GUIDELINES FOR UPGRADE FROM MPHIL TO PHD STATUS

1. Purpose of the Upgrade

1.1. Initially PhD students are registered for the MPhil degree. If they wish to proceed to a PhD, their registration must be changed accordingly. The purpose of the upgrade is to assess the student's progress and ability to complete their PhD programme in a reasonable time frame. In this assessment, the criteria defined below should be applied. The assessment should not be confined to the research material presented by the student but should also consider the student's demonstrable academic and generic skills.

2. Criteria for Upgrade

2.1. A student should be upgraded to PhD status if he or she meets the following criteria:

i. Commitment to pursuing research at UCL leading to the PhD degree;

ii. Satisfactory progress in the work so far;

iii. Demonstration of sufficient awareness of the context of the work and completion of such tasks as a review of relevant literature and a bibliography;

iii. Ability to formulate a viable hypothesis or research question that could be completed within the normal time frame of the PhD programme;

iv. Satisfactory technical and generic skills development (students funded by UCL approved funding bodies, such as the Research Councils, must meet the specific requirements stipulated by those bodies);

v. Formulation of a viable plan for the work;

vi. Consideration of the research ethics dimensions of the project, and application for ethics approval from the relevant Research Ethics Committee if appropriate

vii. Completion of the appropriate sections of the Research Student Log;

viii. English Language proficiency, both written and spoken.

It is expected that the specific components in the student's upgrade report, in conjunction with the upgrade viva (see 3.3.1 and 3.3.3, below), will demonstrate that these criteria have been met. In addition to the above criteria, the student must meet any other Departmental or Faculty requirements.

3. Process of Upgrade

3.1 Management and Oversight

The management and oversight of the upgrade process is the responsibility of the Departmental Graduate Tutor. At the request of the student and supervisors, the Departmental Graduate Tutor will initiate the process and appoint the Upgrade Panel. The Departmental Graduate Tutor should confirm that the Research Student Log has been completed and that there has been appropriate participation in the Skills Development Programme, before the upgrade process is initiated.

3.2 Time Frame

UCL Research Degree Regulations state that upgrade cannot be done less than nine months after initial registration for the MPhil degree for full-time students. There should be two possible attempts at upgrade; the first between 9 and 18 months and, if the student fails at the first attempt, the second between 15 and 24 months. The period between the first and second attempt should normally be no more than 6 months.

There are a number of 4-year MPhil/PhD programmes, and for these programmes upgrade should be between 9-18 months after the start of the research project, with a second attempt if necessary between 15-24 months after the start of the research project.

For part-time students, whose programme of study is typically 5 years, the first possible attempt at upgrade should take place between 15 and 30 months and, if the student fails at the first attempt, the second between 25 and 40 months. The period between the first and second attempt should normally be no more than 10 months.

It is expected that most students will successfully upgrade on the first attempt. Two attempts only will be permitted.

3.3 Components of Upgrade

The process of assessment is implemented by means of written reports from student and Principal Supervisor, and viva, outlining the work accomplished so far, and the programme of further work that will lead to a successful thesis. These components will be considered by an upgrade panel.

3.3.1 The Student's Upgrade Report

The precise form of material considered as part of the upgrade will vary across Departments and disciplines. The student should draft his/her Upgrade Report in consultation with the Principal Supervisor and the Subsidiary Supervisor.

Whilst it is recognised that the exact nature of the report submitted by the student will depend on discipline, it should cover at least the following components (not necessarily as discrete items).

 i. An introduction giving the context of the work;

ii. A literature review;

iii. A research question and hypothesis;

iv. A section on methodology;

v. A substantial piece of work towards the thesis objectives;

vi. A plan and timetable for the remainder of the work;

vii. A bibliography.

3.3.2 Report by Principal Supervisor

A written report from the Principal Supervisor on the student's work must be submitted in advance of the upgrade viva to the Upgrade Panel and the Student.

3.3.3 The Upgrade Viva

The purpose of the viva is to ascertain, in conjunction with the student's upgrade report and the report by the Principal Supervisor, that the above criteria (see 2.1, above) have been met. The viva should also be an opportunity for the student to discuss and defend his/her ideas.

The Upgrade Panel should be made up of a minimum of two members of academic staff, one of whom should be the student's Subsidiary Supervisor who normally chairs the Upgrade Panel. The Principal Supervisor should provide input via a written report (see 3.3.2, above), and may be present at the viva meeting, provided the student agrees, but should withdraw while the Panel makes its decision.

A member of Staff external to the Department of the Student and Supervisor, or external to UCL, may be on the Panel but Departments must consider that this would make that individual ineligible as an examiner for the subsequent PhD thesis.

The Departmental Graduate Tutor has final jurisdiction over the membership of the Panel, its constitution and any dispute between Panel Members.

4. Outcomes:

4.1 Students may either upgrade on the first attempt or, if unsuccessful, be referred for a second attempt within the time frame described above. Students who fail on the first attempt must 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.

It is essential that it is made very clear to students at the outset of the process about the potential outcomes of the process, including the specific criteria to be met after a first failed attempt and the potential outcomes of failure at the second attempt. The following are the potential outcomes of the upgrade process:

Potential outcomes of first attempt:

i) Student is recommended for upgrade to PhD status;

ii) Student is referred to a specific date, with specific criteria to meet, for a second attempt with the need for a second viva;

iii) Student is referred to a specific date, with specific criteria to meet, for a second attempt without the need for a second viva.

Potential outcomes of second attempt:

i) Student is recommended for upgrade to PhD status;

ii) Student is not recommended for upgrade and remains registered for the MPhil.

It should be made clear that a second failed attempt at upgrade will mean that the student will remain registered with MPhil status. This may lead to the submission of a thesis for the MPhil which must be done in accordance with the UCL Research Degree Regulations. It is not the role of the Upgrade Panel to determine, at that stage, if the student's work is appropriate for submission for the MPhil degree.

It is also not the role of the Upgrade Panel to consider action to de-register students who are deemed academically insufficient. Evidence from the upgrade process, however, may be used in subsequent Academic Insufficiency proceedings implemented by the Faculty.

4.2 A written joint report on the outcome should be signed and submitted by the Chair of the Upgrade Panel to the Departmental Graduate Tutor for signature. This report should be copied to the Student, Supervisors and the Head of Department. A standard template for this report is provided herewith: Upgrade Panel Report

Student and Registry Services should also be notified, using the official form provided, of the outcome of the process by the Departmental Graduate Tutor:

The student may request further oral feedback from the Panel.

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