



School of Management  
Student IRP Handbook  
2015-2016



ROYAL  
HOLLOWAY  
UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON

## **Disclaimer**

This document was published in December 2015 and was correct at that time. The Department\* reserves the right to modify any statement if necessary, make variations to the content or methods of delivery of programmes of study, to discontinue programmes, or merge or combine programmes if such actions are reasonably considered to be necessary by the College. Every effort will be made to keep disruption to a minimum, and to give as much notice as possible.

**Please note:** the term 'Department' is used to refer to both 'Departments' 'Centre's' 'and 'Schools'. Students on joint or combined degree programmes will need to use two departmental handbooks.

**An electronic copy of this handbook can be found on your Departmental website <http://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/management/informationforcurrentstudents/postgraduate/home.aspx> where it will be possible to follow the hyperlinks to relevant webpages.**

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## 1. Introduction

The Independent Research Paper (IRP) is a very important part of your MSc International Management degree. It is an opportunity for you to learn and practise researching and writing skills, which you will need in your career. It is the part of the MSc International Management programme where you can apply the analytical and problem-solving techniques you have acquired during your studies to explore a specialist interest in greater depth. The IRP is demanding but at the same time it can be one of the most rewarding aspects of your Master's degree.

The purpose of this handbook is to help you approach your IRP effectively. Every IRP is different: there is no single right way, but many wrong ways to do research. However, with clear aims, careful planning and good organisation, you will save time and achieve more. The IRP is the final piece of assessment for the MSc International Management degree. Though the substantive work is undertaken following the end of the College exam schedule, **with a due date of Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016** you benefit from preparing the ground. The IRP Proposal (**due on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2016**) is an important first stage.

If you have a problem once you have begun your IRP, your supervisor will normally be the first person to contact on most academic issues. If you have an administrative problem you should contact the School of Management Reception. If you have another problem then you can contact the MSc International Management Programme Director, Dr Alex Reppel, [Alexander.Reppel@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:Alexander.Reppel@rhul.ac.uk).

Please note that IRPs have to be submitted by the deadline set by the School of Management.

## 2. The Nature of the IRP

The IRP is not intended to be an original contribution to knowledge, but it should demonstrate your ability to collect data systematically, organise your findings and ensure that your research results are presented in a logical and clear manner.

The IRP should demonstrate both the technical knowledge that you have acquired throughout your MSc International Management degree programme and also the ability to integrate knowledge from different subject areas in order to apply it analytically to an academic but business-related problem.

Consider the constituent elements of the IRP, namely independent, research and paper:

Independent: The IRP is a piece of individual assessment, not team-based or collaboration. As such, your allocated supervisor is not a co-author. Moreover, independent means your own work – not the work of other students, for instance. To be blunt, plagiarism results in the loss of marks, with termination of the degree as a possibility.

Research: There needs to be evidence of a question relevant to some aspect of international management under investigation in the IRP. In addition, you need to provide a review of the associated literature, some form of data collection and data analysis, followed by an answer to the research question.

Paper: The IRP is a written document in the form of a long (8-10,000 words) essay. It must adhere to academic conventions. For example, you must demonstrate an understanding the research question(s) you have selected. You will be assessed on the standard of critical reasoning and overall consistency and strength of argument. In addition, the overall structure and presentation, including referencing and bibliography, is important.

As part of the final submission – as consistent with the independent, research and paper elements – you will be asked to declare that the IRP has been prepared on the basis of your own work and that where other sources have been used these have been acknowledged. (See Appendix C: Declaration of Authenticity.)

What you want to communicate, and how you want to communicate it matters to us. ‘Informed opinion’ is an instructive term as it suggests that your opinion – independent judgement – is informed (based on additional reading, data collection, and data analysis).

In marking your IRP, examiners will be looking for the following attributes:

1. Is the student aware of the state of knowledge in the chosen area?
2. Has the student identified the variables relevant to the problem(s) examined and recognised the inter-relationships between them?
3. Has the student adopted and used appropriate methods of investigation?
4. Has the student carried out an appropriate and sufficient analysis of the findings?
5. Has the student presented the IRP effectively and professionally?
6. Where appropriate, has the student examined a range of possible solutions, framed suitable criteria and proposed a viable solution or recommendation?
7. If the topic of the IRP requires the student to seek
  - permission to undertake the research;
  - a formal ethical assessment and approval (through an ethics committee or a similar body) to undertake the research;
  - permission to quote a person, a company or an organisation;
  - permission to write up the research material; or

- permission to publish any research results,

the examiners will note whether such permission or approval has been sought and acquired.

Every one of these attributes is important. A good IRP must score well on each criterion.

The MSc International Management is the only postgraduate programme offered by the School of Management to be assessed by the IRP. All the other MA/MSc/MBA programmes are assessed by a Dissertation.

There are material differences between the IRP and the Dissertation:

1. Length: 8-10,000 words for the IRP vs. 12-15,000 words for the Dissertation;
2. Weighting (Degree Classification): 14.29% for the IRP vs. 20-25% for the Dissertation; and
3. Assessment Criteria: A condonable fail (40-49%) can be acceptable for the IRP, according to the College's regulations, whereas any Dissertation (MA/MSc/MBA) must achieve at least 50%. See the Postgraduate Handbook 2015/16 for full assessment criteria used in degree classification by the College.

Moreover, there are particular reasons why the MSc International Management is assessed by the IRP:

1. The MSc International Management is exam-intensive. You sit six exams – at 2hrs each for 12hrs in total – covering general management functions, which is substantially more than any of the specialist (MA/MSc) programmes in Management. Moreover, each exam has a course unit weighting of 80%;
2. The amount of research training provided to you – MN5270 Business Research Methods is scheduled within an already relatively crowded MSc International Management timetable – is less than what is provided to candidates on the specialist programmes; and
3. The MSc International Management is both a conversion programme (designed for those who did not read management as part of a first/undergraduate degree) and a termination degree (which is to say it is not designed as a platform for MPhil/PhD studies).

