

Preparing an MRR

A guidance note



1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to offer guidance on the Management Research Report (MRR). For the purposes of this document, we are using MRR to represent both Management Research Reports and dissertations submitted by candidates at CIPD nationally assessed centres, PAC centres and also on approved university postgraduate and master's programmes. It is informed by feedback from the CIPD Standards Moderation Team, which has the task of reviewing samples of candidate work across all centres to ensure consistency of standards.

2 What is the Management Research Report?

A fundamental feature of the CIPD Professional Standards is that qualified professionals should have strategic awareness, a business orientation and be concerned with adding value through people management and development practices. We expect qualified professionals to be able to write a competent report – on a people management and development issue – that seeks to persuade businesses or business partners to change or adopt a particular policy or practice. The MRR is your opportunity to demonstrate these qualities.

As part of the Applied Personnel and Development Standards, it is an applied piece of work that should integrate theory, systematic enquiry and organisational practice. It is a practitioner-based enquiry that needs to reflect the positioning of our Standards at master's level. It is therefore an opportunity to demonstrate your professional competence in an integrated piece of work.

The MRR provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate the ability to investigate and diagnose a 'live' people management and development issue or problem, to locate your work within the body of contemporary knowledge, to collect and analyse data, to derive supportable conclusions and to make practical and actionable recommendations for change, improvement or enhancement to current practice.

The MRR will normally relate to an issue in your organisation or in a work placement organisation. Having this organisational support is clearly advantageous in terms of access to data, support and commitment. However, given that there are a range of routes into CIPD membership, we recognise that not everyone is in employment and that this may not be practicable. In these circumstances the best way to tackle the issue you want to investigate is through a study at industry level or across a number of different organisations.

The key point is that the research for the MRR must involve empirical investigation and primary analysis of data and cannot be undertaken on a purely theoretical desk-based basis. Your objectives therefore need to be clear and focused towards this principle.

Your project will also be confirming or developing both your business report-writing and academic researching skills. You will also be using tools and techniques that form the basis of good professional practice.

As an element of assessment, the MRR requires you to demonstrate a critical evaluative approach and your ability as a 'thinking performer' by meeting the following performance indicators:

2.1 Project management skills:

- identification of a suitable project in terms of feasibility and relevance to your organisation, as well as the key issues in people management and development
- planning and designing a project that demonstrates awareness of strategic issues and that has the potential to add value to your organisation
- explaining and critically evaluating the rationale for the project and its aims and objectives.

2.2 The substance of the project:

- demonstrating your knowledge of existing literature, contemporary policy and practice issues in your chosen project area
- explaining and critically evaluating the contribution of people management and development at individual, team, organisational and societal level.

2.3 Data collection skills:

- demonstrating your ability to access and interpret data from primary and secondary sources
- explaining and critically evaluating the advantages, disadvantages and relevance of different methods of data collection.

2.4 Presenting and analysing data:

- making appropriate and correct use of data-gathering techniques and analysing the data collected by the use of qualitative and quantitative methods
- using an appropriate report structure and report-writing skills to present the MRR in a clear, logical and systematic manner in order to persuade key decision-makers of the merits of the arguments presented.

2.5 Conclusions and recommendations:

- drawing realistic and appropriate conclusions
- developing recommendations and a plan for their implementation within a realistic time-frame, demonstrating awareness of potential costs
- undertaking a critical review of the MRR and identifying how you might have undertaken the project more effectively – this should be articulated in your concluding personal statement.

3 Getting started

3.1 Choosing a topic

Our first recommendation is that you identify one that:

- is in an area of practice that interests you
- has a precise focus and clear boundaries
- is manageable in terms of access to relevant people and documents
- is manageable in terms of the amount of time available to gather data.

Our second recommendation is that you do not rush into any subject without finding out more about it:

- The range of MRR topics is wide, and most of these are central to HRM/people management and development; indeed, it is likely that many of these topics have already been the subject of previous work within your organisation or at your institution or centre, and most will have been addressed in earlier research published in journals and books. This means that there is already plenty of literature about what has been done in these areas.
- Rather than depend too heavily on Google, *Personnel Today* or *People Management*, have a look at the excellent range of publications from the CIPD Research and Policy Team. These cover many aspects of people management and development, outline topic areas and suggest further reading.
- CIPD membership also entitles you to use the website and access the academic EBSCO search engine. This enables you to locate journal articles on any topic – an excellent follow-up to the Research and Policy documents and a start to the bibliography. Acas and the Institute of Employment Studies are among other quality sources.

Some topics lend themselves to a quantitative approach, for example how many people are leaving the organisation, and you need to be comfortable with some relatively simple statistics to establish what the situation is before considering any action. You will find that Valerie Anderson's book and Mick Marchington and Adrian Wilkinson's final chapter are both very useful sources of information on how to construct and undertake a Management Research Report. Mark Saunders and colleagues' similar work is also highly recommended. The full details of these resources are given at the end of these guidelines.

