



GENERAL GUIDELINES

for students undertaking an MPhil/PhD or MD(Res) in the UCL Institute of Cardiovascular Science (ICS)

1. Introduction
2. Application for Admission
3. Programme of Study
4. MPhil/PhD upgrade - MD (Res) checkpoint
5. Procedure for transfer to CRS (Completing Research Student) status
6. Appointment of examiners for research degree candidates
7. Feedback Questionnaire

1. Introduction

The following notes are intended only as a brief guide to starting and carrying out postgraduate studies within the ICS, further information is available on the [Graduate School's website](#) and UCL's 'Regulations and Procedures for MPhil and PhD Degrees' (Academic Regulations) can be found on the [Registry site](#)

Divisional Postgraduate Tutor

Prof. Philippa Talmud
Centre for Cardiovascular Genetics
Rayne Building
5 University Street
London WC1E6JF
p.talmud@ucl.ac.uk
020 7679 6968

Deputy Postgraduate Tutor

Dr.Mihaela Moody
The Hatter Cardiovascular Institute
67 Chenies Mews
London WC1E 6HX
m.mocanu@ucl.ac.uk
020 3447 9376

The Deputy Postgraduate Tutor (DepPGT) is responsible to the Divisional Postgraduate Tutor (DPGT) for the research students within ICS. Students should contact the Deputy in the first instance with regard to MPhil to PhD upgrades, submission of degree entry forms and, examiner nominations. The Deputy should also be approached in the event that there is a breakdown in communications between student and supervisors.

Postgraduate Administrator

Ms Tricia O'Dell
Ground Floor
Rayne Building
5 University Street
London WC1E6JF
tricia.o'dell@ucl.ac.uk
020 7679 0752

2. Application for Admission & Registration for MPhil/PhD or MD(Res)

The initial step is to complete the '[Graduate Student Application' form](#). This is obligatory even if, for example, you were named on a PhD studentship application to a recognised authority which was subsequently awarded. Backdating of registration is not permitted so whenever possible applicants should complete their forms at least 2 months before the proposed start date.

All students should initially submit their completed application to UCL Admissions in hardcopy or online. Please note that online applications will not be processed unless both references and a transcript have been submitted. Admissions will carry out the relevant checks before forwarding to the ICS for approval. Once the application has been approved it will be sent back to Admissions who will send the student a confirmatory offer letter. The student must then accept the offer and formally register in person with Registry upon joining UCL and at the beginning of each academic year.

Some important points to note when completing the application form, which will save queries and delays:

Full-time or Part-time: This does not indicate the time in years that you will devote to your project, rather it reflects your contract status and the proportion of your time you can spend on the project. Full-time students most commonly hold a bona-fide PhD studentship from a research council (e.g. MRC or BBSRC) or a recognized Charity/ Foundation (e.g. Wellcome Trust, ARC, BHF). It is also possible to register full-time if you are supported from other sources, provided that you will be devoting more than 90% of your working time on the project. However, if you are supported as a research assistant on a 3- or 5-year grant, or contracted through the NHS or other employer, then you must register as a part-time student. In practice, this usually means little difference as in both cases the ICS's expectation is to complete the project work within 3 years and to submit as soon as possible thereafter. Applicants who consider that they require the full 5-years of part-time study will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to satisfy the ICS of their motivation, commitment and academic potential. Note that Clinical PhD students holding their own fellowships (e.g. MRC, Wellcome, BHF etc) are usually registered as part-time for administrative purposes, although their funding bodies fully expect them to complete as if they were registered full-time for 3 years.

Submission of the thesis: Students registered as full-time students do retain an option to submit after 2 years of study, whereas part-time students can do so only after 3 years. In addition full-time students cease to pay fees at 3 years and transfer to CRS status (see below), whereas part-time students continue to pay fees until their thesis is submitted (or to transfer to CRS at 5 years).

Funding: ICS expects PhD students to be fully-funded for the entire duration of their PhD degree from the outset and by a recognised authority. There are several principal routes:

- i) a studentship awarded to the supervisor (e.g. a CASE Studentship);
- ii) a fellowship usually awarded to the student following competitive selection and interview (e.g. MRC, Wellcome or BHF Clinical or Non-Clinical Training fellowships);
- iii) a studentship, scholarship or fellowship from the UK or an overseas funding body (e.g. DHPA award);
- iv) a grant from a funding body or industrial partner, usually awarded to the supervisor.

