide students with regular informal feedback but the ESA form is an opportunity for supervisors to provide formal feedback to students.

3.3.3 Supervisors and assessors are also reminded that students are asked to comment on the quality of supervision that they receive at College as part of the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), an important benchmarking tool. Students will be asked to comment on whether they are supported by their supervisors and receive regular feedback on their research activities.

3.3.4 Section C has been developed in order to facilitate broader discussions between students and supervisors not just on academic progress but the wider developmental needs of students. Supervisors should also take the opportunity to support students through honourable exit following an outcome of transfer to MPhil.

3.3.5 When considering what professional, technical and other training students may need as they progress through their PhD, Supervisors are reminded that a full list of Graduate School courses is available at: [http://www.imperial.ac.uk/study/pg/graduate-school/professional-skills doctoral/](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/study/pg/graduate-school/professional-skills doctoral/). It may also be possible for students to attend technical and other taught courses offered by departments. To access this information, supervisors are advised to search the College’s Timetabling software and contact departments directly to see if venue capacity will permit additional attendees. Supervisors may consider discussing the management of research data to assist students with early adoption of good practice. Information about Data Management Planning is available at: [https://www.imperial.ac.uk/research-and-innovation/support-for-staff/scholarly-communication/research-data-management/data-management-planning/](https://www.imperial.ac.uk/research-and-innovation/support-for-staff/scholarly-communication/research-data-management/data-management-planning/)
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>August 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approved:</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective from:</td>
<td>October 2016</td>
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<td>Notes and latest changes:</td>
<td>Formatting changes made on 15 March 2016, revisions made in June 2016 to reflect change to professional skills requirements and removal of RPC requirement Updated to reflect Turnitin requirements for students starting on or after 24 September 2019 (August 2019)</td>
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