The Research Project course unit has some affinities to the IRP, namely the assessment of literature sources and articulating an informed opinion to a

research question. A significant difference is the individual component of the IRP.

### 3. Choosing a Suitable Topic for the IRP

The choice of a topic can be crucial to the success of your IRP. As such you should spend some time and effort in choosing the topic carefully. The key point is that the IRP must focus on **a topic that is closely related to the MSc International Management degree programme**; if in doubt, consult the MSc International Management Programme Director as early as possible.

If you have thought about the matter a great deal, but still cannot find a topic, try brainstorming. Remember the rules of brainstorming: capture and list on paper or on a board every idea (however silly, odd or way out) that comes to you. Do not stop to dissect or analyse your thoughts at this stage. When you have run out of ideas, read the list through; more ideas are likely to emerge. When you can think of no more ideas, go through the list grouping the thoughts together and testing them against the criteria outlined below.

Broadly, there are three criteria against which you should test your ideas for a topic:

- 1) Is it a substantial problem or opportunity?
- 2) Is it realistic given the time and resources available?
- 3) Is it intellectually challenging?

The IRP should have both theoretical and practical elements; an IRP weighed too heavily on either side is inappropriate. Your IRP must be framed in such a way that you can cover it adequately in the time available and report on it fully within the word limit imposed. Most IRPs are initially on the side of being far too ambitious. One of the first tasks your supervisor will usually set is to ask you to define your topic more tightly and precisely. This must be done at the beginning of the IRP if you are going to use your time effectively.

Research on previously unexplored areas can be exciting. However, one reason why a topic has been left untouched may be that the data simply do not exist to undertake any significant research. In certain cases you may, in a small way, be able to fill such a gap. Nevertheless, there are considerable advantages in selecting a topic on which there is plenty of information available.

Note that although copious information may exist about a topic, this information may not be accessible: access may be too costly, or it may be restricted. For instance, if your IRP depends on information only available within a particular company, you need the permission of that organisation to access and use this information. Check that you can obtain the information you need.

In order to undertake some IRP topics you may need to have particular areas of knowledge and skill. For example, do you may need advanced statistical skills or knowledge of decision theory to complete your particular IRP? If so, check

that you have such knowledge and skills, or the time and ability to acquire them, before commencing your research.

During your MSc International Management degree studies you will have had many demands on your time and learned how to manage them. Occasionally your IRP will seem burdensome and you may also be bored with it, and it is then that those time management skills will be most needed. When your commitment to the research project is tested in this manner, what will help you proceed (apart from determination) is your interest in the topic; therefore, a topic should inspire enthusiasm and be motivating when you choose it.

Here are some reasons for NOT choosing a topic:

1. 'Because I can't think of anything else'
2. 'Because my friends or family told me to do it'
3. 'Because it looks easy'
4. 'Because I've undertaken a similar IRP previously'
5. 'Because I left it too late to do anything else!'

Finally, here is a helpful checklist for the selection of a suitable IRP topic:

- Is this a topic closely related to my MSc International Management programme and has an academic orientation?
- Does it have both empirical and theoretical elements?
- Is it achievable – can I complete this over the summer?
- Is there enough information available?
- Can I get access to that information?
- Do I have the necessary knowledge and skills?
- Is the topic sufficiently interesting to motivate me on a gorgeous summer day?

You should be able to answer 'yes' to each question. If not, go back and think again about that aspect of the IRP.

#### **4. The Formal Research Proposal**

As part of the guidance you receive during your Business Research Methods course unit, you will be asked to compose an IRP Proposal of 1,200 words. To complete the IRP Proposal there is no requirement to solicit interest from a faculty member.

There are two main purposes why you are asked to write the IRP Proposal:

- To get you to think about and to start planning your IRP; and
- To enable the School of Management to allocate you an appropriate supervisor.

Although the IRP Proposal is not formally assessed, the MSc International Management Programme Director will review it. He will match students to



faculty members (from ones who are available to be IRP supervisors). Your supervisor will provide (written and oral) feedback on your IRP Proposal as part of the first meeting; ideally this first meeting takes place before the end of Term 2 (24th March 2016).

Your IRP Proposal (MN5270 submission) should be submitted to the School of Management (Reception or Postgraduate Office) by **14.00 on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2016**. You will also be sent instructions by the MSc International Management Programme Administrator on how to submit the Proposal electronically to TurnitinUK via Moodle nearer the time. **You must keep a hard copy of all your coursework.**

Please note, your supervisor may wish you to revise your IRP Proposal as part of providing feedback.

The IRP Proposal should be in the form of a report. It should contain the following sections and information, which form the central attributes of a research IRP.

Please refer to the MN5270 Moodle site for the IRP Proposal document.

Your IRP Proposal should include:

1. The title of your IRP – WHAT you plan to research. The title should provide the reader with an indication of your IRP;;
2. Locate the subject areas (Accounting; Business Economics; Corporate Social Responsibility; Entrepreneurship; Finance; Human Resources Management; Information Systems; Marketing; Operations Management; and Strategy) of your IRP. You may wish to combine two subject areas, though this is not necessary. There may be an industry, country, and/or company focus, which can also be represented in the IRP title. Make sure that your topic is researchable by you in the limited time available. (You are not setting out to write a PhD thesis which takes 3-4 years of full-time research!) The wider, the less focused, a topic is the more difficult and time consuming it will be for you. In your IRP Proposal, provide evidence that you have thought about the area(s) you wish to investigate. Have you thought about the key research question(s) you will address?
3. Indicate WHY your proposed IRP is relevant to the MSc International Management. The title and topic area should be relevant to your MSc International Management degree programme; moreover, it is important that your topic is something that interests you. This may include your motivation. As the IRP stretches over the 2015/16 academic year, select a research a topic of genuine interest to you. Have you thought about the key research question you will address? It is important that you have gone further than just picking a generic topic area to be researched, and that you have decided which aspect of the topic you might investigate in

detail. It is important to try to make this process as specific as possible. Narrow questions are easier to investigate successfully; a broad topic may evoke so many conflicting issues that giving an adequate amount of attention to all of them in the time available might be impossible. Please note that too narrow a topic may mean that the IRP will lack empirical breadth or analytical depth, though. Furthermore, you must choose a subject on which you can easily acquire primary information (documents, interviews, questionnaires, etc.) and for which there is a body of literature to investigate and synthesise when identifying research questions;

