Imperial College London

GUIDANCE NOTES – Early Stage Assessment (ESA) 12 months for full-time students/24 months for part-time students[1]

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, and confirmed as completed no later than:

   i.   12 months for full-time students and 24 months for part-time students (Early Stage Assessment)

   and

   ii.   24 months for full-time students and 48 months for part-time students 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. The ESA must be completed by 12 months (full-time students) and 24 months (part-time students) from the date of initial registration, which may include one opportunity for re-assessment. 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.

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[1] Please note that the milestone deadlines listed in this document apply to students admitted from October 2021 onwards.
Students registered prior to October 2021 should refer to the Academic Regulations in effect for their cohort.
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.

24. Where ESAs contain material of national security classification, these will be exempt from submission to Turnitin. This applies to research projects funded by one of the national intelligence agency funding bodies. In such cases, the supervisor will need to submit a declaration confirming that the ESA has not been submitted to Turnitin because it contains material of national security classification and that to the best of the supervisor's knowledge, the ESA is free from plagiarism. This email declaration should be submitted to the department's PGR administrator and the ESA assessors should be informed.

25. 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 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 completed within 12 months (24 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.

26. 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.

27. 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.

28. A student has one opportunity to repeat the Early Stage Assessment if required to do so by the department; the ESA must still be completed within 12 months (24 months for part-time students) of the date of the initial PhD registration.

29. 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].

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 as follows:.

Doctoral Students (PhD, MD[Res] and EngD): The College requires all doctoral students to achieve a minimum of four Graduate School credits, plus the online doctoral plagiarism awareness course. The online Plagiarism Awareness Course is compulsory, but does NOT count towards the minimum credit requirement which is set out below:

Doctoral students are required to accumulate a minimum of 4 credits by the Late

Stage Review (LSR) as follows:

- By the Early Stage Assessment (ESA) – 2 credits
- By the Late Stage Review (LSR) – a further 2 credits

Course Type	Number of Credits
Online courses	1
Face-to-face workshops	1
Webinars	1
1 Day Retreat	1
2 Day Retreat	3
5 Day Global Fellows Programme	4

MPhil Students: those who are direct entry MPhil, or those being awarded with an MPhil degree having first registered for a PhD, must complete a minimum of two credits by the ESA. The LSR professional development credit requirement does not apply to MPhil students.

2.9.1. 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.

2.9.2. 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.

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

2.11. The Head of Department[2] (or nominee) and all supervisors concerned should sign the ESA form. The independent assessors must also be named on and sign the form.

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

2.13. 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

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[2] Any reference to "department" or "departmental" includes schools, institutions, centres or divisions, as appropriate.

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) 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) will be able to provide confirmation that English language requirements have been met if not known.

Section B

3.2.1   To be completed by the independent assessors. 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/. 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/

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