ICS will only in exceptional circumstances consider applications from individuals who do not have funding in place for the entire duration of the PhD degree. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis and applicants will need to provide evidence, such as bank statements and guarantor letters, that they have access to sufficient funds to cover the Graduate School minimum recommended student stipend (currently £15,590 for 2011/12), as well as tuition fees and, if required, bench fees and consumable costs.

Project Details: If funded by a peer-review grant, then a copy of the project description should be included in your application. In other situations, ICS requires that a two-page outline (approx. 1,000 words) of the research project be provided, including a Title, Background information, specific statement of the Hypothesis to be Tested, Plan of Investigation (bullet-point style and, if possible,

covering two years) and Key References (3-5). This ensures that the basic structure of the project is discussed and agreed before registration of the student.

Principal Supervisor: For most research degrees, it is expected that the student and principal supervisor will already be in contact. For example, by the student identifying a research project and supervisor from the ICS's website; or by the supervisor holding a grant for a PhD studentship and selecting the student at interview. All supervisors of graduate research degree students must be on the [Faculty list of Approved Supervisors](#). Normally, principal supervisors will be post-probationary academic staff members with recognised expertise in the proposed research area, and will already have had previous successful supervisory experience within a team. Requests to act as a principal supervisor should be made via the Postgraduate Administrator, who will arrange for the application to be considered by the ICS and then by Faculty.

Subsidiary Supervisor: Please ensure that a suitable subsidiary UCL supervisor has been nominated by your principal supervisor. In many cases, the subsidiary supervisor will be somewhat independent from the principal supervisor, and hence not a co-applicant on the grant or automatically a co-author. Their main role is to act as an overall advisor and assessor of progress, rather than to influence the aims and direction of the project, which is the role of the principal supervisor (and grant co-applicants). However, in some cases the subsidiary supervisor may be an experienced post-doctoral researcher, perhaps directly involved with the project. In such situations, ICS may deem it appropriate to request that a tertiary supervisor be appointed to fulfil the independent advisory role. ICS expects that the subsidiary and tertiary supervisors will act in unison and jointly fulfil the role of a 'second supervisor'. If nominees are not already approved as supervisors by UCL, then the Postgraduate Administrator will ask them to provide a copy of their full CV, including previous supervisory experience; this will be submitted for ICS and Faculty approval. Note that before confirming their willingness to act in this capacity, they should be fully familiar with their responsibilities [as required by UCL](#). This includes participating in the regular supervisory meetings as detailed in the Research Student E-Log and, as an ICS and UCL requirement, organising and chairing the Upgrade Panel for the viva-voce MPhil to PhD examination (see section 3). In brief, the appointment of the subsidiary supervisor is not frivolous and they are expected to have a prominent role in monitoring the student's progress.

MD(Res)/MS Students: As with the MPhil/PhD programme, the expectation is that all applicants will have demonstrated high academic excellence and have the necessary energy and enthusiasm to fully commit to a science-based research project. Applicants are also expected to have full funding in place for the duration of the degree. The programme of study parallels, therefore, the MPhil/PhD degree, including dual supervision, use of the E-log, access to skills development (section 2) and also a progress checkpoint (see section 3) for those enrolled from October 2009.

3. Programme of Study

General: Students must pursue their programme continuously as [governed by UCL regulations](#), which are described by Registry and elsewhere (for example Research Services, which provides guidelines relating to [Sickness Absence, Maternity/Paternity Leave, Holiday Entitlement and Interruptions](#) for students funded by Graduate Research Scholarships

ICS expects the number of working hours per week to be in line with that of UCL staff, although in practice many students exceed this, particularly when this is dictated by experimental objectives. Unauthorised Absence is treated very seriously and Supervisors must notify Student Records and Research Services immediately of any non-attendance, for which an abatement of the award will be made. Similarly, whether full- or part-time, all students are expected to centre their academic studies on UCL and any need to collect or study material elsewhere requires approval from their supervisor, and perhaps the Graduate School.

An indispensable guide for students and supervisors is the '[Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees](#)' and both should be fully conversant with its material. The website of the Graduate School also includes [essential information](#) and details of the [skills development programme](#).

Time to Thesis Submission: From October 2010, all students must submit their thesis by the end of their CRS period (see 5). Failure to do so means that the student is automatically deregistered and there is no guarantee that they will be allowed to submit in the future. An earlier regulation permitting

students to submit within 10 years of their initial registration has been withdrawn. Hence, a successful application to register for a higher degree does not ensure that one will actually be awarded. However, ICS, guided by UCL regulations, has put in place a number of important checkpoints and support systems to minimise such an event, including the E-Log (next section) and production of various written reports (see 4 and 5).

