

School of Life and Medical Sciences

# Thesis Committee Guidelines

A guide for students and their supervisors

**Edition: April 2019**

Thesis committees have been operating throughout FLS since 2008 and in some Divisions in FMS since 2013. They are in the process of being adopted throughout FMS.

These guidelines are in line with those in the Academic Manual ([https://www.ucl.ac.uk/academic-manual/sites/academic-manual/files/thesis\\_committees\\_2018-19.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/academic-manual/sites/academic-manual/files/thesis_committees_2018-19.pdf)) and are recommendations for those to be adopted in FBS from September 2019.

# CONTACTS

Faculty Graduate Tutor (FGT): Patti Adank  
(p.adank@ucl.ac.uk)

Departmental Graduate Tutors (DGTs):

## Ear Institute

Dr. Doris Bamiou (d.bamiou@ucl.ac.uk)

Dr. Sally Dawson (sally.dawson@ucl.ac.uk)

## Institute of Neurology

Professor Dimitri Kullmann (d.kullmann@ucl.ac.uk)

Professor Steve Kennerley (s.kennerley@ucl.ac.uk)

## Institute of Ophthalmology

Dr. Jacqui van der Spuy (j.spuy@ucl.ac.uk)

Professor Karl Matter (k.matter@ucl.ac.uk)

Professor Virginia Calder (v.calder@ucl.ac.uk)

## PALS

Dr. John Swettenham (j.swettenham@ucl.ac.uk)

## Prion Institute

Professor Parmjit Jat (p.jat@ucl.ac.uk)

## Psychiatry

Dr. Claudia Cooper (claudia.cooper@ucl.ac.uk)

D. Liz Sampson (e.sampson@ucl.ac.uk)

# CONTENTS

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Section 1: THESIS COMMITTEE OVERVIEW</b>                 | <b>4</b> |
| Introduction: the function and role of the Thesis Committee | 4        |
| Organisation and Schedule of Thesis Committee meetings      | 5        |
| <b>Section 2: GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS</b>                   | <b>6</b> |
| TC1 - Preliminary Research Proposal                         | 6        |
| TC2 – 9 month report  | 7        |
| TC3 – 18 month meeting                                      | 8        |
| TC4 – 24 month meeting                                      | 8        |
| TC5 – 30 month - thesis plan                                | 8        |
| <b>Section 3: GUIDELINES FOR THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>   | <b>9</b> |
| Responsibilities of Thesis Committee Members                | 9        |
| Thesis Committee Chair                                      | 9        |
| TC1   | 9        |
| TC2   | 10       |
| TC3   | 10       |
| TC4   | 10       |
| TC5: Guidelines for Thesis Committees                       | 10       |

# Section 1: THESIS COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

## Introduction: the function and role of the Thesis Committee

All MPhil/PhD students registered in the School of Life and Medical Sciences starting after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 will be required to have a Thesis Committee (TC). The role of the TC is for its members to support the Student throughout the PhD programme.

The TC comprises the Subsidiary Supervisor and at least two additional members with relevant academic experience. These members may be UCL staff or external to UCL, but at least one should be a member of UCL academic staff. They may include Research Fellows or Emeritus members of staff. The TC will be chaired by one of the members of the TC who has previous supervisory experience, and could be the Subsidiary Supervisor. Primary Supervisors do not usually form part of the TC, but can do so provided all parties, including the Student, agree.

The Primary Supervisor continues to supervise the Student's research project on a day-to-day basis. The TC acts to support both the Student and Supervisor throughout the PhD programme.

The Departmental Graduate Tutor (DGT) has responsibility for determining the TC members at the beginning of the PhD, taking into account of the views of the student, supervisors and HoD. The Chair and supervisors will be registered with the student's UCL Research Student Log, <http://researchlog.grad.ucl.ac.uk/>. \*It is expected that all UCL staff who supervise PhD students will serve on TCs.

Members of the TC cannot act as final PhD examiners.

Formal meetings with the TC are scheduled over the course of the programme (see below for full-time and part-time students), although the Student, Supervisor or TC can request an additional meeting at any time. Students may also approach TC members informally (individually or as a group) for advice and support should the need arise.

