

## Medical Sciences Graduate School

### Guidelines for Confirmation of DPhil Status Assessors

Thank you for agreeing to be an assessor for a student in their application for Confirmation of DPhil Status (hereinafter 'Confirmation'). The Medical Sciences Graduate School recognises that Confirmation is an important milestone in a student's graduate career and wishes the process to be conducted rigorously and uniformly. The process should help successful students bring their research together and prepare for writing up. It should also identify where a student's plans for completion are not suitable and provide additional guidance to help them to a successful completion.

These guidelines have been developed by the Medical Sciences Graduate School Committee to aid assessors:

#### **General Guidance on Assessment of Confirmation of Status**

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 in their 8<sup>th</sup> 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 are encouraged not to feel deterred from applying for Confirmation in their 8<sup>th</sup> term because they feel they 'have not done enough'. *Rather, assessors are asked to note that the later a student leaves 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.

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 to be complete and written up, they would be in a position to submit a thesis for a DPhil at the University of Oxford.

#### **Components of Confirmation of Status**

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 Presentation, Interview, Amount, Quality, Novelty and Originality of the Work***

The student will give a presentation of their research, which is viewed by both assessors and followed by an interview with both assessors. The student's supervisor/s<sup>1</sup> **must not be present** when the student is interviewed. The format of the presentation is left to departments, to enable selection of the most appropriate time and format to fit local best practice and the style of research.

Assessors are requested to:

- Assess the quality of the presentation, in terms of the student's ability to present a coherent account of their research and its significance to the field
- Conduct an interview with the student following the presentation
- Assess the novelty and originality of the work completed.

The primary focus of assessment should be on the quality of the work completed rather than the amount. However, the Medical Sciences Board recognises that good quality research can only be produced where sufficient experimentation has taken place.

- ***Proposed Structure of Thesis and Timetable for Writing***

The student is required to provide a full thesis contents list, detailing the milestones of any remaining work and dates when draft chapters will be passed to the supervisor(s) for comment.

Assessors are requested to:

- Indicate whether the proposed structure of the thesis is suitable for presentation of the student's results
- Indicate where they have recommendations for improvements

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<sup>1</sup> 'Supervisor/s' in this context means *anyone* in the supervisory team, i.e. including secondary supervisors

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- Assess whether the timetable proposed by the student is realistic and discuss with the student where there may be difficulties with the timetable.

- **Statement of Skills Training**

Research training is a key component of the DPhil career and all students should have used the opportunities available to them to ensure that they have received appropriate training in both subject-specific and generic research skills. A statement detailing the student's skills training will be included on the GSO.14 MSD form.

Assessors are requested to:

- Indicate whether the training received is adequate
- Make recommendations to the student for additional training, where appropriate.

- **Competency in English**

All students are expected to have a high degree of competency in written and spoken English in order to write and defend a thesis. It is expected that all students should have reached such a level by the time they apply for Confirmation.

Assessors are requested to:

- Highlight any concerns about the standard of English.

- **Prospect of Timely Completion**

DPhil students have 12 terms (4 years) in which to submit their thesis.

Assessors are asked to:

- Indicate the likelihood of the student being in position to submit a thesis by their maximum submission date. (The maximum submission date can be confirmed by the Medical Sciences Graduate School Office: [graduate.studies@medsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:graduate.studies@medsci.ox.ac.uk) )

### **Written Reports and Feedback to the Medical Sciences Board**

Assessors are asked to:

- Complete the Confirmation of Status Assessment Form provided alongside this guidance.

An additional written report is only required in cases where the assessors have deemed the student to be inadequate in one or more areas of assessment. It is important that the written report details where the work submitted falls below the standard required and provides clear guidance as to what the student needs to do in order to address the assessors' concerns. The student's supervisor/s<sup>2</sup> must not attempt to contribute to or modify the report. This does not preclude you<sup>3</sup> seeking clarification from the supervisor/s but this must be initiated by you. Please note that whilst a copy of the completed assessment form and your written report will be sent to the student's supervisor(s), the student may also receive a copy of this paperwork from their supervisor(s).

Confirmation is a valuable opportunity to give students feedback and assessors are encouraged to give students informal/verbal feedback on areas in which they are deemed adequate and good as appropriate. A written report may also be submitted on these areas if assessors wish to do so. Please note that if your recommendation is "Confirmation of DPhil status without reservations" and you choose to submit a written report, a copy of the written report will be sent directly to the student by the Divisional Medical Sciences Graduate School Office along with the completed assessment form.

### **Thank You**

Once again, thank you for agreeing to act as an assessor in this important process. If you require further guidance then please do not hesitate to contact the relevant departmental Director of Graduate Studies or seek advice from staff in the Medical Sciences Graduate School Office.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Supervisor/s' in this context means *anyone* in the supervisory team, i.e. including secondary supervisors

<sup>3</sup> i.e. the assessor/s