Research Student Log: The E-Log is an on-line documentation system to assist you throughout your degree programme at UCL. It provides a framework for recording details related to your graduate research programme, scheduled supervisory meetings and activities concerning the development of your academic and key skills. The E-Log is a mandatory component of all UCL research degree programmes and is a means of monitoring the progress of students within ICS, as well as helping to ensure that they are receiving adequate supervision. You will be expected to submit short Progress Reports and to identify Objectives & Required Skills at various intervals using your E-Log; and to document Upgrade and Supervisory Sessions. These reports will be signed off by your supervisor and your general progress checked by your Departmental Deputy Postgraduate Tutor. The Graduate School provides students with full training to use the E-Log, and also for new supervisors or ones unfamiliar with the system. Use of the UCL E-Log will be monitored regularly by the Deputy Postgraduate Tutor's Register.

Skills Development: As well as running induction courses for all new research students, UCL Graduate School now offers a programme for development of academic and generic skills. In particular, full-time Research Council funded students are required to attend appropriate courses and activities equivalent to two weeks training per year. Each course is assigned a value of 1 or more points and two weeks is equivalent to 20 points per year. A range of options are available: IT (office skills/workshops/on-line training/web-page design); thesis-related (writing/preparing/bibliography); publishing & communication; research techniques; and IPR (entre/entrepreneurship; finance workshops). Points are also awarded for submission/ publication of work, poster & oral presentations etc. Importantly, all research students irrespective of how they are funded, are able to take full advantage of the programme. Students are strongly recommended to visit the [UCL Graduate School website](#) on a regular basis to learn what is on offer and how to maximise on generic and transferable skills training during their time at UCL. Importantly, they should also maintain a record of their participation in the [Skills Development Programme](#) as this will be requested at upgrade (section 3).

Divisional Activities: A programme of study for the degree of MPhil/PhD or MD(Res) requires regular attendance at lectures and coursework as prescribed by UCL, which in ICS includes attending the weekly lunch-time seminars. This series includes lectures given by Distinguished Invited Speakers, by post-doctoral researchers and academic staff, and by graduate students (the Postgraduate Lecture Series), including those seeking to upgrade from MPhil to PhD.

4. Procedure for MPhil - PhD Transfer and MD(Res) Checkpoint

Initially, PhD research students are registered for the MPhil degree and so must upgrade their registration. This transfer comprises a number of important strands and guidelines for the procedure are detailed below. These take account of a minimum set of requirements imposed by the School of Life and Medical Sciences, as well as practices best suited to the needs of ICS. The upgrade procedure is initiated at the request of both student and supervisor by submitting the Upgrade Request Form.

Timing: Students are given two possible attempts at upgrade. The first is to occur between 12 and 18 months and, if the student fails at the first attempt, the second should take place between 18 and 24 months. The period between the first and second attempt should normally be no more than 6 months. For part-time students, whose programme of study is deemed to be 5 years, the first possible attempt at upgrade should take place between 20 and 30 months and, if the student fails at the first attempt, the second between 30 and 40 months. The period between the first and second attempt should normally be no more than 10 months. Note, however, that most registered part-time students in ICS are expected to complete their PhD research studies in 3 years, and so will be expected to upgrade at 20 months (this is particularly pertinent for fully-funded clinical PhD research fellows who are supported by MRC, Wellcome or BHF awards).

4-year PhD students - Students on a 4-year PhD programme should upgrade between 18 and 24 months of registration. If a second attempt is required this should be done at 30 - 40 months. The period between the first and second attempt should normally be no more than 6 months.

MBPhD students - Students on the MBPhD programme should upgrade at 12 months. Students who fail on the first attempt will be given specific written criteria to meet for the second attempt. In some cases, a student may be referred to re-submit the written work only, without the need for a second oral assessment.

Oral Presentation: The student must give a seminar on their research work three months or less before their viva-voce upgrade examination. This will normally be part of the Friday lunchtime Postgraduate Lecture Series organised in the Division of Medicine by Professor Lucie Clapp (l.clapp@ucl.ac.uk), although additional meetings may sometimes be arranged to meet demand. The student must contact Professor Clapp a few months in advance to the date they plan to give the seminar in order to book a place in the series.