A good starting point is to develop a brief outline proposal or business case giving details of the topic you have chosen to investigate, your proposed plan and the main literature sources. This is likely to include elements such as:

- why you have chosen the particular issue or subject
- what its relevance is to the organisation
- your preliminary understanding about theory and practice in this area
- the key reference books or articles for initial research
- what research questions are implied from the issue or subject
- your key aims and objectives for the project
- how you will measure the success of the project once completed
- your initial ideas on appropriate methods of gathering data around these questions
- the outline time schedule for this research.

If you are engaged upon a study programme, you should discuss and agree the proposal with your project supervisor before you proceed. If you are a PAC candidate, you should discuss your intentions with your centre to ensure that your focus will be appropriate to meet the needs of the CIPD applied field.

4 What is a suitable structure for a Management Research Report?

The structure should provide systematic and logical steps through which the story should unfold. It is often helpful to have a brief summary paragraph reflecting the key points at the end of each section. Done well, it should aid both the author and reader to think through the issue.

We advocate the following structure.

4.1 Title

The title should indicate clearly the focus of the MRR, and the aims, objectives and recommendations should be aligned. The title can be used to capture the attention of the reader and should, if possible, generate interest in the importance of, or curiosity about, the content of the report. Try to choose a title that clearly indicates the research question and be careful not to seek a 'catchy' title that could detract from the professionalism of the report.

Remember to include your name and submission date, and your programme title if you are submitting within a formal study programme.

4.2 Acknowledgements

You should acknowledge the assistance and support you have received while undertaking the MRR.

4.3 Declarations

You should declare that it is your own work and that your research was conducted ethically. And, if you have promised confidentiality to either the organisation or the research participants, this needs to be ensured and stated.

Including the word count of the report would also be useful.

4.4 Abstract

This is usually only found in academic dissertations, but if your centre requires one then use a few key words to communicate the value of the research and to attract readers. This brief summary of the whole report should help quickly identify if your study could be useful to other researchers. It should include a description of the issue, your research approach and an outline of significant findings.

4.5 Executive summary

While an abstract is not required for MRRs, an executive summary is essential. It performs the same function as an abstract and the intention is to encourage the reader to read the full report. To do this the summary should clarify the issue being studied, why this was being done, how it was done, with an overview of the results that tempts the reader to read the whole report and find out about the conclusion and recommendations. It should normally be no longer than one page and should tell the reader what you looked at, why you looked at it, how you went about it and what the key findings, conclusions and recommendations are – all in one page!

Drawing attention to the important results and findings in a short summary will interest key decision-makers and persuade them to read your report, as well as encourage them to support your recommendations and implementation plan.

4.6 Table of contents or index

Show how the report is structured and indicate the page numbers of the main elements. Make sure that chapters and sections are numbered, but limit the number of heading levels. Also show a list of charts and diagrams (where appropriate), the list of references, the bibliography and identify each of the appendices.

4.7 Introduction

The purpose of the introduction is to set the scene and show how the chosen topic seeks to address an organisation or business need. The issue being considered needs to be introduced with a clear line of sight or linkage drawn between the business drivers and the issue – with the intention that addressing the issue should make a contribution to organisational success.

One approach is to set out the main dimensions of the organisation (history, finance and people) and the business sector/context within which it operates. The aim of the organisational context setting is to identify the few key drivers that are influencing the business and to develop a rationale for the report. A range of management models and the external and internal environment can be used to position the issue.

The terms of reference, aims or objectives of the study then need to be outlined. Terms of reference are usually more broadly drawn, whereas objectives are usually very specific.

Explain the terms of reference and the aims of the report. Include reference to:

- the research question
 - why this was chosen
 - what the problem is and how it is defined
 - the context and location
 - a brief introduction of the organisation
- the overall report structure
- the research objectives and how the issue is to be addressed
- the business objectives, and the scope, boundaries and constraints that might apply or affect the progress of the project.

Some organisations and managers have already decided on what they would like to do about a particular issue and therefore the objectives tend to be framed to reach the desired conclusions and

recommendations. This can result in the project being fundamentally flawed because the objectives presume the conclusions and the recommendations – and you might be tempted or required to ignore the actual findings from the research.

4.8 Literature review

The purpose of the literature review is to put the question in perspective and find out what has been done by others in the past to prevent you from 'reinventing the wheel' and ensuring you learn from other work. It should provide a backdrop for the specific research being undertaken and ideally add some value to it.