4. An outline of the method or methods you plan to use to research your IRP. This is an indication HOW (such as questionnaires, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, literature synthesis) you plan undertake your research. Explain how you will realistically be able to apply the method and why it is relevant for your IRP. Realistic application includes the issue of securing access if you plan to interview corporate managers. You need to appreciate the benefits and drawbacks of different research methods. Consider the following:
  - a. Are the methods suited to the data?
  - b. Will you have time to acquire the necessary data and analyse them?
  - c. What are the limitations of the methodology you use?
  - d. What sources of bias could occur?
5. Provide an approximate timetable of the various stages of your research, namely WHEN you will be engaged in the different stages. This should help you to think of the IRP as a project over a period of time. Consider what is necessary and feasible to do before the end of the exam period;
6. A brief overview of some of the key literature relevant to your topic of research. Your IRP will have to include a review of relevant literature. Are you aware of the key state of knowledge in the chosen area? At this stage a brief indication is probably only possible, but you should demonstrate that you have searched for some relevant literature. (See College's Library portal: <http://eresources.rhul.ac.uk/kb/Management>. RHUL subscribes to Business Source Complete. Note that you can become a member of the University of London Senate House Library – for free – to access ABI Inform.) Demonstrate that you have searched for some relevant literature. Do not write internet or textbooks. Whatever your IRP topic you will not be the first person researching it. There is a requirement to identify some of the key writers and key issues or debates. You should discuss major authors, key debates in the literature and relevant theoretical frameworks. List the reading you have already done and identify the research questions within your chosen topic as best you can. Also, consider how you will decide between different perspectives or bridge the gap between them.

## 5. The Role of the Academic Supervisor

To help you with your research IRP, a member of the academic staff will be allocated to you as a supervisor. Your programme director will read your research Proposal and will select an appropriate member of staff to act as your supervisor. You will be allocated a supervisor by the end of week 6 of the spring term. Your supervisor will be familiar with your topic of research but may or may not be an expert in the particular aspects you have chosen to study.

Accept that supervisor serves as a technical resource. It is his or her job to advise you on methodology and to help you avoid routine research errors. It is therefore essential that you make effective use of the time allocated for supervision. The supervisor will be able to offer advice and critically discuss your ideas, evidence, and methodology. However, the supervisor will not read drafts in detail or act as a corrector of English.

It is up to you to make use of your supervisor. *It is not the supervisor's role to chase you on your progress.* You should make contact and discuss your ideas with your supervisor before you plan in detail your IRP.

**Between weeks 7 and 10 of the spring term,** you will be expected to meet your supervisor to discuss and agree the following:

1. Research topic, objectives and reviewing the literature
2. Methodology/fieldwork

### **PLEASE NOTE: Changes to Topic and Methodology**

Once the topic and methodology has been agreed by your supervisor you will not be allowed to change either the topic or the methodology without a letter signed by your supervisor agreeing to the changes. This letter must be included in the final dissertation. Appendix C provides a template of the letter to be signed by your supervisor. **No changes will be accepted after 30th June 2016.** If you hand in a dissertation that is substantially different from that agreed by your supervisor, it will be marked as a fail.

It is your responsibility to initiate contact with the supervisor in order to receive advice; supervisors are willing to help but do not have unlimited time to place at students' disposal. Keep in mind that over the summer your supervisor may be away on holiday, undertaking research, or attending conferences. It is important that you discuss your planned IRP timetable with your supervisor. Over the summer months you need to keep in touch through your College email. It is your responsibility to check your College e-mail regularly.

Please note that while the number of meetings between student and supervisor will vary depending upon the student and supervisor, the School expects that the student and supervisor will have had *a minimum of two formal meetings* to discuss the IRP. Some supervisors may choose to hold group supervisory meetings with several students together. This is a useful way for you to learn from the experiences of other students.

## ***Getting the most out of your supervisor***

You can make best use of your supervisor's time by paying attention to the following points:

### *a) Prepare for your discussions*

- Just like any other meeting, a meeting with your supervisor requires preparation. S/he will have points to raise with you; make sure you have in turn thought through the points you want to discuss.
- Send written material in advance. Do not expect the supervisor to read your drafts at the meeting. If s/he is not ready, rearrange the meeting to give him/her more time to read the drafts. This is particularly important if the context of the discussion is an extended telephone or online discussion.
- Do your own copyediting and proofreading. Supervisors will refuse to do so.

### *b) Manage your IRP*

- Supervisors may be able to advise you on how to handle difficult situations you encounter, but good project management dramatically reduces the number of these.

### *c) Inform*

- As meetings are infrequent, it is important to keep your supervisor informed of progress on your IRP and any changes that you may make to the agreed subject matter.

While the IRP must provide a measure of your individual effort that does not mean that you have no resources other than yourself. Gathering data, for example, may involve the assistance of others, including internal staff and external specialists. Please acknowledge any such assistance in the IRP.

## **6. Planning and Managing Your IRP**

Your research IRP is like any task or project you might undertake at work – it must be planned and managed. Good planning and management cannot guarantee a good IRP, but poor planning and management will make a good IRP very hard to achieve.

The key stages of planning and managing a research IRP are as follows:

1. *Defining your aims:* From the very beginning you need to have a clear idea of what you are trying to achieve. If you neglect this phase, you may find some truth in the saying 'If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else'. At the end of this stage, you should have a clear statement of your terms of reference.
2. *Working out what needs to be done:* Once you know what you are trying to achieve, you can work out what is involved in getting there. This will

include what reading needs to be done, what contacts need to be made, what data must be collected, what analyses must be carried out and what writing up will be needed.

