

Guidelines for Transfer of Status Assessors in the Medical Sciences Division

Thank you for agreeing to be an assessor for a student in his/her application for transfer of status from probationer research student (PRS) to either full MSc by Research status or full DPhil status. The Medical Sciences Division recognises that the Transfer of Status process is a very important milestone in a student's graduate studies, and therefore wishes for the process to be conducted rigorously and uniformly. It should help successful students to shape their research ideas and ensure they are on track to complete on time and, importantly, should identify struggling students early in their studies so that the source of their problems can be identified and hopefully addressed.

In order to help assessors understand the importance of the task that they have been asked to undertake, the following guidelines have been developed by the MSD Graduate School Committee.

Timing of Transfer

Students who began their programme of study in or after Michaelmas Term 2011* have 4 terms** in which to complete the transfer of status process. Therefore, the absolute latest that submission of a Transfer of Status report should occur is the end of Full Term of the student's 4th term. This hopefully assures that all students have been assessed for transfer and the assessors' report considered by the Board before the start of the 5th Term.

*Students who began their programme of study prior to Michaelmas Term 2011 have 6 terms in which to transfer.

**Separate Regulations apply for Doctoral Training Centre students on 4 year programmes and students on the Biochemistry OU/TSRi programme. Please contact the Medical Sciences Graduate School Office for details.

Student's Transfer Report – Transfer to DPhil status only

In particular, the assessors will need to see the following points addressed, within the word limit*:

- (a) that there is a clear and defined project
- (b) that the student has devised an investigative strategy
- (c) that some initial progress has been made in terms of method development and acquisition of results
- (d) that there is a clear and timetabled path towards completion of the project.

*The word limit for students who started prior to 1 October 2019 is 3,000 words**. This includes an abstract, introduction, results, discussion, a detailed timetable leading to submission and a methods section. Students are permitted to add appendices of up to 2,000 words including methods, figure legends and references.

The word limit for students who started on or after 1 October 2019 is 5,000 words**. This includes an abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, any appendices, and future plans including a proposed timetable for completion, but excludes tables and references.

Students who started on the DPhil in Experimental Psychology **prior to 1 October 2019 have a word limit of 6,000 words, and may add appendices of up to a further 2,000 words including methods, figure legends, and references. Students who started on the DPhil in Experimental Psychology **on or after 1 October 2019** have a word limit of 7,000 words, which should include an abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, any appendices, and future plans including a proposed timetable for completion. This reflects the longer thesis length for this course.

These are strict limits set by the Divisional Graduate Studies Committee and must be adhered to. Therefore:

- Assessors must not under any circumstances request that a student write more than this.
- If a student exceeds these limits, the assessors may return the report and appendices to the student and ask that they amend them to within the word limits. Once the report/appendices have been amended and resubmitted, the assessors may proceed with arranging the transfer viva.
- Candidates should not be penalised for submitting reports of shorter length, so long as they include sufficient material to merit admission.

Student's Transfer Report – Transfer to MSc by Research status only

Candidates are required to submit an outline of their project of no more than 500 words and a timetable for completion. If a student exceeds the word limit, the assessors may return the project outline to the student and ask that they amend it to within the word limit. Once the project outline has been amended and resubmitted, the assessors may proceed with arranging the transfer viva.

Format of Transfer Viva

Two assessors should be appointed and both must be present at the transfer viva. The assessor/s should read the transfer report and then arrange to meet the student in person for the transfer viva. Please note that the candidate's supervisor(s)¹ must not be present at the transfer viva. A typical transfer viva lasts more than an hour and in no case should a transfer viva exceed two hours in duration. Verbal feedback on the quality of the science and the report can be given during the transfer viva itself. The assessors may also let the student know what their recommendation will be – however, *the assessors must make clear to the student that it is a recommendation to the Board and not a result*. The student will be informed of the result by the Medical Sciences Graduate School Office, once it has been determined by the Board.

A written report (that is consistent with the opinions raised during the viva) should be submitted promptly to the Medical Sciences Graduate School Office. The candidate's supervisor(s) must not attempt to contribute to or modify the report. This does not preclude you² from seeking clarification from the supervisor(s) but this must be initiated by you. Please note that if your recommendation is "Transfer to DPhil/MSc status without reservations" or "Transfer to DPhil/MSc status if a satisfactory written response to this report is obtained", a copy of the completed transfer assessment form and your written report will be sent directly to the student by the Divisional Medical Sciences Graduate School Office. Please also note that students may receive a copy of this paperwork from their supervisor/s, regardless of what the assessors' recommendation is.

Work Completed and Future Plans

You are not necessarily expected to be an expert in the student's immediate area of research, but clearly you should be broadly familiar with the science and with the expected standard of work for an MSc or DPhil. Please provide an objective assessment of a) the student's background knowledge of the field; b) the amount and quality of the work completed to date; and c) the quality and feasibility of the proposed work for completion.

Likelihood of Timely Completion

DPhil students have a total of 12 terms (4 years) to complete their studies and submit their thesis (including a maximum of 6 terms holding PRS status). MSc by Research students have a total of 9 terms to submit their thesis (including a maximum of 6 terms holding PRS status). Beyond this students will be removed from the Register of Graduate Students, unless they are granted an extension. Assessors are asked to state how likely the student is to complete (and submit) within 3 years from their programme start date (MSc by Research) and within 4 years from their programme start date (DPhil). It is very important to state if you feel the student is unlikely to be in a position to submit a thesis within 3 years (MSc) and 4 years (DPhil) of their start date.

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. If you have concerns about the student's written or spoken English then please make these clear in your report.

Supervision

You may feel that the student is not getting sufficient supervision to successfully complete their studies within the 9 (MSc) or 12 (DPhil) term limit. This may be because their primary supervisor(s) is/are not providing enough input, or because some additional expertise beyond that capable of being provided by their primary supervisors is required. If this is the case then please indicate this on the form and (diplomatically) state in your report what additional supervision is desirable.

Struggling Students

Experience has shown that the Transfer of Status process is vitally important in identifying students who are struggling. Often this may be for reasons that can be addressed to get the student back on track. Occasionally it may be because the student lacks the ability or motivation to complete successfully. In both these cases it is vital that these concerns should be raised in the assessors' report. In cases where you raise concerns/questions, but you still wish to recommend transfer, please select "Transfer to DPhil status if a satisfactory written response to this report is obtained". In all cases where concerns are raised the Graduate School Committee will work together with the relevant DGS and supervisor(s) to ensure that steps are taken to address the concerns. If you feel that a student is struggling badly, or has poor or unfeasible plans for their future work then you may recommend that they re-attempt transfer of status in 1 term's time (the Regulations allow for this). If a student applying for transfer to DPhil status is unsuccessful a second time, you may recommend that the student be transferred to the MSc by

¹ 'Supervisors' in this context means *anyone* in the supervisory team, i.e. including secondary supervisors

²² I.e. the assessor(s)

Research, or, if you feel that the student is unlikely even to gain an MSc by Research degree, then you may recommend that they should not continue. If a student applying for transfer to MSc status is unsuccessful a second time, you may recommend that they should not continue. This will trigger a formal process for removing a student from the Register of Graduate Students.

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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