The review should be a discussion and critical evaluation of published material. While completing this can be challenging and difficult, it can be very insightful and rewarding as it gets you more familiar with existing literature and ensures you are familiar with the latest findings; this can be helpful not only for you but also for your organisation. The EBSCO, or similar search of the literature, should produce a 'long list' of textbooks and journal articles that might have some relevance to the topic.

The essential elements to identify the relevant literature/sources are:

- books – tend to provide less in-depth coverage but research monographs are an invaluable source of specialist materials, as are CIPD Research and Policy documents
- journal articles – these reflect the latest research and who is researching in this area
- government reports – many government departments carry out research
- magazines, professional publications and newspapers – information provided is usually more limited but they are useful for recent updates, policy changes and case studies from other organisations or similar situations
- dissertations – although these can be difficult to obtain
- Internet – lots of information available but to be used with caution.

The intended outcome of the literature review, in addition to the more thorough grounding in the subject, is that it informs and influences the subsequent stages of your research and helps define and explain the issue in the context of contemporary ideas and thinking, including a discussion on relevant models, concepts, ideas and current good practice. To do this effectively requires the use of journal articles. Among the recommended journals are:

- *Human Resource Management Journal* (HRMJ)
- *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (IJHRM)
- *Personnel Review*
- *Employee Relations*
- *Industrial Relations Journal* (IRJ)
- *Human Resource Development International* (HRDI)
- *Human Resource Management* (US)
- *British Journal of Industrial Relations* (BJIR)
- *British Journal of Management* (BJM)
- *Harvard Business Review* (HBR).

Depending on the word count, a shortlist of key texts needs to be developed. The bibliography lists all the books and other resources read, whereas the references list all the articles and books 'cited'/quoted in the report itself. These texts need to be read to identify their relevance and contribution to the topic. The contents should not be described in the literature review, rather critically analysed for their unique contribution to the subject and perhaps compared and contrasted with other views. You should conclude by pulling the key issues from the literature review together to clearly tie them into your research.

4.9 Research methodology

You will need to identify and justify your choice of research methods and in doing so demonstrate an awareness of alternative approaches and methods, the suitability of primary and secondary data sources to your project, ethical considerations and any logistical problems encountered. We recommend that you make reference to texts on research methods to justify why you think your chosen method was the most suitable, and therefore why the resulting data are robust enough to base business decisions on them.

4.10 Findings, analysis and discussion

Present your significant results or findings so that they are easily understood and accessible to the reader and comment on why you consider these results to be significant. The full presentation of your findings could be made available in the appendices if there are further sources of material that you feel are important to include. Presenting data should not consist of bullet points, strings of quotes pulled together without any commentary, or responses to interviews that merely repeat what each respondent said about a particular question. This section of the MRR is where you need to add value by summarising key issues, linking them together in an integrated manner and demonstrating a critical awareness of literature.

It is important to make use of and interpret all of the data collected, both primary and secondary. Give consideration to both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data in terms of relevance and currency; identify areas where theories and/or models are confirmed or contradicted and the implications for the organisation.

4.11 Conclusions

Evaluate your study against the original terms of reference and objectives. You should synthesise and clarify the results of the analysis and present a sensible and logical summary that provides practical meaning to the organisation.

4.12 Recommendations and implementation plan

Draw on your conclusions and provide practical recommendations on how the issue can be addressed. Whether the recommendations include actions to change or do something differently or to maintain or strengthen the existing approach, it is important that there are not too many and that they are workable. It is advisable that you prioritise the recommendations that are likely to achieve the greatest effect and, in doing so, take into account the reality of your proposals in terms of potential implementation difficulties, the benefits that will accrue from the implementation and the cost implications.

4.13 References

This should be an alphabetical list of all the authors that you have quoted or made reference to in your report. The Harvard system of referencing is recommended.

Making reference to other people's work is called 'citing' and correct attribution and referencing is essential, not only to acknowledge their work, but also to avoid plagiarism.

We define plagiarism as an attempt, whether intentional or not, to deceive assessors. It includes but is not limited to:

- passing off the work of others as your own work
- quoting from published or unpublished work of other persons, including other candidates, without acknowledgement and referencing
- dishonestly presenting as your own the results of another candidate, whatever the medium (text, written or electronic, computer programmes, data sets, visual images whether still or moving).

If you fail to correctly reference your information sources, you are passing off the work of another as your own, whether intentionally or not.

4.14 Bibliography

This is a list of the sources and authors that you have read during your study and which may have influenced your approach. However, you may not have directly referred to these sources in your report and

not included them in the list of references, which is reserved for those from which you have made a direct reference.

4.15 Personal learning statement

This is an opportunity for you to demonstrate one of the qualities of a ‘thinking performer’: that of reflecting on your own experience and learning. Your statement should offer a brief consideration outlining:

- what significant personal learning was achieved while conducting your study and whether there are any learning needs arising out of it
- how you dealt with any problems or difficulties and whether these could have been avoided or alleviated
- how it has helped you understand the process of business research
- what you might have done differently.