The aim of the oral presentation is to provide the student with the opportunity to present their research to a peer group for the purpose of receiving constructive advice about the project. In the seminar, the candidate should:

- Introduce themselves
- Present the background giving a broad overview of subject matter, avoiding where possible expertise-specific jargon.
- Present Aims with a clear hypothesis; give project plan including methods and timetable of the research project
- Present data to date, the progress as well as the obstacles they have encountered.
- End up outlining future experiments for the coming year
- All of these in no more than 20 slides, during 15-20 min, leaving 10min for questions.

Report by Principal Supervisor: A short report from the Principal Supervisor on the student's work is submitted on the Upgrade Request Form, and is made available in advance of the viva-voce to the Upgrade Panel.

The oral examination of the written report is conducted by an Upgrade Panel made up of a minimum of two members of academic staff, one of whom is the student's *Subsidiary Supervisor* (who chairs the Panel), and the other an *external examiner*; if appointed, a *tertiary supervisor* will also be a member. The appointed external examiner, who can be within the department, within UCL or external to UCL, should not be involved directly in the research project, but should be able to assess academically whether the work is original and of PhD standard. The panel will be responsible for producing a brief joint report (200-300 words) of the examination and the final recommendation (Satisfactory/ Some concern/ Unsatisfactory). This format is intended to make the upgrade process transparent and fair. Note that UCL regulations preclude using the external examiner of the Upgrade Panel as one of the examiners for the PhD thesis itself.

The Divisional Postgraduate Tutor has final jurisdiction over the membership of the Panel, its constitution and any disagreement between Panel Members. They also reserve the right to be a member of the Upgrade Panel; indeed, this can be requested by the Principal Supervisor in their report should a concern be expressed about the student's progress.

Written Report: The general format is that of a substantial research article, concise and carefully crafted, which would not be too disruptive to laboratory time, but would demonstrate the student's proficiency in producing a thesis and would provide a substantial template for the final thesis. The text, excluding Figures and References, should be ~10,000 words. This equates to ~30 pages typed in the recommended style of Times Roman Font 12 pt, 1.5 lines spacing and 2.54 cm all-round margins.

- Introduction: About 6 pages, which may include sub-headings. At the end, there should be a clear statement of the hypothesis to be tested (1-3 lines), as well as a brief list of specific aims.
- Materials & Methods: About 4 pages with appropriate sub-headings.
- Results: About 10 pages with appropriate sub-headings.

- Discussion: About 10 pages, which may include sub-headings. At the end there should be a headed section (~1-page) describing the Future Aims and indicating an approximate timetable for their implementation.
- Figures and Tables: There should be no more than a combined total of 10, which if appropriate might also relate to the Introduction or M&M, as well as Results. Each should occupy no more than 1 page and be 'stand-alone' incorporating its own title and legend, which should be understandable without reference to the text.
- References: A maximum of 100 is permitted, though ~60 is recommended. These should be single-spaced in 10 pt type with a 6 pt space between each. They should include the full title of the article.

Research Student E-Log: Students must ensure that their E-Log is up to date and that all supervisors have signed off on their progress. The E-Log will be reviewed by the Deputy Postgraduate Tutor and Postgraduate Administrator to ensure that this procedure is followed. *NB.* Students are strongly advised that their E-Log is always kept full up-to-date. Failure to do this may result in the Postgraduate Tutor failing the 1st attempt to upgrade and, if persisted, may delay submission of the final PhD thesis.

Examiners Report: The written joint report on the outcome of the viva-voce examination should be signed by the members of the Upgrade Panel.

Submitting the UCL Upgrade Form: following the oral presentation and viva-voce examination, the Principal Supervisor should sign the official [MPhil-PhD transfer form](#) and return it along with the examiners' report and the oral presentation slides to the Deputy Postgraduate Tutor. The DepPGT will verify that the student's E-Log is up to date and that supervisory sessions have taken place, check details of participation in the Graduate School's Skills Development Programme, and endorse (or refute) the decision of the Upgrade Panel from the viva-voce examination. The final signature of the official transfer form is that of the Postgraduate Tutor (or Head of Institute should arbitration be required) and they will be responsible for notifying Registry of the outcome via the Institute's Postgraduate Administrator (Ms Tricia O'Dell).

MD(Res) Checkpoint: Although this is not a formal UCL requirement, ICS has introduced an MD(Res) checkpoint to all students enrolled from September 2009. Students will be required to give an oral presentation as part of the Division of Medicine Seminar Series, and will also need to provide evidence of an up to date E-Log. Students should contact Professor Lucie Clapp (l.clapp@ucl.ac.uk) to book a presentation slot. This should take place immediately after 12 months registration.