The TC Chair prepares a short report of the outcomes of a TC meeting and sends this to the Student and members of the committee. If all agree that this reflects the outcome of the meetings, the student enters the report onto the UCL Research Student Log.

The timeline outlined below is for a conventional 3-year PhD studentship and for 1+3 year PhD studentships. In the case of a 1+3 studentship, the timeline starts after the rotation period during the first year has concluded. In both cases, submission should be within 4 years of entering the programme. Part-time student programmes are generally five years and part-time students should submit within five years

In the event that a Student enters Continuing Research Status (CRS) the TC should remain active and continue to meet every six months.

## **Organisation and Schedule of Thesis Committee meetings**

**Organisation:** It is the student's responsibility to organise the meetings of the TC. However, if the student experiences difficulty in getting an agreed date from the TC members, they should seek help from their Primary Supervisor, or from the Graduate Tutor or Deputy.

## **Schedule and Description of Thesis Committee Meetings**

### ***TC1 Preliminary Research Proposal – 3 months***

The Student and Supervisor will prepare a research proposal to submit to the TC for approval (approximately 1,000 words) as well as a personal development plan. The Student meets with the TC for a brief discussion of the project proposal and their training plan. The Primary Supervisor should attend TC1. The TC may recommend some changes to the project proposal and/or have some ideas that may be incorporated.

### ***TC2 Thesis Committee Meeting – 9 Month Report***

The second TC meeting will take place approximately nine months into the PhD. The Student is required to write a short progress report (approximately 1,000 words) describing key findings and a plan of future work. During the TC meeting, the Student is required to give a short presentation, which should expand on the written report and form the basis for discussion. The personal development plan is reviewed and updated.

### ***Upgrade from MPhil to PhD***

Under UCL regulations the upgrade from MPhil to PhD occurs between nine and eighteen months for full-time students and between 15 and 30 months for part-time students. The viva for the upgrade may be examined by the Subsidiary Supervisor, together with an academic external to the TC, or by the TC itself. The model adopted will be determined at Faculty level and will be consistent across a given Faculty.

### ***TC3 Thesis Committee Meeting – 18 Months***

For all Students the third TC meeting will occur after the upgrade from MPhil to PhD has taken place. The student will discuss their upgrade report and their plans for the following period. The personal development plan is reviewed and updated.

### ***TC4 Thesis Committee Meeting - 24 months***

The students should present a brief update of their work. This meeting should be used to discuss any areas of the project that have encountered problems or that are falling behind schedule. The personal development plan is reviewed and updated.

### ***TC5 Thesis Committee Meeting - 30 months***

Students present their thesis outline and writing plan to the TC.

**Table summarising the schedule, reporting and presentation requirements**

| Thesis committee meeting | Written report       | Presentation | Timing    | Timing*   |
|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
|                          |                      |              | Full-time | Part time |
| TC1, Research proposal   | Yes (~1,000 words)   | Yes          | 3 months  | 6 months  |
| TC2, 9 Months report     | Yes (~1,000 words)   | Yes          | 9 months  | 15 months |
| TC3, Meeting             | No                   | Yes          | 18 months | 30 months |
| TC4, Meeting             | No                   | Yes          | 24 months | 39 months |
| TC5, Thesis outline      | Yes (plan of thesis) | Yes          | 30 months | 48 months |

\*The suggested timing of TC committee meetings for part-time students is scheduled for students who would take the maximum time allowed to complete their part-time PhD. However, many part-time students set out to complete in a much shorter timescale. At the beginning of the PhD, the student, supervisor and thesis committee should consider what might be a likely time scale for the PhD and then schedule the timing of the TC meetings accordingly.

## Section 2: GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS

- It is your responsibility to organise the meetings and it is advisable to set the dates at least one month in advance to ensure you are able to meet with your TC before the deadline.
- You should be prepared to discuss your results/data so have them to hand should your TC want to review them again.
- Following the meeting, you will need to write a short entry in your UCL Research Student Log of the meeting outcome and any comments/suggestions made by the TC.

