

Medical Sciences Division

Guidelines for DGSs on Confirmation of DPhil Status Procedures

This document contains advisory information for DGSs about Confirmation of DPhil Status procedure and regulations.

Administration of the Process

The Confirmation procedure is designed to allow departments to utilise existing structures and practices for their presentations where possible; as such the Medical Sciences Board has agreed that administration of the assessment process should take place within departments rather than being coordinated by the Medical Sciences Graduate School Office. Once the process has been completed, all paperwork should be returned to the Medical Sciences Graduate School Office under a single cover.

Timing of Confirmation

Students have 9 terms* in which to complete the Confirmation process; the process is complete when the Board has considered the candidate's GSO.14 MSD Application for Confirmation of Status form and the assessors' report, and determined the result. The Divisional recommendation is that students should apply for and undergo Confirmation of Status in their 8th term. This allows early advice from the assessors and gives time for improvements to be made when a student is aiming to submit within 3 years. Students should not feel deterred from applying for Confirmation in their 8th term because they feel they 'have not done enough'. Rather, the later they leave it, the closer to completion they should be expected to be.

*Separate Regulations apply for Doctoral Training Centre students on 4-year programmes. Please contact the Medical Sciences Graduate School Office for details.

Deferral of Confirmation

If a student will not be in a position to complete Confirmation of Status by the end of their 9th term, it is possible to apply for deferral of Confirmation, for up to a maximum of 3 terms, granted 1 term at a time. The Medical Sciences Board considers that deferral of Confirmation should be used only in exceptional circumstances. Applications for deferral will only be granted when there are strong academic grounds for doing so.

Appointment of Assessors

Assessors should normally be approached by the supervisor and approved by the Director of Graduate Studies in advance of the presentation. The GSO.14.MSD form should be used for DGS approval of assessors (see below).

- Confirmation requires two people with sufficient scientific expertise to assess the quality of the work. In exceptional cases where it is not possible to appoint two individuals from within Oxford, one assessor could be external to Oxford. The Department will be liable for any costs incurred.
- Neither assessor should have acted in a supervisory capacity to the student. This includes use of the student's supervisor, College Advisor, DGS* or Graduate Advisor.
- Both assessors should normally be internal to Oxford although an honorary contract (for NHS employees) would be sufficient. Likewise, a contract research (post-doctoral) staff member who is employed by Oxford University would be acceptable.
- Assessors can be external to the department.
- At least one assessor should have supervised a student in Oxford to completion.

Confirmation assessors may subsequently be invited as degree examiners for the student, provided they have not given further help/assistance to the student between Transfer of Status & Confirmation of Status or between Confirmation of Status and final submission of MSc/DPhil thesis.

As agreed by GSC¹, DGS have delegated authority to approve, where they wish to do so, Confirmation assessor nominations which fall out-with the rules above. When a DGS receives a GSO.14.MSD (Application for Confirmation of Status) on which the assessor nominations are out-with the rules, they may:

- (a) return the form to the candidate with a request that they nominate alternative assessors; or
- (b) if they support the nominations, complete the relevant section of the GSO.14.MSD form with a brief justification; or
- (c) if they prefer to refer the decision to the Board, refrain from signing the form and email the Divisional Graduate School Assistants² with a brief case supporting the use of an assessor/s out-with the rules. The Divisional Graduate School Assistants will relay the case to members of the Board with delegated authority to decide on such matters and report the decision back to the DGS at which point the DGS may sign the form. It is imperative that the Confirmation presentation and interview do not proceed prior to the DGS receiving the Board's decision – as the Board may not approve the nominated assessors.

*If the DGS is nominated as an assessor, their appointment can be approved by the Head of Department (without reference to the Board) in which case, the Head of Department should complete the relevant section of the GSO.14.MSD form in place of the DGS, providing a brief justification.

Where the first attempt at Confirmation is unsuccessful, careful thought should be given as to whether the same or different assessors should be used for the second attempt.

The GSO.14 MSD Form

The GSO.14 MSD form should be completed and signed by the student, supervisor, college and DGS in advance of the presentation. It is important that all parties recognise that by signing the form the DGS is granting permission to apply for Confirmation, not granting Confirmation itself. The completed form and appended information should be made available to the assessors *in advance* of the presentation and interview.

Elements of the Confirmation Procedure

Confirmation of status consists of the following elements:

1. A completed GSO.14 MSD form, signed by the student, supervisor, college, and DGS, which includes a statement of the skills training that the student has undertaken during the course of his or her research;
2. A presentation by the student, followed by an interview with the 2 assessors;
3. A full thesis contents list, detailing the milestones of any remaining experiments and dates when draft chapters will be passed to the supervisor(s) for comment.

The assessors will report to the Board on the candidate's suitability for confirmation of D.Phil. status. This report will be based on the information provided in/with the GSO.14 MSD form, in conjunction with the student's presentation and interview. In cases where the assessors deem the student to be inadequate in one or more areas of assessment, they must attach a short written report detailing where their work falls below the standard required and giving guidance as to what the student needs to do in order to address the assessors' concerns. The student's supervisor/s³ must not attempt to contribute to or modify the report prepared by the assessors. This does not preclude the assessors seeking clarification from the supervisor/s but this must be initiated by the assessors.

General Guidance on Assessment of Confirmation of Status

Confirmation assessment should be carried out on the basis that a student who has reached this stage of their research should have reached the standard at which, were their experimental work be complete and written up, they would be in a position to submit a thesis for examination for a DPhil at the University of Oxford.

¹ 15.10.15

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³ 'Supervisor/s' in this context means *anyone* in the supervisory team, i.e. including secondary supervisors

The student's supervisor/s must not be present at the student's interview with the Confirmation assessors.

There is more substantial information available in the *Guidelines for Confirmation of DPhil Status Assessor*.

Possible Outcomes

Assessors are given a choice of 3 outcomes:

1st Attempt

Confirmation of status without reservations

Confirmation of status with reservations (the student is required to submit a written response, complete a training course, or similar, as specified in the attached report)

Student should make a 2nd attempt to confirm DPhil status in 1 term

2nd Attempt

Confirmation of status without reservations

Confirmation of status with reservations (the student is required to submit a written response, complete a training course, or similar, as specified in the attached report)

Transfer to MSc by Research

Students who are required to make a 2nd attempt will be given the option to appeal to the DGS for different assessors to be appointed for the 2nd attempt. If the DGS has a conflict of interest then the Head of Department should be consulted. Although students are given the option to appeal, and every consideration should be given to the student's wishes, ultimate responsibility for appointment of assessors lies with the DGS (or Head of Department if the DGS has a conflict of interest).

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