3. *Planning*: Once you know what needs to be done, you can draw up a plan for the completion of the IRP. Start with an audit of your skills, knowledge, contacts and interests. Your plan should include a detailed timetable for the IRP and a breakdown of tasks and dependencies within the detailed timetable.
4. *Carrying out the IRP*: Once you have devised your plan, you should be ready to go ahead with your research. When undertaking your IRP, you should review your progress regularly against the plan. Remember that you will need plenty of time for reading around the topic and writing up the IRP. Also, note that you will have to make adjustments to accommodate unforeseen events (including illness and computer problems). If you start drifting off-course, tougher action may need to be taken.

Beware of some of the traps into which others before you have fallen:

1. Rushing into action without thinking what your IRP is really about and, therefore, ending up with bits and pieces of research all focused on different matters.
2. Failing to be clear with regard to the aims of the IRP and thus ultimately undertaking, say, three different IRPs.
3. Underestimating the time needed for writing up. The IRP is the longest and most demanding individual piece of work during the MSc International Management degree. You should make sure you allocate sufficient time for the writing-up period.
4. Failing to build in any contingency for events such as unexpected travel, illness, delays in computing or printing, or unavailability of key informants.
5. Forgetting that many supervisors will be away, on research trips, attending conferences or possibly on holiday, over the summer.

In addition, according to internal and external examiners, there are some common pitfalls:

1. *Lack of Self-Motivation and Passion*: If you are bored with the IRP, it is often reflected in the final submission. Your supervisor offers guidance, but bear in mind that the 'independent' (in IRP) means that you need to take control of overall research exercise. Investigating a topic in international management of genuine interest to you is not required, though it can help to sustain your interest (during the summer months).

2. **Overly Descriptive Account:** Weak IRPs are often marked by describing a single firm or situation in the absence of reference to relevant management literature or analysis of the situation.
3. **Denied Access:** If access to specific firms or individuals is essential to your IRP, you want to ensure access availability as part of the IRP Proposal. If access is not available to your original list of firms/individuals, is an alternative list available? Can the IRP be re-worked?
4. **Absence of Data:** There is no absolute requirement to collect primary data. However, there should be evidence of the data source you are using and why it has been selected. It is possible to create a dataset – for the purposes of the IRP – from publicly available sources such as annual reports, regulatory documents, trade association studies, etc.
5. **Poor Time Management:** The IRP should be tackled in stages. For example, a review of the relevant literature – at the outset of the IRP process – will help you refine the research focus. Data analysis can only take place after you have finished data collection. This means that you cannot start and complete the IRP in a period of two or three weeks (in August). You are encouraged to write on a regular basis, so that the IRP becomes part of your schedule. This means that the IRP assumes priority status alongside your other commitments.
6. **Careless Copyediting and Proofreading:** Do not rely on automatic checks for spelling and grammar.

## **7. Choosing your Research Methodology**

Dissertations fall into two broad categories. Some involve primary research where the student collects new data and carries out an analysis; an example of this would be sending a postal questionnaire to a sample of companies. Others involve secondary research where the student analyses existing data, which have been gathered by someone else and published either internally or externally.

The quality of your results is a function of the quality of your data and the quality of your analysis. Data should not be collected and analysed for their own sake but in order to provide answers to a specific set of questions. In choosing your methods of data collection and analysis, you must work backwards: what you want to know conditions what you need to find out and how.

Your supervisor will advise you on appropriate methods for your dissertation; moreover, there are many excellent textbooks on methods ranging from the qualitative to the highly quantitative. Some books on methodology, which you may find useful, are listed below under heading 15 Further Reading.

All research methods decisions must be agreed to by your supervisor.

### **7.1 Questionnaires**

Some dissertations involve sending out questionnaires. There are some rules, however, which are necessary in ensuring that the process runs smoothly.

1. You must show your draft questionnaire to your supervisor and get his or her agreement to it before it is sent out.
2. If you use the Royal Holloway name on your questionnaire, you must provide the Postgraduate Admin Office (MB11) with a copy before it is sent out.
3. You must keep evidence of how the questionnaire was collected.
4. If you arrange for questionnaires to be returned to the School of Management, you must discuss with Reception and/or your supervisor their collection and storage.

### **7.2 Interviews**

Some dissertations involve conducting interviews. There are some rules, however, which are necessary in ensuring that the process runs smoothly.

1. You must show your draft list of interview questions to your supervisor and get his or her agreement to it before conducting the interviews.
2. You must include a signed consent form in your dissertation and keep a list of people interviewed. See Appendix D

### **Letters of introduction**

You might need a letter of introduction for instance for the purpose of accessing a specific set of protected data. Letters confirming that you are a Master's degree student undertaking a dissertation as part of your course can be provided. *Please note that certification letters intended for any other purpose must be requested at the Student Enquiries Desk - open every weekday from 10.00am to 6.00pm in the Windsor Building Foyer*

<http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/academicsupport/home.aspx>

## **8. Code of conduct for good research practice and ethics regulations**

### **8.1 Good Practices**

You should keep clear and accurate records of the procedures followed and the approvals granted during the research process, including records of the interim results obtained as well as of the final research outcomes. This is necessary not only as a means of demonstrating proper research practice, but also in case of queries about either the conduct of the research or the results obtained. Where there is work which follows required procedures this must be documented and a process must be in place to allow tracking of any document revisions.