5. Procedure for Transfer to Completing Research Student (CRS) Status

This allows students who have completed their research programme extra time to write and submit their thesis without paying fees. During this period they have access to UCL facilities and are entitled to have one draft of their thesis read by the supervisor. Before being granted CRS status, all students must complete the appropriate CRS Request form and submit it to the Deputy Postgraduate Tutor.

PhD students:

Before the transfer, your registration must have been upgraded from MPhil to PhD and you must have completed 3 years of full-time PhD studies, or 5 years of part-time study. In addition to this you will need to include your Time-to-Completion schedule showing how much of the thesis has been completed, and how much work remains. The remaining work is strongly expected to be completed in 12 months or less, and an exact schedule for achieving this and for submitting the thesis MUST be attached. (Please note 12 months is the maximum CRS period for full-time PhD students before submission.) This time plan has to be signed by you and your supervisor, and brought to the Deputy Postgraduate Tutor for discussion and final signature.

Once the Deputy Postgraduate Tutor has checked and approved the time plan, the Postgraduate Administrator (Tricia O'Dell) notifies Registry that CRS status can be granted.

MD(Res) Students:

Students must have completed 2 years registration and submit CRS Status Request as above using the identical form (CRS request form).

Important: As indicated earlier, students must submit their thesis by the end of their period of CRS status, since registration as a student is automatically ended at this point. This means that a student is no longer entitled to access to UCL facilities and services, nor to supervisory advice. Moreover,

there is no guarantee that students will be allowed to submit after this period. If a student does still wish to do so, then they must apply for permission; their principal supervisor and the ICS Postgraduate Tutor will need to support this request. This can be done by completing the *Late Thesis Submission form*, giving the reasons and the date by which the student will be ready to do so. This will be forwarded by the Division to Student Records in the Registry and, if approved by Graduate Education Executive Sub-Committee (GEESC), the student will be liable for the late submission fee.

6. Appointment of Examiners for PhD/MPhil/MD(Res) Degree Candidates

When you are close to completing the experimental part of your research, please consult the Graduate School website to familiarise yourself with the PhD/MD(Res) thesis submission and examination procedure. The requisite [forms and guidelines](#) are downloadable from the UCL website. Please note that all the requisite forms need to be submitted 4-6 months before you are due to submit your thesis. Further, it is the Principal Supervisor's responsibility to recruit examiners and complete the appointment of examiners' forms, not the candidate's.

Research Degree Exam Entry Form: If you firstly registered for your degree before 27th September 2007, you must decide whether you wish to opt for the award of a degree from UCL or the University of London and indicate your choice on your examination entry form. Please note that once the form has been submitted you will be unable to change your awarding body. Once signed off by Principal Supervisor, Divisional Postgraduate Tutor and Faculty Tutor, the degree entry form is then submitted to Student Records.

Examiner Nomination Form: Depending on which award you have opted for, your supervisor will need to complete either the UCL examiner nomination form or the UoL nomination form. It is important that your supervisor provides detailed information for each examiner. This should include 2-3 sentences (not a phrase) about each nominee to delineate their research background e.g. linking their expertise where possible to the thesis subject matter and indicating, if appropriate, how their expertise might complement each other. Previous examining experience, including the number of examinations previously conducted and the institutions involved, must also be listed. In general there should be no or minimal connection between the examiners and the student or supervisors. However, earlier co-authorship or collaboration may still be acceptable, but must be justified by a brief statement to explain why it doesn't jeopardise an impartial judgment of the thesis (e.g. several years ago, in a different field etc).

- For UCL awards, the internal examiner must be from within UCL and should not have formally examined the candidate at any other point during their studies i.e. at upgrade. The use of two external examiners is only permitted in exceptional circumstances and such cases are always referred to the Graduate Education Executive Sub Committee (GEESC) for approval.

- UoL awards require the internal examiner to be from an institution within UoL (including UCL).

- Examiner Nomination forms are accessible via the research degree entry page where additional information can also be found. Please be aware of the two forms - the Description of Thesis (usually a preliminary copy of the abstract), which goes with the Examiner Nomination Form to the Curricular Development and Examinations Office, and the Abstract proper, which goes with the Examination Entry Form to Student Records when the thesis is submitted.

7. Feedback Questionnaire

The ICS monitors the overall experience of students who undertake MD(Res) and PhD degrees under their auspices. All information collected is strictly confidential to academic staff members of its Postgraduate Education Committee and comments are not linked to students as individuals or seen by their supervisors. Students should complete the Feedback Questionnaire and return to the Postgraduate Administrator, Tricia O'Dell.

Good luck!