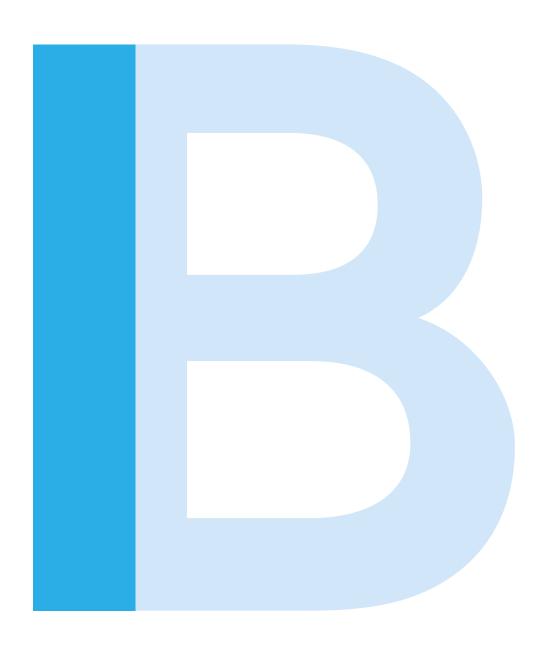# MSc Business Analytics (online delivery, part-time) 2018-20

Individual Research Report Module Booklet

THE INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION

Students who have a firm offer to study on a doctoral programme or are in the process of applying to a doctoral programme can opt to undertake an Individual Research Report (IRR) in lieu of both the Work-Based Project and Business Analytics Report. This document outlines the process for writing and submitting the IRR.

2. HOW WILL YOUR INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH REPORT BE JUDGED?

Your Report Supervisor and one other faculty member will mark your project and an External Examiner will also review it.

It is vital for your success that the report you submit reaches certain minimum standards.

- It is not enough to merely collect secondary data, no matter how much data is collected. **The project requires that you both describe and analyse the data in some way in order to draw conclusions from it.** Your conclusions, or reflections, should normally address both a theoretical and a practical aspect.

- The individual research report requires that you gain a comprehensive understanding of previous work on the topic you have chosen. **In writing your report, you will be expected to show that you have an adequate knowledge of the research and theory that is relevant to having an insight into the phenomenon of interest.** The result of this process is your literature review. You will be required to critique it and show how – or whether – this literature helps you answer the question you are asking and complete your IRR.

- Where data collection forms an important part of the IRR, data collection itself will not be sufficient. **The data must have been gathered using a methodology that you are able to explain and justify as being the most appropriate method for the purpose.**

- The simplest data collection may use existing databases. This could be acceptable if the main goal of your project is to use some complex – probably mathematically or statistically-based – technique to analyse existing data in a way that has not been done before.

- Where data is being analysed through non-mathematical methods it will usually be necessary for you personally to collect the data. You will have to use a methodology that you explain and justify in your report.

- What could seem a good individual research report may still fail because it is not a good MSc project. Your report must make appropriate use of some of the concepts, models or principles that you have learned during the MSc.

- A report may still not pass just on the grounds that it does not meet the presentation standards described below in Section 5 "Writing up your Report". **Successful reports are public documents held in the Imperial College library; they must meet our standards of presentation, use of the English language and references.** This is explained more fully later in this document.

- An absolute requirement is a full and detailed list of references that will be sufficient to allow any reader to identify and access the sources you have used.

3. THE PROCESS

3.1. THE PROCESS IN BRIEF

- You will be required to submit this first draft of your research proposal by 20 April 2020 (4pm). This represents the starting point of your IRR.

- You will receive written, formative feedback from the Report Supervisor (no grade or credit counting towards the MSc award will be given at this stage), with the aim of further developing research and academic writing skills.

- You will then refine and revise your topic in order to submit a Topic Proposal Form by 1 June 2020 (4pm).

- By w/c 22 June 2020 your Report Supervisor will mark and return to you your Topic Proposal with some feedback.