### **8.2 Ethical practice**

The College has detailed procedures to ensure that all research, whether it is carried out by staff or students, is conducted ethically. These should be adhered to and followed where applicable. The Ethics Form should be discussed with your supervisor, signed and included in your dissertation. See Appendix E. Further details can be found at:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/iquad/collegepolicies/documents/pdf/research/researchethicsguidancenotes.pdf>

## 9. The Final IRP

### *Length*

**8,000–10,000 words: this includes in-text references and any footnotes or endnotes, but excludes the bibliography, any appendices, and the abstract (executive summary).** IRPs, which are either longer or shorter than the stipulated length, may be subject to penalty. The IRP should be submitted by 14:00 on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016; failure to do so without prior permission will attract a penalty.

### *Number of copies*

One bound hardcopy of the IRP must be handed in to the reception in the School of Management, where you will be provided with a Student feedback assessment form. This form is to be completed and attached securely to the IRP.

Please note that you also have to submit an electronic copy to the JISC-TurnitinUK software via Moodle. Additional help can also be sought at the School of Management Reception and/or the Postgraduate Admin Office (MB11). A declaration should be included specifying that the IRP has been prepared on the basis of the candidate's own work and that where other source materials have been used these have been acknowledged. A statement should also be included confirming the number of words in the text and footnotes. You should obtain a receipt confirming submission, and should write this number on the Student feedback assessment form when submitting your hardcopy.

### *Format*

The report must be typed. Typing should be on one side of the page double-spaced and on A4 paper. The margin on the left should be sufficient to accommodate the binding (e.g. at least 4cm for left margin, 2cm for right margin). All pages are to be numbered and the IRP should use font size 12.



## ***Running Order of Pages***

A particular running order must be adopted: title page; declaration of originality; abstract (executive summary); acknowledgements (optional); table of contents; the main text of the IRP (8-10,000 words); and the bibliography and appendices.

### ***Title Page***

The title page as the first page of the IRP must follow the standard layout. This includes the following information:

- a) the candidate's full name;
- b) Candidate Number;
- c) the title of the IRP;
- d) a statement that the IRP is submitted as part of the requirement for the award of the MSc International Management degree;
- e) the month and year of submission; and
- f) the name of the supervisor.

### ***Declaration of Authenticity***

A declaration or originality statement follows the title page; it notes that the IRP has been prepared on the basis of the candidate's own work and that where other source materials have been used these have been acknowledged. You are also asked to confirm the number of words (in the main text plus in-text references, footnotes and endnotes).

### ***Abstract (or Executive Summary)***

An abstract (executive summary) follows as the third page. This should indicate the main points and conclusions in not more than 200 words.

### ***Acknowledgements (optional)***

It is customary to acknowledge individuals who were particularly helpful – for the IRP. This can include family members, interviewees, etc. There is no requirement to have acknowledgements.

### ***Table of Contents***

An organised and reasonably detailed contents page is needed. This not only helps the reader navigate through your document but also acts as a summary and guide.

### ***The Main Body of the IRP (8-10,000 words)***

The precise structure of your final report will vary according to the subject matter and the way you have approached the topic. Below is conventional

overview of the key chapters/sections. You are at liberty to modify the structure to better suit what and how you want to write the IRP. Do discuss with your supervisor what is the most appropriate way to structure your IRP.

### *1. Introduction*

Your reader needs to know what the problem or opportunity is that you have investigated. The words used in the title of the IRP should be defined, as part of outlining what you are researching. Why did you choose the topic? Why is it important to international management? (Why are you undertaking the research? What will be the gain in knowledge?) What were the terms of reference you set for yourself? This chapter should end by outlining what you intend to do in the remaining chapters.

### *2. Theoretical Framework (Literature Review)*

What theoretical issues will you examine? You need to discuss the aspects of theory that have determined your approach to the IRP. This part of the IRP draws heavily on the existing literature.

### *3. Methodology*

The methodology adopted to carry out your research. How are you going to address the research questions? How are you going to acquire and analyse the identified data? Which organisations, individuals or sources will provide the necessary data? Will the data be available in the depth required? Are there matters of confidentiality? Include the choices you made.

### *4. Presentation of Findings*

Present the evidence and information collected. Your research question(s) will help to guide how you present your findings.

### *5. Analysis/Discussion of Findings*

Your analysis of the evidence and interpretation of its meaning. There are links to theoretical framework or literature review.

*(Note that some will combine chapters/sections 4 and 5.)*

### *6. Conclusions and Recommendations*

Finally, you must bring together the conclusions you have drawn from the research and make a number of practical recommendations for action in light of those conclusions. Where appropriate, you will address *practical implementation*: assuming acceptance of your proposal (recommendations), what are the costs and practical implications of making it all happen?

## ***Bibliography and Appendices***

At the end of your IRP you should put an *alphabetical* (by surname of the first author) list of bibliographical sources that you have used. Appendices containing technical information, such as questionnaires or statistics, should also be placed at the end.

## **Style**

Try to adopt a lucid style; aim at clarity. Excessive numbering of paragraphs is best avoided as it makes reading less smooth. Avoid using either an unnecessarily scholarly style or the opposite – a style that is too anecdotal and colloquial.

Most IRPs read better if written in the third person. (There is no absolute bar on using 'I', but it should be limited.) Unless you are dealing with a clearly historical subject, use the present tense for immediacy and liveliness.

Avoid lengthy introductions and background sections; write only about the essential points the well-informed reader needs to know. Remember, though, that the reader may need an introduction – but an introduction only – to matters such as the industry, subject area or company within which the study is being undertaken. Finally, it is important to remember that the assessment of the IRP – as an academic exercise – will be done by academics.

## **10. Penalties for over-length work**

The following College policy applies to all students on taught programmes of study:

All over-length work submitted on undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes will be penalised as follows:

- For work which exceeds the upper word limit by at least 10% and by less than 20%, the mark will be reduced by ten percentage marks (e.g., an awarded mark of 65% would be reduced to 55%), subject to a minimum mark of a minimum pass.
- For work which exceeds the upper word limit by 20% or more, the maximum mark will be zero.

