

Researching Responsible Natural Language Processing

Week 1 – 21st October 2026

Individual Exploratory Project

John Vines

Professor of Design Informatics

john.vines@ed.ac.uk



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What is Individual Exploratory Project (IEP)

- 60 credit project course
- There are no dedicated contact hours – all contact hours built into NLP-RR
- One final assignment
 - But! Assignments in NLP-RR contribute towards what you do in your IEP project

IEP Brief:

- Identify a specific research question in responsible and trustworthy natural language processing and design a short study that uses appropriate methods to answer it.
- Precisely document use of appropriate research methods to answer the research question you identified.
- Communicate novel research results to a research audience orally (presentations in NLP-RR) and in writing (the report for IEP).

Ways of approaching your project

- IEP can be approach in several ways:
 - You can use it as a first exploratory or pilot piece of research for your PhD – for example, an initial interview study, early experimentation with new modelling techniques. This would likely be supervised by your PhD supervisor(s).
 - You can use it to work with an additional supervisor from a different discipline or field, to try out methods or concepts that are unfamiliar to you but might be useful for you PhD research going forward.
 - You can use it to work with a non-academic partner on a tightly defined real-world problem – where they may provide specific datasets, methods, or real-world use cases for you to build into your project. This would likely be supervised jointly by a representative of the partner, and your PhD supervisor.

Examples from Cohort 1 and 2:

Some examples of how students last year approached IEP:

- **Billy:** used IEP to design an initial prototype for his work creating physical interfaces for LLMs to explore public attitudes to LLM and Agentic AI governance and ethics.
- **Alex:** worked with British Standards Institute on a problem they set around government policy and regulation of AI companions when users pass away or seek to exit contracts.
- **Jinzuomu:** initiated technical work on synthetic accent generation, conducted online experiments evaluating accent outputs.
- **Neel:** collaborated with Cohere to look at the transferability of reasoning training techniques across language models and what potential these techniques yield for mechanistic interpretability.

The report:

- Takes the form of a research paper, and communicates the learning from the project as per a short research article.
- Documents the research question, relevant background research, methods and study design, what was found out, what new insights come from this.
- 7000 words – template agnostic (choose a relevant one from a conference or journal for the nature of the project).
- The report is 100% of the mark for the 60 credits of IEP
- Deadline: 1st May 2026

Timelines

- **Mid-October:** John and Daniel will share non-academic partner collaboration opportunities.
- **Early-November:** Let John and Daniel know if you wish to talk with a partner to do a collaborative project.
- **Mid-November:** Critical review of paper – submitted for NLP-RR (CW1)
- **Mid-to-late November:** IEP pitch and feedback sessions in NLP-RR
- **Late January:** IEP project proposal – submitted for NLP-RR (CW2)
- **Early March:** IEP video presentations – completed in NLP-RR (CW3)
- **Mid-to-late March:** IEP feedback sessions in NLP-RR
- **7th May 2026:** IEP report deadline

Get started..!

- While the project proposal is not due until January, you can get started as soon as you can...!
- The IEP Learn site should be visible soon – the assignment brief and learning outcomes will be available on there.
- **My recommendation:** chat to your supervisors about IEP in your next supervision meeting and discuss the three different ways of approaching the project.
- Remember: 60 credit project = 600 hours of independent study (outside what you will be doing towards the project in NLP-RR)
 - Suggestion: Plan to distribute it across the two semesters based on other course commitments.

Any questions?

If you have any questions about this week, contact me at :
john.vines@ed.ac.uk



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