- Over the next few months you will undertake and complete your IRR, with input from your Supervisor, in time for it to be submitted on Monday 31 August 2020.

3.2. KEY MILESTONES

20 April (4pm) Draft IRR proposal submitted (max 1500 words)
01 June (4pm) Topic Proposal Form submitted (max 1500 words)
w/c 22 June   Report Supervisor returns marked Topic Proposal
31 Aug (4pm) Individual Research Report submitted

3.3. THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

Your Report Supervisor will initially provide formative feedback on your research proposal and then mark your Topic Proposal. You will be informed of the mark and receive feedback by w/c 22 June 2020. **Please note that the Topic Proposal**

counts for 10% of the final mark for your IRR. You will then proceed to undertake your IRR.

The major role of your Supervisor is to provide guidance in the overall direction of the Report. The conduct of the Report and the achievement of its objectives are your own responsibility.

The following is intended to indicate broadly what you are entitled to expect:

- Two meetings over the course of the Report, each of about 30 minutes duration. These meetings should be spaced at reasonable intervals. More frequent and/or longer meetings are a matter of goodwill rather than entitlement. **You must check with your Supervisor when they are available and, wherever possible, book these dates well in advance. Do not simply assume that your Supervisor can meet at times that are convenient for you or at short notice.** Always send information to your Supervisor prior to the meetings so that they have ample time to consider the material before providing feedback. This is as much for your benefit as the Supervisor's, and will ensure your meetings are productive.

- As these meetings are relatively brief, it is in your interests to ensure that you are well prepared to make the most of them. The Supervisor will expect you to take the initiative both in scheduling the meetings and in the matters to be discussed. Needless to say, it is also in your interest to be punctual.

An important early task once your project has been defined is to agree with your Supervisor a clear statement of the objectives or 'terms of reference' for your Report. It is on this statement that your performance will subsequently be judged and it is therefore vital that you minimise any ambiguity. A clear statement of research objectives is, in any case, the essential first step in the research process. After the final examiners' meeting in November, students will receive written feedback on their Report.

Please note that it is **not** part of your Supervisor's responsibility to correct errors of English language or style. If you feel you need help in this respect it is your responsibility to arrange this - there is an English Language Support Service in the Business School from where you can get additional help in writing your thesis.

4. CHOOSING A TOPIC

4.1. BASIC STEPS

An important part of any research process is determining the research topic to be addressed. The main criteria are that the topic:

- has academic and professional relevance
- is feasible given the constraints available
- has not been undertaken in exactly the same format before
- is related to the material you have covered on your MSc Strategic Marketing programme

For your IRR you are asked to generate your own topic and research question. The best source of ideas is the material you covered in your lectures: was there a particular issue that you found interesting and which you would like to apply? In your reading have you come across a study that you could update or usefully apply to a different geographical setting?

Preliminary research might include informal conversations with your lecturers, web searches, library visits and scrutiny of journals and other printed media. Remember: it is worth talking around your topic area with your colleagues. A research topic is ideally something you feel passionate about and has the capacity to hold your interest and motivate you for many months.

5. WRITING UP YOUR REPORT

5.1. PRESENTATION

Your final Report must be typed in one and one-half line spacing on A4 white paper with font Ariel 11pt. Page margins should be as follows:

- left-hand margin of 4 cm (1½ inches);

- right-hand margin of 2.5cm (1 inch);

- top margin 2.5cm (1 inch);

- bottom margin 2.5cm (1 inch).

The Examiners pay special attention not only to the content of each Report but also to their presentation. It is therefore important that the material in your Report is presented in grammatically correct English and is free from spelling, typographical and other errors.

The Examiners may, in appropriate cases, require the student to carry out amendments to the presentation, (i.e. to correct the above-mentioned errors) within a period of one month after the Examiner's meeting. Any projects that seriously deviate from the style guidelines will be reported as Minor Infringements. This means that students will be given a month after the exam board to correct any presentational errors (i.e. spelling, grammar etc).