In addition to the text, the word count should include quotations and footnotes. Please note that the following are excluded from the word count: candidate number, title, course title, preliminary pages, bibliography and appendices

## **11. Referencing**

You must always attribute ideas that belong to others and also demonstrate that you have surveyed the relevant literature. In all written work submitted as part of any Master's degree programme at the RHUL School of Management, all books, articles and other sources should be referenced in conformity with the so-called Harvard (author-date citation) system. Please note that you need to indicate the sources of your ideas not only when you quote somebody directly but also when you paraphrase someone's text.

Bear in mind that your supervisor assumes that s/he does not need to offer guidance on 'academic form'. The books cited below (in Section 14) on

research methods each have chapters on academic citation and referencing styles.

There are two good online resources:

- The APA Style – author-date citation system including the so-called Harvard system – is used in business and management <http://www.apastyle.org/>. For an online tutorial <http://apastyle.apa.org/learn/tutorials/basics-tutorial.aspx>; and
- Purdue University’s OWL (online writing lab) has summaries of the styles for use by students writing academic papers <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>. In particular, select the APA Style <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/>.

It is essential that you adopt a recognised citation and format style and are consistent in applying it.

## **12. Assessment Offences**

In the Colleges regulations:

“an assessment offence is any conduct which attempts to deceive or is in contravention of any rules or regulations governing assessment. An offence may occur in relation to any piece of work submitted for assessment or review, whether or not the piece counts towards a final mark or award. The work in question may take any form, including but not limited to words, graphs and images, musical texts, data, source code, ideas or judgements”.

**We want to draw your attention to four examples of academic offences.**

### **12.1 Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is treated as a major offence by the University of London. This applies equally to copying from books, articles and other works, and the copying of an essay, or other work, written or produced by another student. Plagiarism carries very serious penalties; the consequences may range from the failure of the work submitted to failing the course and potentially even the entire programme of study. The most severe consequence could lead to dismissal from the University of London. Please refer to the College Regulations governing Examination and Assessment Offences (on the following web page) for further details of procedures that will be followed if plagiarism is suspected: [http://www.rhul.ac.uk/Registry/academic\\_regulations/Examination\\_Assessment\\_Offences.html#Plagiarism](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/Registry/academic_regulations/Examination_Assessment_Offences.html#Plagiarism)

The definition for plagiarism can be found in the College Regulations, published on the College Website. The College Regulations governing Examination and Assessment Offences state the following:

Plagiarism “means the presentation of another person’s work in any quantity without adequately identifying it and citing its source in a way which is consistent with good scholarly practice in the discipline and commensurate with the level of professional conduct expected from the student. The source which is plagiarized may take any form (including words, graphs and images, musical texts, data, source code, ideas or judgments) and may exist in any published or unpublished medium, including the internet...”

“Plagiarism may occur in any piece of work presented by a student, including examination scripts, although standards for citation of sources may vary dependent on the method of assessment. Group working would constitute plagiarism where the discipline or the method of assessment emphasizes independent study and collective ideas are presented as uniquely those of the individual submitting the work.

An allegation of plagiarism does not necessarily imply an allegation of intent on the part of the student to cheat. Situations which may, however, imply cheating in this context include:

- (a) the use of sources which would not normally be available to the student, such as work submitted by others in previous years;
- (b) an attempt to avoid taking responsibility for the plagiarism when presented with material evidence;
- (c) collusion with another person; and
- (d) a repeat offence.

Identifying plagiarism is an academic judgment, based on a comparison across the student’s work in general, and/or on knowledge of the sources, of practice in the discipline and of expectations for professional conduct. Academic staff may therefore determine that plagiarism has taken place even if the source has not been identified.”

### *Avoiding Plagiarism*

1. *Wide reading:* The more dependent you are on one source or just a small number of sources, the more likely you are to replicate the ideas those authors offer. It is good academic practice to consult as widely as possible, and to focus your reading on the issues raised in the assignment topic rather than retrieving everything you read. The further you progress through your degree programme, the more broadly and deeply you will have to read in order to address issues raised in assignments.

2. *Careful note taking and paraphrasing ideas:* Much preparation for assignments involves taking notes from books or other materials that you are reading. In taking notes, you should be careful not to copy sentences or paragraphs directly, unless you place them in inverted commas. If you omit the inverted commas, you might forget that you copied directly and therefore plagiarise unintentionally. It is good academic practice to learn to paraphrase arguments. To do so, you should read, say, a chapter of a textbook and then use your own words and your own sequence of ideas to record the arguments as they relate to the issues raised by your assignment.

3. *Clear citing and referencing:* It is important to record in your notes when a passage is a direct quotation; do not forget to note also the page on which the quotation is located. Direct quotes are very useful mechanisms for conveying key ideas concisely, but in management assignments they should be used sparingly – such as for clarifying definitions of concepts. You should avoid citing large blocks of text from sources. When you do quote directly, you must use inverted commas (“”), make a clear reference to the source at the point of quotation (Author Date, page) and provide its full reference details in a bibliography (reference list) at the end of the IRP.

4. *Citation of all consulted sources:* In order to optimise transparency in academic work, it is necessary to provide a full list of all the sources consulted in writing an assignment. All articles, books and other materials, including Internet sources, should be referenced in conformity with the Harvard system, as specified above.

5. *Wary use of Internet sources:* Although it is convenient and quick to gain access to materials on the Internet, you should note that there is virtually no quality control over what appears on the Internet. There are obvious exceptions – such as Web sites established by authoritative institutions (e.g. *The Economist*; World Bank) – but in general you should think hard before relying on information from the Internet. Where you do make use of such sources, you must give full reference details, including the date you accessed the site.

6. *Writing individual assignments on your own:* Most assignments are designed to examine your individual skills and understanding, and it is important that you write such assignments on your own. This is particularly the case with the IRP. However, you can discuss the IRP and IRP Proposal with colleagues – indeed, this is often a very good practice – but the way you present information and construct an argument should reflect your knowledge and ability.