### TC1: Thesis Committee meeting

**(3 months)**

**NOTE:** It is advised that you set the date at least **one month in advance of the meeting** to ensure that the meeting takes place before the deadline.

### ***Preliminary Research Proposal Submission***

Your Research Proposal should be approved by your Primary Supervisor before sending it to members of your TC.

### ***Preliminary Research Proposal Content***

Your Research Proposal should include the following:

- Abstract (200 words max.)
- A succinct review of the key literature to contextualise the work
- Hypothesis and aims of your project
- A clear plan of experimental approaches for the next 6-12 months including a graphical timeline
- Bibliography.

Word limit: 1,000 (excluding bibliography)

### **Words limits**

Word limits should not be exceeded. A word count should be included on the front page of your reports.

The research proposal will form the basis for your discussion with the TC. Prepare a 15-20 minute presentation for the TC. The Primary Supervisor should be present at this TC meeting.

### **Outcome**

Members of your TC will discuss your proposal and may suggest amendments. Following the TC meeting, your proposal (revised if appropriate) will be approved by your Primary Supervisor and TC members.

### **Personal Development Plan**

Together with your Primary Supervisor, you should draft a personal development plan for your first year that takes into account any mandatory training that you should undertake as well as bespoke training opportunities.

**Student Action:** The final TC approved version of your plan should be sent to the Postgraduate Research Administrator by email as soon as possible after TC1. You should also upload your proposal to your Research Student Log.

## **TC2: Thesis Committee Meeting 2**

**(9 month report)**

### **Report Submission**

Your report should be sent to all members of your TC no less than two weeks before the meeting.

### **Report Content**

Please prepare a short progress report (1,000 words max) outlining what you have achieved since your PhD project commenced. The report should complement your Preliminary Research Proposal and should include progress to date and a plan of future experiments (a methods section is not required).

### **Thesis Committee Meeting**

It is your responsibility to organise your TC meeting and it is advised that you set the date **one month in advance of the meeting** to ensure completion of the meeting before the deadline.

Prepare a 15-20 minutes presentation, which includes the project outline, progress to date and a plan of future experiments.

The written report and oral presentation will form the basis of the discussion with your TC.

## **Outcome**

If progress is judged to be satisfactory, you will begin to plan for your upgrade from MPhil to PhD. You will also discuss your personal development plan and ensure that you are on course to complete any mandatory training before your upgrade.

If there are concerns that satisfactory progress has not been made, your DGT may instigate the Academic Insufficiency Process as outlined in the guidelines ([Academic Insufficiency Process](#)). You will be set objectives, in consultation with your Supervisor and TC which you will be required to meet within a defined period of time. This involves monthly meetings over a period of 3 months, during which time you will be supported by your TC. The process will be assessed by the Departmental Graduate Tutor and Faculty Graduate Tutor.

**Student Action:** Following the meeting, you should upload your report to your Research Student Log and write a short summary of the meeting outcome, including any comments/suggestions made by the TC.

## **Upgrade from MPhil to PhD**

**(9 – 18 months)**

Initially PhD students are registered for an MPhil degree and in order to proceed to a PhD, their registration must be changed accordingly. The upgrade process takes place between 9 and 18 months (for full-time students) and assesses the student's progress and ability to complete the PhD programme in a reasonable time-frame. The guidelines for the upgrade process can be found at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/status/research-students/upgrade>. This will generally involve a presentation to your Department / Division and a *viva*. Examination of the *viva* will be by your Subsidiary Supervisor and an academic external to your thesis committee, or by your TC.

## **TC3 Thesis Committee Meeting 3**

**(18 months)**

The third TC meeting will occur after your upgrade from MPhil to PhD has taken place. If this was successful, you will discuss your upgrade report with the TC and outline your plans for the next 6 – 12 months with respect to your research project and personal development plan. If your upgrade was unsuccessful, your second attempt must take place between 15 and 24 months (for full-time students) after the start of your project, and the TC will discuss and review your plans to address the issues raised by your examiners.