5.2. ORDER OF CONTENTS

The Report should be ordered as follows:

1. Title page

2. Synopsis (maximum 250 words)

3. Acknowledgements

4. List of contents

5. Notation (if applicable)

6. Main text of the report including:

   - Introduction, background to research, overview of research, aims and objectives, terms of reference, key research questions
   - Literature – discussion of relevant literature
   - Methodology – presentation of methods and rationale
   - Data analysis and discussion
   - Conclusions and recommendations, ideas for future research, limitations of this research.

7. References

8. Appendix or appendices (if applicable)

Pages must be numbered at the bottom centre of the page. The title page should be blank. The Synopsis, Acknowledgements, List of Contents and Notation should be numbered with upper case Roman Numerals. The main text, starting with the first page of the first chapter (or Introduction) should be numbered, starting with page 1, using Arabic Numerals, through to the end of the references. Appendices should be numbered using lower case Roman Numerals.

5.3 TITLE PAGE

This must be arranged as shown in Section 9 of this document.

5.4 SYNOPSIS

All Reports must include a one page synopsis. This should include a clear statement that sets out the terms of reference and objectives of the Report as agreed with the Supervisor.

5.5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

You may wish to acknowledge help given from various different sources:

- From people outside the School - staff of other departments, industrial companies, etc.
- You may, as a matter of courtesy, wish to acknowledge the general guidance of your Supervisor, but this should be a fairly simple statement.
- You may have had special help from staff inside the School, in which case it should be acknowledged collectively in one simple sentence.
- Many students want also to acknowledge the personal support they have received from key family members and friends.

5.6 NOTATION

The extent to which you list any symbols used in your report must be left to your discretion. Symbols, which are used in several parts of your report, should preferably be listed before the main text for easy reference. Symbols which are used only once or in one part of the report may be referred to in that part only. Generally, try to place yourself in the position of a reader with average background knowledge and arrange the notation in a manner which will be most convenient for him/her to follow.

5.7 MAIN TEXT

The following points should be borne in mind when writing the text of your Report:

- The Main Text area is the section that contains your fully formed thesis and it is the section where the 8,000-word limit applies.

- Your Report, irrespective of the nature of the topic, must contain critical comment based on the considered assessment of the material/evidence presented in it: this is an essential requirement, as are the conclusions of the report.

- Your Report will not be made available to the general public by any means of distribution and, accordingly, you do not need to worry about getting permission from copyright holders in making direct quotations or copying figures from other publications. However, your sources must be acknowledged. You must also indicate by the use of inverted commas or different typeface the quoted material so that it is clearly identified as such. However, if you subsequently write up your work, in conjunction with your Supervisor, as a paper, then you are subject to normal copyright laws and must only quote very brief extracts even from those Journals, which subscribe to the Royal Society's convention on Fair Copying.

- Depending on the nature of the report, the main text should start with a review of previous literature. In a review and discussion of the work of others (and at all times) it should be clear from the text which of the opinions expressed are those of the author and which are those of other people.

- In a Report involving experimental or other empirical analysis, as well as theory, calculations, etc., the text could be divided as follows:

Experimental technique and method

Experimental results

Theoretical work

Theoretical results

Discussion and conclusion

(not necessarily in this order)

- Where appropriate, students can include links to electronic/video material created in support of and as part of the IRR.

5.8 REFERENCES

It is mandatory that your Report contains a full list of references. Unless references are full and correct they are, at worst, useless and at best a source of considerable trouble to anyone who is trying to find the original document. Although there are many correct ways to reference, the Harvard Referencing System is the prescribed method (as opposed, for example, to the Vancouver system which follows a numbering system). You should refer to the *Citing & Referencing Guide: Harvard Style* that is produced by the Imperial College Library for comprehensive guidance on this style of referencing. No report will be accepted if the references do not conform to those conventions.

5.9 APPENDICES

Appendices should be included where necessary to develop a theme or analysis which is not necessary to a first reading of the report and which, if included in the main text, would tend to confuse the general line of argument, or to present data that are useful as background but not essential in detail.