## 12.2. Duplication

**All work submitted must be your own and original. Please note that any work previously submitted for another course or programme (e.g. UG work) at RHUL or any other institution is not acceptable.** Para 2 (b) of the 2015-16 Regulations on Assessment Offences makes clear that “the unacknowledged replication of one’s own work in any quantity across separate assessments without sufficient redevelopment to make it novel and appropriate to each assessment is an examination offence. This would include the replication of work which was previously submitted for assessment at another institution.”

*A note on paraphrasing and quoting:* Quotes are direct transcriptions of text from other sources while paraphrasing uses your own words to express others’ ideas. You should attempt to paraphrase where possible and only use quotes sparingly and strategically. Both paraphrasing and quoting require referencing, and quotes must refer to the page number from which they were taken.

### **12.3. Falsification**

Falsification is the unacknowledged invention or alteration of data, quotations or references. It is extremely important that the IRP you present is based upon research you have carried out. You must not fabricate survey responses, interview quotes or any primary data. Regular meetings with your supervisor will enable him/her to assess the extent to which your project is authentic. It is recommended that you include, where possible, evidence of the sources of your data in the appendix of your IRP.

### **12.4. Collusion**

“Collusion s to act in agreement with another person in order to obtain an unfair advantage for oneself and/or for that person. Group working may constitute collusion where the discipline or the method of assessment emphasises independent study and collective ideas are presented as uniquely those of the individual submitting the work. Collusion may also include any attempt to impersonate another person, or to allow oneself to be impersonated, in an assessment.”

Please do not attempt to purchase your IRP. Examiners can easily identify work that has originated from elsewhere.

You should also refer to the 2015/16 Postgraduate Student Handbook for practical instructions on how plagiarism, and duplication, falsification and collusion can be avoided.

## **13. Assessment**

The IRP is an essential element in the MSc International Management degree and is therefore an important element in the assessment process for the whole programme.

Your IRP will be initially marked by your supervisor. S/he will assess

1. Depth of analysis;
2. Appropriateness of your interpretation of the data;
3. Practicability of recommendations (where appropriate); and
4. Persuasiveness overall.

All IRPs will be second marked by an internal examiner. Some IRPs will be third marked by the external examiner for the Master’s degree. Where there is doubt over the authorship of the IRP, the examiners have the option of inviting the student to a *viva voce* (verbal examination) to establish the authenticity of the work handed in by the student. This gives the student the opportunity to defend the work and to demonstrate their understanding of the research processes undertaken. Overseas students planning on going home after handing in the IRP should ensure that they leave a forwarding email and/or contact details to enable us contact them. Where necessary, the *viva voce* will be carried out by SKYPE or by telephone.

The grading of IRPs is such that the pass mark is 50%; 60-69 is Merit-level; and 70%+ indicates Distinction-level work. A condonable fail (40-49%) may be permitted. A mark of 0-39% (non-condonable fail) is not permitted; one resit attempt is permitted.

### **Please Note**

**Where there is doubt over the authorship of the IRP, the examiners have the option of inviting the student to a *viva voce* (verbal examination) to establish the authenticity of the work handed in by the student. This gives the student the opportunity to defend the work and to demonstrate their understanding of the research processes undertaken. Overseas students planning on going home after handing in the dissertation should ensure that they leave a forwarding email and/or contact details to enable us contact them. Where necessary, the meeting will be carried out by SKYPE or by telephone.**

**In September 2015, several students attended Assessment Offence Panels to do with dissertations / IRP's. Many of them as a result received a mark of ZERO.**

### **Extenuating Circumstances**

If there are extenuating circumstances (such as illness etc.), an extension to the submission date of up to one month will be considered if supported by evidence. **It is your responsibility to submit supporting evidence with your request**. For medical or psychological circumstances, this will need to be a note from a suitably qualified medical practitioner (normally a GP/family doctor or hospital specialist), psychologist or educational psychiatrist (as appropriate) who has seen you during the period of the condition and is not a close friend or relative. For other personal circumstances (such as divorce or the death of a family member), a written statement of the circumstances from you should be sufficient, although in certain cases we may request further information or evidence.

In the first instance, you should submit your request for extension to Jane Chandar, Postgraduate Programmes Administrator by email to [Jane.Chandar@royalholloway.ac.uk](mailto:Jane.Chandar@royalholloway.ac.uk) or by post in a sealed envelope marked 'Confidential – for the attention of Dr Niran Subramaniam, Director of Graduate Studies'. All IRPs submitted after the deadline due to an extension having been granted **MUST include written permission from the Director of Graduate Studies** confirming the extension.

If you receive an extension for your IRP it **MUST BE handed in by 14:00** on the agreed date.



## Deferral

Occasionally a short extension of a submission deadline may not be sufficient because of prolonged illness or other extenuating circumstances. Students may be unable to submit work on time so that the work is still outstanding at the time of the annual Sub-Board of Examiners. In this case the Sub-Board may decide that the student be permitted to defer his or her assessment to the next IRP hand-in date (twelve months later). In such instance, the student is not deemed to have made a failed attempt; the agreed later submission will be treated as a first attempt. A student who has deferred an element of the assessment of a programme is still a registered student and is effectively continuing with studying for the qualification. For more information about the deferral process, please refer to your Student Handbook or contact the College Examination Office. See also

[http://www.rhul.ac.uk/Registry/academic\\_regulations/Postgraduate\\_Regulations.html#Courses](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/Registry/academic_regulations/Postgraduate_Regulations.html#Courses) under paragraph 46.

## 14. Filing and Publication

The School of Management will retain an electronic copy of your IRP. This may be made anonymous and stored on the All PGT Common Page by the School of Management for others to read and consult.

There is also a system whereby IRPs, whose circulation must be restricted for reasons of commercial confidentiality, can be stored at the School of Management Postgraduate Office. These are not available for reading, except by written permission of the authors, for a specified amount of time. The restriction should be noted on the title page highlighting the date when the IRP will be released for ordinary circulation. This arrangement can only be made in exceptional circumstances (usually following a written request from the company involved) and with the permission of your supervisor. However, you are encouraged wherever possible to allow your IRPs to be circulated so that others may benefit from and build on your work.

