

Initial Research Plan

The Initial Research Plan (IRP), **which must be written by the candidate** with the supervisors' assistance, should be 2-4 pages (single-spaced) including figures (optional) and usually no more than 10 references, and should be submitted electronically.

The purpose of this IRP is to allow assessment of the intrinsic scientific merit of the project and of the student's understanding of the project. It must, therefore, contain sufficient detail to allow a decision to be reached.

The research plan should be formulated on the basis of a full two year MD(Res) or three year PhD programme of research. It should **not** just describe the work that would lead up to the Early Stage Review at 9 months.

The structure of the research plan should be as follows:

a. Title of the research and name of the student and supervisors

b. Background to project

The background should be a survey of the literature directly relevant to your work. It will involve placing your research topic in the context of your field. It may refer to work that has been carried out in the laboratory before you arrived. This section should also provide the information from which you have formulated your hypothesis.

c. Hypothesis

You should add a concluding paragraph which provides a clear, succinct statement of the hypothesis on which your work will be based (one or two sentences at most).

d. Aims

The main goals of your research should be stated concisely, either as short sentences or bullet points.

e. Plan of Investigation

Describe the methods that you will adopt, in sufficient detail to allow both your understanding of them and their feasibility to be assessed. Detail whether these methods are currently available in the Division/Department/Section or how they are to be established. Evidence of pilot work should be incorporated into this section and will be particularly noted.

Approval Process

In addition to supervisors, the student will have two independent assessors (review panel). These will be academics that have the appropriate knowledge base and expertise to judge your progress and offer you advice on your postgraduate project.

During your application stage, the PGR Team would approach your primary supervisor to nominate a review panel for your project. The review panel must be composed of two independent assessors (who are both members of Imperial College London), with one usually from your Section and one from outside the Section or the Department. The review panel plays a vital role in reviewing IRPs, ensuring they meet the required standards of quality and feasibility. The panel members provide thorough feedback and continue their involvement through both the Early Stage Assessment (ESA) and the Late Stage Review (LSR), offering ongoing guidance and critical evaluation during key stages of the research process.

The review panel will read, assess and comment on the Initial Research Plan. In addition, they may provide an external input on the project, with suggestions for specific experiments, methodologies or potential new directions for your research project.

The assessment reports will be made available to both student and supervisors and will confirm that:

- 1) **the candidate** meets the required standard with reference to the following:
 - appropriately qualified
 - proficiency in written English
 - abilities and background suitable to undertake the research project
- 2) **The project and supervisor(s)** meet the required standards with reference to the following:
 - well-defined aims
 - appropriateness of the plan of investigation

- comments on pilot work, if appropriate
- well-designed project such that the candidate has scope to carry out their own research even though they may be working in a large team with complementary projects
- (if truly part-time, the fraction of time that the candidate will be able to devote to their studies)
- necessary space and facilities can be provided
- sufficient funds are available for the expected duration of the programme. Where availability of funds has been confirmed by the signature of the supervisor/s, the liability for the provision of those funds will lie with the supervisor/s and not with the Institute
- supervision can be given for the expected duration of the programme (suitability and experience of supervisor(s))

It is important to note that this process is one of **approval** and not a pass/fail examination.

Initial Research Plans that are not approved at initial consideration may only require some modifications to be made in order for approval to be given at a later date. There is sometimes, but rarely, a need for the project to be entirely revised.