

# Undergraduate Independent Study Project (ISP) Guidelines

These Guidelines must be read in conjunction with the [Taught Degree Regulations](#).

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Status**

It is recommended that this guidance be adopted by Heads of Departments and Chairs of Sub-Boards of Examiners. The guidance does not have the force of regulation (except where it quotes regulations), but it sets out best practice.

### **1.2 Scope and definition**

This guidance sets out the minimum provisions. There may be departmental requirements in addition. An Independent Study Project (ISP) is defined as a 30-credit undergraduate module which is examined by one substantive piece of writing of up to 10,000 words. Some sections of the guidance also apply to 15-credit Extended Essay modules, and to 30-credit modules assessed by several essays. The guidance should also apply to modules that fulfil the same function as ISP modules though with different nomenclature (e.g. "UG Dissertation").

### **1.3 Distribution and dissemination**

Departmental variations from this guidance and particular departmental or subject requirements should be included in the module information on the website and on Moodle. The ISP Module Convenor should ensure that students doing an ISP, their supervisors, and the visiting examiners are all made aware of the provisions of the guidance and departmental variations from it.

## **2. Departmental Arrangements for ISP Administration**

### **2.1 The ISP Module Convenor**

The administration of ISPs within departments is the responsibility of the ISP Module Convenor.

### **2.2 Timetable and procedure for approval of ISP topic and title, and appointment of supervisor**

Students are strongly advised to start their planning for an ISP in Term 2 of the preceding academic year, and should discuss their ideas at an early stage with their ISP Module Convenor. There is very little time at the start of Term 1 for the necessary steps in the approval procedure to be carried out.

Students wishing to do an ISP must submit to the ISP Module Convenor in the department of the ISP a working title and a synopsis of 300-500 words of the proposed topic of the ISP. It must not be assumed that all proposals will be automatically approved. The ISP Module Convenor should check that any necessary pre-requisite requirements have been met (see section 4.1). Where an ISP forms an optional part of the programme, there is no right for a student to do an ISP (see section 4.4).

If, after appropriate consultation, the ISP Module Convenor approves the topic in outline, the ISP Module Convenor will nominate a supervisor for the ISP. The supervisor will normally be from the ISP Module Convenor's own department, although occasionally a supervisor from another department may be more appropriate, subject to the agreement of the member of staff concerned and his or her Head of Department and the ISP Module Convenor.

The supervisor will then consider the title and synopsis in detail (see also section 2.3 and 2.4) and, if acceptable, approve them no later than the deadline for module sign-up.

### **2.3 Statement on ethics**

The supervisor must certify by signing the appropriate form that the ethical aspects of the research for the ISP have been considered, and that the proposed research meets the requirements of the School's Statement on Ethics, the latest version of which may be found on the SOAS website: <https://www.soas.ac.uk/research/ethics/>

### **2.4 Topic and scope of the ISP**

Supervisors should bear in mind that ISP topics should be chosen which students can complete within the normal timeframe. Complex topics which need extra time for completion should not be approved. Topics should not be approved which *require* a student to undertake fieldwork, unless fieldwork is already due to be undertaken as part of the degree course, or the ISP Module Convenor and/or supervisor are confident that the fieldwork plan is realistic and achievable for the student.

### **2.5 Change of topic or scope**

Students who wish to change the topic or scope of the ISP must consult their supervisor, with whom approval of such a change rests. In approving such changes, supervisors should be satisfied that students will still be able to complete the ISP within the normal time and submit it by the deadline for submission. The supervisor should inform the ISP Module Convenor of any substantial change of topic or scope.

## **3. Definition and Requirements**

### **3.1 Definition**

An ISP is valued at 30 credits assessed by the submission of one substantive piece of writing of up to 10,000 words. The essay is on an approved topic of the student's choice, and may be based on original fieldwork (see 2.4), the critical analysis of documents and/or statistical materials, or an original synthesis of material derived from secondary sources.

### **3.2 Length**

The length of an ISP will be determined as part of the approval of the module and then published in the relevant module information on the website and on Moodle. The word count will include quotations, footnotes, titles, summaries and tables of contents but will exclude bibliographies and appendices. Appendices will not normally be marked and they must not include material essential to the argument developed in the main body of the work. Supervisors should give advice to students at an early stage on word length equivalence where the subject matter demands it (if necessary after consultation with the Chair of the relevant Sub-Board of Examiners). Examples are ISPs including large amounts of mathematical or musical notation. (See also the [Word Count and Over-length Coursework Policy](#).)

### **3.3 Contact hours**

Students can normally expect to be given at least three opportunities to meet with their supervisor over the course of the academic year. In addition to individual supervision, there may be an option or a requirement to attend other classes.

### **3.4 Attendance at other classes**

The requirements for ISPs in some subjects may include attendance at classes to provide training in the design, preparation and writing of a research project. Failure to attend required classes without good cause may result in withdrawal of permission to proceed further with the ISP.

Supervisors may in addition require or advise their ISP students to participate in relevant modules.