Moreover, you are encouraged to publish the results of your IRP. Supervisors are the best people to advise on this, pointing out, for instance, which parts of the IRP could best be published and which are the appropriate journals in which the topic could be dealt with. All publications should acknowledge the help of your supervisor and mention your MSc International Management degree programme at Royal Holloway, University of London. In addition, please arrange for the Postgraduate Office and your supervisor to receive a copy of any publication or mention of your work.

## 15. Further Reading

The IRP is likely to be a new academic exercise for almost all of you. Your supervisor is a resource. However, s/he cannot guide you through each and every stage of the IRP. **You will benefit from having a 'business research methods' book to help guide you through the different stages of the IRP.**

Indeed using one is helpful at the IRP Proposal stage. Several popular books on business research methods are available:

- Boris Blumberg, Donald Cooper, and Pamela Schindler, *Business Research Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> European ed. (McGraw-Hill, 2011);
- Alan Bryman and Emma Bell, *Business Research Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (OUP, 2011);
- John Creswell, *Research Design*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Sage, 2009); or
- Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill, *Research Methods for Business Students*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (FT/Prentice Hall, 2011).

**16. Provisional IRP Timetable – check the All PGT Common Page in Moodle for any updates**

28 <sup>th</sup> January 2016 by 14:00	Deadline for submitting IRP Proposal
Mid-end February 2016	List of supervisors posted on Moodle
Mid Feb to end of March 2016	Two meetings with supervisor
30 <sup>th</sup> June 2016	No changes to topic or methodology will be accepted after this date
1 <sup>st</sup> September 2016	Deadline for submission of IRP

**The IRP is a sufficiently challenging academic exercise – one that takes you to the end of the 50-week MSc International Management programme – so you are advised to devote the time and effort in order to achieve a successful outcome.**

**Appendix A: Title Page**



School of Management

Royal Holloway, University of London

[Title of the IRP]

MN5252  
Independent Research Paper

MSc. in International Management

[Name of Student]

Supervisor: [Name of Supervisor]

September 2016

This Independent Research Paper is submitted as part of the requirement for the award of the Master of Science (MSc) in International Management at Royal Holloway, University of London

**Appendix B: Declaration of Authenticity**

**DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY**

**Declaration**

This Independent Research Paper has been prepared on the basis of my own work and that where other published and unpublished source materials have been used, these have been acknowledged.

Word Count (main text which includes in-text references and any footnotes or endnotes, but excludes the bibliography, any appendices and the abstract or executive summary)

Number of contacts with supervisor (including email and face to face meetings) .....

Name of Student

Signature

Date of Submission

**Appendix C: Change of Topic / Methodology Agreement**

Name of Supervisor.....

I have given my permission and agreement to

Name of student.....

Candidate number.....

Programme title.....

***Change of topic :***

*(Insert details of new topic)*

***Change of methodology***

*(Insert details of new methodology)*

***Signature of Supervisor***

*Date of agreement*

***Please note that no changes are permissible after 30th June 2016.***

**Appendix D**

**GENERIC PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Project title**

.....  
...

**Researcher's name**

.....  
...

**Supervisor's name**

.....  
...

- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped / videotaped during the interview. { *Omit this point if the interview will not be taped*}
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research.

**Signed** ..... (Research participant)

**Print name** ..... **Date**

.....

**Contact details**

Researcher: {*complete preferred contact details*}

Supervisor: {*complete preferred contact details*}

**Appendix E**

**ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**  
**SIMPLIFIED ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM**

For staff and student dissertations and research projects involving data collection from research participants (observations, interviews, questionnaires, group discussions, recordings, video etc).

This form should be discussed and completed jointly by both student and supervisor (and in the case of staff, with their immediate line manager) with each keeping a signed copy of the form.

If the proposed work involves human participants, and is judged by the supervisor/line manager potentially to give rise to ethical problems, ethical approval must be sought in advance. The supervisor will recommend whether the completed/signed form and any supporting material should be considered only by the Department's internal approval procedures or be referred to the College Ethics Committee.

**To be completed by the applicant**

*(delete as appropriate)*

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
|  | YES/NO |
| 1. Will the study be <i>covert</i> in any way?                                 | YES/NO |
| 2. Will resulting data be used for purposes outside this study?                | YES/NO |
| 3. Are you working with a vulnerable population?                               | YES/NO |
| 4. Is it possible that your study will cause distress or harm to participants? | YES/NO |

If the answer to any of the above questions is 'YES' please supply relevant supporting materials and explanations.

The working title of my dissertation/project is:

I am fully aware that the research carried out for my undergraduate/masters/doctoral dissertation/study *(delete as appropriate)* requires that I take due care of ethical issues.

I will ensure that consent is obtained from all participants which, saving exceptional cases, will be in writing.

For students: these issues have been discussed with my supervisor

For staff: these issues have been discussed with my line manager

<b>Staff/Student Name (print below):</b>	<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
.....	.....	.....

**To be completed by the supervisor (students) or line manager (staff)**

Issues of ethics, copyright and data protection have been considered where necessary as indicated in the attached material and appropriate measures have been recommended. All necessary materials have been seen and the Ethics Committee's *Notes for Guidance* have been consulted.

Please tick once box only:

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 1. No referral necessary   | [ | ] |
| 2. Form to be referred to departmental ethical approval procedures | [ | ] |
| 3. An application must be made to College Ethics Committee         | [ | ] |

(For 2. and 3. please append supporting documents as required e.g. research project proposal (questionnaires, consent forms).

**Line Manager/Supervisor Name (print below):**

**Signature**

**Date:**

.....

.....

.....





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[www.royalholloway.ac.uk/management/home.aspx](http://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/management/home.aspx)