4.16 Appendices

Although you should retain all of the material collected during your study, you do not need to include everything in your appendices. However, the appendices should include evidence that is relevant to the development of arguments, such as raw data material, data collection material, copies of a questionnaire or interview pro forma and interview transcript, and so on. These should be clearly separated and numbered for easy reference.

5 Layout and word count

Both the layout and word count will vary according to the requirements of your particular centre, the subject matter being investigated, the approach you adopt and whether your MRR is presented for the award of a postgraduate diploma, a full master’s or as a component of PAC. The length of the MRR will be determined by the centre’s own requirements, for example whether it is a report or a dissertation.

The word count should exclude the title, abstract, acknowledgements, executive summary, bibliography, references, tables, diagrams and any appendices. A word count of 7,000–10,000 will impose fairly tight limitations on the number of themes you can develop – it is usually harder to write a shorter report than a longer one.

Centre and type of award	Word count range
Candidate studying at nationally assessed centre for: CIPD postgraduate diploma	7,000–10,000 words
Candidate studying at internally assessed centre for: postgraduate diploma MA/MSc – the dissertation can be used as the basis for the MRR*	7,000–10,000 words 12,000–20,000 words*+ circa 3,000-word summary drawing on the dissertation
Candidate registered for PAC – a report, or A master’s-level dissertation* in a relevant subject area can be used as the basis for the MRR, with a 3,000-word report written summary, focused upon the CIPD GAC.	7,000–10,000 word report or a 3,000-word summary drawing on the dissertation

The following is suggested to provide guidance on section word count:		
MRR element	7,000 words	20,000 words
Introduction	250	1,500
Literature review	1,500	5,000
Research methodology	500	2,500
Findings, analysis and discussion	3,000	7,500
Conclusions	750	2,250
Recommendations and implementation plan	750	750
Personal learning statement	250	500

While each centre will specify their own requirements, the normal conventions of report-writing will apply. The standard layout is usually typed or word-processed on A4 paper in portrait format, using a clear font (for example Arial 11 point) that is 1.5 or double-spaced.

6 Assessment

The responsibility for completing the MRR rests with you and the responsibility for the assessment and internal moderation lies with your centre.

Assessment of your MRR will be based on the CIPD Generic Assessment Criteria (GAC) and the standard we expect is that of master's/M level.

Your assessor must be satisfied that the choice of topic is a relevant one within the organisational context, that the objectives of your investigation are clearly articulated and that you have undertaken sufficient reading and that this has been critically evaluated and used.

The GAC criteria have been mapped against the structure of an MRR so that you can see how they interlink and will be assessed.

GAC criterion	Where found
Clarity and relevance of proposal/terms of reference/aims and objectives	Introduction
Critical analysis of the most significant contribution to the literature, drawing on books, journals and recent research	Literature review Findings, analysis and discussion
Justification and use of appropriate methods of data collection	Research methodology
Focused and relevant discussion of organisational context, evidence of systematic data collection and clear presentation of findings	Introduction, Findings, analysis and discussion
Comprehensive analysis and interpretation of findings in a holistic/integrated manner	Findings, analysis and discussion
Appropriateness of conclusions in the light of terms of reference and empirical work	Conclusions
Realistic, timely and cost-effective recommendations and action plan	Recommendations
Satisfactory presentation of material and argument, and clear and	Whole report

accurate referencing	
Evidence that personal learning has been reviewed, including comments from organisation if appropriate	Final section (and your CPD)

There are also CIPD grade descriptors that attempt to distinguish between the pass, merit and distinction levels. These are briefly summarised below:

Distinction – overall, an excellent piece of work which is very well integrated

Merit – overall, a sound piece of work which is quite well integrated

Pass – overall, a satisfactory piece of work which shows some degree of integration

Fail – overall, an unacceptable piece of work as it stands, lacking integration.

7 Moderation

MRRs are moderated locally by the external examiner or verifier appointed at your centre. They typically review a 20% sample of MRRs, which should include all MRRs in the distinction category (that is, with an award of 70% or more), all marginal fails (45–49%), and a sample from each of the pass and merit bands.

At national level we require all centres to submit a representative sample of MRRs to our Standards Moderation Team – this is to ensure that there is consistency of standards across all centres.

8 Key texts

ANDERSON, V. (2004) *Research methods in human resource management*. London: CIPD.

MARCHINGTON, M. and WILKINSON, A. (2008) *Human resource management at work*. London: CIPD.

SAUNDERS, M., LEWIS, P. and THORNHILL, A. (2007) *Research methods for business students*. 4th ed. London: FT Prentice Hall.