

# Guidelines for PhD Mentors

## Role of Mentors

All students have two academic Mentors assigned throughout their studentship. The roles of the Mentors are as follows:

1. Meet new student informally during first month
2. Evaluate the Research Plan (completed during first 6-12 weeks)
3. Attend student's annual seminars to monitor progress
4. Conduct the Early Stage (9 months) and Late Stage assessments (18 months). Evaluate the document and seminar, and carry out a viva, as required.
6. Monitor progression to writing the thesis at the appropriate time. Complete Year 3 evaluation.
7. Be available to provide support to the student throughout their time in the ICS

Each student will have two Mentors, one lead Mentor from their own Section and one from another Section (as far as is practical), usually appointed by the DPS. These will be Group Heads or senior scientists designated by their Group Head as appropriate. The role of the Mentor is to support and assist the student, and also to be responsible for monitoring their progress.

**Care must be taken at all times not to undermine the student-supervisor relationship and confidentiality must be maintained.**

## Research Plan

Students will submit their Research Plan and the accompanying Form to their Mentors 6-12 weeks after Registration. Both Mentors should evaluate the plan and sign the Research Plan Form before sending them to the PSA.

The proposed project should be:

- sound
- feasible in the time available
- appropriate for a student project
- likely to result in a defensible thesis

**NB** Mentors should meet with the student to provide constructive feedback and should resolve any minor queries with the student and/or the supervisor, but **it is not their function to peer review the science of the group** in which the student is doing their project. If mentors feel that there are serious flaws in the project, or that it is not

providing adequate scientific training, then they should raise this either with the supervisor or with the DPS. Problems of this nature **should not** be discussed in the presence of the student.

## PhD Early Stage Assessment

Early Stage assessment should occur 9 months after registration. The aim is to satisfy the DPS on behalf of the ICS and Imperial College that the student is capable of completing a PhD within the prescribed period of three to four years.

The procedure comprises a **report** of approximately 1500 words written by the student, a **seminar** and a **viva**.

1. **The Early Stage report** should be submitted directly by the student to the Mentors, who are responsible for assessing this and feeding back to the student and supervisor.
2. **The Early Stage seminar** will be arranged by the PSA to coincide as far as possible with submission of the report.

Mentors should consider these questions when evaluating the report:

- Is it clear and readable, and does it convince you that the student understands the subject of the project?
- Has the student undertaken experiments, providing evidence that the project is likely to be viable?
- Do you think that the supervisor has had the right amount of input?
- Is the length within the limits set and are the pages numbered?

Seminar:

- Did the student present a clear and accurate account of the work that was widely accessible?
- Were the visual aids relevant, clear and legible, and well explained?
- Did the student show that they understood the questions and were able to participate in discussion?

The Mentors should decide whether any written corrections or re-writing will be of benefit to the student's training. Any **serious concerns about the project should be discussed in private** with the supervisor and/or the ICS DPS and not with the student.

3. **The Early Stage viva** should be arranged by the Mentors as soon as is feasible after the presentation. The viva should be used as an opportunity to provide feedback to the student, discuss their future plans in some detail, and to evaluate their understanding and knowledge of the project. It should comprise constructive criticism and questioning, but also provide encouragement. The supervisor should not attend this viva.

4. Once all three steps have been completed, an **Early Stage Assessment Form** should be completed and signed by the Student, Supervisor and Mentors and returned to the PSA for review and approval by the DPS, together with a copy of the upgrade report and copies of any original Mentor's reports given to the student.

Further information is available in the Assessment Section of the Student Handbook.

## PhD Late Stage Assessment

Students' progress must be reviewed by their Mentors 18 months after registration. The aim is to satisfy the DPS on behalf of the ICS and Imperial College that the student is capable of completing a PhD within the prescribed period of three to four years.

Mentors should provide a written assessment to the student, copied to the supervisor, addressing the following questions in addition to the questions for Early Stage Review:

- Is the work needed to complete the thesis clearly stated and achievable in the timeframe allowed?
- Has the student obtained results that will be incorporated into the thesis?
- Is there evidence that the student has read the relevant background material and can set the project in its wider context?
- Is sufficient information about the project provided to show that the student is doing more than just following the instructions in kits?
- Where the student is working as part of a group, is there clear evidence that the project is the student's own work? While it is acceptable for the work of others to be mentioned where this impinges on the student's project, this must be clearly stated.
- Are accurate references in a consistent format (that of "Cell") provided?
- Do the figures have appropriately labelled axes and informative legends?

The review comprises a *report* written by the student, a *seminar* and a *viva*. The procedure is similar to that of the Early Stage assessment, although the report is much more substantial for PhD students and the viva may be longer and focus on (a) the results that the student has obtained and (b) the plan of what is needed to complete the work.

Further information is available in the Assessment Section of the Student Handbook.

## Year 3 Review (33-36 months)

All students will be reviewed by their mentors between 33 and 36 months. Part-time students will be reviewed annually after this, if they continue for more than 4 years. The purpose of this procedure is to ensure students are on course to complete their degree, and to meet MRC requirements for annual assessment.

This review consists of a formal meeting between the student and mentors, and submission of the Year 3 form signed by the student, supervisor(s) and mentors, to the PSA by 37 months.