5.10 LENGTH

Your final Report should be no longer than 8,000 words. The word limit applies to the main text area only, as this is where your report is introduced and then carried forward. Your final word-count should not include: title page, synopsis, acknowledgements, list of contents, notation (if applicable), references, bibliography or appendix/appendices. Shorter Reports are allowed depending on the nature of the research (for example some mathematical and statistical projects are usually shorter than qualitative projects). Reports longer than 8,000 words will be penalised.

If the Report is to contain a considerable number of tables and figures, it may be best to place them in an appendix and use in the main text only such summary tables or charts as will assist the reader in following your arguments without necessarily

having to go into great detail. This may help to ensure a smooth and uninterrupted presentation.

5.11 UNACCEPTABLE PRESENTATION

Examiners will not accept projects where the presentational guidelines are not adhered to. They will not accept projects that have any of the following:

- Copyright statements (in any format including as a header/footer);
- Confidentiality statements (in any format including as a header/footer);
- Non standard font size, type and line spacing;
- Page numbers missing;
- No contents pages or contents pages with no page numbers indicated.

6. SUBMITTING YOUR REPORT

6.1. SUBMISSION DEADLINE

The final Report is to be submitted by 31 August 2020 (4pm).

All submissions will be made via the Online Submission area on The Hub.

You will not be required to submit a hard copy of your Report.

6.2. LATE SUBMISSION

The regulations of the University state that late submission will be allowed only for reasons of serious illness (supported by a medical certificate) or death of a near relative.

Please note that the option to defer submission to the following year is not available. The submission date is an inflexible deadline, so you should ensure you pace your work in such a way that you can easily meet it.

If you fail to submit a Report (or submit late without mitigating circumstances as described above), you will be deemed to have failed your first attempt and will be given a further attempt at the IRR in the next academic session. You will not have access to

your academic supervisor after the original deadline and your re-submitted report will be capped at the pass mark.

7. PLAGIARISM AND OTHER PROBLEMS

7.1. PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's words, ideas, judgement or data as though they were your own. Examples include: not referencing the source of your ideas or arguments where they have derived from your reading; directly taking verbatim the words of someone else's work and putting it into your Report without putting it in quotation marks and referencing it; and, copying whole chunks out of books, articles, lecture notes or other reports or other students work, and putting them in your report uncited.

When submitting your Report via The Hub you will be required to submit a form confirming that you have read the above definition of plagiarism and are fully aware of what it means. The submission of this form will certify that the Report is entirely your own work, except where indicated. **Please note that your Report will be scanned electronically for plagiarism.**

Plagiarism is a serious offence. The Board of Examiners is entitled to penalise you for plagiarism, and serious cases will result in an automatic failure of the IRR. The Board of Examiners reserves the right to take further action as it deems appropriate to protect the good name of the School and the College, and this may involve expulsion of a student from the course or withdrawal of a degree award.

7.2 OTHER PROBLEMS

If the Report fails you will be responsible for eventual re-submission of Report the following year.

If the presentation in the Report is not up to standard the Examiners may give a period of grace (e.g. one month) in which to revise the text. You will be responsible for re-submitting your Report once the presentation has been improved.

8. SAMPLE TOPIC PROPOSAL FORM

Please provide a summary of your chosen topic using the 5 headings listed below. This form should be completed using font Arial 11pt. It should take up no more than two sides of A4.

1. TITLE (Provide a tentative title for your Report)

2. DESCRIPTION (Describe your topic briefly; list the aims and objectives and summarise what you would like to do)

3. JUSTIFICATION (Explain why this topic is interesting and useful)

4. METHODOLOGY (Describe the general approach you would like to take and explain how you will meet the aims and objectives described above)

5. FEASIBILITY (Explain how the data required for you to complete your Report will be obtained)

9. SAMPLE TITLE PAGE

IMPERIAL COLLEGE BUSINESS SCHOOL

A report submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the MSc Business Analytics degree

31 August 2020