### **3.5 Drafts**

Supervisors may require submission of drafts in whole or part, and may stipulate a timetable for submission. Failure to submit drafts according to the timetable and without good cause may result in withdrawal of permission to proceed further with the ISP. Supervisors should not mark draft ISPs, either in part or in whole (see 7.1).

### **3.6 Method of preparation**

ISPs should be word-processed.

### **3.7 Scholarly apparatus**

ISPs should include a bibliography of works cited. They should follow the conventions of the appropriate discipline with respect to citations and style.

## **4. Regulatory and Syllabus Requirements**

### **4.1 Prerequisites**

Students who wish to undertake an ISP should check in good time with the ISP Module Convenor in the relevant department whether there are any prerequisite requirements. These may take the form of specified modules which must have been passed (sometimes with a minimum mark), or a requirement that a certain number of modules should have already been passed in the subject of the ISP. Any such prerequisite requirements should be published in the module information on the website and on Moodle. ISP Module Convenors should check that any prerequisite requirements have been met before permitting a student to do an ISP (see section 2.2).

### **4.2 Year of study**

ISPs may be taken in a student's penultimate or final year. Some ISPs are specific to a particular year of study (e.g. a compulsory language year abroad), and others are restricted to the final year. The module information on the website and on Moodle should be consulted for details of such restrictions.

### **4.3 Compulsory, recommended and optional ISPs**

In some degrees an ISP is compulsory; in others an ISP is recommended. An ISP is optional in most degrees.

### **4.4 Entitlement to do an ISP**

Students do not have a right to do an ISP, unless the ISP forms a compulsory part of their programme as set out in the relevant documentation. The granting of permission to do an ISP is covered in the approval process (section 2.2).

### **4.5 Permitted maximum number of ISPs**

Students may take more than one ISP, subject to the following considerations

- ISPs may be taken only in the penultimate or final year
- No ISP may be taken twice in the same academic discipline

### **4.6 ISPs and two-subject degrees**

Students taking a two-subject degree may do an ISP in each of their two subjects, if they satisfy the approval procedure of section 2.2 and the constraints of section 4.5.

## 5. Compulsory ISP for Language Year Abroad Degrees

### 5.1 Approval procedure, timetable and appointment of supervisor

The procedure for approval of ISP topic and title and appointment of supervisor for ISPs must be completed well before the student goes abroad, preferably no later than the early part of Term 3, before examinations start.

### 5.2 Method of supervision for ISPs supervised by a member of SOAS staff

Students must keep in touch with the supervisor at regular (e.g. monthly) intervals, and report on progress made and difficulties encountered.

### 5.3 Procedure for ISPs supervised by a member of staff of a university abroad

Some ISPs are supervised by a member of staff in a university overseas (e.g. for students of Arabic). The arrangements for these ISPs are set out in the scheme for the particular language year abroad.

### 5.4 Date and method of submission

Departmental submission dates for ISPs, which may vary, will be set out in the module information on the website and on Moodle. Submission will be via Moodle.

### 5.5 ISPs and two-subject degrees

Students registered for a two-subject degree in a language and a discipline may do a language ISP during their compulsory language year abroad, but not an ISP in the discipline subject. They may, however, do research and gather materials for an ISP in the discipline, which they may then take in the year after their language year abroad if approved as set out above.

## 6. Submission Process

### 6.1 Date and method of submission

Departmental submission dates for ISPs, which may vary, will be set out in the module information on the website and on Moodle. Submission will be via Moodle.

### 6.2 Late submission

Late submission is covered by the [Coursework Submission Policy](#).

### 6.3 Academic Misconduct and plagiarism (including 'self-plagiarism')

Students are reminded that all work submitted as part of the requirement for any module at SOAS must meet the requirements of the [Academic Misconduct Policy](#). By submitting the ISP students are agreeing to the following:

*"I have read and understood the regulation concerning plagiarism and I undertake:*

- *that all material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person(s);*
- *that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in this ISP;*
- *that I have not incorporated in this ISP without acknowledgement any work previously submitted by me for any other module forming part of this or any other degree."*

## 7. Assessment

### 7.1 Drafts

Supervisors should not mark draft ISPs, either in part or in whole. (See also section 3.5.)

### 7.2 Method of assessment

ISPs should be double marked internally and should always be referred to the Visiting Examiner. The Chair of the Sub-Board of Examiners should send a copy of these Guidelines to the Visiting Examiner.

### 7.3 Oral examination

The specifications for an ISP may include an oral examination. The oral examination may be compulsory for all candidates or may be at the discretion of the examiners.

### 7.4 Over-length ISPs

ISPs that exceed the word limit will be subject to the penalties set out in the [Word Count and Over-length Coursework Policy](#).

### 7.5 Notification of result

Students will be informed by the Registry of the result of the ISP as a percentage mark. Marks must not be disclosed by supervisors or others involved in the marking process.

### 7.6 Appeals

If a candidate wishes to make an appeal they must follow the School's [Appeals Policy](#).

#### Document Version

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