## **TC4 Thesis Committee Meeting 4**

**(24 months)**

The purpose of TC4 is to discuss any areas of your project that are problematic or falling behind schedule. No written report is required. You should prepare a short presentation (15-20 minutes) that will form the basis of your discussion with the TC. You should discuss your personal development plan and training requirements for your final year.

## **TC5 Thesis Plan**

**(30 months)**

The purpose of TC5 is to review your thesis outline and discuss what, if any, final experiments you need to complete for your thesis.

### ***Thesis Outline and Final Experiments***

Your thesis outline should contain a breakdown of each chapter into sub-headings, and include figure titles and/or any other relevant notes/comments about the content of each section. You should indicate which sections need further data to complete. The work limit for a PhD thesis 100,000 words, but this is the upper limit and you should aim to be as clear and concise as possible.

You should also include a timeline of remaining experiments so that you, your Supervisor and TC all have a clear idea about what you will be doing over the final months.

### ***Continuing Research Studies (CRS)***

In the event that a Student enters continuing research status (CRS) the TC should remain active and continue to meet 6 monthly to help the student complete their PhD.

## **Section 3: GUIDELINES FOR THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

### **Responsibilities of Thesis Committee Members**

- Meet with the Student at the designated times (minimum five times) throughout the progress of the PhD
- Read Student reports prior to the TC meeting
- Approve the meeting reports that will be entered into the Student's Research Log
- If required, provide additional support for the Student e.g. additional TC meetings outside of those scheduled to monitor progress
- Raise any concerns regarding the Student's academic progress and/or supervision with the Departmental Graduate Tutor.

### **Thesis Committee Chair**

The Subsidiary Supervisor normally acts as the Chair of the TC and is responsible for ensuring the completion and timely return of the TC's report. The Subsidiary Supervisor may, if they wish, nominate another member of the TC to complete and return the TC's report.

### **NOTES:**

TC members are not required to organise the meetings, this is the responsibility of the Student. They should, however, respond to student timetabling requests promptly so as not to delay the TC meetings unduly.

### **TC1 Preliminary Research Proposal**

The purpose of the Preliminary Research Proposal is to review the student's project proposal/experimental plan and determine whether or not the TC agrees a suitable PhD project has been proposed. This will be emailed to TC members, who should suggest any amendments before a final plan is agreed, which should then be returned by email to the Postgraduate Research Administrator. The TC will review the personal development plan

and advise on training requirements / opportunities and offer advice. The TC Chair submits a short report of the meeting to the UCL Research Student Log.

## **TC2**

This TC meeting occurs before the upgrade from MPhil to PhD. The TC will review the student's progress and advise on what needs to be completed, if anything, before the upgrade takes place. The Chair of the TC should submit a short report to the UCL Research Student Log.

If at this stage, the Student has failed to make satisfactory progress or the TC has particular concerns e.g. academic understanding of the subject area, these should be discussed with the Student during the meeting. The TC will alert the DGT, who, in consultation with the Primary Supervisor and TC, will set objectives for the Student to meet within a defined period of time. This process is set out in the UCL guidelines ([Academic Insufficiency Process](#)) and involves monthly meetings over a period of three months.

## **TC3**

The upgrade from MPhil to PhD occurs between 9 and 18 months into the PhD (for full-time students). Therefore, the upgrade should have taken place before TC3. In the event that this was successful, the student will prepare a short presentation to form the basis of discussions with the TC. The TC will review the objectives for the next 6 -12 months incorporating advice from the upgrade examiners, review training progress and identify training / personal development needs. If the upgrade was unsuccessful, the TC will review the Student's plans for a second upgrade attempt and provide advice to the Student and Primary Supervisor. The Chair of the TC should submit a short report to the UCL Research Student Log.

## **TC4**

The Student should prepare a short presentation focusing on any aspects of the project that are problematic or falling behind schedule. The TC will review the objectives for the next 6 months, review training progress and identify training / personal development needs. The Chair of the TC should submit a short report to the UCL Research Student Log.

## **TC5**

Students can submit their thesis outline to the TC anytime between TC3 and the 30 month point. During the meeting the TC and Student should discuss the thesis outline and the TC should make recommendations, as appropriate. The Chair of the TC should submit a short report to the UCL Research Student Log.